

# Thanks for the Things that Count

WM. ROLFE KERR

**I**t is with a sense of thanksgiving that I acknowledge the privilege of being a part of this great university. I feel deeply that all of us associated with BYU—as students, as faculty, as staff, and as administrators—are blessed with special privileges, and those privileges carry with them special responsibilities.

May I share with you a privilege I enjoyed late last Saturday afternoon. Far more impressive than anything I observed in a very impressive football game between BYU and the University of Utah was the scene I witnessed in the happy postgame locker room. Now, I have enjoyed the sense of victory and championship in many locker rooms before; and while this occasion was typical in many respects, it took on a different appearance as these champions knelt in prayer, led by their own coach LaVell Edwards. The act of praying after the game was not so unique; many teams do this. What was unique was the spirit that was felt and the humble words that Coach Edwards uttered:

*We are thankful, Lord, for the love, admiration, and respect we have for each other, for the association we enjoy, and for the dedication and efforts of the coaches and players. We are thankful that there were no serious injuries to either team and that we performed to the level of our capability and prepara-*

*tion. We thank thee, Father, for the privilege of representing thee and our great university. May we always remember who we are and who we represent that our lives and our performance will be consistent with thy will. [And then he added, almost as an afterthought:] And we are thankful for this championship.*

As I contemplate this Thanksgiving week I add this experience to my list of things for which I am thankful.

Speaking of Thanksgiving, I am reminded, as we all should be, that Thanksgiving Day, as such,

*Began with that little band of Pilgrims who in 1621 expressed their thanks to God in a great harvest feast. History tells us that of the 102 immigrants who landed on the bleak, rocky coast of Cape Cod, nearly half died before their first winter was over. In December, 6 died; in January, 8 more passed away; in February, 17; in March, 13; a total of 44 in four months.*

---

*Wm. Rolfe Kerr was executive vice president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 25 November 1980.*

*Today in our comfortable homes surrounded with plenty it is well for us to pause and remember with deep appreciation the sufferings of the survivors. One account tells us that most of these brave people were not used to hardships; among them were delicately nurtured and elite men and women, who during that first year built more caskets for the dead than homes for the living. Notwithstanding all their trials and hardships, these brave founders of a great and glorious nation had so much to be thankful for that they had to appoint "an especial day on which to give thanks," thanks to God for all of his mercies and blessings to them, thanks to God for things that count. [Earl Nightingale; emphasis added]*

There are obviously many things that count for which we should express thanks, but I would like to focus on thanks for three things that count:

- Thanks for our friends
- Thanks for our freedoms
- Thanks for our families

I was blessed with a marvelous friend through the years of my youth. His example saved me in many precarious moments. Just ten years ago an untimely and tragic airplane accident snuffed out this dynamic and productive life. A short time ago I was thrilled by the visit of his handsome young returned-missionary son, who had traveled many miles to ask me to write a chapter for the biography of his father. What a joy that task was—to tell his family, among other things, that my greatest wish for them was that they find friends possessing the qualities their father had possessed and that they strive to be that kind of a friend to those with whom they associated.

What is a friend? Someone has said:

*A friend is a source of celebration when you feel there is nothing to celebrate.*

*A friend is simply one who answers when you call, and who often answers before you call.*

*A friend is one who makes your grief less painful, your adversity more bearable.*

*A friend is one who makes your disappointments less hurtful, your problems more solvable.*

*A true friend is an earthly treasure whom God lends you to help prepare your eyes, heart, mind and soul for the glories He has prepared for you.*

*A friend is one with whom you are comfortable, to whom you are loyal, through whom you are blessed, and for whom you are grateful.*

*A friend is one who warms you by his/her presence, trusts you with his/her secrets, and remembers you in his/her prayers. [Anonymous]*

Thanks for our friends.

