

Your Contract with BYU

BRIAN EVANS

Brothers and sisters, like me, you have undoubtedly noted the caliber of the devotional and forum speakers this semester. It may never again be equaled. From the introduction just read, you also know that I am not a prominent Church leader, a university president, a U.S. senator, a Supreme Court justice, or an astronaut. I will therefore request your prayers that what I say might be of interest and of value.

Several years ago our son Spencer was interviewing with prospective employers as he prepared to graduate from BYU with a degree in finance.

One large company invited him to Chicago for additional “in-house” interviews, meetings, and social gatherings. Spencer was joined by a cohort of qualified candidates from other fine academic institutions from across the country. It soon became clear, however, that from this process only a few positions would be offered.

Several other recruits whose flights had arrived at the same time, one of whom was Hispanic, joined Spencer on the ride from the airport to corporate headquarters. Because he had served a mission to Venezuela, Spencer engaged this new friend in conversation in her native Spanish, much to the surprise of the other passengers. As days passed, the group

learned that the guy from BYU refused alcohol at dinner, was married, had been a missionary, and preferred to retire comparatively early. Although he was friendly and amusing, compared to the cohorts, he was definitely different.

On the last day of the visit, the group was given a hypothetical situation that required each person to prepare a presentation arguing for a specific corporate program. Spencer was assigned to argue that the corporation should donate funds to a local low-income, home-building project. Although little time was given to prepare, Spencer’s presentation began: “A wise man once said that no other success can compensate for failure in the home.” The company representatives were intrigued. They leaned closer and became attentive; they had never heard such profound counsel before. Spencer continued to expound gospel-centered principles about the importance of the home to society as he argued for the contribution. Ultimately Spencer got the job offer. Why? Because he was different—in a good way.

Brian Evans was chief financial officer and administrative vice president at BYU when this devotional address was given on 16 October 2007.

Experiences like Spencer’s are not unique. They are repeated over and over as faithful graduates leave BYU to make their mark on the world. They happen because you are extraordinary.

The Apostle Peter taught:

*Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*¹

Consider the ways in which you are unique. You have made sacred covenants with the Lord to keep His commandments. In exchange you have been promised the Holy Ghost as a constant companion. Many of you have sacrificed—or will sacrifice—your time and resources to represent the Lord as His emissary in the mission field. You may have learned a new language, been exposed to a different culture, and learned to love and serve in a profound way. You attend a university that believes learning happens best when it includes the influence of the Spirit. You agreed to abide by a university honor code, which suggests that you are a person of integrity. You have the priesthood and/or accept callings in your ward or stake. In so doing you act as the lay ministry in the Church and develop skills of leadership, teaching, organization, and service. In addition to university counselors, you have access to Church leaders who can provide you with help and guidance in times of trouble or indecision. Finally, you know where you came from, why you are here, and where you are going.

Yes, you are a peculiar people. In fact, your education is deemed so important that the board of trustees has determined that the vast majority of the funds necessary to maintain BYU and provide you with a degree should come from the tithing funds of the Church. You are, in effect, all on scholarship. Such a funding decision is not inconsequential, as these

resources could otherwise be put to use to bless the lives of Church members throughout the world, including many living in relative poverty. Such a unique arrangement implies a contract of sorts between the university and its students. After all, the scriptures teach that “unto whom much is given much is required.”²

Years ago I served as elders quorum president in our California ward. One of my responsibilities was to home teach Helen Royston, a convert to the Church and one of the widows in our ward. She was barely five feet tall, and I imagine she didn’t weigh 100 pounds. For as long as I can remember, Helen faithfully taught Primary, including classes with some of my own children. Her home was modest, and it always seemed to be filled with an impossible number of visitors who were in need of a refuge or just down on their luck. Helen made her living working in a laundry. I often wondered how such a little, older lady could withstand such difficult work. I calculated that during her career she must have steam pressed literally millions of articles of clothing.

During ward council meeting one Sunday, we were considering an expenditure that was on the borderline between necessary and extravagant. After some discussion our wise bishop said, “Remember, we are spending Helen Royston’s tithing.” That resolved the issue. I have never forgotten that council meeting. Since that day, each time I hear the story of the widow’s mite I think of Sister Royston. It guides me today in my role as the chief financial officer of this university. How amazing it is that funds considered sacred are made available for your education and benefit.

