

Dally Up: Finding Our Anchor in Turbulent Times

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I am humbled and thankful to be among so many friends today and to see so many of my current and former students. Thank you for this opportunity, President Worthen.

I grew up on a large cattle ranch, first near Eureka, Nevada, and later in Kanosh, Utah. I would start the days very early by catching and saddling my horse in the moonlit and frosty morning hours. As the first rays of sunshine would start coming over the mountains, the cowboys I was working with would scatter out and begin looking for cows and calves from among sagebrush flats and juniper-covered hillsides. The sight was surreal as I would watch hundreds of cows and calves being herded toward a corral to be branded and vaccinated.

As a young boy I aspired to be able to rope the calves as my part of the branding. Alternative responsibilities entailed wrestling the calves to the ground, oftentimes resulting in me getting kicked or run over. At about the age of seven, after repeated failures in tackling the calves, I was finally allowed to try my hand at roping. I remember proudly getting my lasso rope ready and searching out the smallest and slowest-looking calf in the herd. I carefully planned my throw, and I felt the thrill of

accomplishment when the loop settled over the calf successfully. Though the calf was seemingly small and slow, I felt its tremendous force start to jerk me off my horse. Despite trying my best to hold onto the calf, I found that my strength was no match for him. Just as I was being violently jerked out of my saddle, I heard a wise cowboy yell across to me: “Dally up!”

To dally means to take the rope and making two or three quick wraps around the saddle horn. The saddle becomes an anchor point, which connects to the greater strength of a steady and powerful horse. The dally transformed my situation of having inadequate personal strength to being able to access a greater power that anchored the turbulent polar forces acting upon me. This simple act allowed me to draw strength from something far greater than myself. Instead of being violently yanked from my saddle, I found the relative ease of letting my horse do the pulling while I had the much more simple and manageable task of holding the dally tight and maintaining the connection to the anchoring force.

Casey Peterson was the BYU associate dean of students when this devotional address was given on 5 May 2015.

Many times in my life since then I have felt the strength of greater powers than I have been prepared to withstand. These have seemed to yank me from a place of security and comfort. Each time, I have reflected upon opportunities to dally up to a power greater than my own that can serve as an anchor of strength. I would like to share some of the points of my learning about how to dally up in our inevitable circumstances and the need to find our anchor during turbulent times in our lives:

1. Strength in service
2. Strength in involvement
3. Strength in commitments

Strength in Service

When I was four my father was killed in a farming accident. I remember the confusion, the pain, and the worry of my widowed mother. My father was near completion of his degree from BYU and had returned to the family farm to support his young family. Upon his untimely death, many faculty members and department representatives reached out to our family to make sure my father's diploma was received. I remember the small cap and gown that was prepared for me and the nervous excitement of participating in graduation exercises. The personal care, the concern, and the service that those faculty members and administrators gave to my family became an anchor during our tragedy. They continued that care and concern for years, up through the time I was able to be a student myself on this campus and receive my own diploma. The fourth AIM of a BYU education—"lifelong learning and service"¹—has had special significance for me, as I have felt an association between BYU and service on a deeply personal level. My love for BYU students, faculty, and administrators comes because I have been loved by so many in so many ways.

My definition of service comes from Alma 17. Upon feeling a desire to change and to

transition from selfish actions to selfless service, the sons of Mosiah "fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be *an instrument in the hands of God.*"² This campus is filled with many instruments—scientific, laboratory, research, musical, and others. Instruments provide access to all kinds of power. As opposed to tools, which have an inherent power within them based on mass and force, the power of instruments comes from the skill of a master. A master surgeon, a master musician, or a master teacher can do remarkable things while working with instruments.

The sons of Mosiah were not seeking language skills, motivational techniques, behavioral understanding, or psychological analysis of the individuals they were serving. They were seeking to be instruments in the hands of God, allowing His power to flow through them and be made manifest in the lives of those they served. One of the most humbling emotions we can experience is feeling God's perfect power and trust working through us, achieving far greater results than we otherwise could imagine. Those being served are impacted more deeply, and those serving also are blessed. Power in service is the power of God working through us as instruments. Y-Serve students at BYU exemplify the anchoring power of service, especially how being an instrument in God's hands anchors our relationship to Him. [A video about BYU students serving through the Y-Serve office was shown.] Notice the anchoring power of service in the lives of these students, their examples of service, and the strength that service has brought.

Strength in Involvement

We are fortunate on this campus to have offices, ecclesiastical groups, and activities that facilitate service opportunities. BYUSA, Student Leadership, the University

Accessibility Center, Multicultural Student Services, International Student Services, the Residence Halls Association, the Marriott Undergraduate Student Association, First-Year Experience, academic and BYUSA clubs, Student Alumni, wards and stakes, Women's Services and Resources, and the previously mentioned Y-Serve are some of the organizations that provide opportunities to get involved on campus and in the community. As I work with departments and organizations focused on service, I am amazed at the mutual reciprocity between servers and receivers that allows service to flow between them. I love the parables found in Luke 15 that I believe explain both the purposes and the people intended to get involved.

