

Going Forward in the Second Century

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My dear brothers and sisters, I am thrilled to be with you. As president of BYU for nine years, I heard many lectures and devotional addresses. The most memorable talks during that period were not those that only reaffirmed familiar subjects or introduced new facts but those that changed a way of thinking about a subject. I hope that something I say today will suggest or reinforce a helpful way of thinking about something important in your life.

I.

In one of the first devotional assemblies in the fall of 1975, President Spencer W. Kimball delivered his inspired address “The Second Century of Brigham Young University.”¹ I was then president of Brigham Young University, so I listened to and subsequently pondered his talk as intently as any person living.

The subject was that Brigham Young University has “a double heritage,”² being concerned with

both “the secular and the spiritual.”³ Thus, President Kimball explained, BYU must not be shackled by “worldly ideologies and concepts.”⁴ “It must not [allow itself to] be made over in the image of the world.”⁵ As he neared his conclusion, he repeated that challenge:

As previous First Presidencies have said, and we say again to you, we expect (we do not simply hope) that Brigham Young University will . . . “Become a unique university in all of the world!”⁶

What must BYU do in its second century to secure and magnify that uniqueness? The first way BYU will be unique is that it won’t desert or dilute existing truth. President Kimball explained:

BYU . . . must continue to resist false fashions in education, staying with those basic principles that have proved right and have guided good men and women and good universities over the centuries.⁷

Dallin H. Oaks, first counselor in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on September 13, 2022.

A second way BYU will be a unique university is its focus on undergraduate education:

*While the discovery of new knowledge must increase, there must always be a heavy and primary emphasis on . . . the quality of teaching at BYU . . . [that] includes a quality relationship between faculty and students.*⁸

A third and vital source of uniqueness is our personal and institutional relationship with God:

*We expect the natural unfolding of knowledge to occur as a result of scholarship, but there will always be that added dimension that the Lord can provide when we are qualified to receive and He chooses to speak.*⁹

President Kimball also spoke about our relationship with other universities:

We can sometimes make concord with others, including scholars who have parallel purposes. . . .

*In other instances, we must be willing to break with the educational establishment (not foolishly or cavalierly, but thoughtfully and for good reason) in order to find gospel ways to help mankind. Gospel methodology, concepts, and insights can help us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference.*¹⁰

Please note that President Kimball and other First Presidencies are not asking BYU to be a unique university just by being different. Our uniqueness will always be rooted in our following the inspiration that we prayerfully seek in our personal work and that we receive from the university administration and our prophetic leaders. When leaders such as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Commissioner Clark G. Gilbert and President Kevin J. Worthen repeat the same counsel and give the same challenges, hear it for what it is: inspired direction for what BYU and we must be and become.

Speaking particularly to the faculty and leadership of this university of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I ask, “How are we measuring up after almost a half century since a prophet spoke these fundamental challenges?” Elder Holland emphasized this challenge in his inspired address to the faculty and leaders last year:

*When you look at President Kimball’s talk again, may I ask you to pay particular attention to that sweet prophet’s effort to ask that we be unique? In his discourse, President Kimball used the word unique eight times and the word special eight times. It seems clear to me . . . that **BYU will become an “educational Mt. Everest” only to the degree it embraces its uniqueness, its singularity.***¹¹

President Russell M. Nelson explained the nature and purpose of that *uniqueness* when he contrasted two different educational goals:

*There is a major difference, however, between the responsibilities of secular educators and my responsibility as the senior Apostle on earth. Their job is to educate and prepare you for your **mortal** experience—meaning, how to succeed in your life’s work. My responsibility is to educate and prepare you also for your **immortal** experience—meaning, how to gain eternal life.*¹²

The uniqueness of our Church education has the same purpose: education for eternity as well as education for our mortal experience. We go forward with that goal.

II.

We must understand that our having an additional purpose for education will not be welcomed by many educators. It may even be opposed by them and others and even by government regulators. Here I remind us of BYU’s experience nearly fifty years ago when challenged by what has come to be known generally as Title IX.

A 1972 act of Congress forbade discrimination “on the basis of sex . . . under *any* education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”¹³ But the proposed administrative *regulations* expanded that direction by asserting federal control over *all* programs or activities of any educational *institution* receiving such assistance.¹⁴

Alarmed that this would immediately extend federal control over all institutional decisions that specified differences between men and women—even possibly forbidding separate dormitories for men and women—BYU immediately challenged the breadth of the proposed regulations. Testifying before a congressional subcommittee in

1975, I expressed our support for the overall non-discrimination objectives of Title IX but protested that the proposed regulations went too far in carrying federal control beyond the authorizing act of Congress into impermissible conflicts with the independence of private colleges and the religious freedom of Church-related institutions.¹⁵

Before 1975 ended, we had attracted significant institutional and media support for our position. In less than a year, our focused objections prevailed. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) scaled back its formal enforcement of Title IX. The effect on BYU is summarized in this 1976 letter from the director of HEW's Office for Civil Rights: "BYU's Code of Honor, which is derived from religious tenets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, provides for evenhanded treatment of the sexes."¹⁶ The letter further stated that

in those few instances where evenhanded treatment of employees and students would conflict with the religious tenets [of the Church under several cited sections of the regulations] . . . , BYU is granted an exemption from those requirements.¹⁷

President Kimball's second-century address commissioned us "to break with the educational establishment" when necessary "to find gospel ways to help mankind." Where would BYU and other Church-related colleges and universities be today if BYU had not dared to resist the government's 1974 proposal to significantly expand its control over private higher education?

