

The Formula for Going Out into the World

THOMAS S. MONSON

My dear brothers and sisters, how pleased I am to be with you today. There is a special feeling permeating the campus today. Hearts are glad, minds are relaxed, and smiles are everywhere to be found, for graduation day is here. Students, professors, and especially parents heave a gigantic sigh of relief and settle down to enjoy commencement exercises.

I think it is significant that the word *commencement* does not describe a cessation of effort but rather the beginning of a new chapter in your book of eternal possibilities. I am happy to be a part of this most significant event in your young lives. I congratulate your parents—some here, some thousands of miles away—and I commend your teachers. They bask in the reflected glory of the precious product upon which they have skillfully and devotedly labored—namely, you.

I honor you for excellence in a world in which mediocrity is commonplace, and I welcome you to a new world. You will find and confront grievous uncertainties. I do not warn you of

such a world; I welcome you to it. Do not miss a second of it. Relish every moment. This big, wide, wonderful world we live in is yours. In his great play *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare had Antonio say:

*What's past is prologue, what to come
In yours and my discharge.*¹

The future indeed is in your hands. There may be moments of darkness and discouragement. During these periods of crisis, it would be well to remember the counsel from Minnie Louise Haskins, the poet who wrote these words:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*²

Thomas S. Monson, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this BYU commencement address on April 26, 2001.

Today you graduate, tomorrow you enter the halls of justice, the plants of industry, or the classrooms of learning—whatever your future may hold. You say goodbye to college and hello to life after BYU. I mention just four thoughts. They are easy to remember:

1. Labor to learn
2. Strive to serve
3. Think to thank
4. Pause to pray

First, labor to learn. The Lord says, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”³ Graduation day does not mean closing the covers of the books of life, the books of literature, or the books containing the revelations of God. Ralph Waldo Emerson gave some counsel: “God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please—you can never have both.”⁴ Some of you may be business majors, and I join you in remembering the words of the great industrialist Henry Ford, who said:

*An educated man is not one whose memory is trained to carry a few dates in history—he is one who can accomplish things. A man who cannot think is not an educated man however many college degrees he may have acquired. Thinking is the hardest work any one can do—which is probably the reason why we have so few thinkers.*⁵

The Lord had an even greater message that I would leave with you today. He said, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”⁶

Labor to learn.

Second, strive to serve. Thomas Henry Huxley advised, “The great end of life is not knowledge but action.”⁷ And our speakers have put that forth today. I put it another way: Vision without work is daydreaming. Work without vision is drudgery. But work coupled with vision shall provide you the success you desire. To find real happiness, we must seek it in a focus outside ourselves. Service to others is akin to duty, the fulfillment of which brings true joy.

Today’s recipient of the presidential citation, Judge Lloyd D. George, and honorary degree recipients Congressman Tom Lantos, Mr. John W. Gallivan, and Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin personify joy in service. Ever have they been found putting self aside in order to emphasize service to others. They are indeed models to follow.

Strive to serve.

Third, think to thank. In these three words you have the finest capsule course, if you please, for a happy marriage, the formula for enduring friendships, and a pattern for personal happiness. One of the problems of this troubled world in which we live is that people think more of getting than of giving, and they think more of receiving—not even stopping to express a thank-you for that which is received. The poet Henry K. Burton proffered these very simple lines:

Have you had a kindness shown?

Pass it on;

’Twas not given for thee alone,

Pass it on;

Let it travel down the years,

Let it wipe another’s tears,

Till in heaven the deed appears—

*Pass it on.*⁸

I believe there emanates from the heart of every graduate here today the feeling of gratitude to mother and father and, in some cases, to husband or wife. My heart literally weeps when I see the sacrifices your parents make for you. I have seen parents standing in the department store buying clothing for a student soon to leave for BYU. I have noted that the student-to-be was wearing a more expensive suit than was his father. I have noticed that if the student was a young lady, she was more expensively attired than was her mother. But mother and father would have it no other way.

Throughout your lifetimes you can bring joy to your parents by your obedience to the commandments of God and by your attention to your parents. “Honour thy father and thy mother”⁹ is as applicable today as it was at the time of Moses.

Think to thank.

Fourth, pause to pray. My dear graduates, do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; rather, I would urge that you pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work will be no miracle; you will be the miracle. The words of Louisa May Alcott may be of comfort and perhaps guidance. She said:

*I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win,
Nor seek to conquer any world
Except the one within.*¹⁰

So pause to pray.

This, then, is the formula: labor to learn, strive to serve, think to thank, and pause to pray. Remember, oh remember, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who said to you graduates and to all in attendance today, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.”¹¹

Will you listen for that knock? Will you make room in your heart for the Savior of the world, that He may dwell with you? This is my earnest prayer

on this wonderful day in your lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 2, scene 1, lines 253–54.
2. Minnie Louise Haskins, prose introduction to “God Knows” (written in 1908), in Haskins, *The Desert* (self-published, 1912); “God Knows” also included in Haskins, *The Gate of the Year (A Book of Poems)* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 9–10.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Intellect,” *Essays: First Series* (1841).
5. Henry Ford and Samuel Crowther, *My Life and Work* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1922), 247.
6. Matthew 11:29.
7. Thomas Henry Huxley, “Technical Education” (1877).
8. Henry K. Burton, “Pass It On,” *Free Will Baptist* 65, no. 6 (8 February 1950): 16.
9. Exodus 20:12.
10. Louisa May Alcott, “My Kingdom” (c. 1846).
11. Revelation 3:20.