

Perspective, Purpose, Peace

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I wish the lights were brighter. I wish we could see each other more clearly. Dressed as we are, in all our finery and formality, we look far too much the same. If we could peel away the layers of regalia, we would see graduates who hail from more than 50 countries and all 50 states, who speak many languages, and who have developed expertise in the sciences, arts, and letters. And if we could see yet deeper, we would witness even more: individuals of infinite worth and potential, each standing on the brink of an important new journey.

We are gathered today for a rite of passage, a celebration of all that we have learned. But we must take care lest our accomplishments convince us that we know more than we do or that we have, somehow, arrived. The value of our education will only be determined by the future; it will be demonstrated in our personal lives with our families, in our professional activities, and in our communities. Fortunately we control what we make of our education—and of ourselves. And so I offer us a three-pronged reminder: let us consider perspective, purpose, and peace in the context of our higher education.

First, consider our perspective. Imagine for a moment that we could pop the lid off of the Marriott Center and immerse ourselves in

a clear night sky filled to the brim with stars. Imagine also that we were equipped with perfect eyesight—or, better yet, Hubble-quality vision—and that we could drink in the details of galaxies and nebulae throughout the farthest reaches of space. Moses caught a glimpse of something like this and concluded “that man is nothing, which thing [he] never had supposed” (Moses 1:10). This was an important lesson. Wisely, King Benjamin counseled us: “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power.” King Benjamin continued by reminding us specifically to “believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” (Mosiah 4:9).

Because our understanding is finite, because we are nothing—and know next to nothing—we must act cautiously. If knowledge is power and if our power is increasing, then wisdom is restraint—particularly in this age of hyper-specialization when, as individuals, we know more and more about less and less. We must

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be conscientious of our influence. The simple fact that we know how to do something hardly justifies us in doing it. The fact that a scientist can build a nuclear weapon does not mean he or she ought to. The fact that a marketing executive knows that sex sells does not mean that he or she ought to sell by those means. Our knowledge is useful only to the extent that we wield it righteously. Convenience and expediency, political or otherwise, should not motivate us; we must live by loftier standards. Wendell Berry writes:

Do what we will, we are never going to be free of mortality, partiality, fallibility, and error. The extent of our knowledge will always be, at the same time, the measure of the extent of our ignorance.

*Because ignorance is thus a part of our creaturely definition, we need an appropriate way: a way of ignorance, which is the way of neighborly love, kindness, caution, care, appropriate scale, thrift, good work, right livelihood. Creatures who have armed themselves with the power of limitless destruction should not be following any way laid out by their limited knowledge and their unseemly pride in it. [Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance* (Emeryville, California: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), preface, ix]*

Our perspective is limited. Therefore, let us reverence what we do not know and act with care, appealing to Heavenly Father to teach us how to use our knowledge with wisdom and restraint.

Second, consider our purpose. Each of us knows the motto: “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” I’m not one for ultimatums or drawing lines in the sand, but the time has come. By tomorrow the “going forth” will have officially and irrevocably begun. Time is all we’ve got in this life; a few ticks on a clock, a couple of breaths in and out, and we’re done. So what will we do with our time? We can spend our days seeking wealth and other worldly trappings (to which moths and rust

are particularly attracted). This is easy enough to do—especially given the siren song of modern consumerism—but we cannot afford to prostitute our education, to sell ourselves short by “labor[ing] for that which cannot satisfy” (2 Nephi 9:51). Our *souls* are at stake here!

Amulek didn’t mince words when he exclaimed that “if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, . . . ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith” (Alma 34:28).

I have heard some students jokingly suggest that the purpose of a BYU education is to increase our earning potential so that we will eventually pay more tithing and make more sizeable charitable contributions. Nothing could be further from the truth. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3). Much has been given to us. By attending BYU we have received something of a divine investiture. What is required of us now is to exhaust ourselves in service. And thanks to our BYU education, we are uniquely equipped to do so.

Let us become known for our compassion in whatever spheres best suit our life’s unfolding: in boardrooms, in classrooms, in laboratories and conservatories, in factories and foundries, in government and military service, on Scout outings, and in family home evenings. Eric Hoffer noted, “Compassion alone stands apart from the continuous traffic between good and evil proceeding within us. Compassion is the antitoxin of the soul” (Eric Hoffer, *Reflections on the Human Condition* [New York: Harper and Row, 1973], 24). Yet compassion is a character trait in theory only if it is not realized in our interaction with others. Therefore we *must* serve. We know that it will profit us nothing to “gain the whole world” if we lose our souls (Matthew 16:26), but we can rest assured that the Lord will prosper us—and bring salvation to our souls—if we honor His investment in us by going forth to serve.

Third, consider the need for peace in the world and our ability to establish peace. Two thousand years ago, Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). I like to think of peace not as an absence of conflict but as a profound, perfect sense of identity. We know that the Lord’s people and community are characterized by being “of one heart and one mind, and [dwelling] in righteousness [with] no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Citizens of this kind of township—Zion—live in perfect security. Knowing that we are children of God and understanding His divine plan permits us to tap into this sense of belonging and security. Could there be anything more real, individual, or authentic than discovering our own true identity?

Peace, then, is a natural expression of our identity, and it can surround us and emanate from us in our homes, communities, and workplaces. We are peacemakers when we share this security and invite others to find their own perfect identity in the Light of Christ. As we depart from these proceedings, let us make

peace and let us be known for our “peaceable walk with the children of men” (Moroni 7:4).

I wish the lights were brighter. I wish we could see each other more clearly. Dressed as we are, in all our finery and formality, we look far too much the same. So when we shed these layers of regalia, let us remember our individual potential and responsibility. Our perspective is limited, so we must act with restraint and compassion. Indeed, our purpose must be to serve. And we, perhaps more than any other group on the planet, are equipped and obligated to establish peace.

A star occupies a finite region of space, but the light it produces radiates across millions of light years in every direction. In a similar vein, when we honor our education, Brigham Young University will cease simply to be a location and an institution. Rather, it will become a source of power within us that will bless us and will become a means whereby we may bless others through our influence—today and every day that we are permitted to sojourn on God’s footstool. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

