

What I Now Believe About a BYU Education That I Wish I Had Believed When I First Came

A. LEGRAND RICHARDS

I can imagine no greater honor or responsibility for a member of this faculty than to be privileged to speak with you for a few minutes in this capacity. In fact, for the life of me, I could not imagine why I was even considered for this opportunity until I received an interesting letter from KBYU informing me that the devotional addresses I gave in October 1980 and November 1981 would be rebroadcast in November. This was puzzling because I was a graduate student during those years, and I don't remember giving any devotional addresses. But my grandfather gave wonderful addresses both years. Maybe they thought I was somebody else. I really was grateful to learn of these rebroadcasts, but I can hardly resist the temptation to write them back thanking them and then explaining that "these were the last two talks I gave at BYU before I passed away in 1983." Whatever the reason I was asked, I am delighted by the opportunity to address you.

I know that devotionals can transform lives. Not so many years ago, as an undergraduate student, I entered this very building out of breath and distracted by one of the myriad issues that can cloud a student's mind. Elder Marion D. Hanks was the assigned speaker. The building was quite full, and I remember

finally finding a seat just under the clock on the top row of the top concourse. I don't remember Elder Hanks' topic—I'm sure it was important—but I do remember that I was troubled by a personal matter. As I sat, feeling miles away from the speaker, wandering in my own private world, I suddenly felt the Spirit reach up to me to answer my personal concern through the words of Elder Hanks. It was as though he took a time-out to speak with me one-on-one, as if there were a special conduit reaching directly to me to tell me, even in a sea of faces, that the Lord cares about me personally—as I know he cares about you. I'd like to speak personally to you about my experiences, and I pray that what I say may add power to yours.

When I was invited to speak, I reflected on the years I've spent at BYU. I remember the first university assembly I attended as a freshman. It was held in the Smith Fieldhouse, where we had a graphic demonstration of all the areas across the world from which our student body had come. There were banners from each of the states and countries from which we

A. LeGrand Richards was a BYU professor of -education when this devotional address was given on 14 January 1997.

had gathered. If I remember correctly, we sang songs representing many of the areas. I was so impressed: What a privilege it is to be here! I also remember those first classes—I’d look around and all the other students looked so much smarter than I. How could I compete with them? I remember the dazed feelings I had at finals and the joy of finding out that I had been successful in surviving that first semester. As I look at you, I am reminded of those days. I am also grateful that I applied for admission in 1969, because I doubt that with my scores I would have been allowed admittance to your class.

I think I was a fairly normal student, but, unfortunately, not everything I brought with me to BYU back then was helpful. I brought some baggage from my culture and previous experience that hindered my capacity to learn all I could have. Since then I have experienced many semesters at BYU, and I’ve learned a little bit about what a BYU education could be. I am convinced that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ provides the most profound and powerful learning theory ever proposed, but, in practice, this theory is far too often overshadowed by the world’s counterfeits. For the next few minutes then, I would like to share with you three beliefs about education I now have that I wish I had believed when I first came to BYU as a student.

You know, when an activity isn’t very important, we tend to make it into a game. Sometimes education is viewed this way, not because learning is unimportant but because we trivialize the manner in which it is obtained or the reason for which we seek it. I’m afraid that I used to view education as a game; it was a serious game, but a game nevertheless. There were specific rules for winning or losing; there were tricky moves you could make to compete more effectively for those elusive grades; there were secrets you could apply to make it easier. I saw a difference between learning and schooling, but I saw schooling as a game.

First Belief

I wish I had placed my education in its eternal context, which is anything but a game. The Lord outlined a comprehensive curriculum for the School of the Prophets. We have been told to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77) and have been promised that in doing this the Lord’s grace will attend us that we

may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms. [D&C 88:78–79]

That’s a broad curriculum, and if we stopped reading section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants at this point, we might misinterpret the reason for such a curriculum. We are not to study these vast frontiers in order to be smarter than the rest of the world or to compete better in the marketplace or to win some national ranking or monetary reward. We aren’t even to learn it for its own sake. The next verse reads:

That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. [verse 80]

I believe that each of us has been foreordained to a specific mission. We have been preserved to come forth in this particular time of the world’s history, and we will be held accountable to a loving Father in Heaven for how well we learn and fulfill the divine purpose whereunto we have been called. The purpose of education, then, is to assist us as we

discover, prepare for, and freely fulfill our divinely ordained missions.

