

“Anxiously Engaged”

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My brothers and sisters, it is an honor for me to be with you today. You are choice sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven, sent here at this time to perform a great mission. I know many of you well and others in passing. You are wonderful, and I feel your spirit and know of your goodness and your righteous desires. I humbly pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be with us and that each of us may know His will as we focus on the goal to build His kingdom.

Recently, as we always do, the coaches of the volleyball team evaluated this past season. We lamented the fact that if we had been three points better in our last match, we would have advanced to the next round of the NCAA championships. After further analysis it was apparent that the results of several of our matches could have been different if we had only been three to six points better. Different training, a more consistent performance, or a better coaching decision could have made the difference. We determined that if each of us on the coaching staff and on the volleyball team is a little better, collectively we will be a lot better.

I invite all of you to join our team in trying to be a little bit better at whatever we do. For the purpose of our discussion today, I challenge

all of us to do as the Lord instructs in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.
[D&C 58:27–28]

President Gordon B. Hinckley, by his example and by his instruction, teaches us about that great cause in which we should be anxiously engaged:

How glorious is the past of this great cause. It is filled with heroism, courage, boldness, and faith. How wondrous is the present as we move forward to bless the lives of people wherever they will hearken to the message of the servants of the Lord. How magnificent will be the future as the Almighty rolls on His glorious work, touching for good all who will accept and live His gospel, and even reaching to the eternal blessing of His sons and daughters

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of all generations through the selfless work of those whose hearts are filled with love for the Redeemer of the world. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Stand a Little Taller: Counsel and Inspiration for Each Day of the Year* (Salt Lake City: Eagle Gate, 2001), 38]

Because we love the Redeemer, we are called to the work. We should be anxiously engaged in bringing to pass much righteousness. We have the power: let us be about doing good. The Spirit will guide us in knowing what and how to do it, for we are agents unto ourselves.

As we strive to be better, I would like to suggest 10 things we might do to be anxiously engaged in bringing to pass much righteousness.

1. Prayerfully Act

President Ezra Taft Benson taught:

Less spiritually advanced people, such as those in the days of Moses, had to be commanded in many things. Today those spiritually alert look at the objectives, check the guidelines laid down by the Lord and his prophets, and then prayerfully act—without having to be commanded “in all things.” This attitude prepares men for godhood. [CR, April 1965, 121]

If you prayerfully and anxiously engage in opportunities to act, and pursue them with diligence, you will find yourself progressing toward your goals and contributing to the Lord’s cause. The Lord will direct your life and lead you to magnify your callings.

I, like many of you, was directed to BYU even though my friends attended other institutions. I came planning to pursue a career in elementary education. As I became involved in one of my favorite activities, sports, I found opportunities for leadership. Soon I found I had talent and a desire to pursue physical education. By devoting my energies to developing these talents, I was selected to teach and help direct university student programs.

As I approached graduation I received a contract for my dream job, teaching at a prestigious high school in Salt Lake City. Just before school ended, the dean of the college called me to his office, asked me to give up my contract to teach at the high school, and requested that I teach at Brigham Young University the next year. I had never envisioned the possibility of teaching at BYU. I did not have the exceptional intelligence I saw in my university professors. But the Lord knew my willingness to be an instrument in His hands to find a special way to serve the youth of the Church and serve in this part of the kingdom.

If we are anxiously engaged in whatever we are inspired and called to do, we will be prepared for what the Lord has in store for us as we go through life. For some it may not be the conventional path. If we are diligent it will be the direction the Lord would have us follow. He knows what is in store for us and will lead us to the fulfillment of our purpose in life.

So I would urge you and me to be a little bit better in our service. Be better prepared for your teaching assignment in the ward. Do your assignments well and on time. Study the gospel with the same intensity as you do your academic work. Prayerfully act to meet the needs of those you serve in your callings as a home teacher or visiting teacher.

2. Contribute Good to the World

In the book of Moroni, Mormon taught: “For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also” (Moroni 7:5).

President Hinckley added:

You are good. But it is not enough just to be good. You must be good for something. You must contribute good to the world. The world must be

a better place for your presence. And the good that is in you must be spread to others. [Hinckley, *Stand a Little*, 26]

Do something good in the world each day. Help someone in need. Be good at your work so that others may benefit. Share the blessings of the gospel. Be a good brother or sister to others.

3. Be an Example of the Virtues of the Gospel

One of the ways we can make the world better is by the way we live our lives. If we are examples of honesty, character, and integrity, our influence will help others to recognize these values as qualities they respect and want in their own lives.

