

# *Why We Appreciate BYU*

CECIL O. AND SHARON G. SAMUELSON

**COS:** We welcome you this morning at the beginning of a new year and a new semester. We are grateful to be here with you and believe you feel the same way.

**SGS:** We hope you have had very enjoyable Christmas and New Year's holidays and now look forward to both the excitement and rigors of winter semester. We also hope that you haven't yet completely broken all of your New Year's resolutions!

**COS:** We have now been at BYU in our current assignments for a few years—not long enough to have grown tired of this adventure but long enough to have developed some experience and also the ability to observe some recurrent patterns in the way things are done, as well as the somewhat predictable ways in which people react to us and to our campus environment.

**SGS:** That is right. Never have we been in a place in which we have been treated so well by so many helpful and friendly people. But we are still occasionally bemused, if not surprised, by the frequent question posed to us by those wondering where our allegiances are today. It is true that neither of us attended BYU as students. It is also true that we have always been unfailingly loyal to the schools we have attended while there, and especially are we

fully committed to where we currently reside. We are dyed-in-the-wool Cougars! Most often, the question seems to be related to athletics, but our responses are both much more inclusive and expansive.

**COS:** When our absolute loyalty and allegiance to BYU seem to be occasionally questioned or perhaps not fully understood, I often remark that I assume the questioner has never been in the office of the president of the Church. When I was called by President Gordon B. Hinckley to take this leadership assignment at BYU, he said, "We would like you to . . . put on a blue coat." By that he meant he expected and charged us with putting all our loyalties, energies, and enthusiasm behind the cause that we know as Brigham Young University. Even in the face of our obvious inadequacies, we believe we have done so.

**SGS:** On the very day that President Hinckley introduced my husband as the new president of BYU, he, as the president-elect, was asked at a news conference how he might adjust to this new assignment and

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*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when he and his wife, Sharon G. Samuelson, gave this devotional on 10 January 2012.*

set of loyalties. He responded that our shift in priorities had been happily occasioned by the call of the prophet of God. I did not have a blue jacket myself but knew this admonition from the prophet applied equally to me. I then got to go shopping, and what woman doesn't like that opportunity? I know that he and I have never looked back and have been forever grateful since for the remarkable privilege to serve at and be involved with Brigham Young University. While we continue to learn and be positively amazed, we have felt absolutely at home from the very beginning. We already knew the first day that BYU is great, and it has been even better than we could have imagined.

**COS:** That is probably more than you care to hear about us. We really want to focus today on some of the many things we appreciate about BYU. We believe our gratitude is enhanced and sharpened especially because we did not come to BYU early in our lives and careers. This is not to detract in any way from the other pleasant communities in which we have lived or the other universities where we have learned and served. We are grateful for them all, but BYU is particularly special in ways that perhaps none of us fully appreciates and that may not be fully recognized by those who have not been elsewhere or who have not experienced the disappointment of not being invited to serve at or attend BYU.

**SGS:** We do not have nearly enough time today to describe all that we appreciate so very much. What we do say will be almost in shorthand form, but hopefully it will reflect our appreciation and gratitude for what has shaped and is influencing the lives of those who are able to have a BYU experience. We believe BYU helps us all be better people, but we must always remember that does not mean that anyone here is better than anyone else not directly connected to this unique university. Nevertheless, we would be very ungrateful not to acknowledge the many special blessings that are part of being at Brigham Young University.

Let us just mention some of the things that most impress us, and we will comment more fully on a few.

We love the people we meet at BYU. This includes, of course, the students, faculty, staff, and administration, but also the many loyal supporters, donors, and friends who contribute in such significant and diverse ways.

**COS:** We love the Spirit of the Y. We know this means different things to different people. Even those who know little about the university or our sponsoring church often remark about feeling something different and special when on our campus. For those of us who know the history and roots of this great school, we recognize that in large part our current blessings are possible because of the sacrifices for and confidence in the future that so many of our predecessors experienced in much more difficult times.

We love the beauty and functionality of the campus. The fall 2011 issue of *BYU Magazine* highlights the history of the physical facilities of this remarkable institution. I hope the story of the development, growth, and maturation of our university becomes better known to all of us as well as to others. In it we find the source of many miracles that perhaps we take a little too much for granted today as we face the challenges and opportunities of our current circumstances.