Let me distinguish between mission and career. The world teaches that we will find our life's fulfillment through our jobs. This is a lie, but it is a lie taught in the most subtle ways. When we ask, "Who is he?" or "What does she do?" we typically expect some answer regarding the person's chosen career, the social role they play (doctor, lawyer, teacher, etc.), how much money they have, or the amount of property they own.

Of course, it is wonderful to find meaningful employment, and we do have obligations to provide for our families, but a career is different from your life's mission. In all the generations of mankind, very few have even had the luxury to consider or choose careers. (Ask Adam or Noah how they chose their careers!) But I do understand the pressure you feel to decide a major and a career. The biggest danger I see in yielding to this pressure is the tendency to belittle the family. When I was in fourth grade, if you had asked the children in my class "What do you want to be when you grow up?" a few of the boys may have said, "I want to be a dad," but nearly all of the girls would have said they wanted to be a mom. If you were to ask the same question today of a typical fourth-grade class, it is likely that none of the boys would think that fatherhood is even a possible response. And if perhaps one or two of the girls said, "I want to be a mom," they would probably be met with the question "And what else?" I believe that my role of father is a far more important part of my life's mission than my career can ever be, and if I allow my job to dominate my perspective, no matter how important I think my job is, I will shortchange that which is more important.

President David O. McKay reminded us that education is far more than mere job training: "The paramount ideal permeating all education in the grades, the high school, through

college and the university, should be more spiritual than economic" (GI, p. 430).

President McKay also reminded us that "no success in life can compensate for failure in the home" (see CR, April 1935, p. 116; quoting James Edward McCulloch, ed., *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [Washington, D.C.: Southern Co-operative League, 1924], p. 42). May I add the corollary that no other success in life can compete with success in the home. When you reach the age of retirement, not many of you will wish that you had published one more article, sold one more commodity, or spent more time in business meetings. The most treasured moments in my life are very simple. I think of my daughter's tiny hand holding onto her daddy's finger while we climbed down from the front porch to watch ants crawl across the sidewalk, while we rushed to the train tracks to catch a glimpse of a passing train, or while we fed dandelions to the neighbor's chickens. I think of the dance concerts in my living room to "The Tiki, Tiki, Tiki Room" or "Ease on Down the Road" and of late nights sewing a costume or dress. I remember the gentle touch of a hand twirling the hair on the back of my neck while I heard the excitement or trauma of a school day. I think of priesthood blessings, minidates for ice cream, and tickle fights. I watched each of my children take their very first breath. These are the treasures of my life! What professional honor would be worth trading for these memories? The love of a family takes quality time—and a great quantity of it. Don't limit your concept of mission to the notion of a career.

Fulfilling our life's mission is not a part-time project. It can't be something we do only on weekends, in between classes, outside other assignments, or in our spare time. It must dominate our lives. It is far broader than the majors we select—and the resources available at BYU to help you prepare for and fulfill your earthly mission are substantial.

We have some of the most beautiful facilities in the world. We have a marvelous library, and where in the world could you find a faculty more willing to provide individual assistance or more dedicated in their personal lives to eternal purposes? And so I ask: How well are you using the resources available to you on this campus for preparing to fulfill the mission to which you have been foreordained? Note that I am not asking, what is your GPA or your class ranking?

When I first came to BYU, I'm afraid I spent most of my energy trying to do only what was required of me and nothing more. That seemed hard enough! The only parts of campus I visited, aside from the rest rooms, were the places I was required to go for a class. I was so busy playing the game that I hardly allowed myself to think eternally about my learning. In fact, I could never quite understand how I could be a month and a half behind when classes only started last week, but my thinking was far too shortsighted. I even remember making a list of the things I wanted to study as soon as I was out of school (and when I probably would not have access to such wonderful learning resources).

As you seek to discover your divine mission, learn to grow where you are planted. In fact, learn to look for places where you can make a difference. Church service should not be postponed until life is easier. I don't know if it ever gets easier. If you don't learn to serve the Lord while you are in school, how will you answer that you learned all you should have while attending BYU? I once heard wonderful counsel about selecting a career. When a man was asked why he had chosen to become a minister, he replied, "I looked where the fighting was the heaviest and where the lines were the thinnest, and that's where I chose to go." Part of your opportunity to serve the kingdom of God depends more upon where you live than on the specific career you select. Seeking the comforts of an exclusive neighborhood

may exclude you from significant opportunities to make a difference. Don't aspire to comforts, be they economic or religious. Don't stay here too long. The world needs you!

