

Go Forth to Serve

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Beloved Brigham Young University graduates, this is a very important day—a commencement day. It is a beginning of a new chapter of your lives. Thank you, parents, family members, and companions who sacrificed to make this day possible. Thank you, teachers, staff members, devoted bishops, and fellow students who have provided support. And graduates, on behalf of all of us who love you and have prayed for your success, thank you for multiplying the gifts and talents your Heavenly Father has given you, for enduring to the end, and for finishing what you began.

Today you reap a reward that is much more than a diploma. You came to Brigham Young University to obtain an education in Zion—to learn “of things both in heaven and in the earth.” In doing so, you have made preparations “in all things . . . to magnify the calling whereunto [the Lord has] called you, and the mission with which [He has] commissioned you” (D&C 88:79–80).

What is your mission? The details may be specific to you, but the purpose is universal. You entered this institution to learn. Today you go forth to serve. On this special day I would like to visit with you about that sacred mission: to go forth as the disciples of old and serve our Heavenly Father’s children in all the world.

As always, missionary endeavors begin by breaking the “cycle of self.” That is a prerequisite. President Hinckley’s father said it well when he wrote, “Dear Gordon, . . . I have only one suggestion: forget yourself and go to work” (in Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996], 64). At school you have been primarily focused on your *own* learning, your *own* growth, your *own* development. Commencing today, you have the opportunity to lift your sights beyond yourself. Some philosophers will tell you this is impossible—that human beings can only be interested in themselves. But true disciples of the Savior know otherwise. He gave His life for all mankind, and we who follow Him have the opportunity to lose our lives in service to others.

To assist you in living lives of service, let me suggest three essential principles:

First, help others succeed.

Second, learn and develop your own talents and value the talents of others.

Third, obtain a spirit of serving and giving.

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In the coming days of transition, you will have many opportunities to practice these principles and establish a life even more meaningful and fulfilling than the one you created here at Brigham Young University.

Help Others Succeed

Up to this point you have used your intelligence to succeed as an individual. You have measured yourself against a standard set by the performance of your peers. Essentially you have been competing with them, and your grades reflect how well you have fared in that contest.

To help others succeed, you must achieve a different standard. In the world you will discover many people who seem to be average in their intelligence and yet are very, very successful. Why? Because they know that it is impossible to succeed alone. The only way to truly succeed is to help others succeed as well.

As you leave BYU, you will have opportunities to help others succeed. For some this will come naturally; for others it will require effort. If you are in the latter group, let me make this suggestion: Don't try to be at the top of your class. Does that sound strange? Let me explain.

Many capable students have a strong capacity to memorize what their professors have taught and repeat it back with amazing accuracy. This is impressive in the classroom and yields admirable scores.

However, the people who do this in the world are generally focused on themselves and their own success. They use what they know to look good and impress others. I've seen this with many MBA students who accept their first job thinking that what they know and say is more important than who they are and how they relate to others. They fail miserably in their jobs because it is obvious to nearly everyone that they are repeating what they've learned in order to be at the top of their class.

Beginning today, there is no more class to compete with, no reward for being the

"smartest," no high score for being able to repeat all the facts. Starting now, you must use your education not to say something impressive but to do something that will lift others and help them be successful. In other words, you must use your education not to distinguish yourself from others but to devote yourself to them—to helping them grow and flourish, even if it seems at the expense of your own prominence and glory. This is the way of our Savior, who said:

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. [John 12:24–25]

Learn and Develop Your Own Gifts and Talents and Value the Talents of Others

You may learn to lose yourself in the service of others by applying the second principle: Learn and develop your own gifts and talents and value the talents of others. At school it is natural and important to associate with students who share our interests and abilities. These associations make it possible for us to learn from one another and benefit from each other's experiences. Beginning today, you have the marvelous opportunity to let your circle grow.

After graduating from business school as a young man, I learned an essential lesson. A competitor company was taking away our loyal customers, and I was assigned the responsibility of developing a new product to safeguard our market share. This responsibility humbled me, to say the least. In preparing for this assignment, the chairman of the board said to me in a private conversation, "Bob, I have confidence in the abilities you have learned thus far. Now I want you to expand your vision and understanding. I want you to learn to think like a leader and see the whole picture!"

What was “the whole picture”? I soon realized it not only included my own gifts and talents but also the gifts and talents of others. I had come from a marketing background and had fallen into the myopic mentality that my area of expertise was very important. Although marketing is necessary, I began learning the importance of all the other elements in the process: research, development, testing, manufacturing, and so forth.

Which part of the process is most important? That is like asking which department at Brigham Young University is most important. Is it math? music? microbiology? Mandarin Chinese? The only right answer to that question is: None is most important because all are necessary. Or, to say it scripturally, “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

In developing our new product, we made a wheel diagram showing the essential but different role everyone would play and how we would interact. Through that model we all came to appreciate how essential everyone’s gift really was. Needless to say, that learning experience changed my life. I understood more deeply the doctrine of the Lord: “To every[one] is given a gift. . . . And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God” (D&C 46:11, 26).

