

Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve

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There are many iconic symbols here on campus that help graduates remember—hopefully with fondness—their time at BYU. For many it is the Y on the mountain. For some it is the cougar statue at the LaVell Edwards Stadium. For others it is a particular building. Who knows, with enough time and perspective, even the Testing Center may bring warm memories. Maybe not.

For many, the symbol they will remember the most is the sign at the southwest entrance to campus: Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve.

This seven-word injunction has been the topic of numerous campus devotionals,¹ professorial admonitions, and, most especially, commencement and convocation addresses.² Anyone who has attended many graduation ceremonies at BYU has surely heard at least one talk on the topic. So with full understanding that I am not being original, I would like to focus on this saying one more time in a graduation setting because I believe that, notwithstanding the constant repetition, we may still underestimate the depth of its importance and meaning.

A Connection Between Joy and Service

First, a bit of history and context. The Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve sign was erected on campus in 1965 as part of an effort to spruce up the west entrance to campus. Judging by press

coverage at the time, the most exciting feature of the redesign was not the sign or the sign on the other side of the street but the addition of an information center just to the east of the sign on the south side of the road.

Touting this new addition, the *Daily Universe* proclaimed with seeming excitement that the small building contained heating for year-round use, a sliding window, and—wonder of wonders—a telephone that student employees would use to call ahead to those expecting the visitors.³

Times have changed a bit. The Information Center has been demolished, telephone and all. The sign has endured.

When plans for the new entrance were being considered, “the university invited faculty members, and others, to submit a slogan or motto which would be suitable to be placed at the main entrance.”⁴ The suggestion to use Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve was submitted by Stewart L. Grow, a professor of history and political science at the university. In his autobiography, Professor Grow explained why he had submitted that slogan:

Kevin J Worthen, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this commencement address on August 16, 2018.

*Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve is . . . a distillation of my life's philosophy. We are born to gain experience in learning and have both the obligation and **the reward of serving**. . . . I know of no better way to expand **the joy** which man should have than to create a world in which all men will be motivated to learn and to serve each other.⁵*

Thus, from the very outset of its existence at BYU, the injunction to “enter to learn; go forth to serve” has reflected a profound truth: there is a connection between joy and service.

Others have recognized this truth and have used the exact same slogan to remind them of its veracity. Even though he was the first to suggest the motto at BYU, Professor Grow was not its original author. Nor was BYU the first educational enterprise to feature the phrase. According to an article in the *Deseret News* a few years ago, “schools from California to Connecticut to Canada have taken” the slogan as their motto—some before BYU did. “The New York City police academy adopted the slogan in 1925. It was on the cover of the yearbook at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles in 1926.” And it was located “above the door of Fair Haven Middle School in Connecticut in 1929.” At least four other colleges have adopted it as their motto as well.⁶ Clearly the message has, over time, resonated broadly with those involved in education.

An Essential Part of the Refining Process

But even though BYU was not the first educational institution to use the slogan, I believe it has particular significance here because of our understanding of the truths of the gospel—which shapes the kind of education we hope you received here, an education that President Spencer W. Kimball called an “education for eternity.”⁷

As sound as the instruction to “enter to learn; go forth to serve” is in temporal affairs, it is of even more importance when viewed in the eternal setting of the plan of salvation. As Elder L. Tom Perry once noted:

This challenge [to enter to learn and go forth to serve] not only applies to BYU students. . . . It would also be appropriate and correct to say this challenge represents the purpose of our mortal experience.⁸

Service is not just connected to joy in some amorphous, general way. Service is an essential part of the refining process that makes true joy possible.

I first gained some insight into this truth when I was serving as a bishop. It was a busy time of my life with a young family and a busy career. I loved serving as bishop, but I must admit that there were times when I felt a bit overwhelmed and overtaxed, weary of dealing with other people's problems—even occasionally just tired of serving.

One year as general conference approached, one of my fellow bishops who shared my feelings noted that he referred to general conference as a “bishop's holiday”—a Sunday in which he did not have to deal with the problems of others or serve their needs. When he told me this, the thought came to me that it might be a good idea to expand the number of bishop's holidays in a year. In fact, I thought maybe the ideal Sunday would be one in which I didn't have to deal with anyone else's issues or problems—a Sunday in which I would spend time renewing my covenants, reading scriptures, praying, and enjoying the company of loved ones without any obligation to serve others.

