

Take Heed and Go Forth

W. MARK BASSETT

When I graduated from BYU in 1991, I left here wondering what my future would hold. Back then I had no idea of the influence that this place would have on my life's choices—professionally and beyond.

I remember sitting in your very seats here in the Marriott Center next to several friends, watching our high school buddy David Astle develop his skills playing center for the Cougar basketball team. I was a business major in accounting, so I was developing my quads going up and down the stairs in the Tanner Building. Like some of you here today, I was too broke to eat at the Wilk, but I did discover about a hundred ways to turn ramen noodles into a meal. And, like all of you here, in addition to my major studies and a selection of religion classes, I was required to take a bunch of other “core” classes. You know the ones—the classes that make you wonder, “What does this have to do with the rest of *my* life? How is this going to help me in *my* career? Or in *anything*?”

Luckily I had David to help me decide what to take. “Let’s take geology,” he said. “It’s easy!” he said. “They call it ‘Rocks for Jocks,’ and it’ll be a breeze,” he said.

Well, after the first day, I could tell that this jock was mistaken. Our professor was the department chairman—a total geology guru—and we were in for a sixteen-week-long landslide of rocks and volcanoes and something called tectonics—stuff that seemed pointless and that, frankly, disregarded what I already believed about the creation of the earth.

Well, it was not long into the semester, however, when I could tell I was mistaken. That’s because Dr. Harold J. Bissell was not only a renowned and respected geologist but also a true and devout disciple of Jesus Christ, who is the Creator of all things, including geology. I began to understand that this class had a *lot* to do with the rest of my life—with the rest of my *eternal* life.

In the end, for me that geology class had less to do with rocks and drifting continents and

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more to do with faith. I can clearly recall how Brother Bissell bore witness of the Creation and the plan of salvation. He testified that our Father in Heaven did indeed create man and woman, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps some of his colleagues at other institutions might have said that this was in direct conflict with proven science. He did not deny science but understood “pure truth, pure doctrine, and pure revelation,”¹ familiar words from our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. He understood that even science cannot answer all things. Sometimes we must be willing to “wait upon the Lord.”²

I had many such faith-building experiences in other classes—in Doctrine and Covenants, of course, in physical science, and in organizational behavior—in which it was made quite clear to me that coming to the full measure of truth requires *both* secular understanding and spiritual knowledge. For me, and for you, these sorts of experiences are not only “intellectually enlarging” but “spiritually strengthening.”³ They change our very characters and inspire a lifelong desire to continually learn and serve.

Your Beautifully Unique Education

This is a beautifully unique aspect to an education at BYU. I am grateful for professors who demonstrated for me, and now for you, by personal example what it means to “seek learning, even by study and *also* by faith.”⁴

One of my assignments as a General Authority is to interview potential BYU professors. One thing I have noticed about these new candidates is that not only are they well educated but they also put God first in their lives. They make Him and His doctrine a priority.

There is no question in my mind that attending BYU is unique among all other university experiences. *Your* university is not here simply to offer secular learning and perform research. Brigham Young University is focused on the whole of its students, not only in this life but in the life to come. How unique is that? That’s what makes this place special, even sacred, to me.

In today’s world of weakening spiritual reliance and more brazenly enforced secularity, let me

restate that your BYU educational experience is *beautifully* unique.

Our university experience is purposely intended to promote a fundamentally sacred way of life dedicated to becoming a whole being. Ultimately, complete wholeness comes only through the Atonement of Him who said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”⁵ I cannot overstate how influential my BYU experience has been in my quest for that “abundant”⁶ life.

As I think of you here today—including my own children, nieces, and nephews—this is what I hope for you: an abundant life and life eternal. I want you to have *all* that this sacred place has to offer for the rest of your mortal and eternal lives.

And to help us keep a proper mindset that allows us to receive this abundant life and life eternal, let’s reflect upon two bits of counsel given to us by the apostle Paul.

