

Talents

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When I was near your age, I had returned from serving as a missionary in Uruguay, and my wife and I were making plans for marriage. At that time foreign language missions were for a period of two and a half years. I had completed two years of college, but my memory was somewhat dulled by the passage of three years of time. I wanted then to be where you are now, so I came to BYU and spoke with the chair of the Electrical Engineering Department. His first question was to ask me to invert a matrix. Then he wrote out a simple matrix and presented me with a piece of paper to do my work. I had to confess to him that I couldn't remember how to do it. To this he replied, "Then I suggest that you go to the University of Utah." And that is where I went.

Parable of the Talents

That same question is not asked of students today, nor have I ever heard it asked of a prospective faculty member. The students and faculty today possess remarkable talent. A recent faculty candidate observed on his visit that the students here all seem to him to be among those who possess five talents. Of course he is referring to the parable of the talents found in Matthew:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. [Matthew 25:14–18]

To each of the first two, the Lord said:

Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. [Matthew 25:23]

But to the last servant he declared:

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[I will] *take therefore the talent from [you], and give it unto him which hath ten talents.* [Matthew 25:28]

More About Talents

Many years ago explorers discovered the remains of a Roman ship that had sunk around the year A.D. 50. Inside they found what they called copper blister cakes. These cakes were made of 99.2 percent pure copper—sufficiently pure to be used as an alloy, but not pure enough to be used to make copper artifacts without further manufacturing. In other words, these copper cakes had to go through the refiner’s fire before they became useful. Because the discoverers could not see much value in one of these blister cakes, it was discarded into the trash. A good friend of mine eventually retrieved it, and later it was identified by a scholar as a talent.

A talent is not a coin but rather refers to a sum of money or to a weight. As the word is used in the Old Testament, a *talent* weighed about 75 pounds. Others indicate that this word changed in the New Testament to refer to sums of money. My point in telling you about talents here today is for you to understand that a talent refers to something very large. “Five talents” refers to a significant amount of money. In today’s terms a talent of gold (75 pounds) might represent something around a half million dollars. Further, the blister cake talent needs to go through the refiner’s fire. A BYU faculty member recently pointed out to me the additional meaning this gives to the parable of a king who forgave one of his servants a debt of 10,000 talents. The servant subsequently demanded payment of a debt of just 100 pence that someone else owed him (see Matthew 18:23–35).

What is expected, then, from you who are blessed with many talents? In Matthew 5:16 we read, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Developing Your Talents

In his book *Standing for Something*, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

It is not enough just to live, just to survive. It is incumbent on each of us to equip ourselves to do something worthwhile in society—to acquire more and more light, so that our personal light can help illuminate a darkened world. And this is made possible through learning, through educating ourselves, through progressing and growing in both mind and spirit. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing for Something* (New York: Times Books, 2000), 67]

As I was growing up, my mother insisted that I read regularly. She would take me down to the public library and check out about a one-foot length of books from the shelves. She typically chose biographies of great men and women. Sometimes it was painful to stay inside and read when I would rather be doing other things. But then each day I would see my mother reading, and I noted that she finished a book almost every day. That habit has stayed with her throughout her life and has blessed not only her children but her grandchildren, extended family, former students, and friends.

Today at the age of 87, my mother has grown blind, but she still “reads” constantly. She now reads by listening to audiotapes of books. Just a few days ago I asked her what books she had read recently. The list she gave me was impressive. She told me that she was rereading several of the classics, including *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Dante’s Divine Comedy*, *Moby Dick*, *Walden*, etc., all intermingled with scripture and gospel study. She has made the quest for knowledge a lifelong pursuit.

I would invite each of you to study and prepare your minds and then make a commitment to develop your talents and provide a significant contribution to the world. Look around and you will find the examples of many others who have made such a contribution. This university is filled with such people. Talk to

them. Find out what motivated and inspired them. Then choose a pursuit that will bless mankind, your friends, and your family. Much is expected of you. Matthew 25:29 reads, “For unto every one that hath [other talents] shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not [obtained other talents] shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

Prayer

I would like to share with you some things that are important if you are to succeed in developing your talents. Prayer is perhaps one of the primary requirements in obtaining the guidance of our Heavenly Father. In this dispensation one of the first lessons that we find taught in the Doctrine and Covenants concerns prayer and seeking divine guidance. Oliver Cowdery inquired of his Heavenly Father regarding the next steps in his life, and in the response we are given an insight into the keys of asking and receiving answers to prayer (see D&C 6:14–15).

