

Character—The Aim of Education

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You are an uplifting, inspiring sight. I consider it a privilege and a blessing to be associated with you. We looked around at many of you this evening as we came in, and we literally felt uplifted because of you. I should like to thank those responsible for allowing me to speak for just a few minutes this evening concerning a subject I consider important. It's the subject of education—basically, education of character more than curriculum.

Education of Character

President Hugh B. Brown said, "Your aim is not to get ahead of others, but to surpass yourself."

And President McKay stated,

Character is the aim of true education

True education seeks to make men and women not only good mathematicians, proficient linguists, profound scientists, or brilliant literary lights, but also honest men with virtue, temperance, and brotherly love. It seeks to make men and women who prize truth, justice, wisdom, benevolence, and self-control as the choicest acquisitions of a successful life. ["Why Education?" Improvement Era, September 1967, p. 3]

President Brown also said,

We urge all members, young and old, to keep in mind always that the true purpose of life, both here and hereafter, is to seek the joy of eternal progression. As the glory of God is intelligence, man can only share that glory through continuing education of the whole man. [CR, April 1968, p. 105]

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve has stated in this regard,

The process of living on earth, of seeking to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling before God, is in itself a course of education; it is a system of training, study, and discipline whereby the mental and moral powers are schooled and prepared for graduation into the eternal realms. [MD, p. 213]

Plutarch, who lived in the first century A.D., wrote a great book in which he told of the

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characteristics of noted Greeks and Romans. He wrote about a man named Phocion, who lived between the years 402 and 318 B.C. What he wrote about Phocion, the Athenian statesman who was elected forty-five times as one of the chief officers of the state, provides a model for today. Said Plutarch,

Appreciation of him was due not so much to his eloquence as to the influence of his character, since not only a word, but even a nod from a person who is esteemed, is of more force than a thousand arguments or studied sentences from others. [Plutarch, vol. 14, Great Books, Encyclopedia Britannica, p. 604; emphasis added]

To this the *Harmsworth Encyclopedia* adds,

Phocion was neither a great statesman nor a brilliant general; but he was a man of incorruptible honesty and downright common sense.

President Kimball spoke and distinguished Brigham Young University from other institutions of learning in the world. I quote from his discourse given on 12 September 1967. He stated,

The BYU is the greatest institution of learning. Why? The uniqueness of Brigham Young University lies in its special role—education for eternity—which it must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university. This means concern—curricular and behavioral—for not only the “whole man” but for the “eternal man.”

He further stated,

We should be knowledgeable. When we talk of Godhead and creatorship and eternal increase, we have already soared far out beyond the comprehension of most men. To attain these great accomplishments, one would need to know all about astronomy, biology, physiology, psychology, and all of the arts and sciences. The obtaining of all this

knowledge will come largely after our earth life. A doctrine-teaching, character-building university, the Brigham Young University is dedicated to the building of character and faith, for character is higher than intellect . . . We are men of God first, men of letters second, men of science third, and noted men fourth, men of rectitude rather than academic competence. . . . Our academic training must be as impeccable as our lives. [“Education for Eternity,” BYU Speeches of the Year, 1967–68, pp. 2–3]

Understanding

We have spoken of several different qualities we should embrace in developing our character. One of the major qualities we could have is understanding. I’ve chosen a small selection from the Teacher Development Program to give one tiny example of understanding:

A man was putting up a sign “Puppies for Sale,” and before he had driven the last nail, there was a small boy standing by his side. That kind of sign seems to attract small boys. The youngster wanted to know how much the puppies were going to cost. The man told him that they were very good dogs, and he did not expect to let any of them go for less than \$35 or \$40. There was a look of disappointment and then a question:

“I’ve got \$2.37. Could I look at them?”

The man whistled and called, “Lady!” And out of the kennel and down the runway came Lady followed by four or five little balls of fur with one lagging considerably behind.

The boy spotted the laggard and, pointing, asked, “What’s wrong with him?” The reply was that the veterinarian had said that there was no hip socket in the right hip, and that dog would always be lame.

The boy’s immediate rejoinder was, “That’s the one I want to buy. I’ll give you \$2.37 down, and fifty cents a month until I get him paid for.”

The man smiled and shook his head.
 “That’s not the dog you want. That dog will never be able to run and jump and play with you.”

The boy very matter-of-factly pulled up his trouser leg and revealed a brace running up both sides of his badly twisted right leg and over the foot, with a leather cap over the knee. “I don’t run so well myself,” he said, “and he’ll need someone that understands him.”

