

# *“Sticks in a Bundle Are Unbreakable”*

JONATHAN O. HAFEN

**W**ow! What an inspiring sight to see all of you here today to celebrate both an end and a beginning. Blue is my favorite color, so I know I am in the right place today.

You have entered and learned, and now it is time to go forth and serve.

I say this to all of you and to each of you: Your future is radiant with promise and opportunity, and the world needs you.

I love BYU! BYU exists to provide an outstanding education in an atmosphere of faith. And I believe BYU also exists because of the opportunity that it provides us to connect with others.

I speak to you today on behalf of the BYU Alumni Association. Our motto is Connected for Good. I want to share with you what I think that means.

I have so many BYU connections! My parents and grandparents all graduated from this great university, as did all six of my siblings.

And in the summer of 1987, I met my wife, Joy, here on what was supposed to be a group night hike to the Y that ended up being just the two of us. She is, without a doubt, my very best BYU connection.

But when we talk about BYU connections, we aren't only talking about relatives. I first connected with President Kevin J Worthen when he

was my state and local government professor at the BYU Law School almost thirty years ago. He was then and is now a wonderful example of a faithful scholar and leader.

Some of you may have participated in the Rex Lee Run against cancer a couple of weeks ago. Rex E. Lee was a former BYU president who loved to connect with his students.

One of my favorite Rex Lee stories was told by a former law student of Rex Lee's. As a result of their BYU connection, President Lee joined his buddies and this student for a run in Washington, DC, early one morning. As reported by the former student:

*As we all started jogging along the National Mall, we were stopped . . . by a park policeman. He said we had . . . run a red light. He [started] . . . giving us a lecture on running safety, and I'm sure he didn't know he was talking to the solicitor general of the United States. As he was talking, Rex, who was being very friendly about it, said, "If you're going to give us a citation, will you please make mine for speeding, because that would really impress my wife."<sup>1</sup>*

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*Jonathan O. Hafen, president of the BYU Alumni Association, delivered this commencement address on April 25, 2019.*

My most vivid memory of Rex Lee was a connection I made with him when he was BYU's president. I needed some career advice, and so I somewhat nervously approached his office. He invited me in with a warm smile, put aside what he was doing, and asked, "How can I help?" He then gave me some wonderful advice that positively changed my life.

Such connections between BYU alumni and students are common. Alumni love to help students and alumni love to help each other! That is who we are.

Another one of my treasured BYU connections is Victor L. Ludlow, a world-renowned expert on the prophet Isaiah who was both my mission president and one of my religion professors here at BYU.

He taught me something years ago that I have never forgotten. Strangely enough, it wasn't about Isaiah. It was about lumber. He told me that two two-by-fours together can hold four times the weight of a single two-by-four. I did some research and confirmed that, in fact, one two-by-four by itself can hold 636 pounds, two two-by-fours working together can hold almost 3,000 pounds, and three two-by-fours working together can hold almost 9,000 pounds.<sup>2</sup>

Of course this lesson really wasn't about lumber; it was about the importance and the strength of our connections with other people.

A Kenyan proverb captures that concept this way: "Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable."

To me, that means that as we connect with others, our power to do good in the world is exponentially increased.

Let me tell you now about two of your fellow graduates whose BYU connections have affected my life.

Mandi was a high school exchange student from Beijing, China, who lived with a family in Missouri. Soon after Mandi had arrived in the United States, her host family was unable to keep their commitment and asked her to leave their home. Another family in Missouri, this one with BYU connections, heard of her situation and offered to host her so she could finish

her exchange program. After a great experience with that wonderful family, Mandi returned to her home in China, finished high school, and then returned to the United States to attend BYU. Today Mandi graduates with her master's degree in accounting, having completed that rigorous program in her second language of English. Mandi has accepted an offer from Deloitte in Las Vegas, where she will begin working with their audit division in September.

Another graduate among you today, Josh, was born and raised in Sarnia, Canada—just outside of Toronto. Some of his BYU-connected friends there introduced Josh to the Church, which led to his attending BYU. He graduates today with a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering, and he has a very bright future ahead.

Mandi and Josh are now connected to me because they each married one of my kids. So of course we now celebrate Chinese New Year and play hockey! We are so grateful for the BYU connections that brought them here to BYU and then into our family.

Now, let's talk about your BYU connections.

Think about your favorite professors. Think about the friends you have made here. I know there are many. If you stay connected with that group, you will be richly rewarded throughout your life. As part of our Heavenly Father's plan, we are happier when we have strong personal connections like those.

Helen Keller put it this way: "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."<sup>3</sup>

An extraordinary thought is that some of your most important BYU connections may still lie ahead of you.

It is my pleasure today to confer upon each of you a lifetime membership in the BYU Alumni Association. We offer our congratulations and welcome you into this great association of more than 426,000 people. That is a lot of BYU connections!

You are now and will always be "connected for good" with some of the most wonderful people in the world. There are more than eighty BYU alumni chapters throughout the United States through which you can become involved in fun

and meaningful BYU-related activities. And we have twenty-five professional alumni chapters right here along the Wasatch Front.

Professional chapters are sponsored by colleges and departments on campus and offer the opportunity to gather with others from your college as well as to mentor and support current BYU students through programs like BYU Connect.

For your BYU connections who will remain here on campus, it is a bittersweet day. It is hard to see you go, but wonderful things await you!

After all, you didn't come to BYU to stay here. You came to BYU to prepare yourself for what lies ahead and then to go out and pursue your dreams. I can think of no better preparation to pursue those dreams than attending BYU.

My dear graduates, thank you for becoming part of my BYU connections today. May your positive memories of BYU stay with you throughout

your life. May your BYU connections continue to be a strong influence in all that you do. May you know that you will always be welcome here on campus, on this consecrated ground. And may God bless each of you and this wonderful university. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Dee V. Benson, "The House That Rex Built," *Clark Memorandum*, Spring 2007, 27.

2. See Jonathan Ochshorn, "Capacity of Wood Column Calculator," Cornell University, [courses.cit.cornell.edu/arch264/calculators/example7.1/index.html](http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/arch264/calculators/example7.1/index.html).

3. Helen Keller, vaudeville circuit speech; see Garson O'Toole, "Alone We Can Do So Little. Together We Can Do So Much," *Quote Investigator*, 21 April 2014, [quoteinvestigator.com/2014/04/21/together](http://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/04/21/together).