As we know, Paul traveled across the rocky hills and valleys of modern-day Turkey with a faithful young man, Timothy. Perhaps more than for any other missionary companion, Paul demonstrated great affection for Timothy, even referring to him as “my beloved son”⁷ and writing him a couple of letters found in the New Testament. In loving counsel, Paul wrote this to his young companion:

*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*⁸

Take Heed unto Yourself

So what does it mean to “take heed unto [your]self, and unto the doctrine”?

First, to take heed unto yourself would be to take care of yourself. Take advantage of every resource and do your best to keep your spirit, your body, and your mind strong.

May I share with you a cool little life hack about taking care of yourself in a stressful environment like college? Go online to the Church website or to your Gospel Library app and review this little manual called *Adjusting to Missionary Life*. I am guessing that for many of you, this is already familiar. Perhaps you referred to it before

and while serving your mission. It has several tips and tricks and words of advice dealing with all sorts of *college-life* challenges; advice given in sections such as

- Responding Positively to Stress
- Talking Back to Negative Thinking
- Staying Healthy and Energetic
- Getting Up on Time
- Eating Healthy Foods
- Getting Motivated to Exercise
- Talking with Strangers
- Managing Sexual or Romantic Feelings
- Staying Organized with Goals and Plans
- Not Feeling as Smart or as Capable as Others⁹

Physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual—think about it: the counsel and instruction in this manual aren't just for missionaries but for you as well. Read it, substituting words like *missionary* and *companion* with words like *student* and *roommate*. See if this doesn't help you reset your personal-care awareness once in a while.

And for those times when things get really tough, I also encourage you to look for help. A parent, a bishop, a favorite teacher, or a good friend would all be good people to help you.

Let's consider how the Savior personally took heed unto Himself during His mortal life.

The Savior was prayerful by nature. Before His earthly ministry began, the Savior spent forty days in the wilderness engaged in fervent fasting and prayer. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Gethsemane, on the cross, and on other occasions, He engaged in fervent prayers to His Heavenly Father, expressing gratitude and pleading for guidance and assistance. You will take heed unto yourself as you, too, become prayerful by nature.

The Savior also studied the words of the prophets. When Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem after His parents had departed to return to their home, He was found to be in the temple. In Luke we learn that

after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, and they were hearing him, and asking him questions.

*And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding, and answers.*¹⁰

"In the midst" means the center or middle. He was the one teaching. Luke further said that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."¹¹ His wisdom developed as He immersed Himself in gospel learning. He then shared that learning with others.

Today we would be wise to follow Christ's sterling example. You and I need to become prayerful by nature, and we need to increase in wisdom by studying the gospel of Jesus Christ from trusted sources. The Savior's trusted sources, demonstrated by how He responded to questions, included the scriptures of His day. His knowledge wasn't just accurate; it illustrated a breadth and depth of learning. Those *trusted* sources for Jesus of Nazareth included the words of the ancient prophets.

You and I, now and for the rest of our lives, will best take heed unto ourselves by offering regular—even constant—and sincere prayer, along with making time for diligent daily study of the word of God, found both in scripture and in the words of God's living prophets.

"Take Heed . . . unto the Doctrine"

This leads me to Paul's admonition to Timothy to also "take heed . . . unto the doctrine."

Consider President Nelson's opening remarks during our most recent general conference:

Imagine how quickly the devastating conflicts throughout the world—and those in our individual lives—would be resolved if we all chose to follow Jesus Christ and heed His teachings.

*In that spirit, I invite you to listen for three things during this conference: **pure** truth, the **pure** doctrine of Christ, and **pure** revelation.*¹²

If you were listening to the same general conference that I was, you heard many examples of this "pure truth, pure doctrine, and pure revelation," including at least four in the message declared by Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Let me share what I heard:

1. First, I heard that *God and Christ know and love us all, and They hear our prayers*. Elder Christofferson said:

*This divine love should give us abundant comfort and confidence as we pray to the Father in the name of Christ. Not one of us is a stranger to Them. We need not hesitate to call upon God, even when we feel unworthy. We can rely on the mercy and merits of Jesus Christ to be heard. As we abide in God's love, we depend less and less on the approval of others to guide us.*¹³

What comfort and encouragement this truth, this pure doctrine, gives us!