President Kimball affirmed our efforts in these words from his second-century address:

We want you to keep free as a university—free of government control, not only for the sake of the university and the Church but also for the sake of our government. Our government, state and federal, and our people are best served by free colleges and universities, not by institutions that are compliant out of fears over funding.¹⁸

I remind you that President Kimball's second-century address and this Title IX episode occurred long before most of you current students and

many of our current faculty were born. Ancient history? Yes, but important history to remember when current worldly pressures are focused on our differences.

Those who deviate from a majority are often made to feel like ignorant holdouts on subjects in which everyone else is more enlightened. When higher education or the world in general call upon faculty to vary from gospel standards, do we "dare to be different?" I borrow that phrase from Commissioner Gilbert in his recent essay in *Deseret Magazine* on preserving religious identity in higher education.¹⁹ I will return to "dare to be different" as I discuss other challenges.

III.

I now speak to you as students in the second century of this university. Where are you in the differences that make us unique?

Commissioner Gilbert recently showed a humorous *Candid Camera* demonstration of the effect of being different. Smile with me as we resolve not to be intimidated like the poor fellow portrayed here. [A video of an elevator experiment was shown.²⁰]

More important than what you do as a student are the choices you are making in your personal life—the priorities you are adopting consciously or subconsciously. Are you going forward against the world's opposition?

A fundamental fact of mortal life is that there must be "opposition in all things."²¹ The scriptures illustrate that contrast in many ways. For example, the Savior taught His followers to "forsake the world, and save your souls."²² He described His disciples as the "salt" or "savour" of the earth who would leaven the rest of the mass and be an influence that would give light to all.²³ The Savior told His followers, "Go ye into the world, and care not for the world."²⁴ "For all these things do the nations of the world seek after," He explained, and then He said, "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."²⁵

In contrast, He taught about the other extreme: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"²⁶

Our personal choices between the extremes of the Lord's way and the world's way are made

in the context of love. I am sure that President Spencer W. Kimball's second-century address, with which I began, was motivated by love—love of God, whom he served as a prophet; love of the children of God, whom he taught; and love of this university that served them.

I feel that same love as I try to elevate your personal choices. I love God, and I also love this university that has been so important in my life for more than seventy years. Everything I am trying to say to you now is also motivated by love—especially my love for you, my brothers and sisters. Here is some counsel you should consider as you make your choices.

Last year I spoke in general conference on the need for a church.²⁷ When we dare to be different, we choose to engage fully in the restored Church. We keep our covenants. We have the courage to follow all the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. We stand up personally for those who are marginalized. I will speak further of each of those ideas in my following discussion.

Sometimes we hear of Latter-day Saints who have honorably concluded an arduous Church calling—such as a full-time mission or a heavy leadership commitment—and are now taking what they call “a vacation from Church service.” If tempted to take such a “vacation,” you should remember that this soon leads to forgetting gospel truths—such as the first commandment to love God—and it also leads to forgetting gospel covenants. Do not risk that.

When we persist in Church activity and service, we increase our influence for good with family and associates. Our light shines to influence those who see our good works. Our example will be powerful. That is illustrated by this experience of a brother-in-law of my wife, Kristen, when he was in junior high school here in Utah about fifty years ago.

In his class there was a boy who was very different in dress and demeanor and sometimes in words and actions. He was easy to ridicule. Junior high school was difficult for him, especially because trouble from a large bully made his life miserable. The bully and his group would taunt him and verbally tease him and regularly beat him up against his locker.

On the last day of school, everyone was in the gym playing games and talking. This boy was playing a game of chess by himself—he had a board and chess pieces, and he would move from one side of the board to another and was happily playing alone. When the bully saw this, he went over and hit the chessboard, scattering the pieces all over the gym. Suddenly the gym went totally silent. Everyone had their eyes fixed on the bully, the victim, and the scattered chess pieces.

Kristen's brother-in-law could not stand it. He said he didn't care if the bully punched him out. He stood up, walked over, and began picking up chess pieces off the floor. And here is what makes this example great. Immediately, many in the crowd did the same—uniting to protect the victim.

Thirty years later, a well-dressed executive boarding an airplane approached my brother-in-law, who had recognized this man as the boy who had been taunted in the gym so long ago. “Thanks, Holbrook,” he said. “Thanks for being a friend.”

When Kristen shared that experience in a recent talk, she added:

We have among us some who are hurting. We may not be aware of their struggles, but we can make all the difference by our attention, by standing up and bearing testimony, and by listening to the promptings to make a visit or a phone call or get out of bed when we don't feel like it. I promise if you stand up and serve, it will touch lives in an eternal way that you can only begin to comprehend now.