In the recent Australian Open—one of the grand-slam professional tennis tour championships—Jiri Novak from the Czech Republic was playing a critical game in a quarterfinal match. On game point his opponent hit a ball that the linesman called long. His opponent asked the umpire to overrule the linesman. The ball had landed on the side of the court, which allowed the umpire to get a good look at the ball, but the umpire refused to overrule the linesman. Knowing the call would give his opponent the game, Novak told the umpire the ball was in, and his opponent was awarded the point. The capacity crowd vigorously applauded his honor call.

There are several significant points in this incident. Novak was a professional athlete, and there was a lot of money weighing on the outcome of this match, which he lost. It is not common for this type of honor call to happen in major tennis competitions. The crowd's response is indicative of respect for the honesty exhibited in this situation. People believe in the virtue of honesty. However, it takes courage and character to live these virtues in our world.

In the second collegiate national championships for volleyball in 1970, the BYU team was playing in a pool-play match to determine

qualification for the quarterfinals. Brenda, the middle blocker, hit the ball, which landed in the opponent's court, giving the team the final point of the match. The team celebrated, except for Brenda. She told the referee that she had touched the net. The referee was stunned and unsure what to do. Brenda noted the official's hesitation and explained she realized it was difficult to see, but she had touched the net, which made it an illegal play. The official reversed the call, and play continued. After the match several missionaries brought some investigators to see the team. The honor call became an interesting point of discussion.

As the tournament progressed, there were other occasions where honor calls were used by BYU's team. Some teams would also make honor calls when they competed against BYU, but not during their matches with other opponents. The National Association for Girls and Women in Sport was the governing body of the championship at that time. The members of the NAGWS board of directors, who witnessed the events at the championships, were so impressed with the honor calls at the competitions that a statement was drafted for the rule book that requested coaches and officials to encourage honor calls in competitions governed by NAGWS rules. That statement still appears in the current rule book.

Last spring the softball team was playing a game against Louisiana Tech. The score was 0 to 0 in the fifth inning. The Louisiana Tech lead-off hitter sent a ball deep to center field. The umpire ruled that it was a ground rule double because the ball had bounced over the fence. The BYU center fielder, while chasing the ball, stumbled over the fence. Coach Amicone went to see if she was okay, and she told her she was but that the ball went over the fence, making it a home run. This was also confirmed by both the left and right fielders.

Coach Amicone went to the second-base umpire and told him the ball had gone over

the fence without bouncing, so it was a home run. The second-base umpire met with the home-plate umpire, and they decided since it was a judgment call, he had to leave the Louisiana Tech player at second base.

Later in the game the umpire told BYU's catcher that he had never seen anyone come to an umpire to tell him the ball went over the fence as a home run when the call was favorable to their team. He was amazed by the honesty of the players. In all his experience he had never seen anything like that before.

As we strive to be examples to the world, I ask all of you to evaluate your behavior at our athletic contests. Do you treat our guests, fans, opponents, referees, and media with respect? Will they be favorably impressed with our university as they leave the arena? Will our behavior be an example of what we believe? The teams do not need you to taunt, distract, or be demeaning to our opponents or officials. We want to compete fairly and win based on the quality of our play. We want to win against an opponent on his or her best day. Help us to play our best by offering your support and encouragement.

A mission of the university athletic teams is to be missionaries and to build the kingdom by the example we set and the quality of our play. At a meeting with Elder Henry B. Eyring, the coaches were counseled to lead our teams to be "very, very good and very, very nice." Many times we are in a position to open doors for missionaries because we have had an opportunity to be an example on the court, on television, or as we travel of who we are and what we represent. We hope that example will cause someone to take an interest in the Church we represent. I invite you to be a part of that example, influencing those who share the arena with us to have a favorable impression of BYU.

4. Be Valiant in the Cause of Truth

Everyone has opportunities to demonstrate by example the virtues of the gospel. In his book *Standing for Something*, President Hinckley pleaded with us to stand for what we believe:

We cannot be indifferent to the great cause of truth and right. We cannot afford to stand on the sidelines and watch the play between the forces of good and evil. Wrote John the Revelator: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16).

*John's imagery is vivid. It points to our critical duty to stand strong, even to become leaders in speaking up on behalf of those causes that make our civilization shine. Each of us can be a leader within our sphere of influence. The adversary of all truth would put into our hearts a reluctance to make an effort; we must cast that fear aside and be valiant in the cause of truth, fairness, and right. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing for Something* (New York: Times Books, 2000), 171–72]*

Life at BYU is a good one. We have made commitments to live a higher standard based on gospel principles. It is important to understand the meaning of those commitments we have made and make them a permanent part of our lifestyle. These standards can be an armor to help ward off the ways of the world. With this commitment to live the gospel comes the courage to stand strong and be valiant in the cause of truth.