**SGS:** Most complex organizations, including universities, have mission and vision statements and strategic plans. In that broad sense, BYU is similar to other institutions. However—and this is very important—the content of *The Mission of Brigham Young University* and *The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 1996) differs dramatically from the content of similar documents of almost all other distinguished institutions of higher learning. The mission of Brigham Young University “is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life” (p. 1). Not only is the statement itself quite unique, but such an assertion would

not be tolerated or accepted at virtually any other serious university not part of our Church Educational System.

The aims of a BYU education are an extension of our mission and are expressed as the expected outcomes of the BYU experience. They are, first, to be “spiritually strengthening”; second, to be “intellectually enlarging”; and third, “character building”; leading to, fourth, “lifelong learning and service” (p. 3).

We believe the mission and aims to be true and reflective of what BYU is and tries to be. They also represent so much of what we observe, feel, and appreciate about Brigham Young University.

**COS:** In a similar vein, we are very grateful for the BYU Honor Code. As those familiar with our history understand, the Honor Code was instituted by student initiative and continues to be ratified and supported by our board of trustees. Some are confused by what they perceive as imperfections in the Honor Code. What they really do not understand is that it is not based on regulatory control by the administration but rather is a commitment of those accepting the opportunity to be part of the BYU community to live lives of honor. And the expectation rightly is that each of us here will be self-policing with respect to compliance. We have all promised to live our lives in certain ways that admittedly may be at variance with some of the slipping standards of the world. We have promised to be honest in all of our dealings, treat others and the institution with respect, and be personally responsible for all dimensions of our conduct and behavior. Some aspects may seem more important or relevant than others. But, as with the Word of Wisdom (see Doctrine and Covenants 89), living the Honor Code brings blessings that result from obedience to high standards. In our case, by signing our names we have promised not only our conformity but also that we understand the BYU standards of honor and willingly will live them. And, like the Word of Wisdom, the

Honor Code is “adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all [BYU students]” (D&C 89:3).

Another admirable dimension of the Honor Code that will not likely be apparent or even considered by you current students is that it stays with you throughout your lives. With few but notable individual exceptions, BYU graduates are known to be honorable people with integrity in all of its dimensions. We hear this from employers, associates, government and military leaders, and others.

Frequently I receive letters with checks from former students who confess a misdeed that occurred while at BYU—often many years previously. An unnecessary burden has been carried for a long time, and yet there is a drive to make things right even when no one else knows of the transgression, or at least who was responsible. While repentance is always laudable, it is unfortunate to bear such a load for so long. When you make a mistake or commit a sin, own up to it and make it right sooner rather than later. We greatly admire all of you who do exactly that.

**SGS:** One of the continual challenges of the Honor Code for some is trying to decide how far to push the envelope or how close to the line to walk with respect to matters that they might consider less consequential than major violations like cheating, stealing, and illegal or immoral activities. I hear my husband often telling young men with more than a day’s worth of whiskers that they need to get together with Brother Gillette, Brother Bic, or Brother Schick. Some pretend not to understand that they need to shave regularly and frequently, but the look in their eye betrays that almost always they do understand the commitment they have made.

As you walk across campus and are in classrooms and buildings, you will unfortunately see just a few otherwise attractive and bright students who seem to fail to grasp the importance of modesty in their dress. As a

mother who had candid discussions with my own daughters when they were teens and approaching adulthood, I hope you will realize, if you do not already, the vital importance of modesty in dress and apparel. You know what I mean. It is my hope and prayer that all of you will think, consider, and act as you must to be modest in your appearance and reflect the regard you have for the sacredness of your bodies. All of us are examples whether we wish to be or not. Let us again commit to being tastefully modest in our dress and behavior and institute the appropriate changes if necessary. We appreciate those of you who are doing just as is asked of all of us. Please remember that modesty is much more a matter of attitude and respect than it is of hair length, necklines, hemlines, or spandex stretching.

**COS:** As Sister Samuelson mentions the importance of our appearance and conduct, let us also mention how very proud we are of so many of you—including members of our performing groups, student athletes, and others of the student body—who represent BYU, your families, and the Church so very well when you are in public. Even those with different standards than the ones we have chosen to follow recognize the positive impact that saying what we mean and meaning what we say has on our environment and those interacting with us. I express my thanks for what you do in this respect and add my request that we all continue to strive both to do our best personally and also to help others do so. It is not always comfortable to suggest to others the continual need for sensitivity and judgment in these matters, and we hope you will be wise, thoughtful, and courageous. We also hope as you look outward that you make sure to look carefully and frequently in the mirror. In this we include not only you students but also faculty, staff, and administrators with gratitude for your efforts, thoughtfulness, and great examples. It is both a responsibility and a privilege to understand that none of us is ever completely off the stage.