In that way, by following the loving ministering to the afflicted that was taught by Jesus Christ, we can proceed toward what President Nelson described as

the unrivaled difference that belief in God and His Son, Jesus Christ, has in a person's life. There is simply nothing to compare with the refining, ennobling strength and meaning that come into the life of a devoted believer and servant.²⁸

On that same subject, I loved President Nelson's plea to the sisters:

Thirty-six years ago, in 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball made a profound prophecy about the impact that covenant-keeping women would have on the future of the Lord's Church. [President Nelson then quoted this prophecy by President Kimball]: "Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world . . . will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and . . . are seen as . . . different—in happy ways—from the women of the world."²⁹

President Nelson continued:

We, your brethren, need your strength, your conversion, your conviction, your ability to lead, your wisdom, and your voices. The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God!³⁰

IV.

In the first year of his presidency, President Nelson challenged us "to stand out; be different from the world."³¹ He continued:

You and I know that you are to be a light to the world. Therefore, the Lord needs you to look like, sound like, act like, and dress like a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Yes, you are living in the world, but you have very different standards from the world to help you avoid the stain of the world.

. . . And if you are sometimes called "weird," wear that distinction as a badge of honor and be happy that your light is shining brightly in this ever-darkening world!

Set a standard for the rest of the world! Embrace being different!³²

Of course, "being different" does not suggest being different from your brothers and sisters who follow the Lord and His servants. It means being different from the world's ways when those of the world do not follow the Lord's way.

We must not forget the Savior's teaching that "the first and great commandment" "in the law" is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,

and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and the second commandment "is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."³³ The love of neighbor—however important—does not come ahead of love of God and obedience to His commandments. If we truly love God and serve Him as He has taught us, we will love our neighbor as God loves him or her and as He would have us love and serve them.

God's incomprehensible love for His children does not excuse us from accountability when we break His commandments. There is enough mercy in the merciful Atonement and the incomparable glory of the various kingdoms and degrees that follow the Final Judgment to prove God's love for all His children. Jesus showed this in His mortal teachings. He was ever-loving but invariably direct in His commandments and expectations. To the woman taken in adultery, He refrained from condemning her then but concluded by directing her to "go, and sin no more."³⁴ And He concluded the rigorous teaching of the Sermon on the Mount with the incomparable direction "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."³⁵ We proceed toward that divine condition by priorities that follow the Savior without being compromised by worldly values and behavior.

Keeping gospel standards does not make you second class or condemn your example to obscurity. All of us know of persons whose performance is enhanced in quality and visibility by being different from the crowd.³⁶ President Nelson taught us this a year ago:

*Please believe me when I say that when your spiritual foundation is built solidly upon Jesus Christ, you have **no need to fear**. As you are true to your covenants made in the temple, you will be strengthened by His power.³⁷*

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Master and our Teacher and our Savior. I testify that we are led by a prophet, and I invoke the blessings of the Lord upon you as you seek to serve our Savior through the teachings of his prophetic leaders. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.
2. Kimball, “Second Century.”
3. Kimball, “Second Century.”
4. Kimball, “Second Century.”
5. Kimball, “Second Century.”
6. Kimball, “Second Century.”
7. Kimball, “Second Century.”
8. Kimball, “Second Century.”
9. Kimball, “Second Century.”
10. Kimball, “Second Century.”
11. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU university conference address, 23 August 2021; emphasis in original; quoting Spencer W. Kimball, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980, Brigham Young University, 9; see also Kimball, “Second Century.”
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson; emphasis in original.
13. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, 20 U.S.C. sec. 1681 (1972); emphasis added.
14. See “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex,” in Education Programs and Activities Receiving or Benefiting from Federal Financial Assistance, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Part II in *Federal Register* 39, no. 120 (20 June 1974), 45 C.F.R., Part 86.
15. Testimony of Dallin H. Oaks before the Postsecondary Education Subcommittee of the Education and Labor Committee, United States House of Representatives, 24 June 1975.
16. Letter to Dallin H. Oaks from Director Martin H. Gerry, Office for Civil Rights, HEW, 12 August 1976.
17. Letter from Martin H. Gerry.
18. Kimball, “Second Century.”
19. See Clark G. Gilbert’s brilliant essay “Dare to Be Different,” *Deseret Magazine*, 14 September 2022, deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319209.
20. The video shown was “Face the Rear,” a 1962 episode of *Candid Camera*.
21. 2 Nephi 2:11.
22. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:29.
23. See Matthew 5:13–16.
24. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:25.
25. Luke 12:30, 31. See also Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38.
26. Mark 8:36.
27. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Need for a Church,” *Liahona*, November 2021.
28. Russell M. Nelson, “Why Have Faith Now? LDS President Russell M. Nelson Explains During Phoenix-Area Visit,” Opinion, azcentral.com, 10 February 2019, azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/2019/02/10/2776270002.
29. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign*, November 2015; quoting Spencer W. Kimball, “Women’s Fireside Addresses: The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, November 1979; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 222–23.
30. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters.”
31. 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.
32. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”
33. Matthew 22:36–39.
34. John 8:11.
35. Matthew 5:48.
36. See, e.g., *Why I Believe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2002).
37. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.