

Where Your Heart Is

BRENT H. NIELSON

Marcia and I are so delighted to be here with you today at this commencement celebration. From the bottom of our hearts, we congratulate all of you on this wonderful accomplishment in your life. It is no small thing to meet all the requirements for graduation and to make it to this place today. You should acknowledge your parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends who have supported you during this quest for education. My hope is that this day will be a day of celebration, a day of gratitude, and a day when your thoughts will be focused on the wonderful future that lies ahead of you.

Marcia and I love BYU. We met here on this campus. We both graduated from BYU, and our children were tormented every morning as they were awakened by their father singing, "Rise and shout, the Cougars are out!" Every time Marcia and I come to this campus, we reflect on the beginning of our time together. All six of our children graduated from BYU, so the Nielsons are true-blue Cougars.

A Gateway to Your Unknown Future

When I received this assignment to speak to you today, my very first thought was that I graduated from BYU in 1978, exactly forty years ago. My thoughts were drawn to that day of graduation. For me to introduce to you the encouragement

and hope that I have for your future, I have to tell you what I was thinking forty years ago as I sat in your seat.

My graduation was not a joyous occasion for me. During my last semester at BYU, I had received a phone call from my father telling me that he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. In spite of wonderful doctors and many priesthood blessings, my father's health continued to deteriorate. Although he promised that he would be at my graduation, his condition was so precarious that when the day finally arrived, my mother traveled to Provo alone to be with me at my graduation.

My father and I had a very close relationship. I was preparing to go to law school. My father was a lawyer and had been my mentor, my counselor, and my advisor. As I sat here in the Marriott Center on graduation day, I knew that my father had only a few weeks to live.

I was also graduating as a single person, having hoped that during my time at BYU I could be married. Fortunately, my wife and I had already found each other, and I was hoping on graduation day that she would continue to be willing to marry

Brent H. Nielson, a General Authority Seventy, delivered this commencement address on August 16, 2018.

me. My heart on that day was full of uncertainty, sadness, and a little bit of fear.

Just two weeks after my graduation—as predicted by my father’s doctors—my father passed away. My plans for law school were then dictated by my desire to remain close to my mother, as I turned down admission to a law school I had hoped to attend in Washington, DC.

I apologize for sharing that experience with you on this joyous occasion. It is not my intent to take the joy and happiness out of our celebration today. Rather, my hope is that I can share with you what I wish I had known on my graduation day that I know now.

What I know now that I didn’t comprehend then is how amazing your future will be. One of my favorite scriptures is found in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

I have to say to all of you graduates here today that your future is very bright. As you move forward with faith in God, you will not be able to comprehend adequately the joy and happiness that await you and that God has prepared for you. Perhaps one of your biggest challenges is that you want to know right now what your future will look like. You want to know right now who you will marry and when and where your first job will be and how much money you will make. And you especially want to know if you will be happy. My hope for you is that you will understand that today your graduation represents a gateway to your unknown future. The only thing that we do know today for certain is that your life will change and that this change will be a wonderful opportunity for you to become who you need to become.

The Condition of Our Hearts

It is “becoming” that I would like to focus on for just a few moments. When the Savior met with the people in the Book of Mormon, He said something to them that is important for us and for you today. In 3 Nephi 27:21, He said, “For that which

ye have seen me do even that shall ye do.” He went on to say in verse 27, “What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”

If we want to become like and follow the Savior, the questions then for us today are What did He do? and How can following Him bring happiness to us?

Last month I attended my high school class reunion. I haven’t been to a reunion for many years, and I was interested to see that our conversations focused a lot on our current health. Our discussions when I was your age—or shortly after—focused on jobs, education, children, and what we wanted to accomplish. However, at my age, our discussions at this reunion were about the condition of our backs, knees, hips, and hearts—things that I think the parents and grandparents in the audience today can relate to.

In fact, there was a lot of discussion about the condition of our hearts. Some of my classmates have had heart bypass surgery. Others have to take medication for high blood pressure. It may be forty years before you actually begin to discuss the condition of your heart, but I ask you today to take just a moment and think about the condition of your heart. Is your heart closer to Christ than when you started here at BYU? Interestingly, the Savior taught that as you look to your future, to become what you want to become, you will need to look carefully at the condition of your heart.

In Matthew 6:21, the Savior taught, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” In other words, to know the condition of your heart, you will need to follow your treasure. What is it that you treasure most today? What does this say about you and where you are in life?

Let me share with you one concern I have. In Doctrine and Covenants 45:26 and again in Doctrine and Covenants 88:91, speaking of our day, the Lord said this about the condition of our hearts: “And in that day . . . the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men’s [and women’s] hearts shall fail them.”

What do you think it means that “men’s [and women’s] hearts shall fail them”? This is where

I want you to picture me as a young, fearful graduate forty years ago today. What advice would you have given me as I sat here in the Marriott Center?

