

# *Standards of Happiness*

MERRILL J. BATEMAN

On behalf of the BYU administration, faculty, and staff, it is a pleasure to welcome graduates, family members, and friends to the April 2001 commencement. We commend this outstanding class on its achievements and know that the graduates are well prepared for the paths they have chosen to pursue, whether it be in the workplace, in the home, or in graduate school. For the first time in history, this year the number of graduates will exceed 9,000 when the August commencement is included. The number is significant because the 2001 class, in terms of graduates, represents a 40 percent increase over the number that graduated ten years ago, even though the university student body size is not significantly different. Also, it is a 5 percent increase over the number that graduated last year.

The increased number of graduates does not mirror a larger student body but reflects an increased determination on the part of young

men and women admitted to BYU to complete university studies. Ten years ago, a student body of almost the same size graduated just over 6,400—about 2,600 less than this year. The percent of students admitted who graduate continues to increase annually.

The youngest graduate today is nineteen years old; the oldest is sixty. Today's degree recipients come from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and fifty-one foreign countries. Currently enrolled on campus are students from more than 110 countries and all fifty states.

Today I issue a challenge to the graduates. It is my hope that you will strive to achieve a standard of excellence in three areas. These areas will determine your happiness and give you power to influence others for good. The first standard involves commitment to family, the second is commitment to truth, and the third is commitment to community.

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*Merrill J. Bateman, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this commencement address on April 26, 2001.*

### 1. Commitment to Family

The world has a shortage of intact, quality families in which husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and children find love, peace, and safety from the storms of life. It seems that at this point of time, “wrath . . . without mixture”<sup>1</sup> is being poured out upon the earth—as the prophets declared would occur—and that many destructive societal forces are aimed at the basic unit of society. The forces that divide and conquer families are becoming more dominant than the factors that stabilize and support them.

Economic pressures, drugs, various forms of entertainment, an increasing availability of pornography, changing mores, and other problems tear at the fabric that holds the family together. Stories of latchkey children and the challenges they face are well known. New data, recently available, suggest that the less time a child spends with its parents during the early years, the greater will be the child’s social problems. A study sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development recently reported a strong, direct correlation between the time children are cared for by someone other than parents “and traits like aggression, defiance and disobedience.” Those conducting the research indicate that “the findings held true regardless of the type or quality of [outside] care, the sex of the child, the family’s socioeconomic status or whether mothers themselves provided sensitive care.”<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, a guide for producing strong families has been proclaimed by the leaders of the Church. It declares

*that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.*

*All human beings—male and female—are . . . spirit son[s] or daughter[s] of heavenly parents. . . .*

*The family is ordained of God. . . . Children are . . . to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. . . . By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers*

*and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.*<sup>3</sup>

My challenge to you as graduates is that you do everything in your power to live according to the proclamation. Satisfaction, peace, and contentment will be the reward if you incorporate these principles in your life. I plead with you to take seriously the covenants you make with God and with your betrothed in holy places. Do not treat familial promises lightly! Create a family of faith that will remain true through the generations.

### 2. Commitment to Truth

The second challenge is to be true to your faith. The university has provided an opportunity to deepen beliefs in the Father and the Son and in the restored gospel. Not only have faculty created rigorous study programs, but those employed by the university have exemplified faith regardless of discipline or position. Through Church and college experiences, your relationship with the Creator, the purposes of earth life, and your eternal potential should have been impressed indelibly upon your mind and heart.

There is a test that if applied will always lead to truth. Jesus said:

*My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*<sup>4</sup>

I testify to you that happiness and peace on this earth come from living the doctrines of the restored gospel. I promise a life ultimately filled with joy if you strive to obey revealed truth.

### 3. Commitment to Community

Finally, I challenge you to become a positive influence in the community in which you choose to live. This can best be done by simple acts of service. You and your family must reach out to those in need. Keep informed with regard to local issues. Exercise your franchise in selecting wise and good citizens to serve in public office. After you have established yourself in the community, become involved in the local schools, support them, and

build an educational program worthy of your children. Above all, you must be a good neighbor.

In summary, it is my hope that you will create an intergenerational family of faith, that you will be true to an undying flame within that produces a feeling of deep respect for the Almighty, and that you will bless neighbors and friends through kind acts of service. This I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.
2. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Researchers Link Brattiness to Child Care," *Deseret News*, 19 April 2001.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (23 September 1995).
4. John 7:16–17.