

The Wind Beneath Your Wings

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My dear brothers and sisters, what a delight it is to be with you today. To feel your spirit and the greatness of this school is uplifting and edifying.

My wife and I connect in a very personal way to this institution of higher education. No, we never studied here, but our daughter received a master's degree here. As a proud parent, I am not only sharing with you that she graduated summa cum laude, but it is much more impressive and joyful for us as parents that she gave birth to our twin grandsons at the Utah Valley Hospital during the same year. Therefore, my wife and I love Provo. We love BYU. We love to be with you today.

By the way, all of our children and grandchildren live in Europe. They try to follow the long-standing counsel by the First Presidency to remain in their homelands, working to build the Church in their native countries. Great blessings will come personally to them and to the Church collectively as they heed this counsel. I commend the many of you who will strengthen wards and stakes throughout the world as you return to your countries after receiving such an excellent education here at BYU.

In 2003 a hundred years of powered flight is being celebrated. The Wright brothers invented

the airplane in 1903. Having been a pilot since 1959, only 56 years after the Wright brothers, I selected this historic event to make a connection for my talk today.

An ancient Greek myth tells the story of Daedalus and Icarus, who made wings from feathers and wax. Over the centuries, many, including Leonardo da Vinci, tried to invent flying machines. In 1783 the Montgolfier brothers made a hot-air balloon rise above Paris. At the end of the 19th century, Otto Lilienthal, a German who flew his own gliders, was killed during a test flight in Berlin.

On December 17, 1903, a dream of mankind was fulfilled as Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first controlled, powered flight. The distance was about 120 feet, or 37 meters—about half the length of a B-747 jumbo jet—and the duration was about 12 seconds. That's shorter than the time it takes me to climb the stairs leading up to the 747 cockpit.

Few really believed that it would ever be possible for man to fly like a bird. A commissioner of the U.S. Office of Patents is reputed

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to have said: “Everything that can be invented has been invented.”¹

In Paris on November 5, 1908, Wilbur Wright said to the Aéro-Club de France:

*The desire to fly after the fashion of birds is an ideal handed down to us by our ancestors who, in their gruelling travels across trackless lands in prehistoric times, looked enviously on the birds soaring freely through space, at full speed, above all obstacles, on the infinite highway of the air. . . . I confess that, in 1901, I said to my brother Orville that men would not fly for fifty years. . . . I have ever since distrusted myself and have refrained from all prediction.*²

Wilbur and Orville had parents who encouraged education, religion, and family values. Both brothers had their share of serious illnesses. They went through difficult times of trouble, perplexity, and even despair, wondering if they would ever succeed. They tried different vocations as printers, bicycle repairmen, bicycle manufacturers, and, eventually, aircraft inventors. Throughout their lives whenever they picked a project to work on, they were focused and worked as a team.

Looking at the geography of their activities, a thought came to me—more on the light side. Just to go from their home in Dayton, Ohio, to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the Wright brothers had to first take a train, then a steamship, then another train, and finally one more voyage by boat. The trip of about 700 miles took the Wrights nine days. No wonder they decided to invent the airplane.

I know they had their share of frustration and discouragement over “too little time,” “too much to do,” and “too little success,” but stumbling blocks became stepping-stones for them.

As you might have similar feelings at times, let me assure you that you all have reasons to think beyond the horizon of provinciality because you are a royal generation. Even angels are cheering you on; they know of the great divine potential that lies within you.

Taking a view from a higher perspective, what Orville and Wilbur Wright brought about was actually only a small step for man compared to the leap for humanity and mankind you are able to bring to pass during your lifetime as you “enter to learn” and “go forth to serve.”

In 1918, on the 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th hour—a time at which we stand this very day and hour as well—the world community was hoping that with the end of World War I, the end had come to all wars. Since the infamous attack of 9/11/2001, as we read the newspaper, watch television, or listen to the news, we almost constantly hear of “wars and rumors of wars” and realize that “the whole earth [is] in commotion, and men’s hearts shall fail them” (D&C 45:26). But let us remember that God declared, “See that ye be not troubled, for all I have told you must come to pass; but the end is not yet. . . . Behold I speak for mine elect’s sake” (JS—M 1:23, 29).