**SGS:** Before we began this fully immersed experience at BYU, we had the blessing of being on campus several times for various events. At least twice my husband in his General Authority assignments had the privilege of speaking at campus devotionals. Each time it was a highlight for us because of the way we were treated and the great spirit that we felt. We look forward to these devotional and forum assemblies. It is in these gatherings that we are instructed in the important matters of faith and doctrine in our BYU context. It is wonderful to know that on Tuesday mornings we will be taught and edified and have the opportunity to feel the Spirit if we come prepared. We gather as a community to hear from professors, Church leaders, and others who speak to us in ways and on topics not addressed in the same manner or in the same depth as they typically are in the classroom.

What a special blessing it was this past November to have President Thomas S. Monson visit campus and speak to us. Most of the young people in the Church around the world never have the experience of being with the prophet in a setting in which he knows us so well and loves us so much. We are grateful to attend and hope that you will also take advantage of this remarkable blessing that is not duplicated or even possible at otherwise excellent universities. We appreciate you being with us today and ask that you invite and encourage your friends and others in the community to always make 11:00 a.m. on Tuesdays a priority to participate in these unique opportunities.

**COS:** Another distinctive blessing available at BYU, especially for single students, is the network of young adult wards and stakes that has been established. Although for some living off campus there have been modest changes resulting from the inclusion of all single young adults—whether students or not—in these great wards, the experience is a vital benefit of your BYU years. In these units of the Church

you have the opportunities for service and growth not always possible in more traditional wards. Because so many members are students, the special challenges of your highly demanding academic programs are better understood and your callings and assignments take into account your student circumstances.

Over the years, while actively attending stake conferences throughout the world as a General Authority, I have regularly visited with Relief Society and priesthood leaders who have not only met their eternal companions at BYU or in a student ward elsewhere but also learned how to function as effective Church leaders at relatively young ages. Please be active and participate in your own wards.

We do not discourage you from visiting the wards of friends on occasion or going home for Sunday dinner with your parents and families when you are able. We strongly counsel you, however, to be regularly involved in your own ward so that you can fulfill callings, help bless the lives of other ward members needing friends, and do all that faithful Latter-day Saints should do so that you can always have a current temple recommend, whether for baptisms for the dead or, if you have been endowed, the other ordinances of the temple. With the recent announcement of a second temple in Provo, the First Presidency has made a strong statement of support for you and our neighbors in the area and particularly for the essentiality of temple worship and service for us all.

**SGS:** My husband, his associates, and I love you students. Nevertheless, we are concerned that some of you miss out on opportunities to learn because you have yet to acquire the necessary habits of study and scholarship. All of you are very bright and come with impressive credentials. Otherwise you would not have been accepted as part of the student body.

I think my husband won't mind if I tell you that he became a much better student after we got serious in our courting relationship. A lot of our evenings were "library" dates. They

improved our academic performance, and they were inexpensive too! He now remarks how some students seem shocked about the expectation that they will spend at least two hours studying and preparing outside of class for every hour in class. What that specific preparation is and how you study will vary. What will not change, however, is that it is impossible for you to get all you can from your classes and course work if you do not make the necessary independent effort to read, study, think, and read and study some more both before and after class.

**COS:** She speaks the truth! When we arrived at BYU I was immediately impressed with the prominent place that mentoring occupies at our university. As many of you know, my own professional background is in medicine. As a student and a professor, the privileges of being both mentored and then later to be a mentor have been invaluable and fulfilling. My life has been better because of the several who have mentored me. What students sometimes do not understand is that mentoring continues throughout life—at least it continues in my case with my colleagues on the President's Council and with deans, directors, and other leaders. Without exception, these good people know and understand many important facts, principles, and situations better than do I. As they continue to teach, I continue to learn. Likewise, mentoring occurs differently in different disciplines. My advice to you students, whatever your major or your interests, is to do all you can to get to know your professors better and learn all you can from them about life and the gospel and not just about narrow curricular topics.

As BYU continues to emerge as an excellent and serious university of high quality, many across the country and around the world recognize that we are in the top rank of institutions producing outstanding baccalaureate graduates who then go on to receive PhD degrees and other doctorates at the best

universities. These observers know what has happened here but often don't fully understand why. Of course we are blessed with students who are outstanding when they first arrive at BYU, but an understanding of the importance of the BYU experience from the perspective of an outsider may be very limited. Key to what happens here for many students is the mentoring that occurs.

