

To the April 2005 Graduates

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends, it is my most pleasant privilege on this special day to voice again my warm greeting and welcome to all of you and give my hearty congratulations to those we honor in these exercises. We are especially grateful for the presence of Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and chair of the board of trustees executive committee, who presides, and for Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy and member of the board of trustees. We are appreciative of their support and contributions to BYU.

We are also especially pleased to welcome Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy and commissioner of Church education. Although this is his first commencement in his assignment as commissioner, Elder Kerr is no stranger to BYU nor to these exercises. Likewise, we are honored to have with us today Sister Bonnie Parkin, Relief Society general president, and Sister Susan Tanner, Young Women general president. Both of these sisters are members of the board of trustees. Even though Sister Tanner is absolutely even-handed in her board responsibilities, we are not disappointed that she is the wife of our academic vice president John S. Tanner. We also recognize the many other special friends and honored guests who are with us today.

These ceremonies are tinged with sadness at the end of a difficult week for the BYU family. On Saturday we lost one of our graduate students, Mike Ashton. Then Tuesday we received the news that undergraduates Bradley Underwood and John Anderson had passed away—both are receiving their degrees posthumously. The loss of these fine students comes during an academic year in which we've also bid premature good-byes to several other students and members of our faculty and staff. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the affected families, and our hearts are heavier today because of their loss.

My wife, Sharon, and I are just completing our second year here at BYU. It has been wonderful and continues to be so. Many years ago as a young missionary, "the best two years of my life"—up to that point—seemed really to be two years long. Now these most recent "best two years" have flashed by so quickly in spite of the reality that so much has happened. I conclude that, in part, this may just be another evidence of my aging. I also believe that the special wonder and intense activity of

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 21 April 2005.

this most remarkable institution contribute to the compression of this sweet and special time for us.

I do, however, take some comfort in a statement made by Henry Ford many years ago. He said, “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young” (in Laurence J. Peter, *Peter’s Quotations* [New York: William Morrow and Company, 1977], 297). By his definition, I believe I am still young.

I have much to learn, and I am sure that I continue to learn. This is one of the joys of being at Brigham Young University. And, I might add, one of the major reasons for you to be here—not only to learn while you are on campus but to learn how to continue to learn throughout your lives. As you know, this is central to our theology and also key to living an examined and fulfilling life.

As has been my custom and that of some of my predecessors, I wish now to share some important but possibly obscure facts about our graduates. Today we will award 6,436 degrees. Of these, 5,531 are bachelor’s degrees, 711 are master’s degrees, and 194 are doctoral degrees. Our graduates come from all 50 of the United States, from two U.S. territories, and from 59 other countries. Our youngest graduate is still too young to have a Utah driver’s license and our oldest graduate—or at least the one willing to admit it—is 77-year-old Clarence Leavitt Grover, graduating in music.

Individually and as a group you have done well academically. You have earned the right to the diplomas you will receive.

We appreciate the generally very positive responses you shared on our senior survey regarding your BYU experience. Almost 60 percent of you anticipate full-time employment soon after graduation—great news for parents and spouses! About two-thirds of you plan to work in your major field, and the rest will pursue interests in another area.

Nine out of 10 of you said that you would choose to come to BYU again if you were starting over. We don’t recommend starting over for any of you, but we are grateful that your choice to come here has been largely validated. I’m sure our faculty and staff are grateful that the majority of you have been very complimentary about your interactions with them.

Many of you have been employed while supporting yourselves here. Congratulations to those of you who have been so prudent financially. In that vein, let us especially thank your families and other benefactors who have so generously assisted you. We recognize that your tuition, for example, is comparatively very low, and we join in expressing appreciation to the tithe payers of the Church who make this possible.

Seventy percent of you report that you are graduating with no consumer debt. Another 10 percent owe less than \$500. This is commendable. We understand, of course, that it is sometimes necessary to borrow, especially for education, but we continue to urge you to establish and follow patterns of providential living. As one of my close associates puts it, keep performing “plastic surgery” on any unnecessary credit cards or other debt.

Slightly more than half of you graduates are married, and our past surveys indicate that 80 percent will be wed within three years. During that same period almost two-thirds of you will be parents. Know that when you have chosen wisely, we are in favor of these statistics and even of increasing them!

It is both appropriate and necessary that we focus our attention today on our graduates, but I again want to mention our gratitude to so many of you for your essential contributions to our students. Families provide core, often lifelong support. Our faculty invest heavily in these great students and help provide the milieu that makes their remarkable achievements possible. Lest we forget another key group, let me also mention those who serve

in various staff and administrative functions that too many of us may take for granted but who also deserve our praise and appreciation. Indeed, there is not one honored here today who can honestly say, “I did it alone.”

In addition to those mentioned and present, may we continually reflect on those who make the BYU experience possible. Generous donors—who give both small and large amounts—make many of the extras possible that enhance our core educational experiences. The faithful tithe payers of the entire Church provide the bulk of the resources that make our lives so productive and positive. Lastly, we must acknowledge with great gratitude the confidence placed in us by the board of trustees, who make the difficult decisions concerning the appropriation of sacred funds to advance the work of the kingdom of God. I hope it is as comforting to you as it is to me that we are counted by them as part of that great work.

Relative to the tremendous financial, spiritual, and emotional support we receive, let me share the words of then Elder Spencer W. Kimball given more than three decades ago at BYU. He spoke of the university, but his descriptions could, and should, apply to us individually as well. Said he:

In all the world, . . . Brigham Young University is the greatest institution of learning. This statement I have made numerous times. I believe it sincerely. There are many criteria by which a university can be judged and appraised and evaluated. The special qualities of Brigham Young University lie not in its bigness; there are a number of much larger universities.

It should not be judged by its affluence and the amount of money available for buildings, research, and other facilities. It should not be judged by

prestige, for there are more statusful institutions as the world measures status.

*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.” Where all universities seek to preserve the heritage of knowledge that history has washed to their feet, this faculty has a double heritage—the preserving of knowledge of men and the revealed truths sent from heaven. [Spencer W. Kimball, *Education for Eternity*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Provo: 12 September 1967), 1–2]*

Think of what this means to BYU—and what this means to each of us. I marvel at the opportunity and privilege of being part of such an enterprise but also become a little weak in the knees when I think of the responsibility and implied obligations.

Someone once said it is the responsibility of prophets to prophesy and the responsibility of the rest of us to do what we can to see that the prophecies are fulfilled. As you leave residency at Brigham Young University, I pray that you will retain a special place in your heart for this wonderful university. As you do, it will help you reflect on the tremendous blessings you have received and will receive. It will also help you keep focused on doing the things in your life that will allow the Great Judge in heaven to recognize that the significant investment made in you was worthwhile. I am convinced that it was and it is.

May heaven continue to smile on you and yours as you commence the rest of your lives as distinguished graduates of Brigham Young University is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.