The Lord has told us that those who need to be commanded in all things are slothful servants. We should be anxiously engaged in good causes of our own free will and choice and "bring to pass much righteousness" (see D&C 58:26–27), even if it doesn't increase our GPA. We are to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118), even if it isn't required on the final exam. We are to pursue everything that is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Articles of Faith 1:13), even if we don't get credit for it.

In contrast, the thinking most useful for excelling in the game of school does not fit very well into the kingdom of God. For example, can you imagine someone seriously asking, "What's the least I can do to make it into the celestial kingdom?" Wouldn't it seem strange to try to think up strategies to help you compete better in the final judgment or to practice techniques for making a better impression at the judgment bar? This type of thinking may work well for schooling as a game, but it isn't celestial thinking—and these aren't celestial questions.

I've heard it said that education is the only area that Americans pay for and almost hope to be cheated—to be asked to do as little as possible for the credit. I'm afraid I was guilty. In the world's education one can get A's in theology without even believing in God, and one can receive top honors in the "Marriage and Family Living" course while contributing to a painful divorce or abusing family members. But an education for the Lord's errand requires a focused mind, a pure heart, and a life of integrity.

Not many yards from the Marriott Center is a miraculous learning institution—the Missionary Training Center. It is very possibly the greatest language training school in the

world, but it would be impossible for the world to copy it.

Think of it. Imagine a school where young men and women, most of them still in their teens, pay their own way to come to an almost boot-camp type regimen—eating, drinking, and sleeping their new language. During this time they voluntarily refrain from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, dating, dances, rock music, visitors, parties, television, or any other distracting activities. Uncertified college students are hired to be part-time teachers at student wages. There are no transcripts, no grades, no minimum entrance achievement scores, no GPAs—but in the short space of just a few weeks, the young men and women learn more than they would at the best university and for the most part see their experience as a portion of “the best two years of their life.”

Of course the MTC has its problems and may yet need to improve in numerous ways, but why does it work so well? Is it the methods? the materials? the instructional theory? the facilities? Is it the training of the teachers? the staff? the food? The reason it works is the very reason it cannot be copied. It is not built on a secular model. The people who attend are not there for secular purposes.

Now ask yourself, why doesn't the same spirit of purpose and inquiry permeate the rest of this campus? I believe that it could, but only if we, as students and faculty, develop the same sense of mission in our lives, and only if our hearts are far less preoccupied in obtaining the things of this world and aspiring to the honors of men (see D&C 121:35).

I'm not completely comfortable with describing our effort at BYU as trying to combine the sacred with the secular. I would feel better describing it as an effort to learn the temporal in the context of the eternal. Spiritual experiences cannot be secular, but I know of no “secular” subject that cannot and should not be spiritual. Tell Abraham, for example, that astronomy is a secular subject. The Lord has

told us that he never gives temporal commandments because all things are spiritual unto him—and I believe that they ought to be for us as well. The languages of Chinese or Finnish could certainly be considered secular subjects, but when we study them in the context of serving a mission—a proselyting mission or a life mission—they become unequivocally spiritual.

The sacred and the secular are not determined primarily by the subject matter but by the hearts and purposes of those engaged in the process. From this perspective, if we are not studying to prepare for our divine mission, even to study the most sacred texts will be a secular experience. (I fear that for me, too often my religion classes were almost as secular as my other classes because my heart was so enamored with the game of school.) Our challenge is to see the sacred nature of all truth and to pursue it in such a way that we fulfill the mission to which God has and will call us. I am not suggesting that all truth is of equal value or importance but that the way in which we pursue it, if done by the Spirit, will become part of our divine mission—part of our exaltation.

Second Belief

As an undergraduate, I wish I had believed that my professors were nothing more and nothing less than my brothers and sisters. Jesus condemned the professional teachers of his day who loved to walk in long robes, to sit at the head tables in the schools, and “to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.” He declared: “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matthew 23:5–8). I wish we believed this today. I once proposed a column in the *Daily Universe* entitled “Verses I Wish We Believed.” If we believed this verse, it would profoundly affect the relationships between teachers and students.

The typical teacher-student relationship is a hierarchical and secular one—like the king to his subjects. To illustrate this, I sometimes ask my students for a week or two to address me

as “Your Royal Highness”—just to show them how embarrassingly well it fits. “Oh, Your Royal Highness, I tried to get my assignment to you on time, but I was hit by a train on my way to campus and I’ve been crawling for three days. Won’t you please, please, accept it a little late?”

