

BYU: Building a Community of Trust and Respect

PAUL B. PIEPER

My dear friends, today is a wonderful day to be alive. This is an amazing season in the history of the world. And we are here—here at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. I feel blessed, and I hope you feel blessed to be here.

Over the past thirty years of my life, I have served, worked, and lived in dozens of countries throughout the world—in places in which the Church is established and in some in which it is not; among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and among those not of our faith. I have heard countless people express their desires and dreams to study at Brigham Young University, to be part of what we are experiencing right now, right here, today. I think it would not be inaccurate to say that there are tens of thousands around the world who would love to be here and enjoy the blessings we experience at Brigham Young University.

Why is that so? What is it about Brigham Young University that makes students and teachers from all over the world dream of studying and teaching here?

Precious Restored Truths

The opening of the heavens to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820 began the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and resulted in the establishment of His Church again upon the earth. It also brought new understanding about the nature of the human soul, truth, and the divine processes whereby mortals obtain light, knowledge, and intelligence. Consider these profound, paradigm-changing declarations made by the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

- “Man was . . . in the beginning with God. . . . For man is spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 33).
- “The spirit and the body are the soul of man” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:15).
- “Spirit and element [or body], inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:33).
- “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36).

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- “Truth is the knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:24).
- “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29).
- “The word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:45).
- “The Spirit giveth light to every man [and woman] that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man [and woman] . . . that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:46).
- “He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he [or she] is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:28).

These amazing revelations declare that all light, truth, and intelligence are in and proceed from God. All mortals are dual beings with bodies and spirits. Truth and light from God connect naturally to our spirits to enlighten our minds and our spirits, helping us to know what is true and real. The Spirit of God accelerates learning. Obedience to God supports learning.

These truths come with encouragement from the Lord to use our minds and spirits to diligently seek learning, light, and truth “out of the best books” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). The Lord encourages us to become

instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine [of things pertaining to the gospel] . . . ;

Of things . . . in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms. [Doctrine and Covenants 88:78–79]

We are to pursue this knowledge “by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118) “that [we] may be prepared in all things” to

fulfill our callings and missions upon the earth (Doctrine and Covenants 88:80).

Brigham Young University was established to employ and embody these revealed principles in an institution of higher education—“a unique university,” as President Spencer W. Kimball said, with a spiritual and academic learning environment that is different from the world’s (“The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975). The BYU mission and aims webpage (aims.byu.edu) is a wonderful place to review the Mission of Brigham Young University and other materials that will provide you with a sense of this university’s lofty goals and mission.

The success of students, faculty, and administrators—past and present—in understanding and incorporating the restored truths I have discussed into the fabric of the academic and spiritual experience at Brigham Young University is, in my mind, the reason for its reputation around the world. It is why thousands of members and nonmembers alike hope and dream for an opportunity to be part of a Brigham Young University learning or teaching experience. Thank you for your past contributions to help Brigham Young University be the light it has become to the world. Thank you for all you are doing to extend and expand the power and influence of the university for good into the future.

A Community of Scholars and Saints

It is not easy to operate a university with these high ideals and revealed principles—to maintain a consistent climate of academic and spiritual excellence. Prophetic guidance and sound administration help, but such an ambitious undertaking requires commitment and support from every member of the community.

By choosing Brigham Young University and by virtue of your acceptance, students, professors, and administrators agree to become part of a religious academic community united by a common commitment to seek both secular and religious learning by study and also by faith. Each member of the community personally commits to be part of the community and to honor its values

by signing their acceptance letter and the Honor Code and dress and grooming standards for the community.

Membership in the BYU community is voluntary. It is a personal choice made knowing what is expected. A decision to join triggers both access to the benefits of and responsibility to sustain the values and purposes of the community.

A decision to be part of the community is the first step. Building a community requires sustained effort, time, sacrifice, work, and—in the case of the BYU community—divine assistance. A new academic year has recently begun. Some of you are just beginning your BYU experience; others have been here longer. Whether you are new to BYU or have been here for years, I hope you will continue to ask the question “What can I do to strengthen Brigham Young University?” With that question in mind, may I share a few of my thoughts on that topic for the next few minutes?

The Role of the Holy Ghost

Acknowledging and incorporating the essential role of the Holy Ghost in its teaching and learning models is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Brigham Young University. In contrast, most academic institutions solely focus on secular learning approaches. At BYU, the Holy Ghost is recognized as an essential element of our learning and teaching experience—in our personal lives, in our relationships, and in our classes.

This model recognizes the dual nature of human beings and supports balanced learning. Inviting the Holy Ghost to be part of our learning experience increases and enhances our capacities. Parley P. Pratt expressed the Holy Ghost’s effect beautifully:

The . . . Holy Ghost . . . quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires, develops, cultivates and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor,

animation and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man [or woman]. It strengthens and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being. [Key to the Science of Theology (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 101; emphasis added]

Imagine the impact an increased effort to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost could have on your ability to learn. Consider how much more light and intelligence are available to flow into our hearts, homes, and classrooms as students and professors work to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost with them every minute of every day.

