

Learning to Succeed in Life

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No one with any degree of spiritual sensitivity can stand at this place in the presence of such a concentration of devoted, righteous students, faculty, staff, and Church leaders and not feel overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation. I am deeply moved in contemplation of what will occur in ensuing years from the experiences you will gain at this unique university. The students enrolled in this university have the potential for making deep and abiding contributions throughout the world, to form eternal families, to orient and raise righteous children, to strengthen a host of professions, to give service in countless ways, and to be a leaven for good in a world that desperately needs it. I welcome the 6,000 of you who have recently begun your university career as well as all who are continuing your education at this cherished institution that has such a prophetic mission to fulfill. You are part of that mission.

My purpose is to share suggestions to help each of you make the most of this exceptional opportunity for building capacity, strength, understanding, and focus in your life. While most of the remarks are directed to you as students, I pray that some of the insights shared will be of benefit to you who form the

exceptional, devoted faculty and administration of this university.

Before giving specific suggestions, I want to take advantage of a unique teaching moment that we all are currently experiencing. It is my intent to draw from the lives of men of world renown, exceptional in their capacities and their accomplishments, yet who are at opposite poles of peace and personal satisfaction at this moment. I refer to the president of the United States, Bill Clinton, and to the prophets of God and presidents of this Church we revere. President Clinton has expressed anguish and concern for the consequences of his improper choices that have seriously affected him personally, his wife, his daughter, individuals who work closely with him, this nation, and others throughout the world. I will briefly describe what in my own opinion has occurred, then ask you to draw conclusions from those events to guide your own life. Then I will speak of our prophets, that they may continue to inspire you personally. Please listen carefully to not

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misunderstand what I say. I pray to be led in the statements that follow.

President Clinton has made declarations of incorrect decisions in his personal life. What is proper for him and the others who have responsibility to act to do? What should you and I do about it? I am not placing myself in a position to exercise judgment on those who are deeply involved in this matter. I simply want to point out what I understand the Lord has said and what the laws of this nation require. Learning from this experience can be of great personal benefit in helping you make correct choices in life.

First, concerning unchangeable standards, our Father in Heaven has made it very clear that the covenant of marriage is most sacred. The responsibilities that attend it are very clearly defined in His scriptures. The Ten Commandments state: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). The Savior taught: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27–28). “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22). “Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery . . . , nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). And, “He that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive” (D&C 42:25).

The central purpose of the Savior’s life on earth was to atone for the transgressions of all mankind who would accept His commandments and live them. His sinless life was voluntarily given to take upon Himself the consequences of the demands of justice for all who violated any commandment, large or small. He has provided the process of repentance to help every individual rectify mistakes made on this earth through the power of mercy. Mercy does not overcome the demands of justice but satisfies

them through His payment of those demands when earned by our complete, sincere repentance as defined in His teachings. He has promised, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43). President Clinton recently stated in a prayer breakfast with religious leaders that he has begun that process. That matter should now rest in the hands of the president, his religious advisors, and the Lord to see that it is thoroughly and properly performed.

Don’t read or otherwise fill your mind with the salacious details of this controversy. No good will come of that. For some it could lead to destructive experimentation in absolute violation of the commandments of God.

What should you and I do regarding this matter? The Lord has said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). I understand that means to forgive another’s offense against me. I have forgiven the president of any personal offense. I continue to pray for him, his wife, and his daughter and ask the Lord to strengthen and guide him and help him make the right choices in this time of difficulty. I pray for the others who are adversely affected by his decisions.

However, that forgiveness does not wipe out the consequences of those improper choices. They must be faced before the Lord and before those who are charged with the responsibility to evaluate any violation of trust that President Clinton took upon himself with the oath of office and the acceptance of the resultant responsibilities as president of the United States. The Lord has said, “For of him unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3). There are other passages of scripture that confirm that we are not only responsible for our individual acts but must be accountable for those we influence when we

have positions of responsibility. That is true for a father or mother, a bishop or stake president, or a civic leader who has made a promise to be honorable in carrying out his or her office. When there is a violation of that trust, there is a need to follow the procedures that are established to rectify it. As far as President Clinton is concerned, that process has begun and is in the hands of Congress, which has the constitutional responsibility to evaluate it and to take the appropriate action. Let us pray that all involved in that process will be led to make the correct decisions.