Asking

The Lord answered Oliver Cowdery with the following:

I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive. [D&C 8:1]

Receiving

After we have asked in faith, we are given a promise by the Lord:

I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. [D&C 8:2]

You will all recall that Oliver failed in his attempts to translate because he did not understand two additional principles for acquiring

knowledge: (1) the requirement to study it out in our minds and (2) we will feel either a burning in our bosoms if it is right or a stupor of thought if it is wrong (see D&C 9:7–9).

Answers to prayer do not always come quickly. Often answers come over long periods of time and in ways we do not anticipate. Some prayers may be answered immediately if we have an honest heart and the courage to ask with faith, believing that we shall receive. One such prayer is the one offered when we humbly and sincerely ask our Father in Heaven what we need to repent of. The answer will come quickly, but it takes humility, courage, and resolve to utter this kind of prayer.

Similarly, the Lord will answer your prayers about setting goals in your life and developing your talents. I have spoken with many students who have obtained such direction in their lives. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Friends and Companions

Another important issue that you will face in your journey toward developing your talents is the choice of friends. Of singular importance is the choice of an eternal companion. At one time I regularly interviewed couples who had found that right one and were ready to be married. You are likely all familiar with the questions that are asked in these interviews, but to the set of prescribed topics I added three questions.

First, I asked each person how long it had taken them to know that their fiancé was the one. Most had prayed earnestly about their feelings toward their companion. Their answers startled me, but the responses were remarkably similar. The average time, they typically indicated, was about two and a half weeks from the time they started dating.

Then came my second question: “How long did you wait before you expressed your feelings to your fiancé?” Again the responses were surprising. The average time to share their

feelings was about six weeks from the time they first started dating.

Now, for the third question, I asked them about how long they had waited before actually getting married. This time the answers varied greatly, but generally they chose the semester break closest to six months after they had met.

I know that statisticians would say that my results may not be statistically significant—and then only valid for the geographical area just to the south of campus—but I thought you might want to know how long some of your classmates are taking to get an answer to their prayers once they have found their eternal companion.

Besides choosing the proper mate, seek out those who will lift you and inspire you to be better. Seek colleagues who know more than you and learn from them. Remember that in the parable of the talents, each servant was given talents according to their several abilities. Learn from the talents of others.

Obedience

Obedience is a key to progression. The search for truth and the development of character go hand in hand. Shakespeare said, “To thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, lines 78–80). Nephi set an example for us:

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

[1 Nephi 3:7]

Years ago, when I first came to BYU, I met a student from Korea. He had set lofty goals for himself, but he was rather poor and was struggling to get through school. Yet he was dedi-

cated to the gospel and had determined that he was going to get an education and return to bless his homeland. I worked with him and even went to his home to tutor him. He was a hard worker and was obedient in all that he was asked to do. Finally, after much effort, he graduated. He worked in this local area for some time, and then I lost track of him.

Recently, nearly 25 years later, one of my colleagues brought a visitor to my office and introduced him as the executive vice president of one of the largest electronics firms in Korea. I immediately recognized him, and all of the years of our separation faded away. One of the blessings that can come from being true to the gospel is the establishment of lasting and tender friendships. As my former student and I talked, we found that our friendship had not changed. When we remain true to the gospel, our rendezvous with friends will be that way, as it was with Alma and the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 17:1–2).

Your Divine Heritage

Finally, I would counsel you to remember who you are—spiritual sons and daughters of your Father in Heaven. If you are true to this divine heritage, your Father will bless you.

About three years ago our college was scheduled for an inspection by our professional accreditation group. Accreditation is a critical step for a college, since it provides a certification that the graduates of academic programs meet certain standards of knowledge and practice in fields of study.

As part of our accreditation, documentation is prepared covering all aspects of study. Exams, homework, lecture outlines, and the like are assembled for scrutiny. Students and faculty are interviewed, and facilities are inspected. Then, just prior to the accreditation team’s visit, the team leader called and indicated that his team would be arriving at BYU on Sunday and wanted to spend that day inspecting laboratories and classrooms and in

interviewing the department chairs and senior faculty. Since I was dean, I responded that Sunday was the Sabbath and that we would all be involved in worship on that day. Further, I told him that our classrooms and laboratories were used by students for worship services, so it was not possible for their team to visit on that day.

