

# *Always Learning and Growing*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

**I**t is my distinct privilege and pleasure to welcome all of you and to extend my commendations and congratulations to those before us who are recognized in our program of the day and are adorned in the apparel earned by their accomplishments. As we will emphasize later, none has trod this path of achievement alone, and so in our adulation we include all who have contributed in any way to the success of these graduates. On behalf of our administration and board of trustees, thanks to all who have assisted, supported, and blessed the lives of this group of students we honor today.

Each graduating class is unique while having much in common with others who have previously gone this way. As is usual, we have representatives from all 50 states and 57 other nations. We have graduates close to the ages of our typical entering freshmen (whom we will welcome in a few days), and our oldest bachelor's degree recipient is 82! We honor those with unusual circumstances, like DeAnn Jones, who passed away before she could participate with us today.

Thirty percent of our graduates are from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, while the remainder are distributed throughout the other colleges of the university. With the

2,423 degrees to be awarded at today's commencement exercises, we will have more than 8,000 new Brigham Young University graduates in the 2009 calendar year.

One of the issues of concern to you graduates is the unsettled economic situation in which we find ourselves. Some of you wishing to enter the workforce still have not secured employment, and the prospects seem yet uncertain. Some of you are continuing your education here or elsewhere and are also experiencing the effects of the economy and its related challenges. Others of you who are married or planning to be so soon will join or rejoin the honored ranks of homemakers. To you who will be giving primary attention to children and home, we can assure you that there will always be an abundance of work without layoffs or reductions in force!

In the current times it is especially important for all of us to understand that these challenges and uncertainties have been predicted and accounted for in the great plan of our Heavenly Father. I take considerable comfort in the

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*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 13 August 2009.*

promise of the Lord given in D&C 38:30 as He described the worldly conditions of this dispensation: “But if ye are prepared ye shall not fear.” In many respects, you are prepared and therefore can move forward without fear or undue concern. In other ways, you are still preparing and always will be, but the promise still applies even as you change the tense.

In fact, in our theology of eternal progression we will always be learning and growing. Thus your BYU education, which has prepared you for the next phases of your lives, still finds you in a state of preparation that requires lifelong learning, developing, changing, and growing. We think you are up to the task and commend you for your current achievements and especially for your possibilities, both proximate and eternal.

Many years ago an English writer, Izaak Walton, wrote a famous book familiar to many of you entitled *The Compleat Angler*. I like to fish and did so the other day with my oldest son. While we caught a few trout, I can attest that I am not a “compleat” angler and likely will never be a fully competent fisherman. I mention Walton’s contribution not because we have had much interest in training or teaching you about fishing but because of the notion that one can and must become complete in certain phases or dimensions of life.

Just as Walton’s exposition was about much more than fishing, though he obviously loved the angling art, being a BYU graduate is about much more than just mastering the curriculum in your major. It is certainly that, but it has also prepared you to be a lifelong learner in your chosen discipline and in all phases and aspects of life. In addition, the uniqueness of the BYU experience, as is mentioned in the BYU mission statement, is also “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life” (*The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* [Provo: BYU, 1996], 1). I don’t think you will find that statement or goal in documents from any other great univer-

sity that does not carry the name of Brigham Young University.

A rather common fallacy accepted in society is that with graduation, one has finished her or his education. That is a serious misunderstanding if we are considering a truly educated person, particularly one with the lofty goal of achieving eternal life and eventually perfection.

In reality, your diploma is a certification that this institution believes you are now sufficiently prepared to continue to learn and grow both intellectually and spiritually throughout your lives if you are willing to continue to make the same kind of effort at learning that you have demonstrated while students at BYU. This confidence expressed in you is also a tremendous challenge we give you to reach the potential that you have been given by heaven, by your parents and other supporters, and by those who have contributed to your education.

Another reason that I like the work of Izaak Walton, in addition to our shared enthusiasm for fishing, is that he understood very clearly that his learning and work were never really finished. Though *The Compleat Angler* was first published in 1653, Walton continued to add to, modify, and improve his treatise with multiple editions over the years until 1676.

A third reason I admire this man of these many generations past is that he was very loyal to his friends and family. He shamelessly learned from them and had them contribute to his education and to his literary efforts. He apparently wrote for recreation as well as vocation, shared what he learned, and enjoyed freely. In all of this, there is something for us to learn.

While it is a very good thing to become knowledgeable and settled in your own discipline and in your own faith, that is not enough. In my judgment, Walton’s worldwide community of followers, which now includes many even in our own day, would have been in a

lesser place without his willingness to share what he had learned. I do not suggest that all of us should become great writers, poets, or fishermen. What I do suggest is that each of us needs to understand that we who have been given so much have a greater responsibility to contribute to those around us, including our families, our communities, our nations, and our churches.

Those of us who are Latter-day Saints with the benefit of a BYU education have a particular and vital charge to follow the admonition of the Apostle Peter, who counseled that we should “be ready always to give an answer to every man [or woman, I will add] that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

You will be naturally placed in situations and circumstances where by both precept and example you will be able to share the message of the Restoration and answer the honest questions about who we are, what we believe, why we believe, and why we act as we do. We have

great confidence in you and understand that so very much depends on you.

We know that almost all of you are grateful for your blessings and experiences here. We charge you never to forget those who have made this remarkable opportunity possible for you. This includes your families, your teachers (both at BYU and from before you came here), the faithful tithing payers of the Church, and the generous benefactors of this university who make so much of your enriched experience here possible. In all of this, please remember your own contributions and recognize that God has helped you get to this point and has great expectations for you in the future.

You and Brigham Young University are part of Heavenly Father’s great work. It is true, and we are led by apostles and prophets with President Thomas S. Monson as chairman of our board of trustees. I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you and yours at this momentous and wonderful time. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.