

Integrity: The Spirit of BYU

SPENCER W. KIMBALL

My dear brothers and sisters: what a thrilling sight it is to look out over this marvelous assemblage of young people—to see the thousands of you students, drawn from nearly every state and nation to pursue your education, and to see you many hundreds of missionaries, gathered together to prepare yourselves for the greatest event of your lives! I am glad to be with you to celebrate the beginning of another year.

I do not know how eager President Oaks and the University would be to admit it, but I was also a student here at this University. That was a long time ago—before most of you were born—but I was a college student here, and I had anticipated and looked forward all my younger life to someday coming to BYU. It was back in 1917—figure it out for yourselves. I was just a country boy from southern Arizona who had returned from a mission and had done some college work at the University of Arizona before coming to BYU.

One day I arrived in Provo on the train (the interurban train—some of you will even remember that) and as I got off the train and looked up Center Street toward the east, I saw an impressive white building up on the foot of the mountain. I picked up my heavy bags and started out for what I was sure was BYU. But as I got nearer

the building, which was a mile or so up Center Street, I noticed that there were some people out working on the grounds and as I came nearer them they did not change their position very much. I finally realized that this building that I had mistaken for BYU was another building well known in the state of Utah. You can imagine how I felt. Still I was not about to let my embarrassment show. I set my bags down outside, went inside the building with a brave face, and looked the place over as if I were going to inspect it or even buy it. Then I turned around, picked up my bags, and walked quickly back to town.

The First World War was going on then, and I had been in school just a week when I received a telegram from the Draft Board notifying me that I should appear for a preinduction physical examination. A week after that I was pronounced fit and ready for the Army. I may have set some kind of record for the shortness of my stay here. I have frequently

Spencer W. Kimball was President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 September 1979.

admitted since then, that it took me only a week to get through BYU.

The classes I took were small. I took theology from President Brimhall and there were only six in my class. There were four of us in history and two in math, and I was all alone in a public speaking class, in which I learned a few things during those few days I spent at college here. I learned how to breathe deeply, how to roar like a lion and squeak like a mouse, and how to gesticulate with my hands. Those are skills I have been using ever since.

The whole student body then at BYU was a relative handful compared with the great company gathered together today, but I believe that the essential things are unchanged. There may be a vast difference in the number of students and in the scope of the Physical Plant, but what matters most is the spirit of the program. Brigham Young University was established for the purpose of helping men and women to learn all that the world has to teach them, but to do so in a setting infused with faith in the continuing concern of God for man, in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and in the capacity and willingness of the Lord to speak to us today, both through the quiet whisperings of the Spirit which come to us as individuals and through the words of leaders he had called to give guidance. That is the spirit I felt here when I was young; it is still the spirit which animates this great institution.

This is a place where there is a broad commitment on the part of both faculty and students to serve the Lord in whatever he asks of them. That commitment makes them better scholars than they would be otherwise. I want to commend all of you on the depth of dedication to both intellectual and spiritual excellence that I perceive in you here. [At this point President Kimball, who was suffering from cataracts and had difficulty reading, asked President Oaks to read the remainder of this speech.]

In the stakes made up of BYU students, there is an exceptionally high level of faithfulness in the more easily measured aspects of gospel

living: the expenditure of countless hours in service to others, the unselfish financial contribution to worthwhile cause, the participation in gospel study and in meetings. What is not so directly observable, but what I sense to be true, is that nowhere in the world is there a more concentrated group of people who have it as their goal to please God and to return to his presence, worthy of his acceptance.

This is "a city . . . set on a hill [which] cannot be hid" (see Matthew 4:14). What you do here is noted far and wide; an act of vandalism at BYU or an irritated letter to the editor of the school newspaper often makes national news. There are millions of people watching. Among them some are hostile, some are jealous, and a great many are curious. They stand in wonder at what we have here set ourselves to achieve. The Lord's standards, which we strive to meet, are high indeed—so high that we are likely sometimes to fail. But temporary setbacks are no disgrace if we try without ceasing. Never, never give up in well doing!

