

# *As You Embark upon This New Era*

DIETER F. UCHTDORF

President Samuelson, honored guests, parents, family members, graduates, my dear brothers and sisters—Sister Uchtdorf and I extend our congratulations, commendation, and deep love to all of you whom we honor on this happy day. Even nature seems to be honoring you with the beauties of springtime as we mark the culmination of many years of hard work and study.

It is a great privilege for us to be with you today. And we are pleased to be with Elder and Sister Nelson, who are wonderful friends and true servants of the Lord.

I love this university. During my years as an airline captain, I would sometimes cross this beautiful part of Utah on flights from Frankfurt, Germany, to Los Angeles. When I did, I would often announce to the passengers that if they looked out their windows they would have the privilege of seeing the world-famous Brigham Young University below. Some captains might reserve such an announcement for sites like the Grand Canyon or the Eiffel Tower, but to me Brigham Young University has always had a special place in my heart.

My wife and I did not have the privilege of attending BYU as students. However, our daughter received her bachelor's and master's degrees here—and, by the way, she graduated *summa cum laude*. I assume that there are enough proud parents here today who

can easily recognize one of their own. Let me share with you briefly why the memory of our daughter's BYU experience is so tender to us.

Only a few months before receiving her degree, our daughter gave birth to twin boys who arrived six weeks early. Talk about student efficiency! When we observed how she and her husband found time to raise these two little babies while at the same time finishing their schooling, we were convinced that there is a special spirit at BYU. In this atmosphere not only does knowledge grow and multiply, so does the population!

My wife and I came all the way from Germany to attend our daughter's commencement exercises. We sat way up there in the high bleachers with the two little babies in a double stroller, watching the students receive their diplomas. Little did we know that 19 years later we would be here once again, attending another commencement—this time with slightly better seats—representing the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

By the way, our handsome twin grandsons, who were born at Utah Valley Regional Medical Center, are now six feet tall and

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serving missions for the Lord in Asia. Isn't it wonderful how life brings change, challenges, and blessings into our lives?

Today is a significant day of change for all of you. It is a day of closing and opening doors. It is a day of gratitude and rejoicing, a day of acknowledgment of our many debts to God, family, and friends. It is a day of radiant horizons and great expectations, and perhaps a day of a few fears as well.

My wife, Harriet, and I are honored to share this moment with you.

On a personal note, I am both humbled and grateful to receive this honorary degree. I thank you all for this. It will link my family even closer to this wonderful institution.

Happily, the honor I receive today comes without the necessity of taking final exams or, even worse, facing a panel of skeptical professors bent on uncovering vacuums of academic ignorance. So for that I am truly grateful. Nevertheless, I assure you that my family will treasure this honor as we treasure the memories of this beautiful day.

May I add that Harriet, who is with me here today, is the love of my life, and she actually deserves the highest honor within any authority to grant for being my wife and the sunshine of my life for 46 years.

When I asked our children what I should talk about at a commencement service, they quickly responded, "Keep it short, and don't worry about the topic. Everyone will be thinking about other things anyway."

That is excellent advice. However, there are three things I would like to leave with you—three things that may help you as you embark upon this new era of your lives. First, use time wisely. Second, continue to learn. Third, seek the Spirit always.

### **First: Use Time Wisely**

A wise man once distinguished between "the noble art of getting things done" and "a nobler art of leaving things undone." True

"wisdom in life," he taught, consists of "the elimination of non-essentials" (Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* [New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1937], 162, 10). May I suggest that you periodically evaluate how you are doing in this area? What are the nonessential things that clutter your days and steal your time? What are the habits you may have developed that do not serve a useful purpose? What are the unfinished or unstarted things that could add vigor, meaning, and joy to your life?

Sometimes we make the mistake of neglecting the essentials of life. The Savior had harsh words for the scribes and Pharisees of His day: "Woe unto you," He told them, "for [you] have omitted the weightier matters of the law, [justice], mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done" (Matthew 23:23).

Although the Savior's words were directed to a specific audience thousands of years ago, they apply to us as well today.

In modern revelation, the Lord has commanded, "Thou shalt not idle away thy time, neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known" (D&C 60:13). It is quite common to hear people and friends of ours say, "Where has the time gone?" or "If I only had more time."

In reality, time is perhaps the only commodity of life that is divided equally among every person in the world. Think about it—we all have 24 hours in a day. Though some people have more demands on their time than others, we all have an equal opportunity to use those 24 hours wisely.

I learned how remarkably fair time is while performing long-range flights around the world. For example, we departed Frankfurt at 10:00 a.m. local time and, after an 11-hour flight in a B747, arrived in San Francisco at 12:00 noon California time, apparently only two hours later. That was wonderful—we had gained nine hours! Of course, you all know, on the next day, on our way back to Frankfurt, we lost the nine hours again.

Someone has said, “Time cannot be expanded, accumulated, mortgaged, hastened, or retarded” (anonymous, in John Cook, comp., *The Book of Positive Quotations*, 2nd ed. [Minneapolis, Minnesota: 2007], 274).