2. As Elder Christofferson continued, I heard this: *All must repent to receive God's blessings*. He said:

*Because God's love is all-embracing, some speak of it as "unconditional," and in their minds they may project that thought to mean that God's **blessings** are "unconditional" and that **salvation** is "unconditional." They are not. Some are wont to say, "The Savior loves me just as I am," and that is certainly true. But He cannot take any of us into His kingdom just as we are, "for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence." Our sins must first be resolved.*¹⁴

Elder Christofferson made clear that God *does* love us the way we are, but we must strive to be *better* than we are to enter His kingdom in heaven. And Elder Christofferson went on to assure us that as we come unto Christ and lay our sins before Him, we can find ourselves among the righteous at the right hand of God.

3. I also heard that *Christ forgives and that through His Atonement He saves the penitent*. Elder Christofferson declared:

Despite our present imperfections, however, we can still hope to attain "a name and standing," a place, in His Church and in the celestial world. After making

it clear that He cannot excuse or wink at sin, the Lord assures us:

"Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven."

*"And as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me."*¹⁵

4. Finally, I received encouragement to obey the commandments. It is commonly misunderstood that "being good all the time" is hard. While obedience does, in fact, require effort, Elder Christofferson clearly stated the truth. I heard this: *God's commands are loving and intended to bring immediate and eternal blessings*. Elder Christofferson said:

*Indeed, His commandments are not grievous—just the opposite. They mark the path of healing, happiness, peace, and joy. Our Father and our Redeemer have blessed us with commandments, and in obeying Their commandments, we feel Their perfect love more fully and more profoundly.*¹⁶

Can we not see the great love of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in these simple and beautiful truths and doctrine, spoken by a living prophet of God? Let us, indeed, take heed unto the pure doctrine.

In this modern age, we have come to expect that knowledge can and should be obtained immediately; when information is not easily known or accessible, it is often dismissed or mistrusted. Because of the abundance of information, some unwittingly give more credibility to available sources with an unknown origin rather than relying on the Lord's established pattern for receiving personal revelation. When we fail to maintain gospel purity—through speculation or seeking answers from unverified or disingenuous sources—we risk doctrinal drift. We distance ourselves from *pure* truth and from He who teaches truth. This often leads to criticism of those who have been called of God to lead us.

Consider again President Nelson's invitation and his choice of words. What did he mean by *pure*? Let's listen to the words of President Nelson as he concluded general conference with this caution and pleading:

We choose those to whom we will turn for truth and guidance.

The voices and pressures of the world are engaging and numerous. But too many voices are deceptive, seductive, and can pull us off the covenant path. To avoid the inevitable heartbreak that follows, I plead with you today to counter the lure of the world by making time for the Lord in your life—each and every day.

If most of the information you get comes from social or other media, your ability to hear the whisperings of the Spirit will be diminished. If you are not also seeking the Lord through daily prayer and gospel study, you leave yourself vulnerable to philosophies that may be intriguing but are not true. Even Saints who are otherwise faithful can be derailed by the steady beat of Babylon's band.¹⁷

"We thank thee, O God, for a prophet."¹⁸

Trust the *pure* sources that the Lord has provided: the scriptures and the words of His prophets, seers, and revelators.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.¹⁹

You can trust that the Church is a true and living church: *true* because its doctrine is pure and *living* because revelation for the Church continues from God and through living prophets, seers, and revelators.

Certainly the word *true* means correct or factual. But as you take heed unto the doctrine, you might think of the word *true* as it relates to "true north," with reference to the earth's axis rather than to "magnetic north." For those of you who haven't yet taken that required physical sciences class, let me explain.