Do you realize how I could respond? “Well, my lowly subject, first you must run 12 laps around the McKay Building and kiss my ring. And then I have to decide whether it is fair to the other subjects in my kingdom who got their assignments in on time!”

You may love your kings or hate them, but the hierarchical relationship of secular power is typical of the world’s education. Given the secular model on which universities are built, even teachers who see themselves as brothers and sisters may, almost unwittingly, slip into patterns that are not consistent with the Lord’s way.

As long as I viewed my teachers as classroom kings, the roles we played were part of the game—there was no need to admit that I was a brother nor that they were. As brothers and sisters, most teachers sincerely want to be helpful. Nearly all are passionate about their subjects and are delighted to assist anyone who is truly curious or even slightly interested in some aspect of their specialty. Most sincerely feel the responsibility to provide only the best possible learning experiences, but as role players in the game, we look very different. When we, as teachers, are not acting as brothers and sisters, we often act like petty tyrants, making demands and judgments of you that are anything but familial. Can you imagine how your spouse or your family would react if you demanded to be treated as their king or queen? Few situations better illustrate the problem of unrighteous dominion than those of teachers who forget their relationship to their students when they acquire “a little authority, as they suppose” (D&C 121:39).

On the other hand, as brothers and sisters, most students here really want to become what

the Lord would have them be. I know you pray about it. You feel the need to learn wisdom and to prepare yourselves to make a difference in the world. But when students play the role as in a game, they act as beasts of burden, resistant or resentful of the very process they hope will provide them with what they need. I’m embarrassed to admit that I used to do this. At first I did not see my teachers as brothers and sisters—they were potentates of power. They held the goodies of their kingdoms, which I could acquire only by pleasing them. I’ve seen students become so competitive, bickering over the most trivial issues for an extra point or the chance to move ahead of another. Seldom are we as concerned about the truth as we are about the score. I’ve seen students who sit passively and seem to dare their professors to prove that their subjects have any value or relevance. I suppose I used to do this. I never considered that if a class was boring it might be my fault. I don’t think I prayed very often that my professors would speak with the power of the Holy Ghost or that I would listen with that same power. I didn’t then, but I wish I would have. I doubt I expressed genuine gratitude for the efforts of my professors, even for those who seemed to play the game with me.

I don’t think I recognized what a great teacher the Lord is. I’m embarrassed that too often I spent so much effort attempting to impress my mortal teachers that I neglected to ask what the Lord wanted me to know. As a student, too often my prayers were limited to asking for help in guessing the correct answers to some mortal’s exam questions. But you have a far more noble purpose. Of course, you will have many exams that you will need to pass, but if you set your standards too low you may risk much more than a low grade.

Knowingly or unknowingly, some of your professors may exercise unrighteous dominion over you. How will you respond? Your actions need not be determined by theirs; in fact, you are as spiritually obligated to them as they are

to you. Can you prepare to fulfill your divine mission while serving petty tyrants? Of course you can—look at Joseph, Daniel, Ammon, and Mormon. They fulfilled their missions, but not because they were serving the tyrants alone—rather because they served God, even while subjecting themselves to mortals. But the Lord has warned: “No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). And note this: The way Joseph, Daniel, and Ammon served the Lord actually blessed the lives of the tyrants who ruled over them. When you serve the Lord while seeking the education of your divine mission, you will even bless the lives of your teachers—no matter what kinds of teachers they may be.

As professors, we pray that someday we, too, will live up to all of the promises and principles of the gospel in the ways we teach and treat our students—but you cannot afford to wait until we fully do. The kingdom of God needs you now. You are not victims of education; you are not our products. You are ultimately accountable to one far more important than any mortal teacher for how well you use your time, talents, and energy. A loving Father in Heaven has promised that if you ask of him in faith, ye shall receive from him. Don’t abdicate your agency—even to well-meaning mortals, who don’t know or understand your eternal mission.

At the same time, though, open yourselves to learn from the richness of the experience that your brothers and sisters can share with you. Don’t require your teachers to tempt you into learning or to trick you, entertain you, or cheat you into it. We aren’t always helped best by those most entertaining. Welcome high expectations and rigorous standards, but don’t feel satisfied with them. Make your own.