While we are learning at the feet of the apostles of the Lord and His servants, we should listen and learn from their counsel and teachings. We should check our armor for chinks that could be stumbling blocks placed in our path by the adversary. How are you doing with the Honor Code? Are you committed to its value to you as a code of conduct that makes you a worthy servant of the Lord? Do you support the Dress and Grooming Standards? Do you

understand the purpose of these standards? Standards and guidelines help us keep focused on why we are here and prepare us to stand strong and be valiant leaders.

5. Seek the Companionship of the Spirit

When I was in my teenage years, my father was a stake president. At that time the General Authorities stayed overnight in the home of the stake president on Saturday night between stake conference sessions. We had a small, humble home with only two bedrooms appropriate for the visiting Brethren: my parent's room and my simple room. My room became the guest room. I remember cleaning thoroughly and preparing my room so everything was neat, orderly, and appropriate for our guests. I felt everything and every activity conducted therein needed to contribute to an atmosphere where the Spirit could be present for our guests. Many apostles and other leaders spent a night in my room.

That experience led me to a lifelong quest to be sure my life is in order to invite the Spirit to be my companion. How we dress, our conduct, our environment, our associates, and the activities in which we engage all influence the opportunity for the Spirit to be a part of our lives. If we keep our lives in order, the companionship of the Spirit will provide us with peace, comfort, guidance, and promptings. It will enlighten us regarding the Lord's will and help us testify of Christ.

6. Beware of the Adversary

It is not always easy to live each day as we would like. But it is easier when we take care of the chinks in our armor.

An example of one of the more subtle chinks the adversary uses to divert our attention from the influence of the Spirit is pride. President Ezra Taft Benson in his wonderful talk on pride declared that "pride is a sin" and cited several faces of pride: "selfishness . . . , self-conceit, self-pity, worldly self-fulfillment,

self-gratification, and self-seeking." President Benson continued, "The proud depend upon the world to tell them whether they have value or not. . . . Pride is ugly. It says, 'If you succeed, I am a failure'" (Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 5, 6).

There are many circumstances in the university setting that can foster pride. Whenever there is a status system, it is a challenge to value people and work equally. Being a member of a team where there are starters, finishers, and substitutes is another setting where pride can enter into the team chemistry. People who are not teachable or become defensive limit their progress because of pride. Worldly recognition and awards may not be equal and fair and can subtly foster pride unless perspective and recognition of the contributions of others are acknowledged.

Where pride is prevalent, unity is impossible. Unity is mandatory for a team to succeed. It is also mandatory for a family, a marriage, or a business to succeed. I believe that a primary factor in the success of our teams at BYU is team chemistry, where the focus is on the team as we compete. The true meaning of competition embodies the process of striving together.

President Benson continued in his address: "The antidote for pride is humility—meekness, submissiveness. (See Alma 7:23.) It is the broken heart and contrite spirit" (Benson, "Beware," 6). Humble behavior is selflessness and respect and esteem for others as ourselves. It is doing service, being teachable, submitting to the Lord's will, and putting Him first in our lives. In closing his masterful address on pride, President Benson declared, "We must yield 'to the enticings of the Holy Spirit,' put off the prideful 'natural man,' become 'a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord,' and become 'as a child, submissive, meek, humble'" (Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware," 7).

Listen to the prophets. They will warn us of the ways the adversary will challenge our commitment to the Lord. Yield to the enticings

of the Holy Spirit, who is our personal guide to help us become a saint.

7. Be a Participant

We saw many great examples of gracious, humble athletes during the Olympics. Their sincere appreciation for the opportunity to participate was expressed often. Although goals may not have been reached, satisfaction in doing one's best was their reward. What a wonderful experience it was for all of us to share with the world the joy of participation and effort. We would all do well to adopt the Olympic Creed:

The important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part. The important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well. [Baron Pierre de Coubertin, in *Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles 1984 Commemorative Book* (Salt Lake City: International Sport Publications, Inc., 1984), 270]

I like the definition and insights of a champion offered by 11-year-old Mattie Stepanek:

On Being a Champion

*A champion is a winner,
A hero . . .
Someone who never gives up
Even when the going gets rough.
A champion is a member of
A winning team . . .
Someone who overcomes challenges
Even when it requires creative solutions.
A champion is an optimist,
A hopeful spirit . . .
Someone who plays the game,
Even when the game is called life . . .
Especially when the game is called life.
There can be a champion in each of us,
If we live as a winner,*

*If we live as a member of the team,
If we live with a hopeful spirit,
For life.*

[Mattie J. T. Stepanek, *Journey Through Heartsongs* (New York: Hyperion, 2001), 20]

Be a participant, enjoy life, don't worry and fret. Have a hopeful spirit. Be anxiously engaged in the game of life.