Supremacy of Character

An industrialist, Joseph Rosenblatt, spoke at the April 1978 Commencement exercises here at the Y, and he said that the most important quality the graduates could carry in their life’s baggage was character.

“Often we think that knowledge is power,” said Dr. Rosenblatt, the son of a Russian emigrant who settled in the Salt Lake Valley. “But I wonder if it is not more correct in this vigorous, hard, complex age to say that it is character that is power, for mind without heart, intelligence without conduct, cleverness without goodness—all of these have worrisome, dangerous flaws.”

President Dallin Oaks said,

Along with John Ruskin we affirm that education does not mean teaching people what they do not know, it means teaching to behave as they do not behave. . . . Character is more important than learning.

There is a story told, and I do not have the author of it, of a professor of trigonometry. In giving an examination one day, the trigonometry teacher said,

Today I am going to give you two examinations: one in trigonometry and one in honesty. I hope you will pass them both. But if you must fail one, let it be trigonometry. For there are many good men in the world today who cannot pass an examination in trigonometry, but there are no good men in the

world today who cannot pass an examination in honesty.

Honesty is one of the characteristics of our character that we must perfect.

Do you not believe that you can be nigh perfect in many things as far as your character is concerned? Do you not believe you can be a perfect tithepayer? Do you not believe you can be perfectly honest even in small things? Do you not believe you can perfect your character in many of those salient, important characteristics we carry with us after this life?

Born of the Spirit

President Romney on 14 February 1962, to the BYU student body said the following:

Scientists come to their view that there is a God by a process of reasoning from the things they observe through their five sensory faculties. . . . Knowledge of the true and living God is revealed only by the Spirit. . . .

Brigham Young University keeps abreast of other fine universities in the arts, sciences, and other fields which concern themselves with knowledge “born of the flesh.” This university is distinguished from all other universities, however, by the fact that its main objective and, indeed, the justification for its existence is to teach and lead students to learn the things “born of the Spirit.” . . .

. . . The knowledge “born of the Spirit” is knowledge of the highest order and the greatest value. . . .

*We must go further. We must each obtain for ourselves a personal witness that the testimonies of the prophets are true. . . . It can be received through the Spirit by the . . . pattern laid down by Moroni [with which we’re all well acquainted and which may be found in Moroni 10:4]. [“That Which Is Born of the Flesh Is Flesh: and That Which Is Born of the Spirit is Spirit.” (John 3:6), *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1961–62*, pp. 3, 6, 7]*

Being born of the Spirit is of far greater value than being born of the world.

The Upward Reach

Paul J. Mayer, the president of Success Motivation Institute, gives us this little story which illustrates a point. He titled it “Circus Elephants and Limitations.”

An elephant with its trunk can easily pick up a one-ton load, but have you ever visited a circus and watched those huge creatures standing quietly while tied to a small wooden stake? While still young and weak, an elephant is tied by a heavy chain to an immovable iron stake. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot break the chain or move the stake. Then, no matter how large and strong the elephant becomes, he continues to believe he cannot move as long as he can see the stake in the ground beside him. Many intelligent adult humans are like circus elephants. They are restrained in thoughts, actions, and results. They never move out any further than the extent of their own self-imposed limitations.

We are goal-oriented people and must not limit ourselves. You all will recall the famous words of President Kimball wherein he stated,

Do not make small goals because they do not have the magic to stir men’s souls.

And President Benson said,

The Lord himself has a goal; To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We have the same goal: to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We must have the same goal.

He further said,

But when we set goals, we are in command. Clearly understood goals bring our lives into focus just as a magnifying glass focuses a beam of light onto or into a burning point. Without goals our efforts may be scattered and unproductive.

President Kimball stated in this regard,

Unless we set goals, we move no place. I want to stir your ambition to do better. Not for statistics’ sake, but for the good it will do people.

He also says,

We must have goals to make progress, and it’s encouraged by keeping records. Progress is easier when it is timed, checked, and measured. Goals should always be made to a point that will make us reach and strain. The key goals we could have are goals to become perfect in certain elements in the perfection of our character, the things we carry with us after this life.

Not all Education in Schools

With regard to education, I’d like to give you a little quiz. I’m going to give you the names of twelve very prominent lawyers in the world, and then I’d like you to tell me which one, and only one, was a law school dropout. In other words, here are the names of twelve of the nation’s most prominent lawyers. Only one of them was a law school dropout. Can you guess his name?

