

Walk in Beauty

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President Oaks, faculty, students, and friends of BYU, I come before you with heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for this precious opportunity and privilege of speaking to you today. I come in humility, subdued in spirit and desiring only your prayers and the guidance of the Holy Ghost so that what I will say will be the mind and will of the Lord.

It is great to be back on the campus of the greatest university in all the world. I think of BYU as a center of refined culture, spiritual growth, leadership development, learning, and progress. Unlike some universities, it is not a center for atheism, immorality, confusion, hate, crime, or political and moral rebellions. BYU is also a “happy hunting ground” for many of its students; it is here that I met my eternal companion. My wife and I have some choice and fond memories of this place. We are grateful for the beautiful influences of this great and marvelous University.

There is a poetic phrase in Navajo folklore that goes something like this: “May I walk in beauty—beauty behind me, beauty in front of me, beauty above and beneath me, and beauty all around me.” To a Navajo, to “walk in beauty” simply means to be happy and to have peace of mind and peace with oneself; to be happy and at peace with others; to be happy

and at peace with the environment and the world; and to be happy and at peace with the Great Spirit.

It is in this kind of spirit, my brothers and sisters, that I stand before you today. I sincerely feel that I am happy and at peace with myself; happy and at peace with my family; my neighbors, and you; at peace and happy with the world; and at peace and happy with the Lord Jesus Christ. I am especially at peace and happy with my Comanche wife; there is no tribal dispute between her and me. We are probably the only two tribes in the whole USA that are at peace with each other. I simply feel great, my brothers and sisters. To “walk in beauty” means just that—to feel great and at peace in one’s mind about everyone and everything.

The word “great” is a very interesting word. It has the same connotation and meaning as the Navajo phrase, “to walk in beauty.” Sometimes we use this word to apply to persons or things. We can speak about BYU as a

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great institution, you students as a great student body, the faculty as great scholars and teachers, the athletic teams as great athletes or persons, and our nation as a great country. However, this word has one of its finest applications in describing you and me. It designates a human dimension of the highest quality, excellence, or ability.

Greatness is also one of our goals in achieving eternal life. My feeling or philosophy has always been this: If we want to be a great soul in heaven, then we ought to live and practice being a great soul here on earth. In other words, if we desire to become Christlike, we ought to practice and live a Christlike life here and now. To put it in yet another perspective, if we desire exaltation, we ought to “walk in beauty” in all of our days on earth and into the eternities.

Whether our concern is for here or for hereafter, we should be aware of those beautiful godlike virtues or personality traits in each of us that are great in power and in magnitude. These godlike attributes provide divine influences that urge each of us to seek praiseworthy goals. They urge us to reach upward and onward toward perfection in every field of activity. When these character qualities are not disciplined or when they are distorted, ideals are forsaken and the resulting confusion dampens our faith and progress.

Our Heavenly Father represents the greatest good in all the universe. He is all-wise and all-knowing; He possesses all knowledge and is all-powerful and perfect. If you and I will follow Him, His influence, His instructions, and His commandments, we can actually become like Him. He is the giver of all things that are good, positive, and beautiful. We will only “walk in beauty” when we keep His greatness, His virtues, and His qualities in our minds. If we can keep in our minds the thought that we possess His personality traits, mental abilities, and character qualities, our lives will be full of beauty before us, beauty behind us, beauty beneath and above us. Our

lives will be full of successful, spiritual, and beautiful experiences.

If properly trained and disciplined, our godlike human mind can perform some of the most powerful and beautiful things. It can make some of you great teachers, great salesmen, great scientists, great musicians, or simply great persons. Jesus Christ said, “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). There is beauty in our minds if they are full of positive, pleasant, and beautiful thoughts. Faith, courage, strength, industry, and happiness of the greatest possible value can be built only in a mental environment of positive and praiseworthy thoughts. Success or failure starts in the mind. In other words, if you and I did not have heads, we would be perfect.