Decision Making

There are two patterns for making decisions in life: The first I will call *Decisions Based upon Circumstance*; the second, *Decisions Based upon Eternal Truth*. I have chosen the experience of President Clinton and the lives of our prophets to illustrate each of these patterns and their consequences. The guiding principle in the pattern of life where decisions are based upon circumstance is to make them according to the outcome desired. There is no underlying set of values or standards used to consistently guide those decisions. Each one is made upon what appears to be the best choice at the moment. One who chooses this path of action is left to his own strength and capacity and the support of others that can be influenced to act in his favor. Satan encourages choices to be made in this manner because it gives him the greatest possibility to tempt an individual to make decisions that will be harmful and destructive even though they appear most appealing when a decision is made.

The prophets have followed the second pattern—that of making Decisions Based upon Eternal Truth, the pattern of the Lord. They have consistently centered their lives in the commandments of God. Their decisions have been and are made in accordance with those unchanging truths. In addition to his own strength and capacity, a prophet enjoys the

blessings derived from divine inspiration and, when needed, power from God—as do you when you follow the same pattern. His actions are predictable and bless the lives of all those who look to Him for guidance. Those who follow the counsel of a prophet will not be led astray nor disappointed. He lives a life of peace and happiness.

Such men are instruments of tremendous good throughout the world. All who follow their example and counsel will be blessed. I am grateful to have known and loved prophets of God. The individuals that have been called by the Lord to be president of this Church are the most important human beings on earth. The Lord places on their shoulders a responsibility and trust that exceeds that of any other man. A prophet can be trusted for what he *is* even more than for what he has the capacity to do. The worthy character of these humble men is like a fabric woven from countless threads of correct choices—some small, some great, some difficult to make, others less challenging. You can form worthy character in the same way.

I spoke earlier of repentance. Let me add that serious transgressions such as immorality require the participation of one who holds the keys of authority, such as a bishop or stake president, to quietly work out the repentance process to make sure that it is complete and appropriately done. That priesthood officer has a responsibility to determine what action regarding membership should be taken and if there is the required broken heart and contrite spirit to allow the miracle of the Atonement to cleanse and purify the life of the transgressor (see 2 Nephi 2:7). This process is confidential and is carried out privately under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Never make the mistake of believing that because you have confessed a serious transgression you have repented of it. That is an essential step, but it is not all that is required. Nor assume that because someone did not ask you all the details of a transgression you are

free from the responsibility to mention them. Where a transgression such as immorality requires intervention of a judge of Israel, you personally have the responsibility to make sure that he understands all of the details so that he can properly help you through the process of repentance to full forgiveness. Should there be anyone among us today that requires that further evaluation, please talk to your bishop now.

Make sure that as you are seeking an eternal companion that nothing is done that will offend the Spirit. Satan tempts a weaker individual to rationalize when two are in love and agree that sexual intimacies can be performed, that such things are acceptable. They positively are not. The boundaries of appropriate behavior are defined by God Himself. In the sacred, private parts of the body there are centered powerful emotions intended to be used within the covenant of marriage between a husband and wife in ways that are appropriate and acceptable to them both. They are not to be stimulated or used for personal gratification outside of the covenant of marriage. Do not touch the private, sacred parts of another person's body to stimulate those emotions nor allow anyone to do that with you—with or without clothing. Do not stimulate those emotions in your own body. These things are wrong. Do not do them. Such actions place barriers to the Holy Spirit. You need that direction to guide you in the important choices you make here at the university. Such practices would undermine your ability to be inspired in the vitally important decisions you must make here.

I know that you have chosen to make decisions based upon eternal truth or you would not be here today. Please never allow yourself to make an exception to that pattern of life to gain a temporary, appealing advantage or to participate in an experience you know to be unworthy. How can you keep your resolve to live worthily? How can you be sure that determination in your heart will not be eroded by the pressures around you?

Choose good friends—those who have made a similar decision in their lives—from among the student body, the faculty, and your priesthood leaders: those like yourself who elect to keep order and restraint and to use time wisely. Students who go astray generally choose the other kind of friends. Be surrounded by those who are true friends who accept you the way you are and leave you better because of their association.

Remember the sound teachings you've gathered thus far in your life. Much of the disappointment and tragedy that one encounters in university life come from the new freedom to do anything desired. At this time of transition where you have increased control of your life, make decisions wisely. You will be helped by the guidance of the Holy Ghost because of your determination to obey the Lord.

There is no guarantee that life will be easy for anyone. We grow and learn more rapidly by facing and overcoming challenges. You are here to prove yourself, to develop, and to overcome. There will be constant challenges that cause you to think, to make proper judgments, and to act righteously. You will grow from these challenges. However, there are some challenges you never need to encounter. They are those associated with serious transgression. As you continue to avoid such mistakes, your life will be simpler and happier.