**SGS:** I think one of the best kinds of mentoring comes from reading. Studies show that today's young people, including university students, tend to read less than did previous generations. They also spend much more—and sometimes too much more—time on social media. Whatever else you do, be sure to increase your love of and proficiency in reading while you study at BYU. Learning to read carefully, critically, and even just for fun will broaden your understanding in many ways beyond the lessons that you are specifically trying to master. I hope you know that our faculty members are concerned about our students becoming better and more proficient writers. Reading well-written literature will be very helpful in developing and honing your own writing and communications skills. And you will likely experience, as I have, the development of a love of reading that will bring pleasure and growth to you throughout your lives.

We commend many of you who are or have been involved in various reading programs for children in schools and the community. Remember that it is never too soon to begin reading to your children. Not only will it build their love of books and reading, but it will also strengthen your love and bonds with them. In addition, this is a wonderful way to help your little ones develop an early love for the scriptures. The children's book department at the BYU Bookstore knows me well, because I am constantly purchasing books for our grandchildren. I want to help them build their own libraries of outstanding literature and encourage them to develop a love of reading.

**COS:** Perhaps you are now thinking that we have morphed our emphasis away from things that we appreciate about BYU to things we hope you will consider more seriously. In fact, these are things that seem inseparable to us. Even in areas in which we have serious concerns and direct counsel, we appreciate BYU because we can talk about them candidly in ways that would not be possible or be as well understood at any other university. While this is a diverse community, we are largely united in agreement and understanding of our BYU mission and aims. We understand that our efforts and activities are enriched by our faith and also by the faith and prayers of our apostle and prophet leaders who do so much to protect and sustain BYU and all of us who are here. While we may not understand or fully appreciate all of the factors that go into their considerations about our university, we are grateful to attach our faith, prayers, and efforts to theirs in this great work.

**SGS:** What was true from the very beginning of BYU when it was still just a tiny, struggling academy primarily teaching children and young adults with very little previous education is also true today.

I think we all know of Brigham Young's counsel to Karl G. Maeser as he sent him to Provo: "Brother Maeser, I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God" (in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928], 79).

And other prophets and leaders frequently have quoted this inspired prophecy of President John Taylor:

*You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass. [JD 21:100]*

President Taylor and other Church presidents have said much more, and we see the beginnings of recognition and appreciation coming to BYU from across the world.

**COS:** A day does not go by for me since we have been here at BYU that I do not think of President Gordon B. Hinckley's instruction to help BYU become the best it can be. As I have thought about that general charge, it becomes clearer to me that this is a very special place. We have not yet achieved our full possibilities, but we have made progress.

Second, if the Lord's prophets are convinced that our potential will be realized, then we should be confident too and also then be committed to doing our parts, individually and collectively, to make it so. I am persuaded that all of this is true, and thus my appreciation for BYU is not constrained.

Likewise, we appreciate very much the individual miracles that occur at BYU in the lives of those who come here. So many meet their eternal companions in this wonderfully sustaining and encouraging environment. Missionary work takes place in remarkable ways. When Tom Holmoe, our outstanding athletic director, came to BYU as a nonmember undergraduate, he thought it was just to play football. Now he is a Church leader with a great eternal family. Professor Keith A. Crandall, an internationally recognized scientist, assumed he was coming to a fine academic department at BYU and found the Church with its many blessings, including the temple, in addition to the opportunity to make his many scholarly scientific contributions. You will think of others. We could give a long list of students who have been baptized here and then add the even much longer roster

of those who have gained solid testimonies of the restored gospel because of their BYU experience. In addition, I mention those of our community but not of our faith who live lives of example and honor and who bring credit to this wonderful university as well as to their own religious traditions. All of these things and so many more contribute to the gratitude we feel for BYU and what it means to us and to the world.

**SGS:** My dear brothers and sisters, I would express to you my testimony of the gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It has blessed every aspect of my life. I have a testimony of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of His teachings. He has led my life to BYU, and I believe that He has led you here too, because He knew that it would bless you and that you would bless the lives of those you meet. I express this to you with my love in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**COS:** As I add my testimony to the things that Sharon has said and the things we have talked about, I would also like to suggest one additional thing that I appreciate about BYU. In over forty-seven years of married life together, in all of the jobs, assignments, choices I've made, and other activities, Sharon has been supportive. But often what I have done I have done alone. Here at BYU, as you have seen today, we have been able to do most of what we do together. And for that I am grateful. And for that I bear my witness that God is in the heavens and that His hand is on Brigham Young University and on all of us. May we be ever grateful and may we do all we can to take full advantage of the remarkable opportunities we have, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.