Whatever kinds of thoughts we entertain in our minds will dictate whether we will succeed or fail in life. Whatever success or accomplishments we obtain in life will be predicated on a disciplined mind thriving on positive and virtuous thoughts. A disciplined mind in a bed of pure thoughts will gradually banish doubts and fears from the mind. Doubts and fear are the enemies of faith, for faith lives and grows in the mind. Faith is nurtured, cultivated, and developed in the mind in the presence of clean and pure thoughts. We live by faith—our faith in ourselves, our faith in others, our faith in our country, our faith in our work, and our faith in God. We will achieve more and we will receive greater personal power and strength only when we have faith in God and in our own worthwhileness. Our Heavenly Father did not place us here on earth to fail, but to succeed. You and I possess enough of His character qualities and enough intelligence to overcome and conquer all of the problems, doubts, fears, sins, and discouragements of life. Every success has a cause, and that cause is a disciplined, positive mind wherein faith is in full bloom. The apostle Paul said:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. [Philippians 4:8]

When we do these things mentioned by Paul, there is peace and serenity in our minds; our faith grows; and we begin to develop those godlike qualities of honor, integrity, love, patience, understanding, fairness, and truthfulness to their utmost. We begin to “walk in beauty” with an inner glow of peace and happiness, having rid our minds of hate, envy, jealousy, prejudice, doubts, fears, inferiority complexes, and negative attitudes.

We should furnish our minds with ideas of faith, positive thinking, industry, courage, and righteousness. With these helpful, stimulating, and motivating ideas, our faith and strength are greatly increased, we begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness, we develop a high self-esteem, and we increase our love for God and for our fellowmen. Our minds become more receptive to spiritual things and to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. We form a philosophy of life and a depth of character that can guarantee almost any success by keeping us on the straight and narrow path toward the celestial kingdom.

One of the biggest problems, my brothers and sisters, that can come into our life is to develop a low self-esteem, or a low opinion of ourselves. We fall into this predicament when we either allow our minds to go undisciplined or develop negative, rebellious minds. Unless our minds are well managed, they will run wild like morning-glory vines. King Solomon once said, “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). He could very well have said, “As a man thinketh in his *mind*, so is he.” If our minds are not properly trained or are filled with critical, rebellious, unclean, or other negative thoughts, then we build up our

hate and our sins, nurture our discouragements, and enlarge our self-doubts. An undisciplined, negative mind will become mixed up and confused. It will begin to fight against others and against the Church, tear down the government, and rebel against God.

It is when we are in this state of mind that we are usually the hardest on ourselves. We know more about our faults and weaknesses than anyone else; and when we are in this condition we are not strong enough to handle properly our doubts, our fears, our sins and bad habits. We will then begin to develop inferiority complexes and destructive feelings of guilt. Damaging self-criticism and self-condemnation are born in this kind of environment. Sometimes we limit ourselves by comparing ourselves to others and therefore never trying because we feel inferior to others.

A ragged, ten-year-old Navajo boy—fresh off the reservation, unexposed to the world, living in a Mormon foster home in the Church’s Indian Placement Program—would never have succeeded had he compared himself to his Anglo friends, who were far more educated, advanced, and prepared than he was. He did not start school until he was eight years of age, and then was quickly advanced three or four grades because he was behind in his grade and was over age. He had a poor command of the English language. His parents were illiterate. He was from a large family. He was raised on desert animals and mutton stew. He seldom had a decent bath for lack of water. He was raised on a dirt floor in a small one-room Hogan without modern conveniences and luxuries. He succeeded educationally, socially, and spiritually because he was his own competitor and because he set out to develop a high opinion of himself and to develop a more positive mind.

Unrighteous self-criticism and criticism of others are born in the mind, and they can be very destructive. Unjust self-criticism and fault-finding with others are just two of the

things that are perpetuated by Satan. Self-appraisal, when handled properly and in the right spirit, can be helpful.

A person with a low self-esteem will usually blame others for all his troubles and problems and failures. He will begin to say that “they” are to blame. He will gradually lose self-confidence and initiative. He usually does not think well of himself and reacts negatively toward others. Generally, he is mad at the world, the schools, the government, the Church, his teachers, and his priesthood leaders. His rebellious mind will lead to rebellious actions.

If we should ever find ourselves in such circumstances, the cure is not to remodel or change the world but to change our self-world first. It is futile and useless to curse and blame the establishment, the schools, the governments, the Church, or the administration. The cure is to look at ourselves and to change our attitudes and rebellious minds. The change has to come from within first; and then, as we change inside, the world and people will begin to be a little more beautiful. This is especially true for minority groups when they are exposed to the majority, and sometimes for members of the majority when they are in the minority.

