

# *Ever Learning and Ever Improving*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

**B**rothers, sisters, and friends, it is my great privilege on this happy day to add my welcome to all of you and my congratulations to those we honor. We are grateful for the presence of Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve and chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees, Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve, and other honored and special guests.

For me, today is a commencement in the usual sense of the word. It is my first graduation exercise as president of this wonderful, special, and unique university. I am learning much that many of you already know from your own BYU experience. There is nothing like it in the world.

Every day brings surprises—most of them are good, and a few are really exciting and exhilarating. Many are spiritual and even sacred, some are encouraging and lifting, and some are just plain interesting. Let me share just a few of the interesting ones. Although the numbers I report often include the large army of missionaries at the MTC across the street, you might still be impressed. For example, I am told that our annual consumption of ice cream on this campus is about 100,000 gallons! My kind of place! Each year we also consume 350,000 pizzas, 160,000 pounds of French fries,

and 2.5 tons of fudge. We are not necessarily as proud of these statistics as we are about some of the others, but I thought you might like to know.

Our graduates today, generally representative of our entire student body, total 2,758 and come from 49 states, one territory, and 43 other countries. Most graduates are young, with the youngest just having turned 19, and a few are quite mature with the oldest being about the same age that I am. More than half of the graduates are married. All are qualified and presented today with our confidence and endorsement.

You will see from your program the diversity of disciplines and expertise shared by this distinguished graduating class. We know that you parents and family members, friends, and associates are joined by classmates and other students, faculty, and staff, as well as our administration, in our pride and appreciation for the tremendous accomplishments recognized and celebrated today.

I am impressed by what I believe our students and graduates have learned while here at BYU.

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*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this BYU commencement address was given on 14 August 2003.*

I am even more optimistic about the future. I believe most here adorned in academic regalia have also learned a great deal about learning and are committed to continuing the vital learning process throughout their lives. The ability to continue to learn, to adjust, and to adapt is vital for everyone but is also a doctrinal mandate for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36) and that

*whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.*

*And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.* [D&C 130:18–19]

Thus we are committed to lifelong learning in both spiritual and secular spheres.

This compelling urge to learn continually is not only doctrinally sound but absolutely necessary. However well trained and prepared you are for today, the future will be different in ways neither predictable nor anticipated except that it will be different. Some careers will disappear and new ones will continue to emerge. In whatever we are currently planning, new tools and approaches will be necessary even if the nominal job or career description doesn’t change. Let me give you an example—and I could choose from many—from my own background in medicine.

As recently as 60 or 70 years ago, thoracic surgeons (those who operate on the organs in the chest) spent much of their time removing lungs or parts of lungs damaged by tuberculosis. Then, more effective antibiotics for TB were developed and fewer lung operations were required.

What were these surgeons to do? Some retired, some changed specialties, some left medicine, and some decided that other organs in the chest, mainly the heart, needed attention

that they were not then receiving. Many people suffered from rheumatic heart disease with damaged heart valves caused by the streptococcus bacteria. Creative, still-learning physicians devised ways to operate on the heart and fix or replace the damaged heart valves. Many lives were then saved or helped. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve was involved in this pioneering work.

Then penicillin and other effective antibiotics became generally available and rheumatic heart disease became much rarer.

What were these heart surgeons to do? Some retired, some changed specialties, some left medicine, and some decided other problems of the heart not previously addressed needed attention. Coronary artery bypass surgery has now become almost routine. At almost the same time, alternate, less-invasive therapies have become available to prevent or treat heart disease. Incidentally, this includes advice that we exercise more and consume much less ice cream, pizza, and fudge!

What are these current doctors to do? Like before, they will weigh options and decide, but those who have continued to learn and those who are never satisfied that they know enough will discover or help create the next generation of miracles.

This lesson certainly applies to those graduates who will be entering medical school. But the lesson also applies to all the rest of us, whatever our careers or life work will be. We need to be ever learning and ever improving.

As we are reminded in the book of Proverbs, “A wise man [or woman] will hear, and will increase learning” (Proverbs 1:5). Likewise, your BYU education has qualified you for the blessing described in Daniel for those young people who live the Word of Wisdom and keep the Lord’s other commandments: “God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom” (Daniel 1:17). You have knowledge and skill and know how to learn so that you may acquire wisdom.

Again I congratulate you on your accomplishments but even more on your preparation to continue your lifelong learning adventure so

that you might fully achieve every additional blessing Heavenly Father has in store for you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.