

To a Man Who Has Done What This Church Expects of Each of Us

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

Thank you, President Lee, for your gracious and generous introduction. It is wonderful to be with all of you this morning.

These weekly devotionals are a unique thing for a great university of this kind. I hope you take advantage of them. I do not say this because I am speaking here this morning. I say it because I believe they provide you with a remarkable opportunity for inspiration and the opportunity to share the minds and hearts of General Authorities of the Church and others who have matters of importance to bring to your attention.

I can assure you that it is a great challenge to speak to a tremendous gathering of this kind. The speakers spend long and worrisome hours in preparation. I am confident that every one of them prays about his or her assignment. Your time at these devotional exercises will not be time wasted. You may pick up something of far greater consequence in your lives than you may get in your academic classes. I do not diminish the importance of your attending your regular classes, but I hold out to you an invitation with strong urging that throughout the year you take advantage of the opportunity to come here on these Tuesday mornings and

listen to discourses given in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, at the risk of embarrassing President Lee, I wish to speak of him. His remarkable life has been one worthy of an example for each of you. He was not born nor reared with riches. His achievements have come only through hard work and dedicated service. He grew up in a small town in Arizona. He served a mission for the Church in Mexico, where he learned to speak the language, to love the common people, and to love the Lord and His great work. He came to this university when it was much smaller. He was an excellent student who knew where he wanted to go and what he wanted to do. Notwithstanding his commitment to high scholarship, he was a young man with humor who enjoyed good fun. He won the respect of his peers and was elected student body president. After graduation from BYU, he was accepted at the University of Chicago Law

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School, where he earned his juris doctorate in 1963. He holds five honorary doctor of law degrees.

During the 1963 term of the United States Supreme Court, Rex Lee served as law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White.

As a young attorney he won the respect of his peers and superiors. He was appointed assistant U.S. attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's civil division from 1975 to 1976. That was a remarkable achievement for a young man from a remote Arizona cow town. He served as U.S. solicitor general from 1981 to 1985, representing the federal government before the Supreme Court.

He holds the distinction of having argued the largest number of cases before the Supreme Court in a single term, six in 1986. He has argued fifty-nine cases before the high court.

He was invited by the trustees to become the first dean of the J. Reuben Clark Law School on this campus. His was the task of assembling a faculty and a library, the two great basic assets of any good school of law.

Most of us, I am confident, cannot appreciate the enormous work in carrying a load of this kind. His much sought for service represented the tremendous confidence of distinguished clients across the nation. They placed on his shoulders the heavy responsibility of advocating their claims and causes. This speaks volumes for his capacity, for his tenacity, for his scholarship, and for the confidence, respect, and trust in which he is held by lawyers and their clients across the land.

He is a partner in the widely known and highly respected firm of Siddley & Austin in Chicago. He held the George Sutherland Chair of Law at Brigham Young University since returning to the Law School in 1985.

It is not an easy thing to find a qualified president for a great university. Every board of trustees or regents can testify to that. Great qualities of leadership are needed. There is a further requirement in the case of Brigham

Young University, and that is to find a leader with faith in the Almighty and loyalty to His work. When a new BYU president was needed in 1989, Rex E. Lee was the universal choice of the trustees.

During these six-plus years he has served with fidelity, with great devotion, with rare ability, and, I may add, with humility.

Rex Lee is a man not only of strong intellect; he is a man of great faith. He is a man of humble prayer who seeks divine guidance in handling the many responsibilities with which he is constantly faced.

His beloved companion, Janet, is the quiet pillar of strength who stands at his side, who is his counselor, his comforter, his cheerleader, and his dearest friend. What a wonderful, exemplary picture they present to the members of this faculty and student body.

During a considerable part of the time that he has served as president, he has carried the terrible burden of cancer. He has fought this dread disease with patience, with prayer, with faith, and with the best medical care available. When many others might have quit long ago, he has gone forward quietly doing his duty. But it is an awesome undertaking to preside over an institution as large and complex as this. He has enjoyed the respect and love of the faculty. I assure you that he has the total confidence of the board of trustees.