It is equally interesting to consider the generosity of numerous donors who have contributed to enhance your education through new facilities, mentored learning, scholarships, and other endowments. Some of these donors are wealthy. Many are not. Regardless of financial situation, each has made a freewill offering to bless your life. I consider these

offerings as sacred as the widow's mite, for they were made voluntarily and were not compelled or demanded. As you walk across campus you might consider the library addition, the Student Athlete Building, the N. Eldon Tanner Building, Miller Field, the Joseph F. Smith Building, the Indoor Practice Facility, the Museum of Art, LaVell Edwards Stadium, the Monte L. Bean Museum, the Marriott Center, and the newly completed Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center. All were built from donor contributions. The same is true of the Tanner Building addition, which is under construction, and the BYU Broadcasting Building, which is in the planning phase.

These contributions were and are made by friends who love BYU, and they love you. Truly the Lord is watching over this place. His spirit has also moved to bring individuals here as faculty and staff to build up this institution.

In 1952 Ben Lewis, BYU administrative vice president, was intent on establishing a food services program on campus. The postwar boom had dramatically increased the size of the university community, and the need was great. To help find a manager of dining services, Brother Lewis decided to personally visit the restaurants in town to determine which had the best food.

In the end he concluded that the best food was in a restaurant belonging to Wells and Myrle Cloward. It was located inside the Regal Lanes Bowling Alley, where FatCats now stands. Brother Lewis approached the Clowards about coming to work for BYU, but they turned the offer down. It had taken years of hard work to build up their business, and it was starting to pay off.

Again Brother Lewis unsuccessfully approached the Clowards. Then late one evening a fire broke out in the bowling alley. By the time anyone could respond, the building was destroyed. When Brother Lewis heard the news, he exclaimed: "My prayers have been answered!" In later life Brother Lewis noted

that he hadn't prayed specifically for a fire, nor set the one that consumed the bowling alley, but he knew he needed help in getting the Clowards to come to BYU. Soon thereafter Wells and Myrle Cloward accepted Ben Lewis' offer and came to work for BYU.

Beginning with a small cafeteria in the basement of the original Joseph Smith Building, the Cloward family worked together serving students. With humble beginnings and continual progress, they established what would become one of the largest and most successful university food service programs in the nation.

The experience of the Clowards is emblematic of the many faculty and support personnel who have decided to serve at BYU, even though more financially rewarding and supposedly prestigious opportunities are available elsewhere. Our faculty and staff are among the most talented individuals in their fields. Many are nationally and even internationally known experts.

Earlier this year Dining Services determined to fund a new faculty position. They reasoned that, aside from serving good food, providing an additional faculty position would be the most direct way they could bless the lives of our students. How would they do it? With the next available retirement of a Dining Services employee, the position would not be refilled. Instead they would redistribute the work of the retiring employee among the remaining department personnel. Each person would be asked to pick up part of the load, and the savings would be contributed to fund the faculty position.

At the annual university conference in August, it was announced that Professor Gary Burlingame, a faculty member in the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, would be the first occupant of the Wells and Myrle Cloward Teaching and Learning Fellowship provided by Dining Services. In addition, since January, six more teaching and learning fellowships have been provided by BYU Financial Services, Human Resources, and the Office of

Information Technology—bringing the total number of positions to seven.

Why did they do it? Why did they voluntarily commit to sacrifice on your behalf? Because they love you.

Up to this point we have focused on what others have done for you. Let's turn our attention, for a moment, to what you can do to fulfill your part of the contract.

First, be grateful for the gift you have been given.

The late President James E. Faust taught:

*A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being.*³

Occasionally I am required to address a grievance from a person who feels he or she has been mistreated. Most often the situation is a misunderstanding that can easily be cleared up. However, I have sometimes been surprised by individuals who display an attitude of entitlement. Likewise, I believe that BYU customers are occasionally surprised by an unkind service provider. This is not the BYU way. All individuals within the BYU community should live by the admonition of the Apostle Peter, who said:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. . . .

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

*And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.*⁴

Such is the appropriate attitude for a body of Latter-day Saints. Be quick to express appreciation and to use the two most powerful words in the English language: "Thank you."

Second, take full advantage of your opportunity to attend BYU.

Once, when I was serving in a California bishopric, I attended a meeting of the deacons quorum where the adviser was giving a lesson on the importance of education. He explained that he had attended BYU and had been required to earn money for his education by baling hay during the summer.