8. Stay Focused

It is easier to keep the commandments and our covenants when we keep the game plan in focus. Understanding the plan of salvation and keeping our focus on preparation for exaltation will help us to keep our priorities straight. If we will remember to keep our focus every day and make every decision based on our goal to return to our Heavenly Father with the help of our Brother, Jesus Christ, we will have eternal life.

Life's experience is a lot like a game. It is hard to keep focused for the duration of the game—or the match. The opponent provides challenges and tests as the game progresses. When there is a letdown, we fall behind. But we can refocus and get back on track. With the new rally scoring in volleyball, we divided the game into seven-point minigames to provide a checkpoint on how we were doing to meet our end goal. Coach Judkins divided the basketball game into eight, five-minute segments to help the basketball team focus. During breaks, coaches build confidence, provide counsel, give encouragement, and adjust strategy. Coaches never give up—they always believe they can still achieve a goal. They coach to the last play.

Life is like the game. We lose focus sometimes. Our prayers have less meaning. Daily pressures make it hard to study the scriptures. We forget to listen to the Spirit. The opposition diverts our attention to world affairs. When there is a letdown, we fall behind. But we can refocus and get back on track. The Lord

has given us hours, days, and years as checkpoints to help us focus on the final goal of eternal life. We have coaches of life to help us toward that goal: parents, teachers, friends, bishops, angels, prophets, apostles, home teachers, visiting teachers, leaders, and the Holy Spirit. Use valuable checkpoints to help you: prayer, scriptures, church attendance, devotionals, and service. We must keep our focus. Never give up. Your coaches will be there to the last play.

9. Be Happy

The key to happiness is to be anxiously engaged in doing whatever we are guided to do by the Holy Spirit to be a part of this great cause. This will bring true happiness. President Gordon B. Hinckley expressed it this way:

Do you want to be happy? Forget yourself and get lost in this great cause. Lend your efforts to helping people. Cultivate a spirit of forgiveness in your heart against any who might have offended you. Look to the Lord and live and work to lift and serve His sons and daughters. You will come to know a happiness that you have never known before if you will do that. [Hinckley, Stand a Little, 192]

The happiness you will experience is the joy of effort. A great example is the missionaries who serve years in the mission field and return with unfulfilled dreams of numerous converts, yet they speak of the greatness of their mission because of the joy of being totally engaged in a good cause. It is like the Olympian who trains hours, days, and years to participate, knowing that only one will receive the gold. To participate and enjoy the process of striving to reach your potential is worth the effort.

It is the same for us as we strive and train daily for eternal life. It is a wonderful experience as we progress through life to reach our full potential as sons and daughters of our Heavenly

Father. But in the Lord's plan, He desires all of us to obtain the gold, which is eternal life.

As with the Olympic athlete, there will be challenges and setbacks in our progression. There may even be a major problem like a knee injury, which means there has to be rehabilitation before we can continue to progress. It takes courage and determination to endure and pursue the goal. We know the adversary will put stumbling blocks in the way. But we have our support system to help us. Remember that the Savior has experienced all the emotions, pains, and suffering we will have to endure. He will be there to show us the way. Being anxiously engaged in this great cause will bring you great joy.

10. Bear Testimony

In closing, I would like to share with you one of my favorite scriptures:

Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come. [D&C 68:6]

The phrase "be of good cheer" is one of my favorite messages from the Savior. It implies a life of joy, happiness, and optimism based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and our knowledge of the plan of salvation. We know that He lives and loves us and is our advocate with our Father in Heaven. This faith in the Lord and our gratitude for His atoning sacrifice compels us to assist in this great work by bearing our testimony that He is the Son of the living God, that this is His work, and that He will come again.

We cannot be slackers in our commitment to the Lord, in our effort to be an example of His teaching, or in our desire to share what we have with those with whom we have contact. Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and our gratitude for His sacrifice for us

compels us to serve by bearing testimony of Him, even Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. May we do this by our example and our performance, knowing we need not fear but can have courage because the Lord is with us and will stand by us. May the Lord bless each of us as we strive to serve.

Let us strive to be anxiously engaged in bringing to pass much righteousness. I invite

you to join me in trying to be a little bit better in His service.

I leave with you my testimony that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, our Heavenly Father. This is His work, and we are called to the work because we love Him, our Redeemer. Be of good cheer is my prayer for all of us in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.