

Dealing with Challenges

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Fellow graduates, these commencement exercises mark the summit of our educational experience at Brigham Young University. The journey thus far has not been an easy one. We have all encountered obstacles during our time here—some of which have seemed insurmountable. Our challenges have come in a variety of forms. Some of us have struggled with indecision regarding which major to choose. For others the challenge came each time we sat in the Testing Center wondering if we were the only ones noticing the rising temperature. Money has been scarce and sometimes even nonexistent.

Our presence here today is evidence that we have not given up. We decided on a major, we made our final walk down the stairs of the Testing Center, and we have survived our diet of ramen noodles and vending machine Hot Pockets.

We should feel deeply satisfied to know that we have always stood one more time than we have fallen. My fellow classmates, we have discovered for ourselves mankind's ability to overcome, to rise, and to triumph.

I would like to share three lessons that my educational experience at BYU has taught me about dealing with challenges.

Lesson one is that we do not need to deal with challenges alone. Our experience at BYU has strengthened our faith and trust in our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ. We have learned that with Their help “all things are possible” (Mark 10:27). We have also learned that God often eases our burdens through the instrumentality of other people.

Several times when I became overwhelmed with the challenges of school, work, family, and research projects, direction and encouragement from others gave me the fortitude to continue. Last year, after several months of preparation, I made the eight-hour drive to the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. My purpose was to obtain the permission of the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board to perform language research on the reservation for my honors thesis. After reviewing my 22-page application for only a few minutes, they rejected my proposal and sent me on my way. My return trip allowed me plenty of time to become overwhelmed with discouragement.

Jesse Aaron Egbert spoke as the representative of his graduating class at BYU commencement on 13 August 2009.

I had all but decided to give up on the project when I called Dr. Wendy Baker, my thesis advisor. Her empathetic words of enthusiasm and hope during that phone call gave me the determination to continue. I did continue, and we found another avenue of data collection. I have since defended my thesis and presented our research at two academic conferences.

Each of us will experience hardships and setbacks throughout our lives, but we do not need to endure them alone. The words of a favorite hymn come to mind:

*What greater gift dost thou bestow,
What greater goodness can we know
Than Christlike friends, whose gentle ways
Strengthen our faith, enrich our days.
[“Each Life That Touches Ours for Good,”
Hymns, 1985, no. 293]*

Without the help and encouragement from friends like Wendy Baker, our journey would have been so much more difficult.

Lesson two is that we can endure challenges with patience. I worked hard during my undergraduate career to prepare for admission to graduate school. I kept my grades up, worked on research projects with professors, took a GRE prep class, and, like all of you, contributed in campus and community service projects. I carefully selected the graduate schools I would apply to and ensured my applications were complete and submitted early.

After months of waiting for each school to notify me of its admissions decision, I received a rejection letter, then another, and then another until every graduate school had respectfully denied me admission. With help and advice from professors in my department, I submitted a late application to one more graduate school. I was promptly admitted, and, from my present perspective, I am confident that I am going where I am supposed to go.

During that experience I learned what Elder Neal A. Maxwell meant when he said,

“Those, however, who ‘plow in hope’ not only understand the law of the harvest but they also understand what growing seasons are all about” (“Plow in Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 60). During our time at BYU we have planted mustard-sized seeds of faith and knowledge (see Matthew 17:20). Although we will not immediately reap all that we have sown while here, spiritual and intellectual seeds within each of us will continue to bear fruit for the rest of our lives.

Lesson three is that we can serve others—even during our challenges. President Henry B. Eyring said that “the test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well” (“In the Strength of the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 17). Regardless of our circumstances, there will never be a better time than now to serve others. Our personal struggles should serve as a constant reminder of the needs of those around us. Challenges can also prepare us to approach the needs of others with empathy and compassion.

During my time at BYU I have been the recipient of many kind acts of service. A few months ago, after several days of car trouble, I discovered that my starter needed to be replaced. I mentioned this to a neighbor, hoping to get some advice. He offered to look at it for me and did not leave my side until he had replaced my starter almost six hours later. Such examples of selfless service have motivated me to try to be aware of the needs of others. Like all of us, I have participated in small, everyday acts of service. These small acts of service, however, seemed anything but small to those who needed help. One important lesson I have learned is to stop asking others whether they need help and just start helping.

I hope that we will leave this university remembering this maxim from Elder Maxwell: “Whatever our particular fields of scholarship, the real test is individual discipleship, not scholarship” (“Discipleship and Scholarship,”

talk given at the annual banquet of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at BYU, 27 September 1991; published in *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 [summer 1992]: 7). As disciples, let us not forget that Jesus Christ's greatest act of service and His most immense personal challenge took place simultaneously.

I want to close by saying that today should be a day of gratitude. Let us take the time to thank family, friends, mentors, and other special people in our lives who have made today possible. And I speak for all of us when I say thank you to this university's board of trust-

ees, administration, faculty, staff, and alumni. You have made a difference. Most important, may each of us find a quiet place to kneel and express gratitude to a loving Father in Heaven. I know that He is aware of and pleased with the accomplishment that we celebrate today.

As we move into a new season of life, may we always remember the lessons that we have learned during this "intellectually enlarging" and "spiritually strengthening" season of growth (*The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* [Provo: BYU, 1996], 3).