At BYU you have favorable circumstances and inspired leaders who will help you to be honest with others and yourselves and to “be of good cheer” (John 16:33), to have visions, dreams, and always hope—even for your football team, which is presently on a losing streak.

Sometimes it is difficult to see what good will come out of your efforts and where the road you are on will lead to. You might even feel like Paul on his way to Rome. In the book of Acts we read that Paul was taken as a prisoner to the capital city of the world’s number-one military power. It looked bleak for the Apostle Paul. En route to Rome the ship he was on was caught in a *perfect storm*, one not made in Hollywood but in the Mediterranean Sea. All their lives were endangered. We read, “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away” (Acts 27:20).

How did Paul handle this hopeless situation? Amidst all this commotion, he stood up and

said, “Be of good cheer: . . . For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not” (Acts 27:22–24). Paul then gave concise instructions that appeared at the moment far removed from a logical problem-solving process. Among other things, he told them to lighten the ship, and they did so by throwing things they cherished overboard. Then “they committed themselves unto the sea . . . , and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore” (Acts 27:40).

Fortunately the guards who were prepared to kill Paul believed his words and followed his counsel. The scripture reports, “And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land” (Acts 27:44).

There will be times in your lives when you will not know the quick answers for your circumstances. Rely then on the word of God. Your Father in Heaven will always teach you to fear not, but to be of good cheer, to lighten your ship of clutter and focus on the spiritual matters, to commit yourselves to the covenants you made, and to put your sail of righteousness into the wind and head courageously toward the land of your eternal future.

The Wright brothers committed themselves to do what no one else had ever done before—something numerous highly recognized people had declared was impossible. The Wright brothers took time to do their homework. They were humble and smart enough to appreciate and learn about the work of others who went before. And they tackled the problem line upon line, precept upon precept. They realized that there were three main requirements for a practical flying machine:

First, the pilot had to be able to *control the aircraft*.

Second, the wings had to *produce lift*.

Third, it had to be *powered by an engine* to stay aloft.³

They had their goals defined and worked diligently on them one day at a time. Leonardo

da Vinci said, “He turns not back who is bound to a star.”⁴

Similar principles and requirements apply to your own journey through life and toward the destination of eternal life. Divine principles have to be learned and lived as you prepare to rise up on the wings of eagles.

First: You Have to Learn to Control Yourself

It isn’t until you come to a spiritual understanding of who you are that you can begin to take control of yourself. As you learn to control yourself, you will get control of your life. If you want to move the world, you first have to move yourself.

President Spencer W. Kimball often quoted an unknown author:

*The greatest battle of life is fought out within the silent chambers of the soul. A victory on the inside of a man’s heart is worth a hundred conquests on the battlefields of life. To be master of yourself is the best guarantee that you will be master of the situation. Know thyself. The crown of character is self-control.*⁵

Be responsive to the counsel of the prophets, seers, and revelators who will help you to reach true self-mastery. Be responsive to the promptings of the Spirit. The Spirit will influence your conscience and help you to refine yourself by working on the little tasks of self-control—like controlling your thoughts, words, and actions, which leads to self-control of your whole self, of mind, body, and spirit. Remember, *anger* is only one letter short of *danger*.

Your choices are the mirror of your self-control. They will lead you to your eternal destination if they are made with divine direction and control. Stay morally clean. Keep a clean mind and heart. Your thoughts will determine your actions. Control your thoughts. Don’t submit yourself to temptation. Aristotle said, “For what it lies in our power to do, it lies in our power not to do.”⁶

Control wisely and select carefully what you will invite via a mouse click or remote control into your home, your dormitory, or your office. Select reading material, movies, TV shows, and any other form of entertainment that bring good, uplifting thoughts rather than unwholesome desires.

Second: Your Attitude Will Determine Your Lift and Altitude

Dictionaries describe *lift* something like the following: “to carry or direct from a lower to a higher position; the power or force available for raising to a new level or altitude; a force acting in an upward direction, opposing the pull of gravity.”

The Psalmist sets the goals even higher: “Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Psalm 25:1), and, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help” (Psalm 121:1). He invites you to fly with the eagles, not to scratch with the chickens.