Although tuition then was less than \$300 per semester, the wage for baling hay was only about \$2 per hour, which translated to around two cents per bale. After the hay was baled, fall semester began. One day he walked across campus to attend a class. When he got to the door there was a sign posted that read "Class Canceled." His classmates, upon reading the sign, were gleeful and celebrated as they walked away from the building. (I must confess that my reaction might have been the same.) Suddenly the thought occurred to him: "I've been cheated." The wheels in his head began to turn. "I hefted and stacked 70 bales of hay to attend that class today. I want my money back!" The deacons' eyes got big. They had never considered stacking so many bales of hay for so little. More important, they had never pondered the proposition that someone could relish the opportunity for learning.

Surveys completed by graduated BYU students indicate that most enjoyed their BYU experience and would make the same choice again. A minority, however, expressed disappointment with their BYU experience. Not surprisingly, those who expressed disappointment often indicated that they did not attend devotionals, ward services, and activities; did not connect with a faculty mentor; and were not positively influenced by religion classes. The Lord revealed a powerful principle to the Prophet Joseph when He said: "For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?"⁵ Make a commitment to attend devotionals and forums. With the possible exception of this one, they

are outstanding. To the extent you are able, attend a lecture outside your major, join a club, provide service, be active in your ward, take a campus job, and attend a performance or a game. Get involved.

Several years ago one of my sons signed up for the most difficult and advanced BYU math class his prerequisites would allow.

I asked him, "Is that class required for your degree?"

"No."

"Won't taking it hurt your GPA?"

"Probably."

"Well, then, why are you taking it?"

He replied, "Because it interests me and I will never have this opportunity again."

When I saw his textbook, filled with the longest equations I had ever seen, I thought, "He's doomed." The class was graded on a straight curve, and, not unexpectedly, his grade was among those in the lower half of the class.

Months later, when I asked him about his experience, he said, "It was gnarly. But I'm glad I took that class because I understand things I never did before."

Now I have to add in here that we recently talked to that son—he is a graduate student on the East Coast—and he mentioned that he had just set the curve on his graduate mathematics test. I couldn't help but think back to his BYU experience. "Weren't you wise to take that class that was beyond your capacity?" I asked.

Third, be the kind of person you said you were when you requested admission to BYU.

In your application you were asked to sign a written commitment that you understood and would abide by the Honor Code and the Dress and Grooming Standards. You said you would be honest; live a chaste and virtuous life; obey the law; use clean language; respect others; abstain from alcohol, drugs, tobacco, coffee, and tea; encourage others to comply with their commitment; and participate regularly in church services if you are LDS.

As some of my nonmember friends would say: "What in the world were you thinking?"

Hopefully you were thinking, "That's where I would like to learn. Those are the kind of people I would like to associate with."

In large measure, you live up to those standards. You are who you said you were. I congratulate you. Your behavior invites the Spirit to abide on this campus. Because of you, countless visitors have remarked, "There is a different feeling here. What is it about your students and people?"

The same standards you are asked to follow as students apply to faculty, staff, and administrators. There is no double standard. And, as far as I can tell, none of us is compelled to be here.

It is interesting that some will come to BYU, ignore their commitment, and then appear surprised when the university must take action. "You mean you were serious?" they ask quizzically. Others, apparently, take it as a challenge to push the envelope of appropriate dress and grooming or to criticize the leaders and doctrines of the Church.

In the end, living up to the standards we all promised is a matter of personal integrity. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin has taught, "Personal integrity implies such trustworthiness and incorruptibility that we are incapable of being false to a trust or covenant."⁶

In the year 2000, for family reasons, I decided to leave my position as a partner at Arthur Andersen, a large international audit, tax, and consulting firm. A good friend suggested I come to BYU and meet with President Merrill J. Bateman. I did so, and within a few months I was employed here. Three months after my departure, one of Andersen's largest clients, Enron, collapsed in a financial scandal, and the Andersen personnel who worked on that account were charged with fraud and obstruction of justice. The accused individuals and the firm were ultimately convicted, and within a matter of weeks of that conviction, Andersen

had been fired by virtually all of its clients. The firm literally ceased to exist. Overnight more than 50,000 people were out of a job and the firm partners had lost their capital. The Andersen personnel who worked on the Enron account incorrectly thought that their responsibility was to dispense advice on sophisticated and ambiguous financial transactions. They forgot that their real responsibility was to protect the public interest and to act with integrity.