He has presided at a season when there have been many difficult problems to deal with. He has handled them with expertise, understanding, and respect for all involved.

The university has grown stronger under his leadership. It is the largest Church-owned university in America. It was recently rated by *U.S. News and World Report* as the number one "best buy" college in America and also received favorable ratings for the quality of its teaching programs among those institutions that have an unusually strong commitment to undergraduate teaching (see *U.S. News and*

World Report, 18 September 1995 and 25 September 1995).

President Lee has laid the foundation and moved forward a great fund-raising drive intended to strengthen the university and its faculty. He has won commitments for many millions of dollars. He is a powerful advocate and a great persuader. He has led this institution with a growing commitment to excellence. He has even brought a smile to the rock-jawed visage of LaVell Edwards, a great accomplishment in and of itself.

Then, under date of June 12, 1995, recognizing his health problems, he sent to me a letter in which he stated, "I request that you consider releasing me as president of Brigham Young University and that the release occur about the end of this calendar year."

Speaking in behalf of very many, may I say that we deeply regret the circumstances that prompted this letter. President Lee, I speak for a vast congregation of your friends. We have served with you as trustees, as officers of the university, as friends of the university here and abroad. We love you for the great work you have done. We love you for the tremendous energy you have put into this service. We love you because you have loved this faculty and this student body. This is your alma mater where, in your younger days, you enjoyed life with all that it had to offer. Now in these later years you have nurtured, protected, and guided her. You have served as the tenth president of Brigham Young University with honor and distinction, and with compelling loyalty to the sacred trust imposed in you. You will be so remembered through the years to come. You have left your mark, which will be observed and appreciated through the times that lie ahead.

Perhaps I speak a little early when you still have service to give. It is two and a half months until the end of the year. But I do so at this time because this hour affords me the opportunity to express in behalf of the trustees

and the entire Church our gratitude, our respect, our appreciation, and our love. There will be another occasion for formal release, but it likely will be cluttered with the business of naming a successor. Today I can speak to you and of you without sharing you with any other in the course of my remarks. Thank you for being the man you were when you were invited to assume this high and sacred office. Thank you for your years of preparation, those hard and difficult years when you served as a strong advocate, persuasive and powerful, in behalf of those who conferred upon you the sacred trust given you as attorney and counselor. Thank you for the tremendous work that you did in organizing the J. Reuben Clark Law School. It was a great undertaking fraught with heavy responsibility. You did it so very well that the school was officially recognized from the outset and its graduates honored with the distinction of having been well trained in an excellent school of law. Thank you for your efforts recently made in greatly enlarging the library of the Law School, to make of it an even better place of preparation for those who will serve in the legal profession. Thank you for your dedicated service to the Church you love. You have given unstintingly of your time, your talents, your means, and your heart. You have mingled with the great of the earth, but you have never lost touch with those who walk in humble circumstances. We thank you for the great conviction you have carried in your heart concerning the living reality of God Our Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the persuasiveness with which you have testified concerning these great and sacred matters. Thanks to your beloved Janet, who has stood at your side, who has reared your able family, who has cared for you, inspired you, and loved you. I assure you that we have prayed for both of you and will continue to do so. We hope that you will yet have years in which to teach and practice law without having to carry the heavy burden of

administration with which you have been saddled.

And now to all assembled here this morning, at the risk of bringing further embarrassment to the modest man of whom I have spoken, I wish to hold out to each of you his life as an example by which to guide your own.

President Lee has become what he is because he has done what this Church expects of each of us. He has walked the path of faith and prayer and obedience. He has walked with faith in the Almighty, with faith in the risen Lord, with faith in the eternal verities that come as the word of God.

I urge you to do the same. God is our Almighty Father. He is our anchor and our strength. We can look to Him. We must look to Him. We must extend our thanks to Him and seek His direction and guidance and blessing. Not even the most brilliant among us is smart enough to comprehend the majesty and wonder of His ways or to understand the depth of His love for us, His children. He gave His Son, who gave His life for each of us and all of us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the World, who wrought the Atonement in behalf of all, making it possible for us to cross the barrier of death and go forward with our eternal lives to heights undreamed of.

