

A Time of Transitions

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends: I'm grateful to welcome all of you to Brigham Young University on this significant day of celebration for our graduates, their loved ones, our faculty, and the entire university community. As we formally recognize those we individually honor today, we also appreciate that their successes are not solo events and, in virtually every case, are the result of help, support, and encouragement of others in addition to the tremendous personal efforts of those whose names appear on the program of the day. In this we include spouses, parents, children, and other family members; professors, teachers, classmates, friends, Church leaders, faithful tithe payers all around the world, generous donors, and all others who make contributions of a wide variety that result in making the miracles at BYU a reality.

As you know, commencement is a time of transitions. This is true for graduating students, of course, but also true for a number of retiring staff, faculty, and administrators. In that regard I specifically mention the coming retirement in the days ahead of Advancement Vice President K. Fred Skousen, who has served BYU so very well in his current role for a decade and as a faculty member and university leader for an additional three decades.

We will miss him and the others who have done so much for so many over the years. Today we are happy to welcome incoming Advancement Vice President Kevin J Worthen, who has been serving as dean of the J. Reuben Clark Law School here at BYU.

Likewise, Elder W. Rolfe Kerr has been called as president of the Logan Utah Temple and has been released as commissioner of Church Education. Our new commissioner and good friend Elder Paul V. Johnson has also joined with us in the official party.

As is typically the case, this graduating class is outstanding in a number of important ways. More than half are married, and that percentage will continue to increase appreciably in the days ahead. Over a quarter of the undergraduates and almost two-thirds of the graduate students studied at other institutions of higher learning before enrolling at Brigham Young University. All but one state is represented in this class. In addition, five U.S. territories and 61 foreign countries have sent students in this group to BYU.

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 14 August 2008.

Our youngest graduate is just 19 years old, and our eldest reached her 39th birthday about 43 years ago! Sister Hermine Briggs Horman is graduating in general studies. We will have Sister Horman stand and let us recognize her and all those who have made remarkable sacrifices to complete degrees, oftentimes after many years of attending to other important priorities.

As I stated earlier, commencement is a time of transitions. As we conclude one phase of life, we begin another. We should reflect on and glory in the successes, accomplishments, and growth that have occurred while you studied here. Your progress and contributions have been truly remarkable. We should also now be focusing on where we are going in the future, what we will next accomplish, and how we will best continue to learn and grow.

Recently I've been impressed to think about the word *seek*. There are a number of definitions of *seek*. My dictionary includes notions such as (1) to go in search of or to look for something; (2) to try to discover something; (3) to ask for something; and (4) to try to acquire or gain something (see *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], s.v. "seek"). By my count, the word *seek* occurs 572 times in the scriptures, and when variations on this root word and its synonyms are included, the scriptures are replete with literally thousands of references. Examples of each of the definitions I have mentioned can be found, and perhaps some other meanings as well. Of course these verses contain counsel on both what we should seek and what we should avoid. Let me share a few that I believe deserve our particular attention as we embark on the next phases of our lives and careers.

Of course there are many things—wonderful, attractive, and worthwhile—that your BYU education has equipped you well to seek after. Listen to these words of the Lord: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto

you" (3 Nephi 13:33; see also Matthew 6:33). Let's be sure we keep our priorities straight. I have great confidence that you know what your priorities and primary loyalties are.

Often we quote to each other, as the prophets have to us, this important counsel:

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118; see also D&C 109:7]

We try to do this at BYU and hope with great confidence that this pattern of continued learning will be yours all of your days.

Sometimes, for those who have incurred significant debt or have lived at near-poverty levels during the time of the formal university student experience, the following advice, repeated in numerous places in scripture, may not be unduly welcome, however vital and however true:

Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich. [D&C 6:7; see also D&C 11:7]

I predict that for almost all of you, a day will come when, while reflecting back on the difficult days of being a BYU student or spouse, you will acknowledge your years on campus as some of the most happy and special of your entire life. This will be particularly true as you continue to seek after the correct and most important things.

Occasionally I meet a student who reports that he or she wants to strike it rich and then will work on other priorities like marriage, family, service in the Church and the community, and the like. Apparently Jacob, the brother of Nephi, also knew those with similar views. Listen to his words:

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 2:18–19]

Please be careful about what you seek, because you have become educated and equipped to be successful in achieving what you set out to accomplish and achieve. Please remember that all who have supported and

encouraged you in your educational endeavors have done so with not only great love but also with tremendous confidence in your potential to bless your own life and the lives of all of those you touch.

Our Father in Heaven and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, do live. This university is part of Their work and Their Plan, and so are you. We are led by prophets and apostles who also have great expectations for you and the contributions you will make. Congratulations and best wishes as you go on with our faith and prayers in behalf of you and yours. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.