There are those of you in this audience who have breezed through college without any concerns, worries, or fears. You have the perfect job lined up, you have never failed a test, and you have started an NGO—all while getting married, running several marathons, and eating endless cookies from a store just west of here without ever gaining a pound.

But I am also aware that there are those of you who have been impacted by divorce, by death, or by disappointment. Some of you have struggled to continue to believe in Christ and His Church. Some of you have fears about your identity. And many of you are worried about what lies ahead—just as I was.

For just a short time, please don't give in to such fears. Today, just be here among thousands of your friends—your sisters and your brothers—who want to tell you that we love you, that we are proud of you, and that we accept you for who you are and for what you have accomplished. Honestly, we are just happy you came to join us today. Just be here with us and know that you have done something great. As C. S. Lewis said, “For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity” (*The Screwtape Letters* [1941], letter 15).

What Is Your Treasure?

My advice to you, as well as to myself forty years ago, is to look beyond yourself. This is the key to becoming like Jesus Christ. Don't have yourself, your accomplishments, or your fears as your treasure; rather, focus on others and their needs.

As I look around the world today, I see all of us becoming more isolated in our own small world. We wear earbuds. Yes, I own a pair, and I use them often. We immediately look at our mobile device if there are more than ten seconds of downtime. I can only imagine how many times you have looked at your phone since I started talking. Unfortunately, such behaviors describe me at times. We communicate, if we communicate at all, with the tips of our fingers, and instead of

getting up and actually helping someone, a lot of us merely send “thoughts and prayers.” Whenever friends have trials or illnesses or deaths in their family, somehow we think that texting thoughts and prayers is sufficient.

If you will be patient with me for just a moment, I will tell you about the condition of my heart. I recently had surgery on my neck. I am happy to report to you that the surgery went really well. However, as I woke up from the neck surgery, a doctor told me that he had some good news and some bad news. The good news was that the neck surgery went well, but the bad news was that during the surgery, my heart went out of rhythm. This is called heart arrhythmia. The condition of my heart had taken a turn for the worse. My heart was failing me.

I went to a cardiologist, who suggested that because I had never had heart problems before, he could perform something that is called a cardioversion. You will be surprised to know that you actually know what a cardioversion is. Cardioversions are performed often in movies when someone's pulse can't be found. The medical specialists take two paddles and place them on the person's chest, tell everyone to stand clear, and then send a powerful shock wave through the body to try to get the heart to regain its rhythm.

I soon found myself at the hospital again—but this time so that the doctors could try to shock my heart back into rhythm. After sedation and two attempts with the paddles, my heart was back in rhythm. I was then prescribed a heart rhythm medication and told to take it every single day.

At a recent visit to the doctor, I was told that I needed to be sure I took my medication every day without fail. I was told that if I missed a day or failed to take the medication as directed, my heart might go out of rhythm again.

Now why have I told you that long story? Because I am concerned about the condition of your heart as you graduate today. If you want to be happy as you leave today, you need to do the things that the Savior Himself has done. What did He primarily do? I have always been impressed with Peter's answer: the Lord “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

As you leave today, it will be so easy to withdraw from helping and lifting others. It is so easy to worry only about yourself—your new job, your promotions, your advanced degrees, and even your fears. You will find that it is easy to place yourself, and at times your fears, as your treasure. If you do that, your heart will fail you.

The Savior taught us in Matthew 10:39: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

If you worry only about yourself, you will figuratively lose your life.

So today I am hoping that what I have said will be a symbolic cardioversion. We are looking carefully together at our hearts, and we have noticed that there might be a good chance in this generation that they may be out of rhythm. I have given us a joint shock today that hopefully will repair our hearts and put them back into rhythm with the heart of our Heavenly Father. I am also hoping that just as I need to take medication every day to keep my heart in rhythm, you will learn that to take care of your heart, you will need to find opportunities to regularly serve others.

Could it be, as President Kevin J. Worthen taught us, that the invitation we read on the sign as we enter the BYU campus, “Enter to learn; go forth to serve,” is exactly why we came to BYU in the first place?

You will have very busy lives. You are going to have meaningful employment, kids, church callings, hobbies, and recreation as well as disappointment, fear, stress, and anxiety. Be sure that included in all of that, you coach Little League baseball, you shovel your neighbor’s driveway, you hold the door open for the person behind you, you share your talents, and you put down your phone occasionally. No more saying, “Our thoughts and prayers are with you.” If you lose your life, you will find it. Remember, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Your future is very bright. The Lord has a wonderful life in store for you. He has given us very simple instructions. Today, instead of forty years from today, take a moment to think about the condition of your heart. You entered BYU to learn. Today as you graduate, and as President Worthen has asked us, go forth to serve. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.