

A More Wonderful World

PATRICK KEARON

I am so happy and honored to have been asked to speak to you on this day that represents so much hard work, careful teaching, and eager anticipation. I have many friends and loved ones here today, so it feels much more intimate here in the Marriott Center than it otherwise might have. Sitting and listening to this talk could be a real test of those friendships!

I want to thank Dr. Brooks for those excellent insights into the poison of contempt and on how love is the great antidote. My remarks are in many ways connected.

Thank you, too, for the fabulous music from the BYU Women's Chorus. The refrain from that piece of music ("I dream, I feel, I hurt, I heal"¹) speaks for all of us and certainly touches on my thoughts today.

Reflections

As I have prepared to address you, I have inevitably reflected on where I was and what had happened in my own life by the time I was your age. I was a very poor student at school and did not go to university. I had been in a boarding school in England from the age of ten, and I spent countless hours just staring out of windows, reading magazines about airplanes, and counting the days until I could go home, dreaming only of escape. So here

I am, wearing robes I haven't earned. I have to say, they are pretty tasty robes too. I could have saved a fortune in ties, I can see.

You, on the other hand, have earned your robes, your degree, and this very important stepping-stone to your dreams. I congratulate you!

Many of you here are in your early twenties, and I am particularly aware that by that time in my life I had lost my father, who died in a car accident in Arabia when I was nineteen. My sister also lost her husband that day in the same accident, leaving her to raise their two young children. In the aftermath of that devastating trauma, I experienced unspeakable grief, desperate loneliness, and an emptiness that felt like it would never leave. Thankfully, my big brother stepped in to take care of all the practical issues that follow such a loss. He and my sisters led out in watching over our extraordinary mother. In the midst of it all, there were many who extended warm friendship and generous mentoring. Somehow life had to go on for the rest of us, and the love and care of others helped enormously.

Patrick Kearon, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this commencement address on April 25, 2019.

When I think of my father, amongst other treasured memories I think of his favorite music, including the song “What a Wonderful World,” made famous by the inimitable Louis Armstrong. I heard Lexi Walker sing her beautiful rendition of this a few weeks ago.

The words are:

*I see trees of green, red roses too.
I see them bloom for me and you,
And I think to myself, “What a wonderful world.”*

*I see skies of blue and clouds of white,
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night,
And I think to myself, “What a wonderful world.”*

*The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands, saying, “How do you do?”
They’re really saying, “I love you.”*

*I hear babies cry, I watch them grow.
They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know.
Yes, I think to myself, “What a wonderful world.”²*

I love those lyrics, and they seem to sum up, in a way, a good portion of my dad’s character and his outlook on life.

I recollect his energy, kindness, and irrepressible warmth; his love of the landscape, be it Arabia’s arid deserts or England’s and Ireland’s lush rolling hills; and his passion for the skies, the sunshine, and the sea. I can clearly recognize his imprint on my own yearning to be outside, in the open, in the air and sunlight.

I know that my father would have done anything for me. He demonstrated that many times throughout my young life. Favorite memories include when he taught me to drive as a nine-year-old in the Arabian desert, with its wide-open spaces and my father’s gentle guidance. I remember his loving encouragement, his joyful view of the world, and his generous propensity to see and encourage the best in people. I realize, too, that he let me experience hard things, even leaving challenges in my path to prepare me for the life that

he could see I would lead. I know he would have ensured that I complete my education, but he was no longer there to make that happen. As I grew older, had he been there, he would have guided me in work choices, would have joyfully encouraged dating, and would have been a fabulous grandfather when that time came. He would have continued to tell me about his life experiences, indirectly teaching me important lessons and principles. He would have done anything for me, and memories of my father continue to guide me all these years later. I still dream, I feel, I hurt, and I do heal.

Today I hope to reinforce your own understanding of just how much you are adored in heaven and how joyful and fulfilling our path of discipleship on earth can be, as well as explore the fresh and much brighter outlook on repentance that President Russell M. Nelson has asked us to embrace. Inevitably, I suppose, I will then share a few words of advice regarding your next steps after this momentous day.