And it is ever renewing. Even though we may have wasted time yesterday, there is hope. There is a full day waiting for us today and tomorrow. However, if we continue to take our allotted time for granted, we may find ourselves like Elder Neal A. Maxwell put it: “Either we use time wisely or it uses us; either we manage tasks effectively, or we are pushed about and prodded by them” (*The Smallest Part* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 46).

So how can we use our time wisely? In a world of so many things to do, how can we be sure that we are doing the best things? Elder Maxwell continued: “Since our impact must be selective [we must] do some goal-setting in terms of the outcomes we wish to achieve. Such goal-setting needn’t be a hassling, hustling experience but rather a calm, periodic reasoned assessment of what we cherish enough to choose to do with our time” (*The Smallest Part*, 46).

In qualifying for the degrees from this wonderful and grand institution today, you have shown the ability to determine what is most important, to set goals to achieve it, and to then use your time to accomplish these goals. I urge you to continue to set and work toward temporal and spiritual goals. These may include goals to give of your talents, of your time, and of your means to the weightier matters in life. Such goals will guide your decisions about how best to use your time.

### **Second: Continue to Learn**

It has been said that a university “is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see” (John Masfield, remarks on receiving an honorary degree from

England’s University of Sheffield in 1946, excerpts in “Beautiful Places,” *Education, Time*, 17 February 1947, 80).

What an eloquent reminder of your BYU motto: “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.”

Isn’t this also a description of life itself? Isn’t this what the great plan of happiness, the plan of salvation, is all about? Isn’t this the purpose of our existence? My dear young friends, never stop learning. Never stop learning and never stop using what you learn to serve God and your fellowmen.

I encourage you to continue to pursue as much schooling as possible. In the competitive world of today, there is certainly a need to become an expert in your field of knowledge. However, there is also a great need to broaden and extend your horizons of learning and of interest.

Walk through life with open eyes and ears. The prophet Mormon as a child was described as one who was “quick to observe.” He was told to remember the things that he had learned by observing the things around him (see Mormon 1:2–3).

Just think about it—even during the very difficult and challenging times in Kirtland, the Lord gave the Saints a charge to educate themselves:

*My grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in . . . all things that . . . are expedient for you to understand;*

*Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, . . .*

*That ye may be prepared in all things. [D&C 88:78–80]*

Expand and broaden your knowledge. My young friends, this is also your charge and your mission—for today and for the rest of your lives.

In my life I have learned that we can trust in God and in His promises. My family's circumstances during and after World War II made it almost impossible to get any advanced formal schooling. Most of my schooling had to be done after a full day's work. Looking back, I can say the blessings of Church membership, the gospel, the unceasing desire to learn, and the willingness to work hard provided great opportunities even in most difficult times.

You and I cannot know everything. There is, however, One who does know it all, who understands all, who created all and everything—He is the Father of our spirits, our Father in Heaven. Because He is our Father, He has an intense interest in our education. He knows what we need to learn to fulfill our mission in life. Let us always be His students. Let us always open His textbooks. Let us sit at His feet and learn from Him. He knows every language and culture on this earth, and He will teach us in a way that we can understand. Let us always seek further light and knowledge from Him, the only real source of truth and light.

### **Third: Seek the Spirit Always**

In piloting an airplane, you learn quickly that your flight path depends greatly on how you handle challenging external influences such as wind and weather. Even more important, however, are the decisions you make in response to those external influences. Your decisions, in fact, can counteract the external influences to ensure that you stay on course and reach your desired eternal, divine destination. In order to make those decisions correctly, it helps to know what your actual position is. Therefore, it is of vital importance to have a true and valid reference point like the polar star in the Northern Hemisphere or a reliable electronic platform wherever you are.

As you know, there are plenty of winds and storms in the world today that attempt to blow you off course. In order to continue the course you have begun here at Brigham Young

University, you need a spiritual polar star in your life. You need a point of reference that has eternal consistency and reliability.

Today I bear witness to you, individually and collectively, that you do have the most stable and dependable reference platform for your spiritual and physical position available to you. It will help you to know at all times and in all places whether or not you are on the right path.

It is the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Always be worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

I firmly believe that a special spirit has rested upon this school from its very beginning. You have heard many times what Brigham Young told Karl G. Maeser as he commenced his work at Brigham Young Academy: "Remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God" (in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928], 79).

This wonderful and straightforward counsel by a prophet of God still applies to everything you do today and in the future. Keep this special BYU spirit in your lives. Do nothing without the Spirit of God. The presence of the Spirit of God will bring focus, certainty, and confidence into your life. And "by the power of the Holy Ghost [you] may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5). The gift and the power of "the Holy Ghost . . . will show unto you all things what [you] should do" (2 Nephi 32:5).

What a wonderful promise for you as you move forward into your future.

You are a marvelous generation. You are blessed beyond measure. The world needs you and your goodness. Great opportunities await you. I love you; I admire you. Do not fear. God is with you; have faith. Use your time wisely, continue to learn, and always live worthy to have the Spirit with you.

I leave you my blessing and love, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.