The first is the parable of the lost sheep. My kids and I have a farm near our home in Salem. My kids raise animals to pay for their activities, educations, and missions. We are very familiar with the concept of animals getting out and wandering. The parable of the lost sheep is about leaving the comfort of the flock and the fold and looking for something better, probably food. Looking for something better is not a bad thing. Don't we all aspire to find something better in our lives? In fact, isn't coming to college much like leaving our comfortable flock and fold to venture out to an unfamiliar environment that will improve our situation?

Across campus there are activities, events, involvement, and food that are publicized to encourage and entice the lost sheep of campus to find something better. Are we looking for these lost sheep and helping them find their way? President Worthen has often said that if we look hard enough, those students are easy to see. In one way or another, we all are looking for something better, and it can be challenging to find something better without a caring shepherd to assist our efforts. Let us be those shepherds. Service is the

connecting conduit that brings lost souls from the periphery into the fold of involvement and acceptance.

The second parable is of the lost coin. This wasn't an issue of monetary devaluation, but it was an issue of priority. The money meant something to the woman, but perhaps not enough to be a high priority of care and concern for her. Other tasks, other items, and perhaps other people caused her to neglect her coin until it became lost.

How many people on campus who have infinite worth are neglected as we worry more about our own selfish tasks, our own items, and our own circles of friends? One of my greatest wishes for this campus is that the worth of each student is recognized and not one is lost in obscurity or has a feeling of unimportance and neglect. To accomplish that, we all need to reach out in care, compassion, and conversation to each other. During inevitable times of sadness, loneliness, or inadequacy, there are thousands of students, programs, clubs, activities, and opportunities awaiting you. Instead of waiting for them to find you, please step up and volunteer to lead those activities. Leaders feel the strongest anchor through increased investment and involvement.

The worth of souls, we know, is great to God; let us never neglect each person who is a child of Him. I am grateful each day to learn about the stories and lives of individual students who become involved. They are fascinating in what they have overcome, what talents they bring, and who they are. Each of us has a story, and each of us has great worth. Taking the time to get to know others offers us great opportunities to learn charity through our involvement.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton defined charity in the following way:

Real charity is not something you give away; it is something that you acquire and make a part of yourself. And when the virtue of charity becomes

implanted in your heart, you are never the same again. . . .

Perhaps the greatest charity comes when we are kind to each other, when we don't judge or categorize someone else, when we simply give each other the benefit of the doubt or remain quiet. Charity is accepting someone's differences, weaknesses, and shortcomings; having patience with someone who has let us down; or resisting the impulse to become offended when someone doesn't handle something the way we might have hoped. Charity is refusing to take advantage of another's weakness and being willing to forgive someone who has hurt us. Charity is expecting the best of each other.³

Charity for others becomes an anchoring point, achieved by knowing the Savior through seeing and serving others as He does. Service is the laboratory for learning charity. As we come to have charity for others, love God, and serve others, we begin to be stronger in the covenants and commitments that bind us to them and to find their infinite worth.

The third parable is of the prodigal son. It is an instance of selfishness and rebellion. For whatever reason, there are those in our midst who are in open rebellion or are participating in selfish behaviors. Often their actions are detrimental and destructive. Their storminess and turbulence create divisiveness and dissension. The parable of the prodigal son teaches unconditional love for the individual, even when we don't accept their behaviors. But if left unchecked, rebellious actions lead to a loss of the sense of the sacred that Elder D. Todd Christofferson spoke of when he stated:

The importance of having a sense of the sacred is simply this—if one does not appreciate holy things, he will lose them. Absent a feeling of reverence, he will grow increasingly casual in attitude and lax in conduct. He will drift from the moorings that his covenants with God could provide. His feeling of accountability to God will diminish and then be forgotten. Thereafter, he will care only about his own

comfort and satisfying his uncontrolled appetites. Finally, he will come to despise sacred things, even God, and then he will despise himself.

On the other hand, with a sense of the sacred, one grows in understanding and truth. The Holy Spirit becomes his frequent and then constant companion. More and more he will stand in holy places and be entrusted with holy things. Just the opposite of cynicism and despair, his end is eternal life.⁴

We have the opportunity and responsibility through service and involvement to help those who are willfully rebelling regain their sense of the sacred. This can be the most difficult service that we give, but it can yield high rewards throughout eternity.

