

# *Preparing Students for Eternity*

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I am grateful for the opportunity to share some remarks today and to express my deep, heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for who you are and what you do. President C. Shane Reese’s address this morning was exceptional. He stands on the shoulders of President Kevin J Worthen and continues the unbroken line of excellent leadership that has characterized this great university. I also congratulate the award recipients and those who have provided the beautiful musical renditions.

## **We Must Diligently Pursue Both “the Light of Christ” and “Every Good Thing”**

I addressed this university conference meeting in August 2020.<sup>1</sup> At that time I referenced, as have other General Authorities from time to time, then Elder Spencer W. Kimball’s 1967 seminal talk titled “Education for Eternity.”<sup>2</sup> Elder Kimball challenged BYU and its faculty and staff to aspire

to a prophecy given by President John Taylor. President Taylor issued this declaration:

*You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters.*<sup>3</sup>

Elder Kimball also quoted President Brigham Young, who said, “Every accomplishment, every polished grace, every useful attainment in mathematics, music, and in all science and art belong to the Saints.”<sup>4</sup>

The university’s mission statement declares that “Brigham Young University [is] founded, supported, and guided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>5</sup> This is a significant asset and should not be viewed as a constraint.<sup>6</sup> I love how President Kimball explained it in his address here in 1975: “You must speak with authority and

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excellence to your professional colleagues in the language of scholarship, and you must also be literate in the language of spiritual things.”<sup>7</sup> It is this literacy that will allow “us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference.”<sup>8</sup>

My intent in referencing this high standard is not because I have a sense that BYU is falling short. My feelings are quite the opposite. I am exceedingly pleased with what I see transpiring at this great university. I see continuous and significant righteous achievement. But the standard that President Kimball set is a high bar. Our best efforts are expected, and there is yet much to be accomplished.

When our goal is to prepare students not only for this life but also for eternal life, we can never rest on our laurels. This year’s theme from Moroni 7:19—“Search diligently in the light of Christ [and] lay hold upon every good thing”—makes it very clear that we must diligently pursue both “the light of Christ” and “every good thing.”

The Savior has declared, “I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”<sup>9</sup> He has also commanded us “to bring up [our] children in light and truth.”<sup>10</sup>

Speaking of every good thing, Moroni, quoting his father, Mormon, taught: “Wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.”<sup>11</sup>

The light and truth given to us by revelation in this final dispensation is not easily comprehended or often understood, primarily because of incorrect traditions.<sup>12</sup> We have frequently observed that good people who are primarily involved in the secular world have a hard time understanding our purposes and aspirations as members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am not particularly critical of the fact that or even surprised that they have such a difficult time understanding us.

In my thirty-three years in the San Francisco Bay Area before being called as a General Authority, I was a student at Stanford Law School and a business lawyer. Then I ran a healthcare system. It was a challenge explaining to law students, colleagues, and even close friends not of our faith many of the things that I was involved with

because of my faith, such as periodically going to the Church welfare farm to provide manual labor, attending a temple session on a Saturday morning, serving a two-year mission in the middle of my education years, or serving as a lay leader in the ward and stake where I lived.

It was relatively easy for friends to understand efforts to achieve Christlike attributes or worship at Sunday services. The reference points they easily related to were attendance at church and charitable giving. It was not easy for them to understand how temple worship and other activities fit in the gospel picture.

I appreciated Meagan Kohler’s recent *Deseret News* article explaining what she hoped major media would understand about the Church and temple buildings. I loved her description that “temples *are* monuments. . . . They are beacons of light and peace, piercing clouds of cynicism, conflict and despair.”<sup>13</sup> She was concerned that some media articles had primarily focused on temples as beautiful, financially expensive buildings. She declared:

*If the church’s significance and impact is only measurable in dollars distributed, then it’s a charitable organization rather than a church. To decide whether the church spends its money well, you must first decide what matters most. If the answer is forming eternal bonds with God and each other, then “a temple-building spree” is money well spent.*<sup>14</sup>

With Meagan Kohler’s words as a preamble, let me gratefully expand on your well-chosen theme: “Search diligently in the light of Christ [and] lay hold upon every good thing.”

### **Our Commitment to Education Grows Out of Our Doctrine**

Latter-day Saint doctrine is unique and unequivocal about the role of intelligence and the importance of education and knowledge. In section 93 of our Doctrine and Covenants, we are taught:

- Truth is independent: “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”<sup>15</sup>

- “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”<sup>16</sup>
- “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.”<sup>17</sup>
- Exercising our agency to find light and truth and lay hold of every good thing is a doctrinal goal.<sup>18</sup>

In the quest for both faith and knowledge, we also need to maintain humility. In my experience, those of you associated with BYU have avoided Nephi’s painful teaching that some who “are learned . . . think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, in our day in much of society we see self-importance and arrogance flaunted while humility and accountability to God are denigrated. Many who consider themselves learned do not understand our purpose here on earth. Amulek, Alma’s missionary companion, stated this very clearly: “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God.”<sup>20</sup> Having sufficient humility in our lives to help God’s children deepen their faith in Him and, in doing so, more fully establish the Lord’s Church should continue to be a primary objective.

