

Living Right

RICHARD G. SCOTT

No one with any degree of spiritual sensitivity can stand at this place in the presence of such a concentration of devoted, righteous graduates, parents, loved ones, faculty, and staff and not feel overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation. I am deeply moved in contemplation of what can occur in ensuing years from what you graduates have learned at this unique university. You have the potential for making deep and abiding contributions throughout the world. You have the will to form eternal families, to orient and raise righteous children, to strengthen a host of professions, to give caring service, and to be a force for good in a world that desperately needs it.

With profound feelings of thankfulness I warmly greet each one of you we honor at this commencement service. Each has met the lofty standards of personal worthiness and academic achievement to qualify to be at this singular university. You have kept those standards of righteousness. Through many long, arduous days and nights of devoted study, exacting testing, and other rigorous qualifying effort, you have well earned the degree that will be conferred. You have not only attained an outstanding secular education, but you have done it while meeting the highest standards of integrity and spirituality. I am truly humbled to be in your presence.

I do not know if I will ever have another opportunity to speak with you again in a like setting. My intent is to share some lessons learned in the crucible of my own life's experience to help you build securely on the foundation you have laid here at Brigham Young University. That will require mentioning some of the innermost feelings of my heart. I know that the largest portion of the gathering today consists of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I ask those with different religious backgrounds to translate these comments into concepts comfortable to you.

Would you consider that I am in a private setting with you as an individual or a married couple? Forgive me if I speak quite plainly from my heart.

This world is in serious trouble. The fundamental values of this nation are being undermined. There is a continual crumbling of principle, virtue, integrity, and religious values—the foundation stones of civilization and definitive ingredients of peace and happiness. I will share with you as simply and as

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clearly as I am able a pattern for success and happiness in life despite these conditions.

God has given you the capacity to exercise faith so that you may find peace, joy, and purpose in life. However, to employ its power, faith must be rooted in something secure. There is no more solid foundation than faith in the love Heavenly Father has for you, faith in His plan of happiness, and faith in the willingness and power of Jesus Christ to fulfill all of His promises.

Some of the principles upon which faith is based are:

- Trust in God and in His desire to provide help when needed, no matter how challenging the circumstance.
- Obedience to His commandments and a life that demonstrates He can trust you.
- Sensitivity to the quiet prompting of the Spirit and courageous follow-through.
- Patience and understanding when God lets you struggle to grow and answers come a piece at a time over an extended period.

You must understand and use the power of the interaction of faith and character. God uses your faith to mold your character. Character is woven patiently from threads of doctrine, principle, and obedience. Character is the manifestation of what you are becoming. Your character will be the yardstick that God will use to determine how well you have met your mortal probation. Strong moral character results from consistent correct choices in the trials and testing of life. Such choices are made with trust in things that are believed and, when acted upon, will be confirmed as true.

As you walk to the boundary of your understanding into the twilight of uncertainty, exercising faith, you will be led to find solutions to the challenges of life you would not obtain otherwise. With even the strongest faith, God will not always reward you immediately

according to your desires. Rather He will respond with what in His eternal plan is best for you. Your exercise of faith will forge strength of character available to you in times of critical need. Such character is not developed in moments of great challenge or temptation. That is when it is used.

The bedrock of character is integrity. Worthy character will strengthen your capacity to recognize the direction of the Spirit and be obedient to it. It is more important than what you own, what you have learned, or what goals you have accomplished. Your consistent exercise of faith builds strong character. In turn, fortified character expands your ability to exercise faith, thereby enhancing your capacity and confidence in conquering the trials of life. And this strengthening cycle continues. The more your character is fortified, the more enabled you are to exercise the power of faith.

Wherever you live, whatever your occupation or focus in life, you will be drawn into the battle for the souls of men and women. Be valiant in that struggle. It is waged on the basis of character. Satan and his troops have defined their character by resolute opposition to the will of our Father and consistent violation of His commandments. You have solidified your character by consistent correct choices. That character has permitted you to benefit from the privilege of a BYU education. Throughout life you will be rewarded from the efforts you have expended here. So many want to have the opportunity that has been yours, but they will not enjoy it. Show your gratitude by serving well in life.

Neither Satan nor any other power can weaken or destroy your growing character. Only you could do that through disobedience. That is why Satan is so intently focused on tempting you to make decisions that will undermine your character. Satan is an accomplished master at making devastating choices appear attractive, even reasonable. So be careful. At this crucial time of life you will be faced with many choices. The decisions you make will

profoundly affect life now and for eternity. Make them wisely.

There are two patterns for making decisions in life: (1) Decisions Based Upon Circumstance and (2) Decisions Based Upon Eternal Truth. Satan encourages choices to be made according to circumstance. That is: What are others doing? What seems to be socially or politically acceptable? What will bring the quickest, most satisfying response? That pattern gives Lucifer the broadest opportunity to tempt an individual to make decisions that will be harmful and destructive, even though they may appear most appealing when a decision is made. With this approach there is no underlying set of values or standards used to consistently guide those decisions. Each one is made for what appears to be the most attractive choice at the moment. One who chooses this path cannot expect the help of the Lord but is left to his own strength and to that of others influenced to act in his favor. Sadly, most of God's children make decisions that way. That is why the world is in such turmoil.