Lifting your eyes toward the God of heaven is a process cultivating your own very personal spirituality. It is a desire to live in harmony with the Father; the Son, our Savior; and the Holy Ghost. It is also your ability to be truly “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us], even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

With the right attitude—which, incidentally, is also needed to produce sufficient lift for an airplane—you will be able to effectively communicate with your Heavenly Father, and not to just say your prayers. You will be able to say prayers that will go beyond the ceiling of the room—prayers not filled with trite repetitions or spoken without thinking but filled with your deep yearning to be one with your Father in Heaven.

Prayer, if given in faith, is acceptable to God at all times. If you ever feel you cannot pray, that is the time when you definitely need to pray. Nephi taught in plainness: “For if ye

would hearken unto the Spirit [of God] which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit . . . teacheth him that he must not pray” (2 Nephi 32:8).

President Harold B. Lee taught: “The sincere prayer of the righteous heart opens to any individual the door to divine wisdom and strength in that for which he righteously seeks.”⁷

Obedience assures us an answer to our prayers. We read in the New Testament: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

The Prophet Joseph Smith learned in a revelation given to him in Kirtland in 1831: “He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30).

In order to lift, enhance, and cultivate your relationship with God as His spiritual children, you have the unique opportunity to converse with the supreme source of wisdom and compassion in the universe.

Daily, simple but sincere and mighty prayers will help you to lift your lives onto a higher spiritual altitude. In your prayers you praise God, give thanks to Him, confess weaknesses, petition needs, and express deep devotion to your Heavenly Father. As you do this, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, you perform a spiritual effort that leads to increased inspiration, revelation, and righteousness—not self-righteousness—and brings the brightness of heaven into your lives.

This brings back memories from my professional life as an airline captain: departing from a dark and rainy airport, climbing through thick and threatening winter clouds, and then, suddenly, breaking through the cloud tops and steeply gaining altitude into the bright sunshine and into the endless blue sky, feeling free, safe, and home at last. But this beautiful feeling reflects only the smallest part of what you can experience through your daily prayers.

A word of caution: In aerodynamics, gravity and drag work in *opposition* to lift. This same important principle has been an integral part of the plan of salvation from the beginning. As Lehi explained: “For it must needs be, that there is an *opposition* in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11; emphasis added). And King Benjamin warned, “For the natural man is an enemy to God . . . *unless* he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19; emphasis added).

This leads us to God’s great gift to His children: agency.

Lehi taught this most important doctrine to his children. He said:

The Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. . . .

. . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the . . . power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. [2 Nephi 2:16, 27]

You have agency and you are free to choose. But there is actually no *free* agency. Agency has its price. You have to pay the consequences of your choices.

Like gravity or drag in aerodynamics, agency will collect its fee through accountability—just like the foolish man who chose to step out of the window of a high building had to accept the consequences of his choice. He had to learn the hard way that “it ain’t the free fall that hurts; it’s the sudden stop.”

Agency is a spiritual matter. Without awareness of alternatives, you could not choose. Agency is so important in your lives that you not only *can* choose obedience or rebellion but you *must*. During this life you cannot remain on neutral ground—you cannot abstain from either receiving or rejecting the light from God.

Human agency was purchased with the price of Christ’s suffering. The power of Christ’s Atonement overcomes the effect of sin on the

condition of wholehearted repentance. Through and by the Savior’s universal and infinite Atonement, all have been redeemed from the Fall and have become free forever to act for themselves (see 2 Nephi 2:26).

By learning to use the gift of agency to make right decisions you will increase your spiritual lift and altitude. You will also quickly recognize one other prime source of spiritual truth: the written word of God.

Lifting your eyes toward heaven requires an attitude directed upward. With this positive attitude toward life comes the desire to *feast* “upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20)—not to just occasionally nibble on the scriptures or the words of the prophets.