The leadership of this church and our leaders in higher education have over a long period dedicated the time and resources necessary to provide exceptional educational institutions. The Church system of higher education tries to emulate the Savior’s message, ministry, and mission.<sup>21</sup> As the flagship of the Church Educational System (CES), BYU offers its spiritual leadership as an asset and a resource for the entire Church. We are grateful for what you are accomplishing.

Think of the size and complexity of the Church’s educational commitment across the world. Last year BYU, BYU–Idaho, BYU–Hawaii, and Ensign College had a combined campus enrollment of 76,856. Through BYU–Pathway Worldwide, an additional 61,491 online students were served across 180 countries. In the next two years, BYU–Pathway enrollment will exceed the combined enrollment of all four university campuses, reaching students who could not afford or did not think they had access to education.

Beyond Church schools, seminaries and institutes enroll an additional 733,668 students.<sup>22</sup>

Each of these institutions provides a road map for success in this life and service in the kingdom.

Many universities with much smaller enrollments have large endowments and charge very high tuition fees.

Our precious students cover a wide spectrum of backgrounds and circumstances. Our most academically oriented students can compete with students admitted to the highest-ranking schools. This is true here at BYU.<sup>23</sup> I am grateful that students who have not had educational opportunities and who come from different countries, cultures, languages, and races, as well as from economically disadvantaged families, are also getting the benefit of an excellent education.<sup>24</sup> Today, no matter where you live in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you have access to an affordable, high-quality, spiritually based education because of the priority the Church places on education. Speaking to the National Press Club last year, Elder David A. Bednar shared that the Church invests more than \$1 billion annually in higher education.<sup>25</sup>

Please note that our commitment to education grows not out of some historical antecedent; rather, our commitment to education grows out of our doctrine. There are four doctrinal commitments that Latter-day Saints adhere to and support in a heartfelt manner. These commitments clearly qualify for the “every good thing” part of this year’s theme. They are set forth in the Church’s *General Handbook*. These commitments require huge amounts of time and significant financial resources to achieve. The Church is organized at the general and local levels to accomplish these purposes as set forth in the *General Handbook*:

*We come unto Christ and assist in God’s work by:*

- *Living the gospel of Jesus Christ.*
- *Caring for those in need.*
- *Inviting all to receive the gospel.*
- *Uniting families for eternity.*<sup>26</sup>

These are not just current objectives and purposes. They are based on historical revelation and the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

An account from early Church history provides context and perspective. The refining process of Zion's Camp in 1834 has been an example for the entire Church. Even when the Church had very few members, for forty-five days more than 230 men, women, and children marched more than one thousand miles from Kirtland, Ohio, to Clay County, Missouri. The purpose was to assist Church members who had been forced from their homes. Certain additional principles were provided by the Lord at that time. The Saints did

*not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them;*

*And [were] not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom. . . .*

*And . . . mine elders [need to be] endowed with power from on high.<sup>27</sup>*

In Kirtland in February 1835, the Prophet Joseph Smith explained some of the significance of Zion's Camp to the brethren who had participated. He told them:

*God did not want you to fight. He could not organize his kingdom with twelve men to open the gospel door to the nations of the earth . . . unless He took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham.<sup>28</sup>*

It is interesting that most of the initial apostles of the Restoration and all of the First Quorum of the Seventy were veterans of the camp.<sup>29</sup>

Additional principles and doctrine were provided when the leaders were endowed with power from on high, which occurred in the house of the Lord, the Kirtland Temple.<sup>30</sup> The events of April 3, 1836, are recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110.

These powers endowed from on high included (1) "the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth";<sup>31</sup> (2) the keys of "the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham"<sup>32</sup> for preparing people to meet God; and (3) the keys for the redemption of the dead and priesthood sealing power.<sup>33</sup>

## **Our Responsibilities in God's Work of Salvation and Exaltation**

Why have I covered this in such detail? I wanted to clearly establish the unquestioned significance of responsibilities that matter most and rest upon all of us—particularly those of us who work with the rising generation—to emphasize the elements of God's *work of salvation and exaltation*. These responsibilities are at the pinnacle of laying hold of every good thing. Complying with these divinely inspired points of doctrine is a massive effort.

