

Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Fight!

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It is a privilege for me to be here, not just as a General Authority but especially as a former BYU student and as a Cougar fan. When I first stepped onto this campus more than thirty years ago as an English as a second language (ESL) student, I never would have imagined that one day I would be invited to speak at a BYU devotional. I will tell you why I felt that way in a moment, but first, let me tell you about the title of my message: “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Fight!” It is a slogan that you have heard many times but with a little change at the end.

As I was writing down some ideas and thoughts here and there during my preparation for this occasion, I was still looking for a title that could pull all those thoughts together. A few weeks ago, my wife, Mônica, and I were here in Provo to spend time with our daughter Renata and our four grandkids. When we asked them where they wanted to have lunch, to our surprise they picked Wendy’s—right there on the corner across from campus. While we were there, I saw the famous BYU sign across the street: “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve.”

I had seen this slogan many times, but at that moment it brought me a prompting. There was the title I was looking for. Using this title I would

be able to put all my loose notes and thoughts together and hopefully have them all make sense.

But, aware that you probably have heard great messages about this slogan many times, I decided to change the second part a little. Therefore, my version of the slogan and title of my message became “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Fight!” And you will see why.

Enter to Learn

So let’s start with “enter to learn.” Now I can go back to my previous comment about being in this meeting as a former BYU student and why I never would expect such a thing as speaking in a devotional to ever happen.

As I mentioned before, my first experience at BYU was entering to learn—not to obtain a degree but to learn English. I don’t know if you know that for many international students the English as a second language course is the first step to hopefully being able to apply to a BYU program. When

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your English still is not good enough to pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), this course is a good option. That was my case.

I come from a humble family with little resources to put their children in good schools or to take English courses. Also, during those days missionaries did not have the opportunity to learn English while serving a mission in their own country. There was no such program in our missions in the past. I started my mission as a young missionary knowing zero English. Two years later, my English was still zero. Maybe I knew a few more words, such as *Big Mac*, *French fries*, *popcorn*, and so on. But that was it.

Thanks to a great missionary companion, David Boekweg, and his family and a loving mission president, John Hawkins, I had the chance to come to the United States right after my mission to learn English. I came not to apply to a BYU undergraduate program but at least to not be so afraid of this language anymore.

I remember how impressed I was with the beauty of the mountains, the greatness of the campus, the student lifestyle, the sports activities, and the weekend parties. I was amazed by the idea of how nice it would be to be a student here. But that was not my situation at the time. I had come just to learn English and then to go back to Brazil, and that was what I did. But I left my Utah days with a dream in my heart that maybe, someday, I would be able to return to BYU as a regular student. Or, if not me, hopefully I would be able to provide my children with such an opportunity in the future.

Ten years later—after getting married, obtaining a degree in economics from a good Brazilian university, serving as a young bishop, and becoming the father of three small children—I was back in Utah with my family. I was then an MBA student under scholarship at the Marriott School of Management. Now, finally, I was here as a real student, entering to learn. But it was not easy.

At this point I want to empathize with students going through a tough time to get good grades or with those who are not as successful as they would like to be. Please don't get discouraged, or even if you get discouraged, don't stay that way for too long. Some school classes and

some degrees are not as easy for some as they are for others. I was in the not-easy-for-some group. I know the feeling of receiving below-average grades, of being left behind when study groups are formed, and of taking days to get an assignment done when others would do it in a few hours. I know how it is to feel inadequate to do something or to feel frustrated with your own progress. But I want to assure you that you can do it. If I could do it, you can also do it. When we are willing to pay the price, anything is possible.

I remember how hard it was for me to get the TOEFL and GMAT scores I needed in order to get into the MBA program and to qualify for a BYU scholarship. It took three years for me to get the minimum scores to be accepted. And I almost didn't make it. Year after year I studied during free evenings and free weekends—always with the same result: almost, almost.