Your Heavenly Father Will Do Anything for You

Your Father, your Heavenly Father, will do anything for you. He wants nothing but your eternal happiness and success. He is providing you with a learning experience so much richer than the one for which you are being honored today. You are being prepared for life, eternal life, and exaltation. You have an outline of the syllabus, but large pieces of the course have no textbook. The course requirements and the rubric are individually tailored to each of you, and because of the wisdom and omniscience of God, no two are alike. Your Father is eager for you to complete the course and return to Him—and to do so joyfully! The course He has created for you is entitled discipleship, and the path of discipleship is your life’s work. This will be your training ground, where you will be proved and you will learn what you need to learn to make your way home. It can sometimes feel like a test.

President Henry B. Eyring has said: “The Lord doesn’t put us through [a] test just to give us a grade; he does it because the process will change us.”³

The Path of Discipleship

You will soon be taking your next steps on the path of discipleship with these new, hard-won qualifications. But you have been equipped with so much more than that to aid you as you continue your journey. You are fortunate to have been given the faith, strategies, and understanding—through the Spirit—to see the world as it really is, with all its wonder, beauty, and eternal purpose. Along with your excitement today, you may have some anxiety about this next stage in life. As you proceed, always remember that “[we] are, that [we] might have joy”⁴—that is both joy here and joy eternally. So enjoy your onward journey on the path of discipleship. Choose to be happy.

Discipleship and Repentance

I have general conference still very much in mind. President Nelson has been guiding us with great care toward becoming better disciples, more Christlike, and more natural ministers. We are slowly getting used to having less structure and guidance, no boxes to check, and much more love as we look after and look out for one another. We are learning over and over again the joy of simply caring for each other in the Lord’s way.

President Nelson, whom I will quote extensively, is also preparing us to change our hearts in other ways. We are being encouraged to turn our homes into sanctuaries of faith and centers of gospel learning.⁵ He is inviting us to “grow spiritually, to strengthen our faith in Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, and to deepen our own conversion to the Lord. He is calling us to do better and be better than we have ever done or been before.”⁶

It might surprise you that President Nelson calls all of this repentance—this spiritual growth, this strengthening of our faith, this doing better and being better than we have ever done or been before. It is clear that we have not properly understood repentance. There are too many hesitant and even negative responses that spring into our minds when we hear the word *repentance*. With repentance described as I have just described it, we should feel differently, with no hesitation

and no discomfort. This fresh and much brighter understanding of repentance will be vital on our path of discipleship.

Instead of thinking of repentance in terms of steps on a checklist, we can think of it as a condition, a state of being, and a happy, peaceful way of life.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell said the path of discipleship

*is the only pathway where littering is permissible, even encouraged. In the early stages, the debris left behind includes the grosser sins of commission. Later debris differs; things begin to be discarded which have caused the misuse or underuse of our time and talent.*⁷

As we litter the path of discipleship with our unwanted burdens, we will see that the path is also lined with beautiful gifts. We will pick up these gifts as we go—gifts of light, peace, joy, and other attributes of Christ. We need to be aware, to look for them, and to expect to find them.

We have often thought that repentance is just stopping sin. That is an important step, but there is so much more to it than that! “True repentance is focused on the Lord Jesus Christ and the joy that comes from His redeeming power.”⁸ It is turning away from the natural man in us and turning back to God, returning to Him with our changed behaviors, minds, and hearts. The Jehovah of the Old Testament promised scattered Israel that if they would “return unto the Lord [their] God, and . . . obey his voice . . . with all [their] heart, and with all [their] soul[s],”⁹ He would gather them, protect them, and prosper them.¹⁰ As we continually return our minds and hearts to the Savior—weekly, daily, hourly—“with the Savior as our . . . standard, repentance is magnified to a complete change of heart.”¹¹ “Repentance is the Lord’s [process for gaining] spiritual growth”¹² and joy—the joy of redemption in Him. He literally wants us to change—to become less like the natural man¹³ and more like He is.¹⁴

We might resist repentance for many reasons. These include:

- we don't think we have done anything wrong, or
- it will be too painful, or, perhaps,
- we have done something so bad or so often that we think repentance won't work for us and that we can't be forgiven.

There is only one unpardonable sin. There is repentance and the gift of forgiveness for everything else. Everything else. No matter what, no matter how often, no matter how long. "Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon [you]; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."¹⁵ "As often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me."¹⁶

Think of this fresh understanding of repentance as the gift that it is. Think of it as a present, wrapped in gleaming paper with a bright bow—but unopened. It is time to open it and receive the gift.

Your Next Steps

As you take your next steps along the path of discipleship, let this new understanding and relationship with your Father and Savior shape your life. You can shape this wonderful world, or you can certainly shape your corner of it. And you will definitely see it differently.