It is impossible for you and me to “walk in beauty” while our minds are filled with old grudges and bitterness that are pouring poison into our systems. A little hate, a touch of prejudice, a touch of jealousy lodged in our minds can be compared to cancer. They can spread rapidly and run wild, seriously injuring our self-confidence and critically damaging the self-esteem of others.

While it is important to put the right kinds of thoughts into our minds, it is equally important to know how to get negative thoughts out of our minds. Positive, virtuous thoughts should be put into the minds while impure thoughts are gradually eliminated.

Doubts and fears thrive and mushroom from a seed of negative and impure thoughts. Faith

is retarded in an atmosphere of weak and evil thoughts. When our minds are full of bitterness, we live in a world of sin. When our minds are full of evil, we live in a world of hate. When our minds are full of doubt, we live in a world of fears. Sin is born in the mind. Immorality is born in the mind. Crime is nurtured in the mind. Cheating and dishonesty are cultivated and developed in the mind. Fault-finding is born and nurtured in the mind. Hate and prejudice are born in the mind.

Some of us sometimes carry a burden of accumulated guilt or sin, causing us to feel unworthy and to withdraw from families, friends, and Church activity. Evil and weak thoughts that have not banished from our minds can cause us to give up on ourselves, and we gradually lose our self-respect and self-confidence.

One of the main purposes of the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ was to help you and me establish a more successful, positive, and happy way of life with a well-trained mind and a disciplined character so that we will succeed in reaching the celestial kingdom. He said at one time,

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
[Matthew 11:28–30]

What the Lord meant was, “adopt my way of life—live, think, and act as I do.” He invited us to think as He did and to live as He did. He wants us to manage our minds properly and train and discipline our character properly—in other words, to empty our mind of all bitter thoughts, jealous thoughts, evil thoughts, and other negative and weak thoughts. Jesus Christ never entertained any doubts, fears, hate, evil,

or other negative thoughts in His mind. He invites you and me to do the same thing.

Only when we get the weak and evil thoughts out of our minds can we begin to “walk in beauty” and achieve our goal of eternal life with our Heavenly Father. We need to empty the impure thoughts out of our minds, and to get down on our knees and repent of them if we need to do so. Scriptures make it very clear that no unclean thing can enter God’s presence. The celestial kingdom could not be the celestial kingdom if it were filled with hate, doubt, fears, negative thinking, immorality, and selfishness.

To develop a well-trained mind full of positive, virtuous thoughts is light. The scriptures say, “that which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). The more you entertain good, righteous thoughts, the more light you receive. The more light you receive, the closer you get to perfection; and the closer you get to perfection, the closer you are to becoming a possessor of all things that the Lord has. He said, “Wherefore, he is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son” (D&C 50:27).

But the Lord also said that “no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin” (D&C 50:28). “Cleansed from all sin” included emptying our minds of all weak, negative, and evil thoughts. These impure thoughts represent darkness, and the Lord told us to “chase darkness from among you” (D&C 50:25). Selfish and evil thoughts debase the soul. Jesus Christ condemned the

fostering of such thoughts, motives, and feelings.

We can control our future by being able to control what we put into our minds. William James, a famous author and psychologist, had this quote to offer:

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*
[John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), p. 1100.]

Important it is, my brothers and sisters, that we think wholesome, kindly thoughts. Thoughts are the seeds of acts. Righteous thoughts, if consistently kept in the forefront of the mind, will inevitably lead to righteous acts. Even the thoughts in our minds at this very moment are contributing significantly in shaping our character and soul.

May I admonish and counsel each of us, my brothers and sisters, to consider seriously Mormon’s last affectionate wish for his son Moroni: “My son, be faithful in Christ; . . . and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

My brothers and sisters, may our Heavenly Father’s divine care and inspiration always attend you. May you think in beauty, may you talk in beauty, may you live in beauty—beauty before you, beauty behind you, beauty above and beneath you, beauty all around you in all of your days here on earth and into the eternities—I humbly pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ. Amen.