

This Is a Student

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I am reminded of the story of legendary football coach Vince Lombardi. In 1960, the Lombardi-coached Green Bay Packers lost the NFL championship game to the Philadelphia Eagles, 17–13, with the final drive by the Packers ending just short of the goal line on the last play of the game. Given the nature of sports, I am certain there were a lot of discussions during the off-season about what innovations the Packers might use to get over the top, what adjustments might alter the result in a future championship game, and what shiny new thing might make the difference. In that context, with everyone waiting for the new direction, Lombardi began his first meeting with the team in 1961 with a simple but powerful statement: “‘Gentlemen,’ he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, ‘this is a football.’”¹

Vince Lombardi thus reminded the team—who were so anxious to improve—that they should not lose focus on the key fundamentals. . . .

Let me begin the school year with this simple but powerful observation: “This is a student.” And this is a student, and this is a student, and these are students. [A series of student portraits was shown.] This is why we exist. This is the primary focus of our mission. As I noted in that initial annual university conference address in 2014:

*At the end of the day, students are the product we produce. . . . How they turn out—what they do and, more important, who they are—is the ultimate metric by which our work will be measured.*²

... These are students—disciples of Jesus Christ who, led by prophets, can provide uplift to a world yearning for hope and joy.

This kind of student requires a unique kind of education: an education that requires a unique kind of faculty, staff, and administrators—faculty, staff, and administrators who prioritize the

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eternal development of their students over the praise and prestige of other pursuits.

More important, this kind of education requires faculty, staff, and administrators who are disciples of Jesus Christ, motivated by love of God and of His children to bring others to Christ, who is the one true source of all light.³ We will succeed in this remarkable mission only to the extent that we focus on Him in all we do. As the mission statement makes clear: “Any education is inadequate which does not emphasize that His is the only name given under heaven whereby mankind can be saved.”⁴

Notes

1. David Maraniss, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 274. As reported by David Maraniss, Lombardi’s biographer, wide receiver “Max McGee, from the rear of the squad, delivered the immortal retort, ‘Uh, Coach, could you slow down a little. You’re going too fast for us’” (274).

2. Kevin J Worthen, “The Why of the Y,” BYU annual university conference address, 26 August 2014; emphasis added.

3. See 3 Nephi 18:24; Doctrine and Covenants 88:6–13.

4. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981); emphasis added.