We all know that the earth spins on an imaginary pole running through it from the North Pole to the South Pole. Where that North Pole would stand is *true* north—the bearing to which all maps and global measurements align. The magnetic field that directs the needle of a compass to point north also aligns with that North Pole—almost! *Almost* is the critical term here. Depending upon where you are on the planet, this magnetic field

actually pulls the needle away from true north to the east or the west a little—or a lot. Using maps and references, you must adjust your compass to compensate for this pull to make sure that you are navigating in relation to true north, not magnetic north.

Taking heed unto the pure doctrine will lead you to "true north," your proper destination, undeterred by the magnetic "pulls" of the world. The pure doctrine of Jesus Christ—and knowledge of the plan set forth by our Father in Heaven—is exactly what we and the world need to help us continually adjust our course home to Them. In fact, in my lifetime it has never been more clear to me than it is today that the world needs the knowledge and understanding revealed by our Creator through living prophets.

The pure doctrine of Jesus Christ, His message, is what will save us all—in this life and in the next. Listen once again to Paul's counsel to Timothy:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

"Save Thyself, and Them That Hear Thee"

Alma is one who understood the great saving power of those who knew and lived the doctrine and opened their mouths to share it. As described by Mormon, Alma had faith that

the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them.²⁰

Taking heed unto the doctrine, or the word, had long ago redeemed Alma. Now he was taking the word to the wicked Zoramites, knowing it would save them as well if—let me repeat—if they were humble and teachable.

You might recall the story. As Alma and his companions came into the land of the Zoramites, they were astonished to see the extent to which they had fallen away from the Lord, calling out in vain and rote prayers and worshipping

themselves and their own ideals more than God. As Alma began his preaching, however, only the humble and teachable among the Zoramites were ready to hear his words—pure truth and pure doctrine—and be saved.

Those who were teachable left the land with Alma, while the proud and apostate Zoramites were left to “the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them.”²¹

We Ask Ourselves, “Am I Teachable?”

Pondering this, let me ask us all for a moment of self-reflection. Which among the Zoramites would we have been? Let us each consider for a moment these questions:

- Am I teachable?
- Do I prickle at sincere, constructive criticism, *or* do I welcome loving counsel and self-examination?
- Am I quick to anger or to take offense or to find fault, *or* do I strive for patience, charity, and understanding with an open mind?
- Do I bristle when I come upon doctrine or teachings that I don’t fully understand, *or* am I quick to my knees, inquiring of the Lord with a sincere desire to know His will for me?
- Do I strive to hear and respond to the guidance of the Spirit, *or* do I desire to counsel God and His servants on how things should be?
- Am I teachable?

A number here today might be prone to proudly stand, holding to their own views and interpretations of God, His doctrine, and His teachings, despite the pain such discord brings. But don’t let that be you. To those sincere seekers who are grappling with difficult questions, you are heard and loved. You will find answers as you put your trust in God, hearken unto His servants, and wait “patiently on the Lord.”²²

“Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.”²³

Paul, before he ever met Timothy, knew what it meant to receive new doctrine, to have his heart changed, and to be saved by it. As we all know,

Paul was first Saul of Tarsus. He was a sincere and devout believer in Jehovah and the laws of Moses—so much so that Saul was militantly defending his convictions, enforcing the law among the people of Judea, and searching out and arresting those rogue Christians. One day, while on the road to Damascus, Saul found himself receiving new doctrine, *pure doctrine*, which was in direct opposition to his previous beliefs and ideals.

Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

*And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*²⁴

Now, “kick against the pricks” was a commonly understood phrase in that day. It referred to the spike at the end of a long, wooden pole used to goad draft animals—such as oxen and horses and donkeys—into moving forward as they pulled a wagon or cart or plow. Often these animals would protest against their true purpose—to pull the load—and would kick against the “encouragement” to move forward, which only resulted in more discomfoting goading.

So, in effect, on the road to Damascus, the Lord was saying to Saul, “It hurts when you fight against the truth, doesn’t it?”