You might think I'm telling you this story to demonstrate divine intervention on my behalf or to illustrate the principle that "timing is everything." Actually, I mention it to persuade you that, along with your testimony, your integrity may be the most important thing you possess.

Arthur Andersen, the person, was born in 1885, the son of Norwegian immigrants. He was orphaned at 16 and by 23 became the youngest CPA in the state of Illinois and a member of the faculty at Northwestern University. At 28 he opened his own firm, dedicated to the principle of absolute integrity, which he demonstrated time and time again through the Roaring Twenties, the stock market collapse of 1929, the Great Depression, and postwar recovery.

In my own experience, the people I knew in that firm followed Andersen's example of integrity, including many faithful Latter-day Saints. A small handful of their coworkers, however, managed to tarnish the good name of their founder and the reputation of many thousands of their colleagues.

Those whose reputations were sullied must have felt like Alma the Younger did when he chastised Corianton: "Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words."⁷

I might add, "And would not allow you to practice accountancy in any state."

At BYU we make hypocrites of ourselves if we do not behave the way we say we believe.

Clearly the standard for us is high. At times we will fail and fall short and have the need to make things right.

A few years ago my daughters were visiting a neighbor couple making a treat. Emma, then six, managed to spill an entire carton of milk on the floor. There was an awkward moment of silence as the group surveyed the damage. Then Emma spoke up: "Everyone makes mistakes." She was right. We all make mistakes. None of us is without sin—no, not one. Thankfully we can look to the Savior to balance the equation of justice and mercy on our behalf.

Fourth and last, stop to lift a fellow student.

College has been described as the most selfish time of your life. This is because it is the time when we focus on our own betterment. We gain knowledge, prepare for a career, participate in extracurricular activities, socialize extensively, and possibly find a mate. These are certainly worthwhile endeavors.

In the midst of your comings and goings, however, you will meet others who are struggling physically or academically. Some are just trying to fit in or are feeling lonesome or depressed. The next time you are preparing to leave your apartment for an event, consider who you could invite along. Missionaries are taught that part of their responsibility is to "invite all to come unto Christ."⁸ Surely if all are worthy of an invitation to come unto Christ, they are worthy of an invitation to join a study group or to come to a dance. Let our campus be an inclusive community, not an exclusive fraternity.

Sister Bonnie Parkin, then Relief Society general president, gave a wonderful devotional address here earlier this year.⁹ She encouraged each student to consider a personal ministry of service. Afterward I began to think seriously about Sister Parkin's message. I considered the many times that President Thomas S. Monson has described visiting the sick, the aged, the troubled, or the dying. It occurred to me that he was, in effect, teaching us the same message.

When I discussed this concept with one of my sisters who had been a student here in the 1960s, she mentioned that she had a roommate at BYU named Carolyn who had had a personal goal to make a new friend in each of her classes. At the beginning of the semester, Carolyn would survey each classroom and choose someone she could make her friend. During the remainder of the term, Carolyn would take the time to become acquainted and get together. Her classmate would eventually become part of her circle of friends. I wonder whether any of those befriended by Carolyn during those years would today confess that she was one of the few friends they had during college.

May I invite you to consider a personal ministry of invitation and inclusion? Look around you and the Spirit will instruct you on who to include and invite. When you feel the prompting of the Spirit, obey it! This kindness will bless your life and enrich your BYU experience in countless ways.

When I was a child, my high school-age older sisters were involved in after-school activities, and both of my parents worked. I was shy and did not like attending Primary, which was held on Wednesday afternoons in those days. I shall always be grateful to La Rae Reynolds, the ward Primary president,

who lived just a few houses away. When it came time to leave for Primary, I would hide in the backyard beneath a tree or bush. Sister Reynolds would come looking for me and not give up until I was found and taken to Primary, where I belonged. I suppose I could have come up with a better place to hide, but, you see, I really wanted to be found. Most people want to be found.

May God bless you, my brothers and sisters, to be grateful, to take full advantage of your BYU opportunity, to be the kind of person we believe you are, and to invite and include those around you, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 2:9.
2. D&C 82:3; see also Luke 12:48.
3. James E. Faust, "Gratitude as a Saving Principle," *Ensign*, May 1990, 86.
4. 2 Peter 1:4–7.
5. D&C 88:33.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Personal Integrity," *Ensign*, May 1990, 30.
7. Alma 39:11.
8. D&C 20:59.
9. See Bonnie D. Parkin, "Personal Ministry: Sacred and Precious," BYU devotional address, 13 February 2007.