Now I would like to discuss the three levels of learning that are available to you here at Brigham Young University and mention some suggestions to help you obtain the maximum benefit from each one of them.

Formal Instruction

The first level of learning I would call formal instruction. This is the level you are most familiar with. You have worked hard to get here, you have chosen a field of study, and you are busy garnering what you can from the classes you have selected and the professors and their assistants who help you. Formal

instruction is focused on what you hear, read, and write, as well as on your expressions in class, your study, and your effort to acquire an understanding of the materials shared with you. Success in formal instruction requires discipline, the wise use of time, and scheduling your study to minimize conflicts of overlapping assignments and competing activities. Consistent study habits that focus on daily application of effort to learn are far more effective than panicked cramming near times of testing. Consistent learning allows you to grasp the essentials of your courses so that you may apply them throughout your life. Formal instruction is generally built on a sequence that employs previously learned material. Hence, concentrated, sporadic study won't allow you to attain the understanding you need to master the materials. Formal instruction in a university requires self-motivated initiative. It is enriched when you can go beyond the minimum requirements and do extra work. That requires a balance in the load you carry. Condition that academic load to be a reasonable evaluation of your capacity—not too much and certainly not too little. If you are struggling with how to set those limits, seek help. You will have to initiate that request for help. You are not alone here, but part of your growth and experience is to learn how to find needed assistance. Those abilities will help you throughout life's journey, for we all need help to succeed.

You may be tempted to say, "I have so much to do I can't take on anything more. The struggle I have just to meet minimum academic requirements is almost more than I can handle." I am not suggesting that you work harder, unless you are not tugging at your limits of capacity already. I am encouraging you to work more intelligently. Let me share with you how. It is by using two other levels of learning. At first it may seem like just more to do, but as you consistently use these guides, your university experience will be easier—as will the rest of your life.

Social Interaction

The second level of learning is that obtained through social interaction. By this I mean how to deal effectively with others—how to live and serve together productively at all levels. Often those who do extremely well scholastically lack confidence in their social skills. At this university that challenge can be met and overcome. The most important lessons can be learned by careful observation. Study how those who make friends easily act. Study those who seem to be natural leaders and therefore contribute much. What motivates them? How do they relate to others? These lessons you can learn in the classroom and in extracurricular activities.

Yet there is no way to learn more effectively than through service to others. Each of you has the opportunity of giving of yourself through your ward or stake activities. That can either be formal service by accepting a call when it is made or it can be by observing a need and administering to it in the life of another individual. Learn to serve here—not to be served. There is immense happiness in selfless service. Selfless service will lead you to learn the principles of effective, harmonious human interaction.

Carefully observe what goes on about you in the classroom, and especially out of it. It is not likely that the most treasured truths you will carry away from this educational experience will occur at the feet of a master teacher. Rather, they will be distilled from many careful observations and crucially important promptings that can pass unperceived or unrecorded in your consciousness unless you search for them.

In the society of today—where you will grow as an individual, as a member of a family, and as a professional—there is increasing need for skill in interaction with others. Learn it while you are here. Observe what yields enduring good and develops the kind of relationships that are desirable. Determine how

they are obtained. Put them in practice. Remember, the core principle is to give of yourself while showing genuine interest in others.

Spiritual Direction

The third level of learning comes from qualifying to obtain spiritual direction in your life. It is the most rewarding yet possibly the most difficult initially to feel confident in using. It is centered in that quality of being called “righteousness.” To be righteous is to seek intently to be obedient to the commandments of God. It is to be clean in thought and act. It is to be honest and just.

Continually bless your life with the power of righteousness. Righteousness engenders trust. It builds confidence. It yields enduring worthy achievement. Righteousness is shown more in acts than in words. A clever individual without foundation principles can at times acquire—temporarily—impressive accomplishments. Yet those accomplishments are like sand castles. When the test of character comes, they crumble and fall, often taking others with them. Despite how carefully a transgressor seeks to keep violations of commandments secret and hidden, in time they nearly always become publicly known. Satan himself sees to that. He and his angels are determined to cause the greatest possible harm to each of Father in Heaven’s children. One serious act of disobedience or violation of trust invariably raises questions of whether or not there are others. It undermines the faith and confidence of others in that individual, whether warranted or not.