Making a More Wonderful World

Wherever you have come from, whatever your background, you are enormously privileged to have had these educational and spiritual opportunities here on this campus. There are so many across the globe whose lives and situations are so much less than this. Our sisters and brothers suffer from poverty, oppression, injustice, war, and corruption—to name but a few of the conditions of this terrestrial world. As you set goals and make plans for your life, working to relieve the suffering and lift the burdens of others should be present in your endeavors. These don't have to be grand acts. You may not be in a position to make a global impact—though some of you will—but all of you will be able to do your part in spreading light, hope, peace, joy, and love in your circles of

influence, helping to make this a more wonderful world for more of God's children.

There is a clear need for you to engage in public service. You can serve on school boards, in charities, and in local and national governments. Build individuals and communities. Where appropriate, involve yourself in politics. Avoid the political tribalism and contempt that has become so destructive across countries and continents. You can become an advocate for fairness in all corners of society.

Taking the Light of the Gospel to the Entire World

Your responsibility is to fulfill the Savior's charge to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and to feed His sheep. Determine to serve wholeheartedly in every ward or branch you may live in. Plan now to serve a mission in your older years. There are no earthly medals for service and discipleship. Most of what we do in service to others will never be recognized or honored except by God, who sees it all. So without medals, without honors, we follow the Savior and go about doing good—in our families, in our communities, and in our nations.

If a briefcase can change us, imagine what you can do!

Experiencing the Love of Our Father

So, graduates and friends, one more personal reflection as I conclude. By the age that most of you are today, I had not yet encountered the restored Church of Jesus Christ. I was baptized at the age of twenty-six. My friends and the missionaries had taught me how much my Heavenly Father loved me, and I knew that in my head, but I didn't begin to know it in my heart until I became a father myself several years later. It was then that I had my first real glimpse into how our Father feels about us, His children. The concept of infinite love only started to seem possible when I experienced the new and unimaginable love that enveloped me with the birth of our first child. Then I thought I couldn't ever feel that much love again—until the next child arrived and I was once again overwhelmed by a love and a wonder

I cannot begin to describe. And so it went with the birth of each successive child. At times when our own children have hurt, I believe that I have felt more pain for them than I would have felt for myself. I have also experienced extraordinary joy out of all proportion to what might be considered our children's insignificant moments, expressions, or triumphs.

And so it must be with our Father in Heaven, only magnified beyond measure by His infinite and eternal love.

Your Father in Heaven will do anything for you and just wants you to return. Yes, there will be testing, but we are here to be changed, refined, and sanctified through our trying experiences, not to get a grade for how well we do. One day you will return to Him in person, because you have been, every day, returning to Him in repentance. Through all that life may bring, trust and have faith in Jesus Christ's redeeming power and relish the path of discipleship in this wonderful world.

Conclusion

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has shared the following:

I testify that no one of us is less treasured or cherished of God than another. I testify that He loves each of us—insecurities, anxieties, self-image, and all. He doesn't measure our talents or our looks; He doesn't measure our professions or our possessions. He cheers on every runner, calling out that the race is against sin, not against each other. I know that if we will be faithful, there is a perfectly tailored robe of righteousness ready

and waiting for everyone, "robes . . . made . . . white in the blood of the Lamb" [Revelation 7:14].¹⁷

He is cheering you on, and "the race is against sin, *not* against each other." Now you must go and help make this a more wonderful world for all of God's children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. "Gratus Animus" (2017) by Daniel Kallman was sung by the BYU Women's Chorus.
2. "What a Wonderful World," by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss, 1968.
3. Henry B. Eyring, "Waiting upon the Lord," BYU devotional address, 30 September 1990.
4. 2 Nephi 2:25.
5. See Russell M. Nelson, "Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints," *Ensign*, November 2018.
6. Russell M. Nelson, general conference leadership meeting, 4 April 2019.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, "Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father," *Ensign*, November 1995.
8. Nelson, leadership meeting.
9. Deuteronomy 30:2.
10. See Deuteronomy 30:4–7.
11. Nelson, leadership meeting.
12. Russell M. Nelson, "Repentance and Conversion," *Ensign*, May 2007.
13. See Mosiah 3:19.
14. See 3 Nephi 27:27.
15. Isaiah 55:7.
16. Mosiah 26:30.
17. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Other Prodigal," *Ensign*, May 2002; emphasis in original.