Much is expected of us because much has been given. That is a principle of the Lord. It is important for you to realize that all the facilities and organizations you see about you at this University did not just happen. You have a marvelous setting for your task—fine classrooms, efficient laboratories, extensive libraries, comfortable dormitories, generous recreational facilities, beautiful grounds. And all this comes to you at a small fraction of its actual cost. Most of the balance comes from the tithes of faithful members of the Church—your parents, neighbors, and others throughout the world—who give gladly from their wealth or their poverty in the firm conviction that they are giving the Lord his due. The Church has a sacred responsibility to use those funds well, and in fulfillment of that responsibility we allocate many millions of dollars to the operation of this school. Why? For your benefit, and through you for the benefit of the Kingdom, whose future leaders you are. Since you are the beneficiaries of a great spiritual

heritage, of a great fund of the world's knowledge, and of institutional means for blending the two, we ask you to make this University all that it can be, all that it should be, and all that it must be if we are to fulfill our "errand from the Lord."

Brigham Young University brings together students and faculty who are committed by covenant to live by a unique standard—a standard of freedom from such ills of the world as dishonesty, sexual immorality, disrespect for others, the seeking of pleasures from harmful or addictive drugs, and scorning of the law. And that high standard is largely met by you students and faculty. People are amazed, for example, at the large number of pencils turned in to the Lost and Found Department. That is the kind of meticulous honesty of which we are proud. In addition, there exists here a friendliness, concern, modesty, and self-restraint that are remarkable in a community so large. I only wish that such conduct were universal. But, even here there are a few who still have some maturing and repenting to do. We hear too many reports of destructive pranks, of plagiarism or cheating, or petty shoplifting, of self-appointed censorship or selfish removal of library materials, and of disregard of the University standards of dress and grooming.

When I was here last year, I spoke in the same vein of the need for integrity. I make no apology for returning to that theme, because integrity (which includes the willingness and ability to live by our beliefs and commitments) is one of the foundation stones of good character, and without good character one cannot hope to enjoy the presence of God here or in the eternities. In this institution students and faculty commit themselves explicitly to abide by a code of conduct which includes both living by the moral precepts of the gospel and conforming to a dress and grooming code. Some purport to accept the moral standards as important and denigrate the other as trivial and as intruding on their freedom of choice. These people fundamentally misperceive the question, which is not whether

the dress or grooming code is wise, but whether they should consider themselves bound by a promise. It is not that such a code is forced upon anyone; there is free choice to come here or to go to some other institution which makes no such demands. Indeed, other schools, often supported by tax monies, may be less costly to attend, may have equally high academic standards, and will probably have associated with them a Church-sponsored institute of religion—a program which provides for wholesome social life and gospel study without binding the students to abide by BYU standards. There is no disgrace in making that choice; it is a wholly legitimate option. But once having elected to come here and to participate in this community with its special calling to represent the Church and its highest standards, you must not compromise your integrity by promising what you will not do. By taking covenants lightly, you will wound your eternal self.

I use the word *covenant* deliberately; it is a word with sacred connotations and I mean to use it with all its special spiritual force. Self-justification is easy and rationalization seductive, but the Lord explains in modern revelation that "when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, or our vain ambition . . . the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and . . . he is left unto himself to kick against the pricks . . ." (D&C 121:37–38). Of course we can choose; the free agency is ours, but we cannot escape the consequences of our choice. If there is a chink in your integrity, that is where the devil concentrates his attack.

I assure you that all the standards, both those relating to moral conduct and those relating to dress and grooming, are the result of intense, prayerful consideration by those entrusted with the overseeing of this University. BYU is in the best sense of the word a showplace. You might be surprised at the great number of inquiries we get from people wanting to know more because of what they have seen of BYU, its students, its faculty, and its graduates. They see here the

beautiful grounds and buildings, which you help to keep almost spotless; they see students who have mastered the skills and knowledge they came here to learn as well as learning self-discipline and hard work, and whom employers are eager to hire; they see men and women whose virtue makes them shine in a crowd; they see young adults whose clean-cut appearance demonstrates that they feel no need to follow after the pattern of the world, which often revels in filth and disorder and garish fads; they see young men and young women who look like men and women, who have not succumbed to the morally destructive trend toward a unisex appearance in dress and grooming; they see people living cheerful, orderly lives, devoted to improving their ability to serve God and their fellowmen.

Shakespeare had Polonius truly say, “The apparel oft proclaims the man” (*Hamlet*, act 1, sc. 3). We are affected by our own outward appearances; we tend to fill roles. If we are in our Sunday best, we have little inclination for roughhousing; if we dress for work, we are drawn to work; if we dress immodestly, we are tempted to act immodestly; if we dress like the opposite sex, we tend to lose our sexual identity or some of the graces that distinguish the eternal mission of our sex.