“Feasting” includes searching, pondering, asking, praying, and living the word of God. Read the holy scriptures as if they were written for you—for they are. Nephi said, “For behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

One powerful scripture in the New Testament, James 1:5, initiated a wonderful process that led to the restoration of all things. May I ask you to take time to feast upon the word of God? It is available 24/7 but should not be treated like a fast-food service. Jesus asked listeners to go home and ponder what He had taught them (see 3 Nephi 17:3). This pondering, feasting, and meditating will help you “know to what source [you] may look for a remission of [your] sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Prayers and feasting upon the word of God are two elements of a heavenward attitude that will also enhance your work ethic and your willingness to serve and lift others. It will help you to carry Church responsibilities with the willingness to magnify your callings without trying to magnify yourself. With this divine attitude you will be more concerned about *how* you serve rather than *where* you serve. King Benjamin taught, “I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings

ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). And we do this by “lift[ing] up the hands which hang down” (Hebrews 12:12).

Third: You Need to Find and Trust the True Source of Divine Power

The Wright brothers needed engine power to make the airplane fly. Without true engine power this machine would have remained static. There would have been no lift, no forward motion to enable flight—no airplane.

You have an all-encompassing true source of power available to help you reach the purpose of your creation. This is the power of God, exercising a subtle and loving influence in the lives of His children, lifting you and keeping you aloft. It is manifested as the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The Latin source of the word *comforter*—*com fortis*—means “together strong.” As the Holy Ghost visits your own spirit, you become stronger than you are by yourself. When you receive the Holy Ghost, you receive strength, power, peace, and comfort.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

*There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this sign or ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him. Until he obeyed these ordinances and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of hands, according to the order of God, he could not have healed the sick or commanded an evil spirit to come out of a man.*⁸

Parley P. Pratt stated that the Holy Ghost *inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person,*

*form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It develops and invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens, invigorates and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is . . . marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being.*⁹

President Marion G. Romney gave us encouragement:

*You can make every decision in your life correctly if you can learn to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This you can do if you will discipline yourself to yield your own feelings to the promptings of the Spirit. Study your problems and prayerfully make a decision. Then take that decision and say to him, in a simple, honest supplication, “Father, I want to make the right decision. I want to do the right thing. This is what I think I should do; let me know if it is the right course.” Doing this, you can get the burning in your bosom, if your decision is right. . . . When you learn to walk by the Spirit, you never need to make a mistake.*¹⁰

The Prophet Joseph Smith talked about the promptings of the Spirit as “sudden strokes of ideas.”¹¹

The Holy Ghost will make you independent. You need to learn many things during your time at BYU, but if you will learn how to have the Holy Ghost as a constant companion, all other needful things will fall in place. Through your personal righteousness the Spirit of God will guide you to learn to control yourself, to enhance your attitude, to increase your spiritual altitude, and to find and trust the true source of divine power.

To stay one more time within the metaphor of flying an aircraft, many things are required to make an airplane fly and fly safely, but the most important thing, as I used to call it, is the “wind beneath your wings.” Without it, there is no lift, no climb, no flight into the wild blue yonder or to faraway, beautiful destinations.

The Holy Ghost will be the wind beneath your wings, placing in your hearts the firm conviction of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His place in the eternal plan of God, your Eternal Father. Through the Holy Ghost you will know *your* place in this plan and *your* divine eternal destination. You will be converted to the Lord, His gospel, and His Church, and you will never fall away. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Samuel Sass, "A Patently False Patent Myth," *Skeptical Inquirer* 13, no. 3 (spring 1989): 310–12, also reprinted in vol. 27, no. 3 (May/June 2003): 43–45, 48.
2. In *The Papers of Wilbur and Orville Wright*, ed. Marvin W. McFarland (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), 2:934.
3. See Tom D. Crouch, *The Bishop's Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 166; see also lecture given by Wilbur Wright in Chicago on September 18, 1901, "Some Aeronautical Experiments," in *Journal of the Western Society of Engineers* (December 1901): 489–510, and in McFarland, *Papers*, 1:99–118.
4. From Windsor Drawings 12282r., in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 261.
5. In Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 235; see also Brigham Clegg, "Speakers' Contest: 'Sacrifice,'" *Improvement Era* 5, no. 9 (July 1902): 684.
6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 3, chapter 5.
7. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 318.
8. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 199.
9. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1891), 102.
10. Marion G. Romney, *CR*, October 1961, 60–61.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 151.