Third Belief

When I was a student I wish I had believed that the standards of the world were not sufficient for a consecrated people. I believed this

phrase as it pertained to religion, but I supposed that it didn’t have much to do with my education: “Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:5). It isn’t enough to go beyond the standards of the world. We must build upon a different foundation “according to the pattern” the Lord has given (D&C 94:2).

In 1914 Joseph F. Smith offered the Church a prophetic warning. He told us:

*There are at least three dangers that threaten the Church within, and the authorities need to awaken to the fact that the people should be warned unceasingly against them. . . . They are the flattery of prominent men in the world, false educational ideas, and sexual impurity. [“Editors’ Table: Three Threatening Dangers,” *Improvement Era* 17, no. 5 (March 1914): 476–77]*

With the perspective of time, we see how prophetic this warning was and is. I was serving a mission when Elder Ezra Taft Benson built on this theme, declaring, “As a watchman on the tower, I feel to warn you that one of the chief means of misleading our youth and destroying the family unit is our educational institutions” (“Strengthening the Family,” *Improvement Era* 73, no. 12 [December 1970]: 46).

If BYU is to heed these warnings, we must build on a different foundation than the world’s. In his “Second Century” address, President Spencer W. Kimball reminded us that “this university is not of the world any more than the Church is of the world, and it must not be made over in the image of the world” (“The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU Founders Day address, 10 October 1975, in *Classic Speeches*, vol. 1 [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1994], p. 139).

We could not build the Mount Timpanogos Temple on a foundation designed for the state capitol building. It wouldn’t fit, and the compromises necessary to make the attempt would severely affect the purpose of the structure.

Likewise, an education built upon the world's foundation will not adequately serve the purposes of Zion.

The world's education is built upon pride. If pride were removed from the normal concept of a university, I'm not sure what would be left. President Benson taught that "pride is essentially competitive in nature" ("Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, p. 4). Quoting C. S. Lewis, he declared:

Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. . . . It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. [Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 109–10]

An education built on pride is more concerned with comparison than with truth; it is more interested in its ranking than its virtue.

President Benson also taught that "the proud cannot accept the authority of God giving direction to their lives" ("Beware of Pride," p. 4). Have you ever considered how unwilling the world's educational institutions are to give any legitimate place to Jesus Christ? But this position has developed only relatively recently, almost as if it were a response to the Restoration. Typical of nearly all other early universities in this country, one of Harvard's founding documents from 1643 states:

*Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17:3, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. ["New England's First Fruits," in Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 434; text modernized]*

Does that sound like the foundation of a modern university? Today, like Korihor of old, the

world teaches that "no deity will save us; we must save ourselves" ("Humanist Manifesto II," in *Humanist Manifestos I and II*, ed. Paul Kurtz [New York: Prometheus Books, 1973], p. 16). Students are taught to rely upon the arm of flesh in the form of science, technology, or even laws and principles for the solutions to all the world's problems. It has become academic heresy to believe and practice that Jesus Christ is the only "name given under heaven whereby man can be saved" (2 Nephi 31:21).

As social problems are identified, we turn more and more to the schools to solve them: from racial prejudice to AIDS, from malnutrition to drug abuse, from teenage pregnancy to gang warfare. At the same time, any reference to God, the Ten Commandments, or Jesus Christ is being carefully purged from the schools under the pretense that the Constitution requires it. Our students are allowed to read and write profanity but may not offer prayers. They can listen to music with the vilest of lyrics but are not even exposed to George Washington's inaugural address or to excerpts from Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Franklin because they are "too religious."

Today's teachers receive more training and have better facilities and quicker access to the latest curricular materials. They are trained in the latest practices, newest theories, and most current information. For the most part, they are remarkably dedicated and sincere. In spite of this, the moral decline of our society in nearly every category is more dramatic than ever. Literacy rates are decreasing; gang activity and drug traffic are at an all-time high; violent crime, illegitimate births, and teenage suicide rates are appalling; and divorce has reached epidemic proportions. The rich are richer and the poor are poorer, even though the average years of schooling are steadily increasing.

Too often professional educators, fully aware of this moral slide, spend their "labor for that which cannot satisfy" (2 Nephi 9:51). We argue about methods and measurements while

our children are starving for real substance. We search out publishable results to questions that are for the most part beside the point.