Let me share a little of the history of the three keys committed by Moses, Elias, and Elijah as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110 and what the Church has accomplished with respect to each of them.

### **1. Inviting All to Receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Two months ago, on June 22, President Russell M. Nelson introduced in a video a second edition of *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. It had been nearly two decades since the initial *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* had been introduced. In the introductory letter that accompanied President Nelson's video, the First Presidency stated:

*The Savior's gospel is the only enduring solution for the challenges faced in today's world. This underscores the urgent need to make the truth of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ known to all. Preach My Gospel is a treasured resource to help bring the Savior's healing, sanctifying power to individuals, families, missionaries, and those they teach.<sup>34</sup>*

The overwhelming commandment of the risen Savior in all four gospels in the Bible is to "preach the gospel" to "all the world."<sup>35</sup>

The keys for gathering Israel in this dispensation were committed, as I have noted, by Moses in the Kirtland Temple. In the first 120 years of the Restoration of the Church, approximately 62,970 missionaries served. Amazingly, we have more than 69,000 missionaries serving under a call from the prophet right now. We are grateful for the enormous expansion of the missionary effort.

In the last two decades there have been almost five million missionary convert baptisms into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>36</sup> The

number of missions has increased from 338 to 414 since 2004. One hundred sixty nations and many territories are within the boundaries of these missions.<sup>37</sup> Our effort to invite all to receive the gospel has shown dramatic results.

In addition to taking the gospel to the world, the rising generation has been prepared to provide leadership for the Church.

It is interesting that experts on mental maturation who are not of our faith have pointed out to Church leaders that serving a mission provides a maturation process for learning that is an excellent preparation for higher education.<sup>38</sup> On this campus, more than two-thirds of our students have served missions. Depending on the semester, that is more than 21,000 returned missionaries.<sup>39</sup> Think of the strength that these BYU students have carried across the world. In turn, consider how their mission experiences strengthen the learning environment on this campus. All of this is an outgrowth of a fundamental doctrine of the Church to invite all to hear the gospel.

## 2. *Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ*

This responsibility is again set forth in the Savior's teachings in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Elias committed the keys for "the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed."<sup>40</sup> These keys include religious observance in the home and church worship in chapels across the world. It includes young and older men exercising their priesthood to bless the human family. These efforts by Church members are the most easily understood by the secular world. Almost everything we do in the Church is to bring people to Jesus Christ and the blessings that are promised. We have more than 31,300 wards and branches and more than 19,400 chapels. These meetinghouses are spread across 195 countries.<sup>41</sup> On this campus we help our students prepare for future Church service through our twenty-one university stakes with more than 260 student wards.<sup>42</sup>

## 3. *Uniting Families for Eternity*

President Russell M. Nelson has emphasized the significance of our temples and of making baptismal and temple covenants with God as we

receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation. The keys for redeeming the dead and the sealing power are essential for the rising generation regardless of what they are studying and regardless of what their particular interests are. All students should have instilled in their hearts a desire to receive the power from on high represented by temple endowments and sacred temple covenants. The revelation President Nelson is receiving to establish temples all over the earth is clear and convincing evidence of the necessity of each individual to give this effort a very high priority.

When I returned from my mission in 1962, there were twelve temples in five countries across the entire world. Today there are 179 dedicated temples in fifty-one countries and an additional 136 temples in fifty countries that have been announced or are currently under construction.<sup>43</sup> It is not coincidental that we have a house of the Lord adjacent to every CES campus. Here in Provo—and soon in Rexburg—there are *two* temples.

## Conclusion

Why have I spent so much time covering the doctrinal purposes of the Church? Our purpose, in addition to knowledge and education, is to prepare students for eternity. If we are going to use "the light of Christ" to "lay hold upon every good thing," these purposes of Christ's restored Church must not just be understood but exhibited in all of our lives and included as part of the "gospel methodolog[ies]"<sup>44</sup> in President Kimball's foundational address in 1975. Each of us must continuously strive for personal righteousness and temple worthiness. I believe BYU and you faculty members and employees are on the right track to be the institution that Spencer W. Kimball described. I express our love and appreciation for you and for all the great work you are doing. I am confident that this marvelous institution will be a seminal voice for building faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement and preparing for the Second Coming of our Savior. I pray that the Lord will bless each of you as you strive to righteously empower the rising generation.

I bear my sure and certain apostolic witness of the divinity of the Savior and the reality of His Atonement. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. See Quentin L. Cook, “Be Not Weary in Well-Doing,” BYU university conference address, 24 August 2020.

2. See Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967.

3. John Taylor, “Discourse,” *Deseret News Semi-Weekly*, 1 June 1880, 1; *JD* 21:100 (13 April 1879); quoted in Kimball, “Education for Eternity.”

