

In the Race of Life: Get Ready, Get Set, Go!

MICHAEL O'CONNOR

This is truly an impressive sight. Generally my words of wisdom are relegated to my wife, my four children, and my thirty-two Twitter followers. This audience is a little larger today. (And my comments may be longer than 140 characters.)

As president of the Alumni Association, I hereby confer on each of you graduates lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. We offer our congratulations and welcome you into this great association of more than 370,000 members. You will have many opportunities to join your fellow alumni in meaningful activities associated with the university.

This sea of blue gowns and the collective accomplishment it represents fills my alumni soul with pride. Looking at the seats above, you can see others who have gathered today to honor your tremendous achievement: friends and family who celebrate with you today as you cross that finish line to graduation.

Four years ago I was thrilled at my own daughter's acceptance to this university and circled this date on my calendar as the day I would celebrate *her* graduation. But instead of wearing a cap and gown today, Kaitlin is on an

island off the coast of Italy wearing a missionary name tag and practical shoes. (I'm proud of that accomplishment too.)

Since that time we have received many of you into our family circle. Friends, roommates, and extended family are here today. I express my personal congratulations to Zoe, Ashley, Erik, Michael, Matt, Elise, and others we have to come know through our associations here at BYU.

I also offer congratulations to Josh Merrell for not only graduating today but also surviving twelve consecutive weeks of teaching Italian to my two missionary daughters in the MTC. Josh, tell Paige hello for me. She leaves for Milan on Tuesday.

Today is a mark of an incredible achievement. Each graduate here today represents a unique story of dedication and perseverance, and we are proud of you. Since my own daughter is *not* here today, I would like to give you the advice I expected to give her.

Michael O'Connor was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 25 April 2013.

The Apostle Paul likened this life unto a race when he said, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

So, following that analogy, consider the fact that the finish line you cross today is simultaneously a starting line for the next phase of life. (It brings new meaning to the phrase “line upon line,” doesn’t it?) As you approach that starting line, my advice is first to *get ready!*

Get Ready!

To *get* what you want, you must first be *ready* for what you want.

President Thomas S. Monson stated:

*Preparation for life’s opportunities and responsibilities has never been more vital. We live in a changing society. Intense competition is a part of life. . . . Preparation is not a matter of **perhaps** or **maybe**. It is a mandate. The old phrase “Ignorance is bliss” is forever gone. Preparation precedes performance. [“Duty Calls,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 43; emphasis in original]*

I am confident that your education at BYU has prepared you academically, practically, and spiritually to be ready to “run with patience the race that is set before” you and that you will perform well.

Get Set!

Next, you must *get set*—or, in other words, you must *be set* in the values you have internalized here. Continue to stand firmly planted and “be not moved” (D&C 87:8) in the high standards of integrity that you have incorporated into your lives here at BYU.

Go!

The third step is to *go!*

Just as our students consider the world our campus, BYU alumni have truly *gone* forth from this campus in excellence to work and

serve in communities locally and all around the globe. Now it is your turn to *go* and do the same. Remember to take the Spirit of the Y with you and to represent us well.

And Return

My final admonition is to look for opportunities to *return*.

Luke 12:48 states: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

The race of life often brings you full circle on life’s track, so you will be able to return and bless BYU with your time, talent, and treasure.

As alumni you can offer your time and talent by mentoring and preparing the next generation of BYU students. You can participate in local chapters, attend sporting events, and wear blue on casual Friday. Look to hire fellow BYU graduates and for other opportunities to support the Cougars.

It may not seem like it today, but you will be able to share your treasure too. Seven of the last eight buildings constructed on campus have been substantially funded by generous donors. These donations have come in every size from individual alumni and from members of the President’s Leadership Council.

The current construction of the new Life Sciences Building reminds us that there will always be a need for BYU to have state-of-the-art resources for its students.

The privilege of giving back is not dependent on how much or how little you may have. So please don’t block our number on your caller ID.

Giving is a form of service that always blesses both parties. I testify that as my family and I have served this university, we have been blessed immeasurably.

Thank you for all you have done as students here on campus and all that you will do as alumni of Brigham Young University.

I leave these things with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.