

# Becoming the Sine Qua Non

C. SHANE REESE

Wow! I wish you could trade spots with me for a second. You are an incredible, incredible sight. Congratulations to our graduates and thank you to the parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, mentors, faculty, staff, and all who are in attendance today. Thank you for being here. And thank you for being *there*—there for our graduates when they needed it the most. You took late-night phone calls, gave impromptu pep talks, and proof-read term papers—even if your own last term paper was written on a typewriter.

Thank you.

To borrow a Latin phrase, you are today's sine qua non section; literally translated, *sine qua non* means “without which, not.”<sup>1</sup> You are the people *without which* today would *not* be possible. Today is about honoring our graduates, but it is also about honoring you. So, class of 2024, please rise and join me in thanking all of those in our sine qua non section. Thank them for all they have done!

Today we are gathered in a special place on this campus, the Marriott Center. Over the years this arena has hosted artistic and athletic performances, scholars, and dignitaries. It has also served as the hallowed forum where prophets and

apostles have taught sacred truths, have borne special witness, and have inspired generations of students.

The Marriott Center is named after J. Willard Marriott in acknowledgment of the Marriotts' generous support in constructing this very venue. But, as evidence that no good deed goes unpunished, while Brother Marriott was here being honored when this building was dedicated, his car was apparently being towed away from the very arena that now bore his name.

If somehow you managed to escape BYU without getting a parking citation, there are still plenty of opportunities ahead. One prominent college president described the modern university “as a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking.”<sup>2</sup>

But, as you all know well, at BYU we aspire to much, much more than this.

In the parlance of statisticians (my favorite parlance), BYU is an outlier in the modern higher education landscape. We proudly and energetically embrace our charge from prophets and apostles to “dare to be different”<sup>3</sup> and to “become the BYU of prophecy.”<sup>4</sup> Our students

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C. Shane Reese, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this commencement address on April 25, 2024.

and programs consistently rank among the most competitive in the nation. But at BYU we are more concerned about the measurements of heaven than the metrics of this world.

The courage to be different isn't really about singing hymns in tunnels or chugging chocolate milk by the gallon while eating yards of Cougar Tails. No, it is about our united quest to become "the Christ-centered, prophetically directed university of destiny and promise."<sup>5</sup> And today, graduates, my friends, BYU's mission is embodied in you as you go out and choose daily discipleship, honor divine covenants, and strive to serve wherever your paths might take you. This eternal curriculum is only just commencing for you graduates.

A friend of mine played football at a community college in California. He wasn't a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but when a teammate transferred to BYU, he decided to come along.

He spent more time on the sidelines than he did on the field, but he didn't mind because he was learning a lot, majoring in English, and meeting people, including someone he hoped to marry. He was inquisitive and asked good questions. On the field, his queries were about Xs and Os. In the classroom, he sought to hone his academic and communication skills. He became increasingly interested in the purpose of life, in his relationship with God, and in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

In time he was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When a teammate asked why, he responded simply, "I really believe for me this is the way."<sup>6</sup>

As he approached graduation, a thoughtful mentor, seeing potential in this young man, asked him to stay on as a graduate assistant.

Fast-forward more than forty years to February of this very year, and that same BYU graduate, now looking a little older, stood atop a massive podium in Las Vegas surrounded by floating confetti. He was holding the Vince Lombardi Trophy, side by side with the woman he met and married here at BYU. Travis Kelce hugged him. Even Taylor Swift was giving him a little love. If you haven't guessed by now, this is the Andy Reid story.

It is also a classic BYU story—a story of becoming. It is a story full of triumphs and trials as well as highs and lows. It is a story marked by daily decisions to choose Christian discipleship and the courage to embrace what Ruth L. Okediji described on this campus as a fully integrated life—a life in which religious convictions and professional pursuits are harmonized, not compartmentalized.<sup>7</sup>

In the *LDS Living* podcast *All In*, Andy Reid said:

*What a great example [Christ] was for us. All the trials and tribulations that He went through. [And] Joseph Smith, the trials and tribulations that he went through. These are great examples for us.*

*And then we just hang on to that iron rod, because that son of a gun [life] can be difficult at times. But you hang on and you work your way through these things and bank on your faith.*<sup>8</sup>

Graduates of 2024, your eternal journey of becoming commences today. Follow Jesus. Honor your covenants. Align your life with the teachings of living prophets. Become the sine qua non in others' lives. And who knows? You may end up being buddies with Taylor Swift. Or perhaps your limousine will get towed from an arena that carries your name.

In any event, I pray that "goodness and mercy [will] follow [you] all the days of [your] life."<sup>9</sup> I pray that your life will be crowned with significant achievement and meaningful service, with rich relationships and ceaseless growth, and with "the joy of the saints"<sup>10</sup> and "the peace . . . which passeth all understanding."<sup>11</sup>

Wherever your degree takes you, remember to continue to develop the courage to be different. Dare to strengthen your resolve as a disciple of Jesus Christ. And if you do get a parking ticket when you return to campus, come see me. I will take care of it.

We love you, and congratulations again, class of 2024.

## Notes

1. Merriam-Webster online dictionary, s.v. "sine qua non": "without which, not"; "something absolutely indispensable or essential."

2. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), 20. Clark Kerr served as the first chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, from 1952 to 1957. He then became the twelfth president of the University of California, serving from 1958 to 1967.

3. Clark G. Gilbert, “Dare to Be Different,” *Deseret News*, 14 September 2022.

4. C. Shane Reese, “Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response,” address delivered at his inauguration as BYU president, 19 September 2023; see also Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

5. C. Shane Reese, “Perspective: Becoming BYU,” Opinion, *Deseret News*, 11 December 2023, [deseret.com/opinion/2023/12/11/23997519/c-shane-reese-what-byu-must-become](https://deseret.com/opinion/2023/12/11/23997519/c-shane-reese-what-byu-must-become).

6. Andy Reid to Tom Holmoe, quoted in David Fleming, “Mahomes, Favre and Other NFL Stars Reveal the Larger-Than-Life Tales Behind Andy Reid,” NFL, ESPN, 19 January 2020, [espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/27736041/the-larger-life-tales-andy-reid-told-mahomes-favre-other-nfl-stars](https://espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/27736041/the-larger-life-tales-andy-reid-told-mahomes-favre-other-nfl-stars).

7. See Ruth L. Okediji, “The Costly Arc of Religious Freedom,” BYU forum address, 30 January 2024.

8. Andy Reid, in “Andy Reid: United—Creating Great Teams On and Off the Field,” episode 266 of *All In*, an *LDS Living* podcast hosted by Morgan Jones Pearson, 20 March 2024, 13:33–13:57, [ldsliving.com/all-in/andy-reid-united-creating-great-teams-on-and-off-the-field](https://ldsliving.com/all-in/andy-reid-united-creating-great-teams-on-and-off-the-field).

9. Psalm 23:6.

10. Enos 1:3.

11. Philippians 4:7.