4. Brigham Young, “Instructions,” *Deseret News*, 15 July 1863, 17; *JD* 10:224 (April and May 1863); quoted in Kimball, “Education for Eternity.”

5. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).

6. A constraint simply connotes boundaries. It is like Speakers’ Corner in London, where I participated as a missionary. We could address any topic, save obscenity, blasphemy, and criticism of the Queen. As faculty and employees, there are boundaries. But the deeper *opportunity* is to draw on the unique assets of your affiliation with the Church to do things you could do nowhere else.

7. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

8. Kimball, “Second Century.”

9. Doctrine and Covenants 93:2.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 93:40.

11. Moroni 7:13.

12. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:39.

13. Meagan Kohler, “Opinion: What the *Wall Street Journal* Would Have Learned About Temples from a Latter-day Saint Like Me,” *Deseret News*, 30 June 2023, [deseret.com/opinion/2023/6/30/23779740/wall-street-journal-lds-temples-response](https://deseret.com/opinion/2023/6/30/23779740/wall-street-journal-lds-temples-response); emphasis in original.

14. Kohler, “Opinion.”

15. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.

16. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 93:29.

18. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:30–31.

19. 2 Nephi 9:28.

20. Alma 34:32.

21. See Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

22. Statistics prepared by the Church Educational System, 31 July 2023.

23. See Quentin L. Cook, “Great Expectations,” BYU devotional address, 10 November 2020.

During that November talk, I stated that when I had spoken to the BYU faculty and staff earlier that year in August,

*I mentioned that BYU has grown in both size and accomplishment. I indicated that knowledgeable friends had pointed out to me that BYU’s typical incoming class of about six thousand students is approximately one thousand more than the first-year classes at Harvard, Stanford, and Yale Universities combined. The average number of those admitted who had enrolled at those three universities is 1,633 each. If you look at a similar number of first-year students at BYU, including high school GPAs, ACT and SAT scores, and other relevant accomplishments, BYU compares very favorably. [See also Cook, “Be Not Weary”]*

24. See Richard D. Kahlenberg, “Affirmative Action Should Be Based on Class, Not Race,” *Open Future, Economist*, 4 September 2018. In the *Economist* article, Kahlenberg wrote: “Social science research . . . finds that today, being economically disadvantaged in America poses seven times as large an obstacle to high student achievement as does race” (also quoted in David Brooks, “Let’s Smash the College Admissions Process,” *Opinion, New York Times*, 1 June 2023).

25. See David A. Bednar, National Press Club address, Washington, DC, 26 May 2022; transcript available at Bednar, “An Apostle Describes a Latter-day Work,” Newsroom, Church of Jesus Christ, [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-bednar-national-press-club-speech](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-bednar-national-press-club-speech).

26. “God’s Work of Salvation and Exaltation,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, August 2023 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2023), 1.2.

27. Doctrine and Covenants 105:3–4, 11; emphasis added.

28. Joseph Smith, quoted in Joseph Young, *History of the Organization of the Seventies: Names of the First and Second Quorums. Items in Relation to the First Presidency of the Seventies. Also a Brief Glance at Enoch and His City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishment, 1878), 14; quoted in Steven C. Harper, *Making*

*Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour Through Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 391. It is fair to say that most of the leadership of the entire Church for the next fifty years came from those who had participated in Zion's Camp.

29. See Harper, *Making Sense*, 391.

30. Earlier, on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist had conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and then, a short period thereafter, Peter, James, and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver.

31. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.

32. Doctrine and Covenants 110:12.

33. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.

34. "Preach My Gospel, Second Edition," First Presidency letter announcing the 2023 edition of *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 22 June 2023. See also "Second Edition of 'Preach My Gospel' Is Now Available," Newsroom, Church of Jesus Christ, video, 22 June 2023, [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/second-edition-of-preach-my-gospel](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/second-edition-of-preach-my-gospel).

35. Mark 16:15; see also Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:45–48; John 21:15–17.

36. Statistics prepared March 5, 2023, by Membership and Statistics, Church of Jesus Christ. Total convert baptisms in the past two decades: 4,930,947.

37. Statistics prepared August 1, 2023, by Missionary Department, Church of Jesus Christ.

38. From a meeting with Richard V. Reeves, author of the book *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2022).

39. Statistics prepared July 31, 2023, by BYU's institutional research team.

40. Doctrine and Covenants 110:12.

41. Statistics prepared by Membership and Statistics (2023 second quarter), Church of Jesus Christ; includes chapels owned and rented.

42. Statistics prepared July 31, 2023, by BYU's institutional research team.

43. Statistics prepared July 31, 2023, by Temple Department, Church of Jesus Christ.

44. Kimball, "Second Century."