And then one day I received a telephone call from the person responsible for administering the scholarship in Brazil. He told me over the phone: "Carlos, I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is that you are among the three finalists this year. [There was only one scholarship available.] The bad news is that of the other two candidates, one is a son of a General Authority and the other one is a son of a regional representative. The third one is you."

My answer was, "And me, a son of God."

Miraculously, that year I got the scholarship and was accepted into the MBA program.

My English ability was enough to barely pass those admission tests, but I can tell you it was not enough to keep up with the bright people in my classes. Most of the time I was behind to a point that some professors recommended I take extra writing- and speaking-English classes. So during my first semester, besides my MBA classes, I took parallel English classes during my free time.

In addition to the second-language challenge, there were also some hard classes that I had to take. I still keep as a reminder of those days a picture of the huge yellow finance book that I hated. It still brings me to tears when I look at it. I remember passing many nights awake studying for tests, preparing case presentations, or writing

papers while watching through my bedroom window as the snow fell. There is always a price to be paid when we are looking for better results and a better future. I was willing to do my part, although, I must confess, there were many times that I felt tired and discouraged.

At the end of my first year, things started to become easier. English was still a challenge and some classes were still a nightmare, but I felt more prepared for them. I shifted my MBA focus to an organizational behavior major, and things started to become more meaningful to me. At the end of my second year, my grades were finally above average, and after a good summer internship experience, I received one of the best employment offers of my class. Thanks to that offer I was able to go back to Brazil to start the second part of this journey: “Go forth to serve.” I mean: Go forth to fight!

So, as a conclusion for this first half of my message, you are here to learn, and it does not matter how behind you are or how hard it seems to be, you can do it. When we are willing to pay the price, anything is possible.

I hope you understand that this principle can also be applied to your life. This mortal experience is a time for learning and growth, but sometimes it is not easy. Just as you find in your studies, you might feel inadequate or frustrated with your own personal progress, but I want to assure you that you can do it. Of course there is also a price to be paid, but it is possible. And the main reason why it is possible is because we have the Savior Jesus Christ and His grace as a resource in times of trouble.

In His own words, the Lord said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you; And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. [D&C 78:17–18]

Well, let’s now talk about the other half: Go forth to fight!

Go Forth to Fight!

Why go forth to fight? Let me start with a broader vision of why we are here on earth.

Each one of us is here in this life for a purpose. We know there is a plan of salvation and we know we are part of a bigger plan. Before this life we were prepared for this time, and we have a mission to fulfill. After this life we will keep progressing with the final goal of returning to the presence of our Heavenly Father with our family. It is with this big picture in mind that we should guide our decisions and plans, even our careers and temporal goals. We are not here in this life just to be successful in our profession, get rich, enjoy life, and die. Of course we should look for temporal and material progress, but we should always see it as the means toward a greater cause and not as the end result.

In the Pearl of Great Price we find the Lord talking to Moses as follows:

Behold, I am the Lord God Almighty, and Endless is my name. . . .

And, behold, thou art my son. . . .

And I have a work for thee, Moses, my son.

[Moses 1:3–4, 6]

This was a clear message to Moses about two important truths: (1) Moses was a son of the Almighty God and (2) the Lord had a mission for him. Those same truths are valid for you and for each one of us. Maybe you are thinking that such missions are just for prophets like Moses, but listen to what President Spencer W. Kimball had to say about that:

*In the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as are those we sustain as prophets and apostles! [“The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, November 1979]*

So this means that each one of us has assignments to fulfill in this life just as the apostles and prophets do. And your time here at BYU as an undergraduate or graduate student, majoring in X or Z, should be considered as part of your preparation, as a resource to get there.

But our common enemy—the one who has been fighting against the Lord since the beginning—will try to deceive you. He will try to make some of you believe there is no plan of salvation or no plan for you in this life. For others, he will try to get them to believe that there is no right or wrong or even gender or that a little sin here or there will not hurt. For others, his method will not be to make them do something wrong but to have them just not do anything. To be passive with the things of the Lord would already be enough to take you away from your path and mission in life. There is no room for spiritual passivity in this latter-day journey.

