

# *A Time for Optimism*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, faculty, brothers, sisters, and friends: It is a signal privilege to welcome each of you to Brigham Young University's commencement exercises. We are gathered to celebrate, to honor you, and to reflect on what has been accomplished and what is yet facing each of you as your circumstances change and your lives encounter needed adjustment. We, of course, sincerely congratulate all who have achieved so much, often with distinction and frequently with challenges more significant than anticipated at the outset. In doing so, we also acknowledge the contributions of those whose names do not appear in the program of the day but who without their involvement these accolades would not be possible or appropriate. In this we include spouses, parents, children, and other family members; friends, classmates, faculty members, teachers, and mentors; Church leaders and contributors of tithes, offerings, and donations; and all who have enriched the experiences and education of today's graduates.

We have been richly blessed to be at BYU and certainly have wonderful advantages and opportunities that far exceed the usual in this large and complicated world; yet we live in an age of uncertainty and considerable challenges that can be very distressing, should we allow

them to be so. The employment situation for graduates is not rosy in every discipline. The national and world economy makes us all, including the experts, more than a little nervous. In fulfillment of prophecy we live with "wars and rumors of wars," massive oil spills, extremes in weather, and aggressive political regimes—and the list goes on and on. If we look to be discouraged or choose to be so, we have ample evidence to support such a case.

I, for one, feel differently, and I hope that is also true for each of you. I believe that with all of our problems, difficulties, and uncertainties, we have the best reasons for optimism regarding the things of greatest importance. In this I do not discount the ambiguities, disappointments, or dilemmas we all face, including those yet to come. Perhaps a personal experience will best help you understand why I feel the way I do.

Eight and a half years ago the 2002 Winter Olympics were held in Salt Lake City. At that time one of my assignments was to serve on the Public Affairs Committee of the Church.

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*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 12 August 2010.*

As you might know, many prominent people from around the world visited Salt Lake City. All of us at Church headquarters and many others had multiple opportunities to host these special visitors. On one of these occasions Sister Samuelson and I had the privilege of accompanying Mr. Mike Wallace—the host of the *60 Minutes* television program—and his producer to the special cultural event presented at the LDS Conference Center during the Olympic Games.

You may recall that Mike Wallace twice interviewed President Gordon B. Hinckley on his television program. While Mr. Wallace could never trip up or confuse President Hinckley with his penetrating questions, they became good friends as a result of these interviews, and Mike Wallace came to Salt Lake City for the Olympics as a guest of the Church. As we sat with these good people, it was clear that they were impressed, and Mr. Wallace frequently made very complimentary comments about President Hinckley.

At the conclusion of the performance, we accompanied these VIPS to their limousine. On the way we met President and Sister James E. Faust of the First Presidency, who had also attended the performance.

As I introduced President Faust to Mike Wallace and explained the close relationship President Faust and President Hinckley enjoyed in the First Presidency, Mr. Wallace said to President Faust, “You are just the man to answer a question I have had for some time. Gordon Hinckley is the most optimistic man I have ever met. Can you tell me why?”

President Faust didn’t hesitate for even a moment and replied with a twinkle in his eye, “President Hinckley knows how all this is going to turn out.”

Mike Wallace, a self-described agnostic Jew, knew exactly what President Faust meant.

Of all the graduates from every university in the world, you should also know how things are going to turn out. Through the

living prophets and scriptures we know that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be carried throughout the world and that when the work is completed, the Savior Jesus Christ will come triumphantly to the earth again. The question then is not how the world will turn out but how will we as individuals turn out?

Your Brigham Young University education positions you uniquely to turn out to become or accomplish what you should and must. There is no guarantee, however, and the course of your life depends on you and on your following the Lord as you should. While your accomplishments to this point are impressive and significant, you have “miles to go before [you] sleep,” as we are reminded by Robert Frost (“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” [1923]).

Each of you has learned a great deal in your major and other areas of interest, but no one in this room has learned all there is to know. Thus the most important skill you have acquired at BYU is likely your understanding of how to learn, because this is a talent or capacity that is transferable to virtually every topic and to every situation. You have learned to learn “by study and also by faith” and must remember that this pattern of effort and rigorous scholarship must be continually combined with equally intensive and serious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in your Heavenly Father’s plan for you and for all His children.

If you keep these principles and truths clearly in focus and in your top priorities as you leave this phase of your learning, then you will be successful whether you are going on for further education and training, entering the world of employment, or focusing your energies primarily on your homes and families.

We know how things in the big picture will turn out and have great confidence that you also in your individual lives and careers will turn out as you wish and as heaven intends. Because BYU is a very special place, as are those who study here, you have been richly

blessed and will continue to be so as part of this grand legacy established by the Lord's prophets here upon the earth. We invoke a

loving Heavenly Father's richest blessings upon you and yours at this wonderful and special time. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.