

# *Are BYU's Aims Your Aims?*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Once again it is my great privilege and honor to welcome each of you to these exercises today. I continue to bask in your achievements and am grateful to express my congratulations and commendations to you graduates, your families, and all who have contributed to your noteworthy successes. The faculty is both impressed and relieved that you have achieved the tremendous mileposts reflected in the program of the day.

This class of graduates is rather typical of those of recent years in terms of your numbers, majors, ages, and other demographic characteristics. There is more than a fifty-year difference in the ages of our oldest and youngest graduates. As is usually the case, all fifty states can claim graduates in the class, as is also true with three U.S. territories and seventy-two other countries. Between this commencement and our August event, we will have in excess of 8,000 newly credentialed BYU graduates in this calendar year, and we are immensely proud of all of you who have done so very well.

In previous commencement exercises I have mentioned many of the external challenges and opportunities you will face as you complete your BYU experience. The economy may not be as worrisome for some of you, but it is still not robust, and much uncertainty awaits us. In

fulfillment of prophecy we are surrounded by wars and rumors of wars—some in countries native to members of the class—and horrible natural disasters such as have been experienced in Japan and other parts of the world. Again, these places are home to some of you and of great concern and worry to us all.

Likewise, on other occasions I have commented on the marital status and trends of the class and our hopes and aspirations for you in this regard. Perhaps after our most recent general conference you will likely conclude that all that needs to be said has already been said! Still, we recognize that today is not one of exclusive, individual celebrations but largely family events that we heartily endorse. Continue to give high priority and attention to your spouses, children, and extended families with the understanding that they will be most important to you when nothing else is.

In recent months we have given special and significant attention to the BYU mission statement and Aims of a BYU Education. If you are not familiar with them or want to refresh your understanding, please look for them on

---

*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 21 April 2011.*

our BYU web page. These documents were carefully crafted under the inspiration and approval of the board of trustees many years ago, but they still stand the test of time and are as accurate as they have ever been. One of the reasons for the current increased attention to them is that the university's accrediting agency has required that we submit to them our core themes, learning objectives, and other information with more detail than ever before.

Under the inspired leadership of Professor Jim Gordon we have concluded that the mission statement and Aims of a BYU Education provide wonderfully clear and accurate statements of what BYU really is, what we really value, and what we really aspire and work to achieve. None of this should surprise anyone in attendance today, but it is a source of both great comfort and significant enlightenment to those of us with leadership responsibilities at BYU.

We speak of our aims, which I will explicate in a moment, as if they were separate and distinct. Actually, while framed in plural language, they reflect the central prophetic theme that has been our guide and inspiration since our founding 136 years ago when Brigham Young said to Karl G. Maeser that BYU "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).

Let me mention them in their individuality, as you will then better understand their inseparability. While some institutions may focus almost exclusively on one of these important values, BYU does not and cannot for reasons we hope are obvious to all of us here and increasingly understood by Church members, friends, and observers all around the world. While we tend to refer to them in a particular order, we recognized that each would be diminished in its value and in the prophetic aspirations of our leaders should any one of them be asked to stand alone.

First in our chronology is that a BYU education always should be *spiritually strengthening*.

Second, a BYU education must be *intellectually enlarging*.

Third, a BYU education is designed to be *character building*.

All three of these aims lead to a pattern of *lifelong learning and service*.

While we speak of them as BYU aims, we hope in the process of your experiences here that they have become your own personal aims as well. It would be my request and plea, if you will accept them as such, that you might consider how these aims will help focus and direct the rest of your lives. Please ask yourselves the following questions regularly and intently:

**First**, what am I doing to make sure my life, my activities, and my priorities are spiritually strengthening? Am I living my life in such a way that I can reliably seek the direction of the Holy Spirit and know that I am receiving it? Am I avoiding choices or temptations that would detract from the companionship of the Holy Ghost?

**Second**, what do I do to continue to develop in an intellectually enlarging way? We believe that one important skill and associated attitude acquired by almost all BYU graduates is the understanding of learning how to learn. More than ever you will be your own teacher and will create your own tests and quizzes. Some of what you have learned at BYU will be timeless, but other specifics, facts, or approaches in your major discipline will change over time, and you must be able to keep up. Think about how you will continue to acquire new ways to learn and master what you must and want to accomplish.

**Third**, as your lives become even more demanding and complicated, your integrity and honor will come under ever-increasing attacks. Thus you must continue to build and strengthen your character upon the already firm foundation of honesty, dependability, and

reliability that you initially brought to BYU and have enhanced while here. Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed this important truth: "It is easier to be a character than to have character!" ("The Disciple-Scholar," in Henry B. Eyring, ed., *On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995], 21).

We believe with great confidence and conviction that you are optimally prepared for long lives of continued learning and substantial service in all that you do. We are proud of you and your accomplishments. We are grateful for your contributions both now and in the future and are inspired with the optimism

that you will make meaningful differences in the lives of others as well as with the circumstances and causes in which you are involved. The tithe payers of the Church and the others who have shared their treasure so that you might experience all that BYU offers deserve the confidence they have in the rightness and value of their investments. Thank you for the part you have played.

Brigham Young University is a very special institution created, sustained, and led by the Lord's prophets. Of this I testify as I leave my blessing and commendations with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.