But Saul was humble—and teachable—and he was quickly redeemed: “And [Saul] trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”²⁵

Let’s be like Saul, whom we best know as Paul, continually asking, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” For as He did for Paul, the Lord has a great work for you to do as well—a work that will “both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Conclusion

In the same letter to Timothy, Paul also gave him this encouragement and this charge:

*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*²⁶

I have a mental picture of all of you who attend this great university. I can see that you would let no one despise your youth. You know that you are not too young to make a significant impact for good on this world. You are now, and will long continue to be, examples of good and righteous living to everyone around you, whether it be in person or virtually.

My dear friends, never forget that President Russell M. Nelson has declared this to *you*: “You are the hope of Israel, ‘children of the promised day!’”²⁷ Our living prophet has also declared, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is exactly what is needed in this confused, contentious, and weary world.”²⁸

These two statements put the onus directly upon your shoulders: You *are* the hope of Israel, because it will be *you* who will bring the hope of Christ to this “confused, contentious, and weary world.” As you take heed unto yourself and take heed unto the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—the sponsor of this sacred institution—I know you will both save yourself “and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto [many others].”²⁹ “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,” and you will both obtain and help others to obtain an abundant life and life eternal. As you have entered to learn, you *will* go forth to serve.

A year or so after I had graduated from BYU, then BYU president Rex E. Lee called on his students to give back and replenish the educational wells that earlier pioneers had built:

*As Elder Robert L. Simpson often quoted: “We have all drunk from wells we did not dig, and warmed ourselves by fires we did not build.” **Having drunk from BYU’s well, we have a lifelong opportunity and obligation for the continuing quality of the well itself.***³⁰

Let me repeat that last sentence: “*Having drunk from BYU’s well, we have a lifelong opportunity and obligation for the continuing quality of the well itself.*”

I repeat the Savior’s promise: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” I bear my sincere and solemn witness that He is “the good shepherd: the good

shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”³¹ He is the Savior of all mankind, and He is your individual Savior. His Father is your Father. They love you. They desire to bring you home. I bear my witness of Them and of Their work, which moves forward on this earth. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Pure Truth, Pure Doctrine, and Pure Revelation,” *Liahona*, November 2021.
2. Isaiah 40:31; see also verses 28–31.
3. Aims of a BYU Education (1 March 1995).
4. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118; emphasis added.
5. John 10:10.
6. Aims of BYU; see also Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).
7. 1 Corinthians 4:17.
8. 1 Timothy 4:16.
9. See *Adjusting to Missionary Life: Resource Booklet* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), Mission Callings, Handbooks and Callings, Church of Jesus Christ, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/resource-booklet-adjusting-to-missionary-life?lang=eng.
10. JST, Luke 2:46–47.
11. Luke 2:52.
12. Nelson, “Pure Truth”; emphasis added.
13. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Love of God,” *Liahona*, November 2021.
14. Christofferson, “Love of God”; emphasis in original; quoting Moses 6:57.
15. Christofferson, “Love of God”; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 109:24; 1:32; Mosiah 26:30.
16. Christofferson, “Love of God.”
17. Russell M. Nelson, “Make Time for the Lord,” *Liahona*, November 2021.
18. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 19.
19. Ephesians 4:14.
20. Alma 31:5.
21. Alma 35:15.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 98:2.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 112:10.
24. Acts 9:3–5.
25. Acts 9:6.

26. 1 Timothy 4:12.

27. Russell M. Nelson, in Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2018/08-se/hope-of-israel?lang=eng; quoting “Hope of Israel,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 259.

28. Russell M. Nelson, “Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” *Liahona*, May 2021.

29. 3 Nephi 18:32.

30. Rex E. Lee, “Some Thoughts About Butterflies, Replenishment, Environmentalism,

and Ownership,” BYU devotional address, 15 September 1992; emphasis added. See Deuteronomy 6:10–11:

And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land . . . to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not.

31. John 10:11.