Worthy character centered in truth, fortified by continuing correct decisions, and anchored in integrity is what I know you have decided to acquire in your life or you wouldn’t be here. Let me help you understand how to do that. This is a time to set your course for life, a time to establish fundamental priorities. One of the opportunities you now have is to be able to differentiate among the many good and bad things that can be done and to select those that

are righteous and truly essential. Here you enjoy a personal freedom that likely you have never had before. That freedom can be a friend or enemy, depending upon how it is used. You will come to find that the restraints provided by the teachings of the Lord actually form a platform leading to greater freedom. Should they be hurriedly dismantled in the excitement of increased personal choice, serious problems can result. Carefully consider your options and make correct choices to establish the proper priorities in this critical phase of your life. Continue to be one who invariably makes choices consistent with the commandments of God, and you will be on a secure path. He who is tempted to temporarily set aside standards to gain an attractive advantage is on the path that leads to heartache and disappointment. The BYU Honor Code is a tool to help you to consistently follow the correct pattern of life, the one the Lord has outlined.

I have discussed three levels of learning. Conscientiously use each of them. Your objective is not to *get through the university* but to *absorb and use* the experiences that can be acquired here, the knowledge that can be obtained through righteous effort, and the lessons that can be learned from consistently facing and resolving the challenges that you will encounter in your academic, social, and private life. The inspiration of the Spirit will help you do that.

In this university you not only can learn knowledge essential to your chosen field, but you can learn how to live life to its fullest. As you augment your learning by *what you observe* and *what you perceive by the Spirit*, you will greatly increase your capacity to be successful in life. You will be led to establish objectives for life that will likely be more enduring, productive, and satisfying than you otherwise would select. You will discover more of your true potential.

If your focus at BYU has been primarily to excel only in formal instruction, you have not

understood the rich potential available here for you. Formal instruction can be obtained at any good university. Be wise. Benefit by consistently using all of the levels of learning available to you here.

In closing, may I speak from my heart to each individual present. The Lord has a purpose for you, individually, to be at this singular campus as a student or member of the faculty or staff. Discover it and fulfill it. It will likely not be revealed all at once but will be unfolded line upon line. As you pray and work hard, you will find threads of understanding that will lead you to the path the Lord wants you to follow for the greatest enduring, meaningful attainment, contribution, joy, and peace of mind. Faithfully and courageously follow those threads of understanding and direction.

As a student it will require focused effort, stretching your capacities, and often setting aside things that would be pleasant and enjoyable to do in preference to essential things that must be done. Here you can find the beginnings of what the Lord has intended for you to accomplish in life. I feel to promise you that as you continually learn from the three different levels we have discussed, you will gain the training, orientation, and capacities that the Lord would have you acquire while here. They will yield much joy and a productive life now and eternally.

As a member of the faculty it will mean concentrating more on what you feel the Lord wants done here with your capacity and strengths than on gaining the recognition and acceptance of your professional peers throughout the world.

I am on the executive committee of the board of trustees that oversees this university. We anguish over the reality that because of limited resources many of the choice youth, gifted faculty, and highly skilled professionals among the membership of the Church cannot experience the blessings of being at Brigham Young University. I am aware of the very large

investment of the Church in this institution, both in money and in human resources. I ask sincerely that if anyone who hears or reads this message has decided to concentrate only on formal education, ignoring the other unique opportunities here; or if a faculty member has chosen to be more concerned about peer acceptance than meeting squarely the goals and objectives of the university; or should there be anyone who has any intent to break the Honor Code, please consider fulfilling your expectations at another university. Your ambition can be adequately met there, and you would open a place for another to fully utilize the unique experiences offered at this university. As an ecclesiastical leader, if you find someone in any of these categories, help them change to gain a broader vision or help them go elsewhere.

In an exercise of a sacred privilege that can be used when prompted by the Holy Spirit, I invoke a blessing of the Lord upon each of you, a blessing by which—according to your faith in Jesus Christ, your obedience to His commandments, and your diligent effort—you may be strengthened and guided in your efforts to live righteously. Also, that you will succeed in your chosen field and can develop those skills that will lead you to live productively and joyfully. I invoke a blessing that according to your righteousness and your faith and commitment to live worthily, you will be given support to resist the efforts of Satan to cause you to violate your standards so that you may remain morally clean, pure, and righteous.

I bear witness that the Savior will guide you through the Holy Ghost as you steadfastly do what is right and make the correct choices according to His teachings using the pattern of Decisions Based upon Eternal Truth. That pattern of life will lead you to success, accomplishment, peace, happiness, and great joy.

I solemnly bear witness that you are precious and special spirits who have the opportunity to be here. We pray for you; we love you; we want the best for you. I know the

vast majority are already doing the things I've talked about. Help others you come across who haven't found that way. I know that Jesus

Christ lives. I solemnly witness that He lives, loves you, and will help you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.