What could make a real difference to our moral decline? Will our society be saved by a new reading program or by requiring greater proficiency in mathematics? Will a new sex education program taught in a secular context solve the problems of infidelity, pornography, or illegitimate births? I don't condemn those who engage in today's educational research—certainly contributions are being made to many valuable questions—but I am reminded of President Kimball's promise:

By dealing with basic issues and basic problems, we can be effective educationally. Otherwise, we will simply join the multitude who have so often lost their way in dark, sunless forests even while working hard. It was Thoreau who said, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root" (Walden [1854], I, "Economy"). We should deal statistically and spiritually with root problems, root issues, and root causes in BYU's second century. We seek to do so, not in arrogance or pride, but in the spirit of service. We must do so with a sense of trembling and urgency because what Edmund Burke said is true: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" [or for good men and women to work on irrelevant projects!] (letter to William Smith, 9 January 1795). [Kimball, "The Second Century," p. 143]

I fear that most of what is published in education wouldn't make much difference even if it were used at the grandest scale, because it doesn't address the most important issues. Moroni saw our day and warned us plainly that we must "serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ" or we will ripen in iniquity, and when we are fully ripe, we will be "swept off" (see Ether 2:8–12).

Whether or not it wants to hear it, the world is crying out for what we often take for

granted. It most needs faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and though it may seem to want anything but this, there are yet many "who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" (D&C 123:12). If the world needed bread, would we give it a stone? (See Matthew 7:9.) Whatever else we may offer the people of the world, if it doesn't ultimately lead them to Christ, how good can it be?

In a world obsessed with appearances, it should be no surprise that many of us suffer from academic bulimia. I used to. Toward the end of the semester or just before a test I would binge on information, cramming as much as possible into my brain. Then I would walk carefully and quickly to the Testing Center, hoping that I didn't spill too much before I arrived, only to purge my system into categories of A, B, C, D, or "none of the above."

Grades seemed to dominate my life. But whatever else grades can measure, they cannot measure what is most important. A GPA is not an average of that which matters most. Even with the most conscientious effort to be fair and equitable in how grades are given, they are often used to justify assigning people into a society divided into "ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning" (3 Nephi 6:12). And whatever Christian justification might be given for grades, I do know that if we allow our learning to be primarily motivated and dominated by them, we will be serving the wrong master. If any of us were to die at the end of the semester, I doubt that Saint Peter would ask to see our transcripts. We might, however, be asked, "You've just had a semester at BYU (or two or 12). How well have you used your time, talents, and energy to prepare yourself to serve the Lord?"

"But, Brother Richards," some may say, "you aren't being realistic! Grades do matter. I have to play the game. Unless I focus on grades, I won't be able to keep my scholarship; I won't be admitted into the most prestigious graduate program; I may not get the best job."

The reality is, however, that you are not on this earth to maintain a scholarship, enter prestigious graduate schools, or beat someone else in the marketplace. You have a much higher standard. You need to please the Lord God Omnipotent. I promise you that if you please him, with an eye single to his glory, your life will not be without great opportunities. The Lord doesn't want you to shortchange your educational preparations. Your scholarship won't be less if you consecrate these preparations to him as an offering. I doubt your GPA will even decrease when you seek to serve the real Master. And, as with Daniel of old, others will see your good works and because of them "glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). True accountability is to him to whom someday we must all give an accounting. No mortal standard, no matter how rigorous, is high enough.

Let me conclude with a parable: Once there was an army. It was strong, handsome, and fairly well trained. The soldiers knew their duty. They were assigned to be watchmen on the towers. They were to sound the alarm to warn the people when the enemy approached. In times of relative peace, however, it isn't always easy to remain alert in such an assignment. To help spend the time, the soldiers often

invented games to amuse themselves; some of these games required great skill. One game was particularly engrossing, and many soldiers became quite proficient at it. Someone suggested that they start a tournament to determine who in all of the army was the best player. The tournament became the talk of the whole village and even beyond. In fact, game players from all over the land actually began to join the army simply so they could compete in the tournament. Each year great honors were given to the champions, parades were held in tribute to their achievements, and children dreamed of the day when they, too, could join the army to participate in the tournament. Of course the enemy was not disappointed by the tournament's acquired popularity; it was one of the enemy, in fact, who proposed the competition in the first place.

My brothers and sisters, we are the army of Zion. We can make a difference, but we must stay alert as watchmen on the tower and not be distracted by the games or purposes of the world. I bear you my witness that God cares about the way you think and what you are doing with the time you spend at BYU. I pray you will consecrate it to him, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.