Patrick Henry, a member of the Continental Congress; John Jay, First Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; John Marshall, a Supreme Court Chief Justice; William Wirt, a United States attorney general; Roger Taney, very famous in the practice of law in 1799; Daniel Webster, who had a phenomenal legal reputation; Salmon Chase, a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president, an occupation greatly enhanced by his former experience as a lawyer; Stephen Douglas, admitted to the bar in 1834; Clarence Darrow, a lawyer of world renown; Robert Storey, president of the American Bar Association; Strom Thurmond, a well-known lawyer in South Carolina.

Now those are the twelve. I'll repeat their names again. Only one of them abandoned law school after one year, never to return. Which one was it? Patrick Henry, John Jay, John Marshall, William Wirt, Roger Taney, Daniel Webster, Salmon Chase, Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, Clarence Darrow, Robert Storey, Strom Thurmond?

Now, if you remember your history, you will know that the only one who was a law school dropout was Clarence Darrow, but the interesting part of the story is the other eleven most distinguished American lawyers could not have dropped out of law school because they never went to law school. They were self-educated. They understood the need to have continuous education. (Adapted from P.H. Aurandt, *Paul Harvey—The Rest of the Story*, p. 132). Do you know of any university in the world which offers more continuing education than BYU offers? It's the Lord's desire that we educate ourselves, keeping in mind that the greatest education of all is not the education of the mind, but the education of the character that we carry with us, an education of the spirit, an education into learning how to be self-sustaining, how to be in full self-control and be master of self.

Knowledge “Born of the Spirit”

There are two highly important qualities of character—I should say, two important truths—which we must possess and share. I now quote from *The Charted Course of the Church in Education*, by President J. Reuben Clark. He said,

In all this there are for the Church and for each and all of its members, two prime things which may not be overlooked, forgotten, shaded, or discarded:

First: That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, . . . the Atoner. . . . He was crucified . . . [and] reunited with His body. [That is first and foremost.]

[Secondly,] *the Father and the Son actually and in truth and very deed appeared to the Prophet Joseph. [He heard their voices; he saw the two. The holy priesthood was restored.] The Book of Mormon is just what it professes to be. . . . The Prophet's successors, likewise [are] called of God. . . . Without these two great beliefs the Church would cease to be the Church.*

Any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines as to Jesus of Nazareth or as to the restoration of the Gospel and Holy Priesthood, is not a Latter-day Saint. [8 August 1938, pp. 2–3]

I read now from the book of Acts, chapter 12, parts of verses 4–15. You may recall the circumstances. Herod the king had just martyred James. It seemed to please the people, and so Herod put Peter in prison. We read from verse 4,

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him [that means he was surrounded by sixteen soldiers; King Herod did not want him to escape]. . . .

. . . Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains.

. . . The angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he [touched] Peter on the side, and raised him up saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. . . .

And he went out, and followed. . . .

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord. . . .

. . . He came to the house of Mary . . . where many [of the brethren] were gathered together praying.

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

They knew he was in prison; they knew he was surrounded by soldiers and chains so they said to her,

. . . Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. [Acts 12:4, 6–7, 9–10, 12–16]

What did Rhoda do that was so important? Rhoda constantly affirmed that it was indeed the prophet of God knocking at the gate. Likewise we constantly affirm that we are in the presence of sixteen prophets, seers, and revelators, one of whom by divine right can have all of the keys and powers that God would have us have.

One year ago last month on the 31 of May I was at one of my stake conferences in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It so happened that on that very day President Kimball was arriving in order to set apart some sealers in the temple. I knew President Kimball wasn't well. He had just received his pacemaker about two or three weeks previous to this date. His physician and security were with him. After he finished his work in the temple, I hurried back from my stake conference and met him at the temple at noon. As I met him, I said, "President, are you feeling well enough to greet 27 new missionaries here at the MTC?"

He said, "Yes, of course," in his kind way.

We had 27 *Bolivianos* and *Peruanos*. They never thought in all their life they would ever see the prophet of God. They did not know he was there. When we sent word to them that he would like to greet them, they were speechless. They came into the temple one by one. I stood by him to translate the few words they could utter. These are some of the few things they said: "I know you are a prophet of God," "This is the happiest day of my life," or they said, "I love thee." And then with his strong arms he embraced and kissed each one. Do you think those 27 left the same way they came in? They were different people. They felt of his influence. They knew he was the Prophet of God. They went out with a certain and strong testimony that he is.

I bear that same witness. I know, as I see you this evening, that he is a prophet of God, and that he and his counselors in the First Presidency are those men inspired with the most accurate decisions this world can have. I bear witness that all sixteen of those men are prophets, seers, and revelators, and that the Lord himself directs this his kingdom through those Brethren in order to give salvation and saving principles to all mankind. I testify this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.