Strength in Commitments

In his inaugural address at BYU, President Kevin J. Worthen stated:

We must go to the mountains spiritually if we are to obtain an elevated and ethereal education. It is not enough to gain learning by study; we must also live our lives in such a way that we—both students and faculty—are able to receive inspiration directly from God. That requires adherence to both the spirit and letter of the Honor Code—which was designed not just to distinguish us from other universities but to prepare us for elevated forms of learning.⁵

One way that we are a unique and elevated university is through our observance and commitment to the Honor Code that President Worthen spoke of. The Honor Code is a blessing and an anchor given to us at BYU to stabilize our moral, academic, social, and spiritual pursuits. As President Worthen also explained, it is designed to elevate us in these pursuits. I am saddened by those who continually neglect aspects of the Honor Code or, worse, try to reduce the rigor of the Honor Code by changing it. They argue that it is outdated and antiquated. Yet elevated learning and constancy in commitment are unwavering

blessings that are part of our “quest for perfection and eternal life,”⁶ as stated in the Mission of BYU. How can we truly expect the anchoring power of the Spirit in our lives if we are lax, lazy, or disparaging in our observance to a commitment that we have made? Is it elevated learning if we seek the minimum of standards or play the game of not getting caught? A student I recently met had grown his hair for two years until it reached down his back while still attending classes, church, and activities on campus. He explained that it became a quest for him to see how long he could go without someone telling him to cut his hair. He placed the responsibility for his commitment on others to enforce it. That student has now come around, is one of my dear friends, and is doing fantastically well with Honor Code compliance—haircut in place.

Other students rationalize that if they don’t have a test in the Testing Center, an intramural game, or a work requirement, dress and grooming standards don’t need to be observed. They begin to focus on enforcement by the institution and not the integrity of the individual. In fact, the first point of the Honor Code is honesty. I believe that if all students understood and esteemed this point of being honest in their commitments and their covenants, then we wouldn’t have to talk about how often to shave, what constitutes modest clothing, what moral boundaries not to cross, academic honesty, curfew times, and even the dreaded man bun. Our vision would be lifted from the minimally accepted social standards to what President Worthen called “elevated and ethereal education.” What distinguishes us from other universities is the individual commitment of each student to uphold his or her commitment based on individual integrity. This is summed up in the beautiful poem by Edwin Markham:

*Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilded goes?*

*In vain we build the world, unless
The builder also grows.⁷*

I appreciate an institution that is not just concerned with building facilities, reputations, and research but that is based on a foundation of integrity and commitment. Individuals will be able to experience elevated learning that helps build testimonies, families, communities, careers, and the Church. In construction, the quality of the materials determines the strength of the product; with our learning, our character and commitment determine the strength of our product, anchored resolutely to the infinite power of God.

Ether 12:27 reads: “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble.” Notice that the scripture refers to *weakness*—a singular term. In the presence of God, I imagine I would recognize many areas of improvement that I would need to make. Yet this scripture states that in His presence it is our weakness that we are shown. I believe this weakness refers to our relationship with God. If we come to Him, we see the infinite and perfect love that He has for us. Yet we also see the weakness in our relationship with Him and the many ways in which we are lax and lazy in how we honor Him, pray to Him, and show our love to Him. That is very humbling. But if we are humble and actively come to Him, the scripture goes on to say, “If they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak *things* [plural] become strong unto them.” If we strengthen our relationship with the Savior, the many weaknesses we have are made strong. It is not merely us that changes.

This is the beautiful lesson I learned as a young boy: that I could dally up to an anchor point that would allow me access to a far greater power than my own and that exerting my efforts on holding that anchor point strong and tight was manageable to me if my focus

was on the connection to the anchor point, rather than on my own inadequate power.

I am grateful to work with students who are striving to dally up to the power of service, involvement, and commitments during turbulent times in their lives. I am grateful for their humility when they have trusted in their own power and have found it to be inadequate to withstand temptations and turbulent times. I am grateful when their humility leads to accountability for their actions. I am grateful for the masses of students, faculty, administrators, bishops, advisors, Honor Code counselors, therapists, and family members who collectively recognize the worth of a soul and stand ready to help. And I am most grateful for a loving Savior who allows us to be His fellow servants by being instruments in His hands. When we reflect upon Him as an anchor in our lives, I am grateful for the physical manifestation of the marks driven through His hands and feet that show the depth of sacrifice and charity from Him that sustains and blesses us today.

May we be steadfast and immovable in our relationship with Him through our opportunities to serve and by dallying up to His power through the commitments and covenants we make. I testify of these truths and say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014), 5.

2. Alma 17:9; emphasis added.

3. Marvin J. Ashton, "The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword," *Ensign*, May 1992.

4. D. Todd Christofferson, "A Sense of the Sacred," CES fireside address, 7 November 2004.

5. Kevin J. Worthen, "Enlightened, Uplifted, and Changed," BYU inauguration devotional address, 9 September 2014.

6. *Mission and Aims*, 1.

7. Edwin Markham, "Man-Making," in *Poems of Edwin Markham* (New York: Harper, 1950), 6.