Now I hope not to be misunderstood: I am *not* saying that you should judge one another by appearance, for that would be folly and worse; I am saying that there is a relationship between how we dress and groom ourselves and how we are inclined to feel and act. By seriously urging full conformity with the standards, we must not drive a wedge between brothers and sisters; for there are some who have not heard or do not understand. These are not to be rejected or condemned as evil, but rather loved the more that we may patiently bring them to understand the danger to themselves and the disservice to the institutions to which they owe loyalty, if they depart from their commitments. We hope that

the disregard we sometimes see is mere thoughtlessness and is not deliberate.

Perfection is our goal, but we all still have a long road to travel. Maintain your integrity and seek to live by the Spirit. Keep all the commandments, so that you will one day stand blameless before God. Give the Lord this year and every year your faith and loyalty, that he may look with pleasure upon what you have done.

My beloved young brothers and sisters, I have enjoyed being invited to this place each year to share with you some of my concerns as I, with you, look forward to another season of learning and growing. I commend you for your great faithfulness and devotion to the educational task while living by faith at the same time. You have achieved much already in life to have come this far. Strive to equip yourselves to be honorable, productive citizens of the kingdom.

I have some final thoughts that I would like to share with you. Love one another. I look forward to reunion one day with my parents—a loving mother whom I lost seventy-three years ago, and a faithful father by whose deathbed I sat fifty-five years ago. I have often felt their continuing concern for my welfare, and I know from my own experience how sweet the love of family can be. But I am also grateful for the larger family of which you are all part: my brothers and sisters in Christ. I love you, in all of your variety and in spite of your human failings, and I know that the Lord loves you more—much more—than is in our mortal capacity to love.

I know that those whom the Lord has called to give leadership to his children in this dispensation of time are recipients of divine inspiration. My grandfather sat in the first Quorum of the Twelve; My father served as mission president and stake president in a much smaller Church under five presidents of the Church; I have served as a stake officer and General Authority for sixty-one years. Our three lives have spanned essentially the whole period of the restored Church; taken together,

we have known with some intimacy almost all of the General Authorities since the Restoration. On that basis I tell you that those Church leaders were men whose great accomplishments have transcended even their substantial innate abilities, for the Lord has given them power to do his work.

What I say of the Lord's influence on leaders I say also of his influence on countless thousands of others in whose homes I have stayed, whose testimonies I have heard, and whose good works and unselfish service I have seen. I have learned that where there is a prayerful heart, a hungering after righteousness, a forsaking of sins, and obedience to the commandments of God, the Lord pours out more and more light until one finally has power to pierce the heavenly veil and to know more than man knows. Such a person has a priceless promise that one day he will see the Lord's face and know that he is (see D&C 93:1).

Oftentimes special notice is taken of the General Authorities—and rightly so, since we are under responsibility to pray for them that they may be successful in their callings—but I know that the Lord is just as pleased with any soul on this earth who magnifies whatever calling the Lord has given him as he is with those whose lives and accomplishments are more visible. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said simply but eloquently, "In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines."

And he lived by that precept. I have all my life sustained my leaders, praying for their welfare, and I have in these past years felt a great power coming to me from similar prayers of the Saints, raised to heaven on my behalf.

I am grateful for the Lord's longsuffering. He seems to get so little in return for his investment in us. However, the principle of repentance—of rising again whenever we fall, brushing ourselves off, and setting off again on that upward trail—is the basis for our hope. It is through repentance that the Lord Jesus Christ can work his healing miracle, infusing us with strength when we are weak, health when we are sick, hope when we are downhearted, love when we feel empty, and understanding when we search for truth.

Above all, I declare that Jesus Christ is the center of our faith; I testify to you that he lives. He leads his Church today; he hears our prayers when we humbly, earnestly, unceasingly seek to know his will, making this, too, a day of miracles and of revelation.

[At this point President Kimball arose to conclude the speech.] I should like to give a very grateful thanks to President Oaks for continuing my talk, and I would like to express to all of you—as you go forth to serve the Lord, keep his commandments, and prove his words—a very great thanks also. I bear witness that this is the truth, that that which my fathers and I and your fathers and you have been teaching to the world is true and divine. God bless you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.