The pattern of the Lord is for His children to make Decisions Based Upon Eternal Truth. This requires that your life continue to be centered in the commandments of God. Thus decisions are made in accordance with unchanging truths aided by prayer and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. You have learned how well that works here at BYU. In addition to your own strength and capacity you will enjoy divine inspiration and power when needed. Your actions will be predictable and bless the lives of all in the circle of your influence. You will have a meaningful life of purpose, peace, and happiness.

There is no guarantee that life will be easy for anyone. We grow and learn more rapidly by facing and overcoming challenges. You are here to prove yourself, to develop, and to overcome. There will be constant challenges that cause you to think, to make proper judgments, and to act righteously. You will grow from them. However, there are some challenges you never need to encounter. They are those associated

with serious transgression. As you continue to avoid such mistakes, your life will be simpler and happier.

I know that each of you has chosen to make decisions based upon eternal truth or you would not be here today. Please never allow yourself to make an exception to that pattern of life to gain a temporary, appealing advantage or to participate in an experience you know to be unworthy. I have seen so many young couples and individuals fumble the ball of life because they look to the wrong sources for how to live. They become distracted from true principles by being tempted to compromise just a little bit to gain influence, position, or acceptability. They justify those deviations, rationalizing that later a greater good could be accomplished. In the long run that pattern will take you where you definitely do not want to be.

How can you keep your resolve to live worthily? How can you be sure that the determination in your heart will not be eroded by the pressures around you? If you are blessed to be married, rejoice in that companionship and in your children. Let there be absolutely no secrets kept from each other. That will provide powerful insurance for continuing righteousness and happiness. Decide issues together. Keep the gospel light burning brightly in your home through scripture study, prayer, and the other things you know to do. Honor and live temple covenants as you receive them. Drink deeply from the fountain of the revealed word of God. Hold fast to His word. Keep the Sabbath day holy. In short, continue to do what you know you should do. Wherever you go, stay tightly connected to the Church and consistently serve in it. While single, keep those same objectives as they apply.

As an exceptional son or daughter of God, you are sorely needed. There is an urgent need for more men and women like you who will stand for principles against the growing pressures to compromise those very principles. Men and women are required who will act nobly and

courageously for what the Lord has defined as right, not for what is politically correct or socially acceptable. We need individuals who have the spiritual, righteous influence that will motivate others to enduring good. We need statesmen of integrity, businessmen who are honest and morally clean, attorneys who defend justice and the legal system, and government officials who preserve principle because it is right. Above all, we need mothers and fathers who will preserve the sanctity and safety of the home and the integrity of the family, where faith in God and obedience to His commandments are taught as the foundation of a productive life.

You who are gathered here can be an essential part of that shining light, that righteous influence to increase the moral fiber of this nation and its homes. There are so many with whom you will associate who live their life for the moment. They do not understand the need for principles, eternal laws, and truth. They have been brought up in an environment where decisions are made on the basis of today's circumstances or tomorrow's opportunities for gain. Show them a better way. There are some things that are wrong because God decreed they are wrong. Truth is not determined by what men think, no matter how influential they may be. It was determined by an Almighty God before the creation of this earth, and it will exist forever.

Oh, there can be transitory euphoria from power, influence, or material wealth, but true, lasting happiness, the kind that is felt in the early hours of the morning when you are truly honest with yourself, can be garnered only by obedience to the teachings of God. You must have honesty, integrity, chastity, virtue, and a willingness to forego something attractive, even apparently desirable for the moment, for greater good in the future. I speak of the willingness when circumstance demands to lay everything on the altar to defend true principle.

An example will illustrate the kind of moral courage I mean. Some years ago a persuasive, able individual with great influence in the

Senate of this nation leveraged legitimate concerns for the defense of this country for personal ambition. Some of his colleagues became concerned with allegations made against him. They decided that an investigation was required to determine whether or not his actions were justified and honorable or whether he should be censured. Discussions were held concerning who should participate in the search for truth.

A relatively unknown senator—but a good man with faith in God and unquestioned integrity—awoke from a nightmare and told his wife that he had dreamed he had been put on the committee.

She responded, "Oh, no! That would be political suicide."

He went to the office and returned home after a long day, ashen white.

His trembling wife said, "No! You've been put on the committee."

He responded, "Worse than that. I have been asked to be its chairman."

Then, with characteristic devotion to duty, he and other valiant men began the difficult, trying evaluation of evidence to discover truth and to put an end to false practices. It was not an attack against an individual but against wrongdoing in high places. Though that action did later cost him his political career, I will ever remember him for his courage, integrity, and willingness to sacrifice personal gain for the greater good he gave this nation.

Will you prayerfully consider what we have discussed together? There are many willing to be led by your righteous example. Because you have been enlightened, you owe to those who follow the best example you are capable of giving. Not only will they be blessed, but your life will be enriched as well. Come to know of the great influence for good that flows from individual acts born of conscience and principle rooted in truth. Resolve that each moment of your life will reflect your determination to humbly be an example of righteousness,

integrity, and conviction. With such a life you will succeed in the purpose for which you came to earth.

I began this message indicating that I have validated in my personal life the truth of the principles shared. There have been times when my choice to stand for principle against strong forces implied that there would be significant personal loss. But that did not deter me. I was determined to do what was right. The anticipated loss, however, did not occur. Somehow, doing

what was right in time opened far greater and more meaningful opportunities. I testify that you will never go wrong when you trust in the Lord and in His promises, no matter how severe the challenge.

May the Lord strengthen your resolve, your exercise of faith, and your use of growing character so that you may be every bit the instrument for good that He desires. I testify that He lives. As you worthily seek His help, He will guide you in your life. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.