He continued to press the issue, letting me know that the Sabbath day visit would be a requirement if we were to be accredited. Finally, an idea occurred to me. I responded that we would accommodate their team visit if they could come in the middle of the day. I was sure at that time there would be a sacrament meeting in progress in the study area of the Clyde Building and that there would be ongoing classes in the auditorium, classrooms, and laboratories.

When the time for the visit arrived, our department chairs all presented themselves in their Sunday best. The accreditation team arrived in casual attire and were startled to see that all of the young men in the building had on white shirts and ties and that all of the young women wore dresses. All of the students were better dressed than they were! Our department chairs introduced themselves, and we split up to visit different areas of the college. I took the team leader to the doorway that enters the study area. He stopped suddenly and peered through the doorway to see a young man giving a talk in sacrament meeting. He wouldn't go in, but he listened intently for a while. Then he turned to me and observed that he had rather expected that these students for their worship would be sitting around tables chatting and drinking Coke.

He then asked to go to one of our large classrooms. I escorted him to the auditorium, and we entered the room from the rear. There we observed a young lady who was standing by the side of a table adorned with a tablecloth and a flower. She was giving a Relief Society lesson, and I explained the role of the Relief

Society in our Church. The next stop was similar, but this time we observed the operation of an elders quorum meeting. As we were leaving, I took the opportunity to also explain about the Sunday School. The other visitors from the accreditation team each had a similar experience.

Two days later the team met with the academic vice president for a brief oral report on the state of our college. His opening statement surprised us, for he pointed out that it was clear our students and education were firmly grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then the team members one by one were most laudatory in their reviews of both the academic programs and the students.

In 2002 a consortium of companies including General Motors, EDS, Unigraphics, and SUN made a software donation to BYU that amounted to over \$300 million (Partners for the Advancement of Computer-Aided Design/Manufacturing/Engineering Education [PACE]). This donation was provided, we were told, to acknowledge the accomplishments of the students and faculty and to help them with their academic programs. We scheduled a time for the presentation that allowed us to focus on this generous gift. I am grateful to all of those students who came and supported us in such grand fashion. The PACE group was all abuzz about their visit and the celebration. Everything about that day was perfect.

Then PACE decided to make a similar donation to BYU—Idaho. This donation was somewhat smaller and amounted to about \$60 million in software. Unlike BYU, BYU—Idaho had scheduled their announcement to coincide with their weekly devotional. Just prior to the time of the devotional, President Bednar had a reception for the PACE team. During that time he talked about BYU—Idaho, their unique approach to sports, and the devotional that they held regularly. He explained that it was a custom at BYU—Idaho for all of the students to hold up their scriptures at the beginning of

the devotional. Then he presented a copy of the scriptures to the PACE team leader so that he wouldn't be embarrassed when the students all had their scriptures in their hands and raised them high. During the devotional President Bednar called upon the team leader to say a few words, which he gave most appropriately.

Last year this same PACE team leader asked me to attend an annual conference in New York. There I made a presentation to the other deans in attendance concerning what BYU had done with our PACE gift. After I finished, the PACE team leader related to the entire group of deans that he had a copy of the scriptures that he had received from BYU—Idaho. He told them how he valued these and recounted his wonderful experience there. Remembering who we are can have a lasting effect for good.

At BYU not too long ago, a young man approached his bishop to introduce himself. He was from the Pacific Rim and stated that his given name was Golden. Proudly he told the bishop that his parents were converts to the Church, and they had named him in honor of the General Authority whose conference talk had had such an impact upon them when they were investigating the gospel. He told how his parents wanted him to always remember the great example set by that man. As I heard this

I was a little surprised, and my thoughts were likely the same as yours. Then he went on to tell his bishop that the name of that General Authority was "Golden B. Hinckley." That name has served him as a tender reminder both of what his parents expected of him and of his parents' humble origins.

I would like to close with the invitation that President Hinckley gave to the women of the Church and extend that same invitation to all of you:

*I . . . invite [you] to rise to the great potential within you. I do not ask that you reach beyond your capacity. I hope you will not nag yourselves with thoughts of failure. I hope you will not try to set goals far beyond your capacity to achieve. I hope you will simply do what you can do in the best way you know. If you do so, you will witness miracles come to pass. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Motherhood: A Heritage of Faith*, booklet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 9; see also *TGBH*, 696]*

I share these thoughts and leave you with my testimony that I know the Church is true. I wish you the best of blessings as you develop your talents. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.