Obtain the Spirit of Service and Giving

When we invite others to share their gifts, we prepare ourselves to apply the third principle: Obtain the spirit of service and giving. Consider, if you will, the spirit of service and giving demonstrated by the faculty and staff of this university. This is a teaching institution—or, in other words, a giving institution. Faculty and staff members at Brigham Young University devote their education and experience to giving you a wonderful gift: an educational foundation for the rest of your life.

In other words, their mission is to prepare you for your mission.

Because they have obtained the spirit of service and giving, they have been able to focus their professional energy on you rather than on themselves. Because they have had your eternal welfare in mind, they have endorsed standards that support a spiritually centered education and have encouraged you to live those standards wholeheartedly. In your last few days on campus, I counsel you to take a moment and express your appreciation to those who have helped you, taught you, and touched your heart. As you move forward, let your model be the one, solitary leper who went back to thank the Savior for giving him a rich, new life.

Moving ahead, you have the opportunity to follow the example of your teachers. Whether or not you become teachers in the formal sense, you each have the opportunity to continue learning, continue living the highest gospel standards, and continue by precept and example to teach what you have learned here. In this way the cycle of giving continues, and the world truly becomes an extension of the Brigham Young University campus, for what has happened here will continue to happen everywhere—through you.

Wherever you go, the cycle of giving will have its greatest influence in your own homes. Here the eternal part of your mission will unfold, for here those who teach and those who are taught are joined in the most important education of all: the education for eternity. I pay special tribute to all who will serve in the sacred school of the family and especially to the many talented sisters who are receiving their degrees today. The world will try to convince you that the most important success is achieved in the workplace. I salute all who will focus their efforts on the family. I especially salute you sisters who will train up our Heavenly Father’s children in the way they should go (see Proverbs 22:6).

On this commencement day, let me remind you that your capacity to obtain and act upon this spirit of service and giving may depend upon your obedience to temporal commandments. The living prophets have counseled us time and again to put our lives in order—to pay a full tithing and a generous fast offering, to store food and other essential items, and to become self-sufficient by eliminating debt.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a world being destroyed by debt. When we are in debt, we not only lose our agency to act, we also lose our opportunities to give both temporal and spiritual service. If you have had to go into debt to obtain your education, I encourage you to repay your debts as soon as possible. Then go forward with commitment not to finance on credit any item of any kind, except perhaps a house and vehicle that are well within your means.

For many, this may require what I call “plastic surgery,” which you may perform yourselves this very day. All it requires is a pair of scissors and those credit cards that you cannot use responsibly by paying them off every month. If you need to perform such surgery, do it. Do it now. President Hinckley has been counseling the members of the Church to overcome debt for many years. Let us reap the blessings that will come from obedience to his counsel.

What are those blessings? In time, as you work hard and pay an honest tithe, you will be able to provide for your own needs and the needs of your family. Then you will have the privilege of acting upon the spirit of service and giving. There are endless ways you will be able to bless your community and support worthwhile public and private charities. You will be able to provide Church humanitarian assistance or contribute to the Perpetual Education Fund. Most important, you will be able to help support missionaries throughout the world, including your own children and yourselves.

You will also be in a position to give back to this university in a substantial way. All of us are aware that your tuition pays only a very small part of the cost of your education. What you have enjoyed here at Brigham Young University is possible because of others who have sacrificed and freely given of their means. Now it is your turn to follow the commandment of the prophet Jacob:

Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.

[Jacob 2:17–19]

I thank our Heavenly Father that you entered Brigham Young University to learn and that you have diligently prepared to go forth and serve. There are no shortcuts to that service. There is no fast track. But day by day, by following principles of service, the purpose of your BYU education will be fulfilled. I pray that as we go forth today, as true Latter-day Saints who count their blessings and rejoice to see all that God has done, we will be determined to

- help others succeed
- earnestly learn and develop our own gifts and talents and value the talents of others
- obtain the spirit of service and giving

This is the key to lives of meaning and fulfillment. Said our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley:

Do you want to be happy? Forget yourself and get lost in this great cause. Lend your efforts to

helping people. . . . Look to the Lord and live and work to lift and serve His sons and daughters. You will come to know a happiness that you have never known before if you will do that. I do not care how old you are, how young you are. . . . You can lift people and help them. Heaven knows there are so very, very, very many people in this world who need help. . . . [Let us] stand a little taller and reach a little higher in the service of others. [Liverpool England Fireside, 31 August 1995; in TGBH, 597]

I give you my testimony that our Savior Jesus Christ has set the example of service in behalf of all of God's family. Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Restoration, was His servant in bringing forth the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days. Today we are led by a true servant of the Master, even His prophet President Gordon B. Hinckley. How grateful we are that he has done as the prophets and apostles of old and has gone forth throughout his life to serve in all the world.

May we earnestly do likewise is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