Now maybe you are wondering what your mission could be. Well, I can tell you one of them—a critical one. One of your missions is one you were enlisted in a long time ago, and it is to fight in the battle of these latter days. What battle is that? It is the fight for right, the fight to establish the kingdom of God, the fight to survive, and the fight to help others along the way. It is the fight to protect our family. It is the fight for the truth. In sum, it is the fight against the enemy of this great cause and plan of salvation.

In these latter days, this battle is becoming more difficult. Listen to the words used by President Russell M. Nelson when he was announcing some of the many changes the Lord is asking us to make in our day:

The adversary is increasing his attacks on faith and upon us and our families at an exponential rate. To survive spiritually, we need counterstrategies and proactive plans. ["Opening Remarks," Ensign, November 2018]

It is interesting to hear the word *counterstrategies* being used in a Church talk. That word is usually used in a business or military context. But it totally makes sense to use it, because we are in a

war. And we were reserved to come into the world at this time to fight in this war.

In D&C 138 we find these verses, which are talking about us:

Choice spirits . . . were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work. . . .

. . . They [we] . . . were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men. [D&C 138:53, 56]

We are now living the fulfillment of those words. We are now fighting for the salvation of the souls of men.

When I hear President Nelson teaching us, I can see the Lord preparing His Church and especially His children for this latter-day battle. President Nelson's words are not just about Church programs. They are about protecting ourselves against the enemy. They are counterstrategies and proactive plans to protect the Lord's kingdom, His Church, and His children. They are to protect you.

Let's review three of President Nelson's recent teachings, starting with ministering. As he has said, it is a holier and higher approach to caring for others (see "Ministering," *Ensign*, May 2018). Ministering today is essential to help those in need among us. I am talking about spiritual needs, emotional needs, and physical needs. Since we are in a war, it is not unusual to have wounded warriors along the way. The battle has been harder for some than for others.

The enemy is using different weapons and strategies: gender issues, family issues, drugs, pornography, attacking our youth, and attacking our young single adults. So what is the Lord doing through His prophet? The Lord is counterattacking. Ministering is part of that. Home teaching was not enough anymore. We needed people taking care of people.

Let me share a personal experience related to that. A few weeks ago, Mônica and I were in Logan for an assignment, and we decided to go on a date. A friend from that area recommended the Bluebird. Maybe some of you here today are familiar with that restaurant. It is a nice place.

Founded in 1914, the restaurant opened in its present location in 1923.

As we were there in the restaurant, our server came to us and asked, “Are you Elder Godoy?”

I said, “Yes.”

Then he started to talk to us in Spanish. He had served as a missionary in Peru, where we had served also.

While chatting here and there, I sensed that he was not comfortable with the subject of mission service. Since I knew his former mission president very well, as we were eating I sent him a message asking about that elder. His mission president replied that he had been a good missionary but that he didn’t finish his mission. And then I could understand why he was a little uncomfortable with the subject. I didn’t want him to feel bad about himself.

And why not? Because missions—although they are so important to all of us and to the Church—are not a saving ordinance. I wanted to tell him that, but that was not the right environment. I wanted to hug him. I wanted to say, “Don’t feel bad about yourself. Just keep going.”

I want to tell those here today who for some reason have not served a mission or didn’t finish it, don’t punish yourself for the rest of your life. Just stand up and aim at the next ordinance. Ordinances are the keys for our salvation and exaltation. And the next ordinance after your mission is sealing. This should be your main concern, to be worthy to get there with the right person at the right time. Stand up, aim toward the temple, and keep going. There are so many things still to be done in this life, and the Lord still expects a lot from you.

Another inspired counterstrategy announced by President Nelson was combining the Melchizedek priesthood quorums. Mónica and I are reading the Book of Mormon in Spanish. We don’t want to lose that beautiful language, and we are in those war chapters in which Moroni and Helaman are fighting and putting armies together. When I heard of this adjustment in the quorums—putting high priests and elders together in one quorum—for me it was like the Lord putting His army in one body, getting ready for the battle. That is what is

happening. We are strengthening the priesthood army in readiness for the latter-day spiritual battle.