It was in that general frame of mind that I came across a statement from President Marion G. Romney that changed my thinking dramatically:

Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.

Knowing that service is what gives our Father in Heaven fulfillment, and knowing that we want to be where He is and as He is, why must we be commanded to serve one another? Oh, for the glorious day when these things all come naturally because of the purity of our hearts. In that day there will be no need for a commandment because we will have experienced for

*ourselves that we are truly happy only when we are engaged in unselfish service.*⁹

As I read this inspired declaration, I was struck with an almost frightening thought. If I didn't enjoy serving, I wouldn't enjoy the celestial kingdom. Service is what they do there. As I reflected on that thought, I suddenly had a new insight into people like President Thomas S. Monson, who, when he had free time—when he could choose for himself what to do in a spare moment—sought to serve others. He didn't serve out of a sense of duty or to provide us with a good example. He served because that is what he really wanted to do—all the time. That is what brought him joy. That is what brings Heavenly Father joy.

Joy Out of Serving

Over time I have come to believe that one measure of our eternal progress is how much joy we derive from service. In that regard, I have told my family that when I get as much joy out of serving as I do from watching BYU win an athletic contest over one particular opponent, I will know that I am finally firmly on the path to heaven.

At BYU we strive to provide an education that is spiritually strengthening, intellectually enlarging, and character building, all leading to two things: lifelong learning and service.¹⁰ I think we sometimes fail to recognize that *lifelong* modifies both *learning* and *service*.

We often quote Brigham Young to make clear that learning is eternal:

We might ask, when shall we cease to learn? I will give you my opinion about it; never, never. . . .

*We shall never cease to learn, unless we apostatize from the religion of Jesus Christ.*¹¹

I believe this observation applies with full force to service as well. To paraphrase Brother Brigham, "We might ask ourselves, when shall we cease to serve? Never, never. We shall never cease to serve unless we apostatize from the religion of Jesus Christ." If we stop serving, our eternal progress will stop because "service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made."

And so I hope that you will go forth to serve for the rest of your lives, understanding that we believe in really long lives—even eternal lives. May you find the deep, eternal joy that comes from unselfishly serving others is my prayer for you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Ben B. Banks, "Go Forth to Serve," BYU devotional address, 24 September 1996; L. Tom Perry, "Enter to Learn—Go Forth to Serve," BYU fireside address, 5 March 1995; A. Elaine Bond, "Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve," BYU devotional address, 1 July 2003.

2. See, e.g., Henry B. Eyring, "Go Forth to Serve," BYU commencement address, 25 April 2002; Andrew J. Maxfield, "Perspective, Purpose, Peace," BYU commencement address, 27 April 2006; Su Ge, "Go Forth to Serve," BYU commencement address, 21 April 2016; Terry R. Seamons, "Lifelong Learning and Continuous Service," BYU commencement address, 14 August 2014; Robert D. Hales, "Go Forth to Serve," BYU commencement address, 27 April 2006; Jeffrey R. Holland, "Banishing All Shadows," BYU commencement address, 26 April 2018.

3. See "Info Center to Be Built," *Daily Universe*, 24 September 1965, 1.

4. Stewart L. Grow, *My Autobiography* (1986), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 128.

5. Grow, *Autobiography*, 129; emphasis added.

6. Tad Walch, "BYU Not Alone in Using Motto 'Enter to Learn,'" *Deseret News*, 4 August 2007. The other four schools using the slogan are Delaware State University, Tennessee State University, Keene State College (New Hampshire), and Oakland City College (Indiana).

7. See Spencer W. Kimball, "Education for Eternity," pre-school address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967.

8. Perry, "Enter to Learn."

9. Marion G. Romney, "The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance," *Ensign*, November 1982.

10. Paraphrased from The Aims of a BYU Education (1 March 1995).

11. Brigham Young, *JD* 3:203 (17 February 1856).