We enjoy many freedoms in this life, but one for which we should be especially thankful is our freedom to learn. How effectively are we using this great privilege? A prominent educator and businessman in this state wrote a letter to his mother when he was a university student in 1922. He said:

*I often wonder how I will reach the heights of which I dream, but I always reach the same conclusion. That is: the extent of my ultimate success will depend on my successes in each one of my classes every day; it will depend on how hard I study every night, and on how I appreciate my religion. In other words, my success in the future will depend in proportion to my success in the present.*

Richard Ballantine, the founder of our Sunday School, wrote the following to his son and daughter who were away from home attending a university:

*In conclusion let me express the hope that in the midst of your intellectual pursuits you will both remember to cultivate towards God, our Heavenly Father, that true piety of habit and deportment which should pre-eminently distinguish the children of Zion and which will give to your characters a grace, a beauty which mere literary culture can never impart. [21 January 1871]*

How well we learn counts so very much.

*“At a given instant, everything the surgeon knows suddenly becomes important to the solution of the problem. You can’t do it an hour later or tomorrow. Nor can you go to the library to look it up. In other words, shallow education is not enough.*

*“School isn’t a time simply for acquiring credits or surviving certain subjects, but is a time for acquiring knowledge and character and competence that can be counted on and called upon as needed.*

*“In many ways we put our lives, our health, our solvency, our safety, our very survival in the hands of other people, and we have to be assured that they have the required knowledge, the character, and the competence.” (Sunshine Magazine) This is one reason why cheating is so hazardous, and why shallow, shoddy learning—the spirit of just getting by—is so altogether unacceptable. [Earl Nightengale]*

Thanks for our freedoms—particularly our freedom to learn.

The scriptures tell us of the importance of our families. The Savior said,

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

*For the Father loveth the Son and sheweth him all things that himself doeth; and he will shew him greater works than these. [John 5:19–20]*

He also said: “I speak that which I have seen with my father, and ye do that which ye had seen with your Father” (John 8:38).

I was blessed with exemplary parents who both showed and led the way. My journal entry on 11 May 1980—Mother’s Day—records my impression of some lessons for life taught me by my mother:

*Selflessness is a mark of greatness.*

*Complainers gain little sympathy.*

*Creative hobbies enrich the life of the creator and the observer.*

*Others’ feelings deserve genuine concern.*

*Time wasted is time lost.*

*Doing things for and with your family will never be a sacrifice.*

*Interest in people brings life’s richest rewards.*

On 15 June 1980—Father’s Day—I recorded a similar entry regarding my father:

*Superior performance will be noted and rewarded. Personal example will be followed, whether good or bad.*

*Anticipation of the next task greatly increases effectiveness.*

*Effective fathers are available, approachable, and affectionate.*

*Busy lives must take time for family and fun.*

*Love for the gospel is essential to the good life.*

*A mission brings strength and eternal joy.*

A lovely woman came upon a little boy, hungry and shivering in the cold. Her motherly instincts prompted her to take the child in and warm and feed him. After the shivers had stopped and the boy had eaten, he looked up appreciatively at the woman and said, “Are you Heavenly Father’s wife?” The question penetrated her soul and rendered her nearly speechless, but then in inspiration a thought came and she answered, “No, I’m not his wife, but I am his daughter.”

I am blessed with a wife who is a true daughter of God, who learned well in both her heavenly home and her earthly home the lessons for life that are now exemplified in our home and family. We just recently added the sixth child to our family. I attended my wife in the delivery room as a loving witness to the miracle of this great partnership with God.

I thank the Lord this day and every day for my family.

You have all heard the often-quoted truth expressed by Harold B. Lee: “The most important part of the Lord’s work that you will do is the work that you do within the walls of your own home.”

I would follow that truth with another. The two most important decisions you will make in this life are the kind of person you choose for a mate and the kind of person you choose to be as a mate. Both of these decisions—and they are of equal importance—will determine the quality of what you do within the walls of your own home.

This reminds me of the young groom of two months who felt rather sure of himself as he said to his bride, “We’ve now lived together for two months and I’ve noticed a few of your defects. Do you mind if I discuss them with

you?” To which she sweetly responded, “I would be happy to have you do that; it was those defects that prevented me from getting a better husband.”

Of all the things that really count, our Father in Heaven’s love and watchful care for us count most of all. I’m thankful for my knowledge of him and pray that we will take a renewed look at the importance of our friends, our freedoms, and our families.

Thanks for our friends—for friends are fortunes.

Thanks for our freedoms—for freedoms cast the future.

Thanks for our families—for families are forever.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.