

Embracing the Truth

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Fellow students, graduates, parents, siblings, peers, and teachers, good afternoon! I would like to begin by addressing my peers. Friends, I expect that you, like me, are probably feeling excited today and perhaps a little anxious and maybe even a little burned-out at the end of this road to graduation. And certainly you and I are each asking ourselves the essential questions: So what? What will my BYU experience amount to? What am I going to do with it?

I select the word *experience* intentionally in posing these questions because BYU has provided us with much more than an education. Yes, we have a shared experience of taking classes, but this has included more: living in Provo, playing intramurals, hiking the Y, dating, deliberating on the details of the Honor Code, and so on.

Over the course of these experiences, you and I have encountered new facts or truths about the world and about ourselves. Some of these truths delight us—such as when we realize that an act of service we have given has lifted someone’s daily burden. Other truths are a little harder to swallow—such as when we recognize that the girl we have been pursuing for several weeks really isn’t that interested.

Both of these kinds of truths, when faced fully, can teach us essential human lessons. I wish to share with you three stories from my BYU

experience that helped me learn about the power that comes from willingly accepting the truth. I hope they will build our courage to accept both the easy and hard truths we all face.

Transform Our Hearts

The first story came from a study of the conversion of Saint Augustine, the great fourth-century Christian thinker whose story I became familiar with here at BYU. Augustine’s words are inspiring, but it was the months before his conversion that caught my attention. These were days when Augustine claimed that he wanted to follow God but had a “staggering” will, unable to commit to the godly life with a “strong . . . will” to “take heaven” (*Confessions*, book 8, chapter 8, 19). He famously prayed, like many of us, no doubt, “Grant me [self-restraint, Lord], but not yet” (see *Confessions*, book 8, chapter 7, 17).

I connected with Augustine when I read this, ruefully laughing at my experience of claiming to want something divine—but not yet! Not until divine intervention came could Augustine face the truth of his reliance on Jesus Christ. In facing this

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truth, the once staggering sinner became fixed on Christ.

From this experience I extract and share with you lesson number one: fearlessly facing truth about ourselves has the potential to transform our hearts from sinner to saint.

Expand Our Secular Knowledge

Our second story is a personal favorite of mine about an unsung scientific hero. Biologist Alfred Wallace was a contemporary of Charles Darwin who collected fossils around the world and had a special interest in the adaptations of species. During one voyage to the Malay Archipelago, Wallace contracted malaria.

I chuckle at the irony of the scenario as my teacher described it: Wallace, lying in a bathtub on a swaying ship, far away from home, barely coherent, and hot with fever, looking about the dull cabin and thinking to himself, “I am going to die.”

Rather than ignore this possibility, Wallace allowed the truth to demand his attention. He realized that because he was without children, he would not pass on his traits. It was in this moment that his research fell into place like a missing puzzle piece, leading to an understanding of what we now call natural selection. Ultimately, Wallace copresented this theory alongside Darwin, changing the face of biological science.

Wallace’s embracing of a difficult truth—the possibility of his death—led to a great discovery and to our second lesson: facing the truth, even if very difficult, can expand our secular knowledge.

Change How We Treat Others

I conclude with a third, more personal story. I took a class here at BYU examining the formation of identity through history and art. During a discussion in class on racial identity, my instructors defined the concept of privilege and how it associates with upbringing. Gradually in our conversation I sensed an uncomfortable truth about myself. In spite of the effort I had put into my work, my success had largely been given to me: it was a gift of my circumstances, of growing up in a home with stability and with resources. I was realizing that my success was not truly my own.

Faced with this unnerving truth, I felt an obligation to view the world differently, to withhold judgment, and to live gratefully. This taught me lesson number three: facing an inconvenient truth fully can change how we treat others and how we treat life in the most essential ways.

For me, these kinds of paradigm-shifting moments triggered by a facing of truth are fundamental to the real BYU experience. Indeed, they help me understand the words of Christ when He said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

With this verity thundering in our ears, I wish to say thank you. Thank you for sharing this BYU experience of discovering the truth with me. And thank you, BYU, for helping us learn the truth that defines each of us: until we comprehend the true character of God, we do not comprehend ourselves. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.