And I hope you understand your role. You are one of those young warriors, just like the two thousand children of Helaman. You were prepared to participate in the battle. We, the old warriors, need your help. The battle is getting harder, and we need your help.

And finally, a key counterstrategy also announced was home-centered and Church-supported gospel learning. We can see the reason for this adjustment. Where is the enemy attacking most heavily? In our meetings? No. He is attacking our homes. That is where we need more reinforcement. Just as fortifications were needed in the Book of Mormon wars, we need to build walls and fortifications around our homes to protect them from the enemy attacks (see 3 Nephi 3:14).

This is not something just for families. It also applies to you, especially as you are away from your family. You need to protect your home. The enemy wants to enter your dorm. In your building. With your roommates. That is where he wants to be. And you need to build barriers against his attacks. This change in Sunday worship hours is not just to reduce the time at church, it is to move more gospel study to our homes, where fortifications need to be built.

Here, the first half of the BYU slogan, “enter to learn,” can be used again. You should also consider your time here as a time to learn more about the gospel, to strengthen your testimony, and to fortify your faith. “Enter to learn” is also an invitation to learn to protect yourself, to be stronger, and to be more faithful.

I hope you are not relying on getting all your gospel learning from your BYU gospel classes. Although they are important, they are not enough to strengthen your faith and protect you. Just like Church gospel classes are not enough, BYU gospel classes are not as well. That is why the focus was moved from church- to home-centered gospel learning. Please don’t take this lightly. This battle for the souls of men is real, and many good young adults are being hurt by the darts of the enemy.

This time of your life is critical. For many of you singles, it is the time right before temple

sealing. And it makes you a target. Why? Because it is the enemy’s last chance to prevent you from entering a key eternal covenant. You are not just a young adult. You are a potential eternal family, one that will start an eternal cycle “and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19). It is easier to try to impede this process before it begins, and that is now, at this stage of your life.

Can you see that? Can you see that the war against the plan of salvation that started in the life before this one is still going on? And that just as you were fighting it there, you were called to fight it here also? You are part of the Lord’s army. You don’t need to be set apart for that. The call to stand up for the truth is not a Church calling. It is a life calling. You don’t need to be called to do that. You were born in the last days, and that is already enough. Using the words of President Nelson:

*Tonight I invite you literally to rise up with me. . . .
 . . . While you sing, think of your duty as God’s
 mighty army to help prepare the world for the Second
 Coming of the Lord. This is our charge. This is our
 privilege. [“Ministering with the Power and
 Authority of God,” Ensign, May 2018]*

How do you prepare yourself to fulfill this mission? Follow the prophet and apply his teachings in your life. Focus on the temple. Serve there as much as you can. If you are not worthy now of

a temple recommend, that is where you should start. If you were wounded in this earthly battle, stand up, talk to your bishop, and keep going. There is much more to come, more battles to fight, and you should stand up and keep fighting.

The Lord is aware of your struggles and your challenges. He knows you, your potential, and your dreams. His Atonement is real and can help you become clean, but, more than that, His Atonement can give you strength to do better. Sometimes it is not a matter of worthiness, it is just strength needed to keep going. I know He is on your side because He loves you. Follow the prophet. If you follow him, you will always be on safe ground. And more than that, you will be ready to do your part in this great battle of the latter days.

Now, in conclusion, let me put these two halves of the slogan together: Enter to learn; go forth to fight!

It doesn’t matter how behind you are in your classes or how bad some of your grades have been. Stand up and fight. You can do it! In the same manner, it doesn’t matter how behind you are in your spiritual life or how many mistakes you have made. Stand up and fight. You can do it! More than that, you were called to do it. We are in the latter days, and you are an important part of this latter-day journey. Of this I testify, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.