Even today I can remember lessons that the Spirit taught me on this campus more than forty years ago, supported by inspired professors and faithful fellow students at BYU who taught and learned with the power of the Spirit. The topics were secular, but the learning was spiritual. By the power of the Spirit, these teachings entered my heart and remain there. As we work to keep our lives clean by living the principles of the gospel, the Holy Ghost will come to quicken, invigorate, enlarge, and expand our minds and intellectual capacities, taking the fullest advantage possible of BYU’s unique learning environment.

Trust

Another important element for building a unified and strong BYU community is trust. Trust is a “firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something” (Oxford Lexico online dictionary, s.v. “trust,” lexico.com/en/definition/trust). Trust is essential in building unity and cohesiveness within a community. High trust leads to greater effectiveness in achieving personal and institutional objectives.

Recent surveys confirm the obvious: people are losing trust in many traditional institutions in our society, including the national press, the national government, the police, and education systems. Further, these surveys find that trust in institutions is lowest among those belonging to Generation Z (see “Tracking Trust in U.S. Institutions,” Morning Consult, updated

26 August 2021, morningconsult.com/tracking-trust-in-institutions). That's most of you. Other surveys of university students show that there is a significant correlation between trust and a sense of belonging. Students with high trust in faculty, administration, and fellow students in their university feel a greater sense of belonging. Those who have low trust feel less included (see "The Trust Gap Among College Students," National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], Indiana University School of Education, nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/trust/index.html).

In summary, greater trust brings a greater sense of belonging, and greater belonging creates a stronger sense of community. A stronger community accelerates learning and growth.

Under President Kevin J. Worthen's wonderful leadership, the BYU administration has recognized the need to increase trust and build a stronger sense of belonging. The establishment of the new Office of Belonging, led by a vice president-level administrator, will support that effort. But perhaps more important than the creation of a new office is what each of us can do individually to build greater trust within the BYU community.

For the past several years, our society has been sucked into a giant vortex of trust-destroying conduct by opposing sides of almost every social and political issue. Such conduct includes

- putting ego and selfish gain ahead of the good of the community as a whole;
- mocking, belittling, and demeaning those with whom we disagree rather than carefully listening to understand them;
- exercising raw power to impose our will on others rather than engaging in discussion and persuasion to find mutually acceptable solutions; and
- using lies, half-truths, and misinformation to discredit others and promote one's position rather than seeking the truth about a particular issue or subject.

Do these things sound familiar to you? They should. These same types of tactics have been used by the adversary since before the foundations of the earth. Satan put his selfish desire for power

ahead of the Father's plan of happiness for all mankind and used half-truths to persuade one-third of the Father's children to follow him (see Moses 4:1–4). Lehi was shown how those in the world mock, scoff, and point fingers at those who believe to bully, intimidate, and embarrass them into abandoning their faith (see 1 Nephi 8:26–28). Satan has used and perfected these tactics over millennia and has adapted them to today's social media environment. Now anyone can stroke her or his ego, promote a personal agenda, or sow doubt in others through a catchy tweet, a clever TikTok video, or a sarcastic meme. They try to justify these cruel means by convincing themselves that it is necessary to fight fire with fire. Because they have grown up in this shrill social media world, it is no wonder that Gen Zers have trust issues!

But the Lord has made it clear that "no power or influence can or ought to be maintained" except upon principles of righteousness, including "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42). Promoting God's righteousness can never be accomplished using Satan's means or tactics. In contrast to Satan's tactics, using God's means will always bring increased trust.

Today I implore you not to be sucked into Satan's trust-destroying tactics just because that's what the rest of the world around us is doing, especially against fellow members of the BYU community. Disciples of Jesus Christ use His means to accomplish His ends.

Because BYU is a community of faith, there are things you can do to build greater trust that secular institutions cannot. One is to pray daily for the other members of the BYU community. Pray for your fellow students. Pray for your administrators. Pray for your teachers. Pray for the leaders of the Church, particularly those who have responsibility for BYU. I can promise you that your trust will increase as you do. Teachers and administrators, pray with increased faith for the students. Pray that the Holy Ghost will help us all become united to realize BYU's potential and mission. On fast Sunday, add fasting to your prayers and ponder what more you can do to develop greater capacity to trust and be trusted.

Fulfill with exactness your commitment to live the Honor Code and dress and grooming standards. Your integrity engenders trust in others and within the community.

Because trust is a choice, choose today to look for the good and the positive in each other and forgive quickly when offended. Impute the best motive you can to each other's words and behavior. Don't be looking for reasons to attack someone else. Trust others as you would have others trust you.