These great basic truths must become the foundation stones of our lives. Recognition of God and a desire to walk in obedience to His words and ways are essential to every one of us assembled here today. With this knowledge comes the imperative fact of accountability to God for what we do with our lives. We are His sons and daughters, and He will hold us accountable.

He has established His church, which carries the name of His divine Son, as the conservator and teacher of truth, that truth which will make and keep us free.

The Father and the Son have spoken in opening this the dispensation of the fulness

of times, the most glorious dispensation in all ages of the earth.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was established to bring us nearer to God our Father and the risen Lord. It was established as the repository of the keys and authority of the everlasting priesthood, which has come again under the hands of those who received it from the Lord Himself. It is among us. It is real. It is the only power under the heavens that reaches beyond the veil of death. It is eternal and everlasting in its consequences.

The Church is the great teacher and builder of values. Its precepts are designed to lead men and women along the way of immortality and eternal life, to make their lives more complete, more rich and happy while moving through this vale of tears, and in preparing them for the beauties and wonders of that which lies ahead. Keep faith with the Church. It is true. It is divine. He who stands at its head is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is the church of the Almighty that carries the name of His divine Son. Its earthly leaders are those who are called of God under a plan that He has put in place.

What does the Church expect of each of us? It expects the kind of behavior that has been exemplified in the life of the man of whom I have spoken. I am sure that he would be the first to admit that he is far from perfect. So it is with each of us, but we have a mandate to work at it, to keep trying to constantly improve. "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men" (Articles of Faith 1:13). May I add a few words on this statement as I speak of what this Church expects of us.

Simple honesty is so remarkable a quality. It is of the very essence of integrity. It demands that we be straightforward, unequivocal, in walking the straight and narrow line of what is right and true. It is so easy to cheat. At times it is so enticing to do so. Better a poor grade than a dishonest act. There has been told and retold

on this campus for generations the words of Karl G. Maeser concerning honor. They need to be repeated here and across the world. I suppose all of you have heard them before, but I give them again.

I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first! [Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1953), p. 71]

My father was a student of Karl G. Maeser at this institution long ago. He heard those words himself from the lips of Brother Maeser. He repeated them to us again and again. They have become engraved in my mind as if they were words of scripture. They set forth with simplicity and eloquence what this Church expects of me and of you.

It expects us to be true—true to ourselves, true to our loved ones, true to the best that is within us, true to the faith. President George Albert Smith, on a number of occasions, told of meeting his grandfather, whose name he carried, in a dream. He was asked by his grandfather, “I would like to know what you have done with my name” (George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948], pp. 111–12).

President Smith said that he never got over the effects of that experience. It was only a dream, but it was real and it was important. There burned within his heart throughout the remainder of his life a compelling mandate to be true to the name that he carried.

In the language of the article of our faith that I have given you, the Church expects you

to be chaste and virtuous. You know what this means. I am satisfied I need not repeat it here. But I do urge you, with all of the capacity of which I am capable, to avoid the corrosive, destructive forces of iniquity found in pornography. Pornography is the literature of the devil. Shun it. Stay away from it. Lift your sights and your minds to the higher and nobler things of life. Enjoy life while you are here at BYU, but do so in ways that are uplifting and wholesome. Remember, “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). Sin never brought happiness. Transgression never brought happiness. Disobedience never brought happiness.

Recognize pornography for what it is—a vicious brew of slime and sleaze, the partaking of which only leads to misery, degradation, and regret. This Church expects you who have taken upon yourselves the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to walk in the sunlight of virtue and enjoy the strength, the freedom, the lift that comes from so doing.