Now, if you feel that your trust in others has been too deeply damaged to allow you to trust, then put your trust in your Heavenly Father. Last April, President Russell M. Nelson taught:

Please know this: if everything and everyone else in the world whom you trust should fail, Jesus Christ and His Church will never fail you. The Lord never slumbers, nor does He sleep. He "is the same yesterday, today, and [tomorrow]." He will not forsake His covenants, His promises, or His love for His people. ["Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains," Liahona, May 2021; emphasis in original; quoting Mormon 9:9. See also Psalm 121:4; Isaiah 54:10; 3 Nephi 22:10.]

This is His university. You are His child. He knows you better than anyone. Trust Him completely while you continue to build trust in others.

Respect Other Members of the Community

Another important related element for strengthening the BYU community is respect—that is, respect for every member of the community. One definition of *respect* is “an act of giving particular attention”; another is “to refrain from interfering with” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, s.v. “respect,” merriam-webster.com/dictionary/respect). We all want to have the world acknowledge that we exist—we want to be seen and recognized, not ignored. In addition, we want people to refrain from interfering in our lives and trying to micromanage us. Respect can be shown by both acknowledging others and listening to them. Showing respect is showing trust.

Showing respect is a learned attribute that requires intentionality to develop. We spend most

of our teenage years trying to become independent from our parents. Anxious to exercise our own agency and grateful to finally be able to decide things for ourselves, our independence can grow inadvertently into an attitude of disrespect. When we disrespect someone, we fail to acknowledge them or we resist listening to their ideas and opinions, sometimes fearing that they are trying to control us. Disrespect separates and divides. Respect unites and strengthens.

In your present life stage, most of you need to intentionally develop the ability to respect others in the community. The truth that we are all children of God is the foundation for respect for all, supported by the Savior's admonition to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). Work hard to see and acknowledge others and respect them.

When I think of what respect for others looks and feels like, I think of an experience from the life of President James E. Faust. On one occasion after he had been called as a General Authority, then Elder Faust, his wife, and two family members decided to attend a session at the Washington DC Temple. His son recalled that after they had arrived and entered the temple, his father

*presented his recommend, which [was] a special one issued to the General Authorities and look[ed] somewhat different. The gentleman who was checking recommends did not know what it was and told my father he wouldn't be able to enter the temple. Rather than embarrassing the man by telling him who he was, Dad politely excused himself and we all left. [Marcus G. Faust, quoted in James P. Bell, *In the Strength of the Lord: The Life and Teachings of James E. Faust* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 188]*

I am moved by the deep respect that President Faust showed to the man at the recommend desk. President Faust acknowledged and respected him, letting him do his duty as he had been instructed. Because of that respect, President Faust would rather not go in the temple than cause the man embarrassment in front of others. So, as a fellow disciple, President Faust did the respectful thing: he thanked the man and left.

Any action of any member of a community has an effect upon the other members of that community. A choice by one community member to intentionally violate the standards of the community disrespects the other members of the community. One who belittles or demeans one member of the community disrespects the entire community. When our primary interest becomes promoting a personal agenda at the expense of the community mission, the mission of the entire community is diminished. Although those behaviors may be acceptable and even common in the world, they ignore the principle of respect. As a result, we live in a world in which everyone is looking for respect but few are willing to show it.

Listen to the respect exemplified in this quote in a recent conference address by Sister Sharon Eubank, first counselor in the general Relief Society presidency:

*My own Relief Society president recently said: “The thing I . . . promise . . . you is that I will keep your name safe. . . . I will see you for who you are at your best. . . . I will never say anything about you that is unkind, that is not going to lift you. I ask you to do the same for me because I am terrified, frankly, of letting you down.” [“By Union of Feeling We Obtain Power with God,” *Ensign*, November 2020]*

Respect acknowledges the sacred trust that belongs to members of a community to acknowledge and listen to each other. Respect motivates each member of a community to keep the other members’ names safe, to see each other at our best, to not say anything that will not lift, and to be terrified of letting each other down.

Conclusion

My dear young friends, it has been a remarkable experience for me to be here with you today. I can feel the goodness of your lives, the energy of your spirits, and your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored Church upon the earth. Thank you! Thank you for being where you are and being who you are. Thank you for letting me share a few minutes with you today.

BYU is a unique institution in the world—a community of Saint scholars, a community of Saint students, and an unparalleled community of academic and spiritual excellence that could only be possible as a result of the Restoration.

You have all chosen to become members of this unique community. May we work as one to realize the full power and strength of Brigham Young University by (1) working to keep the Holy Ghost present every day in every part of our lives, (2) building and showing trust for one another and in God, and (3) helping each member of the community to feel respected.

As we conclude, I want to testify of the prophets, seers, and revelators who God has called in our day. I am their witness. I know that President Russell M. Nelson is called of God and is His mouthpiece on the earth today. I am a witness that his counselors and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve are the servants who God has called to lead His Church. They are an important part of the BYU community by virtue of their callings.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s kingdom, the community He has established on the earth today to prepare the earth for His Second Coming. I so witness to you, with my love, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.