Drink here from the springs of knowledge that flow with purity in the classrooms of this unique and wonderful institution. Partake of the spirit as well as the knowledge of faithful men and women who constitute the faculty of this school. Learn here the disciplines that will help you as you travel the course of your lives, the most important of which is self-discipline, the power to govern your thoughts, your words, your acts, notwithstanding the temptations that come before you. Learn of things of the heart, the mind, the spirit, and the words and wisdom of the Almighty.

The Church expects you to reach out with benevolence in doing good to all men. In writing to the Hebrews, Paul admonished, “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (JST, Hebrews 12:12). That admonition is repeated and magnified in modern revelation: “Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the

weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5).

I know that you are engrossed with your studies. This is important, but in a sense it is a selfish pursuit. Take a little time, now and again, to reach out to help others—there are those right around you, students in need of a little kindness, a little attention, a little appreciation. You who are extremely able, you who learn with comparative ease, reach down to those who have greater difficulty in mastering academic material that is relatively easy for you. In so doing you will bless your own life as you bless the lives of those you help. A little tutoring can do wonders for someone who does not quite comprehend. It will do wonders for you as you give of yourself and your knowledge to bless another.

There are those in nursing homes, hospitals, and those who are shut-ins in their own homes. You can bring sunlight into lives filled with gloom, sadness, and pain. Contradictory as it may sound, the admonition of the Savior is absolutely true as anyone can testify who has put it to the test: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39).

We were in Boston last April for a regional conference. The stake president invited us to go to the University of Massachusetts Medical Center to visit Robert and Reed Nixon. At the hospital we met with members of the family and proceeded to a special room where two young men were on life-support systems. They were brothers, and they had been injured in a terrible accident. Each was paralyzed from the neck down. We were asked to bless them and did so.

Months have now passed. They have left the hospital, followed by a term at a rehabilitation center. They are now home and are making some headway. The most severely injured spoke in stake conference two weeks ago. Tears fell from the eyes of that large

congregation who listened to a boy say with great effort a few words of gratitude and faith.

They have been able to come home because of the kindness of others. A handful of contractors in the area contributed time, labor, and materials, as well as their skills, to add to the family home, creating facilities that have made it possible for the boys to be with their loved ones.

Give expression to the noble desires that lie within your hearts to reach out to comfort, sustain, and build others. As you do so, the cankering poison of selfishness will leave you, and it will be replaced by a sweet and wonderful feeling that seems to come in no other way. Never forget that the Church expects you to be benevolent and to do good to all men.

I add to this the related thought that you will grow as you look for the good in others. This season of your schooling is a time not only to expand your minds but to enlarge your personalities and strengthen your character as you look for the virtues, the strengths, the goodness, in the lives of those about you.

Finally, the Church expects you to work while you are here. It is making a tremendous investment in you, an investment that comes from the sacred tithing funds of the Church. Work is the miracle by which talent is brought to the surface and dreams become reality.

I think President Rex Lee’s life is a compendium of these great virtues and expectations of which I have spoken. I commend them to each of you, even at the expense of embarrassing this modest man.

In conclusion, I speak out of my heart with sincerity with love for each of you. You who are here are so richly blessed with a great and precious opportunity. Do not waste it. Do not regard it lightly. It is sacred and of great consequence. Be thankful every day of your lives while you are here. Pray for guidance. Pray for help. Pray for strength to resist that which is evil. Seek the enlightenment of the

spirit of Christ. Cultivate and invite the direction of the Holy Ghost.

Everyone of you is precious. You are precious in the sight of God. You are precious in the sight of your parents. You are precious to us who count on you to take advantage of this great season of preparation for the world in which you will live.

President Lee, I salute you and honor you as you serve in these waning months of a great administration. I apologize if I have embarrassed you. I have spoken with sincerity out

of great respect and affection. Faculty, students, I compliment each of you on the precious opportunity that is yours to walk with fidelity, devotion, loyalty, hard work, and appreciation for all that is good and uplifting.

I leave my blessing with you and commend to you every good thing, that your lives may be fruitful in those strengths and virtues that distinguish the noble and the great and the good from those who live beneath their possibilities. May you be blessed of the Lord is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.