

# *Enter to Learn: How to Organize According to God's Laws*

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The entrance to our campus is signified by three inspiring mottos: “The glory of God is intelligence”; “The world is our campus”; and “Enter to learn; Go forth to serve.” In contemplating the injunction “Enter to learn; Go forth to serve,” I am intrigued by the proposition that our students should “enter to learn *how* to go forth to serve *more effectively*.” This modification makes explicit the relationship between what we learn and how well we serve. It also clarifies our responsibility as members of the BYU academic community to not only motivate our graduates to serve willingly but to also increase their capability to serve effectively.

A key for what our students need to learn in order to serve more effectively is found in D&C 51:15: “And thus I grant unto this people a privilege of organizing themselves according to my laws.” Since coming to BYU three years ago, I have welcomed the opportunity to explore in my organizational behavior classes and in my work at the Center for the Study of Values in Organizations scriptural clues regarding God’s organizing laws.

I have chosen to address this subject in a BYU devotional because I believe that our potential to realize our unique educational mission is predicated upon our ability to organize

our activities and relationships according to God’s laws, and to provide opportunities for our students to learn these organizing laws from our thoughtful instruction and our compelling example. Demonstration is superior to exposition as a teaching tool, and there should be no better opportunity for LDS members to observe the effective implementation of God’s laws of organizing than at BYU. In that regard, it is instructive to note that the word *university* originally meant a community, which in its normative sense connotes a supportive, invigorating, and ennobling learning environment.

Stated succinctly, my thesis is that President Bateman’s charge to transform BYU from a “university in Zion” into a “Zion university” has as much to do with implementing God’s laws for organizing our offices, our committees, our work crews, our wards, our dormitories, and our athletic teams as with integrating sacred and secular learning in our classrooms.

To provide a common point of reference for my remarks, I’d like to begin by relating an

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experience taken from Joseph Smith’s diary. During the second week of December 1835, the Prophet spent several evenings participating in a debate at the home of his brother, William, in Kirtland, Ohio. The subject of the debate was whether it was necessary for God to reveal himself to man in order for us to experience happiness. Joseph spoke in favor of the proposition—his intimate understanding of the subject and his forceful nature undoubtedly contributed to his side winning the debate.

At the conclusion of this activity, the future of the debate series was discussed. Joseph urged the group to disband, fearing, in his words, “that it would not result in good” (Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), p. 105). William opposed this position and became very angry. He refused to allow his brother Hyrum to express his opinion on the subject, invoking his right as the owner of the home to manage the discussion as he saw fit. William’s frustrations grew to the point that, according to the Prophet, he “used violence upon my person” (Jessee, *Personal Writings*, p. 106).

A few days later Joseph described this event and its effects:

*I left [his] house with feelings that were indescribable. The scenery had changed [along with] all those expectations that I had cherished, when going to [his] house, of brotherly kindness, charity, forbearance and natural affection, that in duty binds us not to make each other offenders for a word.*

*. . . With marks of violence heaped upon me by a brother . . . I returned home, not able to sit down, or rise up, without help, but through the blessings of God I am now better.* [p. 114; text modernized]

This experience was equally troubling to William, as reflected in the following letter he sent Joseph: “Brother Joseph—Though I do not know but [if] I have forfeited all right and title to the word *brother*, in consequence of what I

have done.” He then requested a release from his apostleship, because “then I would not . . . bring so much disgrace upon the cause, when I fell into temptation [because of my] passions” (pp. 110–11; spelling corrected).

From the Prophet’s entry in his journal two weeks later, on the morning of January 1, 1836, it is evident that, although his physical wounds had healed, his emotional scars were still very painful.

*Notwithstanding the gratitude that fills my heart [in reflecting on] the past year, and the multiplied blessings that have crowned our heads, my heart is pained within me because of the difficulty that exists in my father’s family. The Devil has made a violent attack on Brother William and Brother Calvin, and the powers of darkness . . . cast a gloomy shade over the minds of my brothers and sisters, which prevents them from seeing things as they really are. The powers of earth and hell seem combined to overthrow us and the church by causing a division in the family. Indeed, the adversary is bringing into requisition all his subtlety to prevent the Saints from being endowed, by causing division among the 12, also among the 70, and bickerings and jealousies among the Elders and official members of the church. . . .*

*But I am determined that nothing on my part shall be lacking to . . . amicably . . . settle all family difficulties on this day, that the ensuing year . . . may be spent in righteousness before God.* [p. 121; text modernized]

Later that day, Joseph’s father, uncle, brothers Hyrum and William, and Martin Harris attended a meeting in the Prophet’s home. According to Joseph’s account, his father opened with prayer, and then

*expressed his feelings . . . with all the sympathy of a father whose feelings were wounded deeply on . . . account of the difficulty that [existed] in the family. And while he addressed us the spirit of God rested down upon us in mighty power, and our hearts*

*were melted. Brother William made a humble confession and asked my forgiveness for the abuse he had offered me, and wherein I had been out of the way I asked his forgiveness. The spirit of confession and forgiveness was mutual among us all, and we covenanted with each other . . . to strive from hence forward to build each other up in righteousness in all things and [to] not listen to evil reports concerning each other, but [to] go to each other with our grievances in the spirit of meekness and be reconciled, and thereby promote our own happiness and the happiness of our family and, in short, the happiness and well-being of all. [p. 122; text modernized]*

This story illustrates what I believe to be three of God’s core organizing processes—sanctification, edification, and unification—which work together to harmonize individual, interpersonal, and group spiritual development. None of these processes can operate independent of the others. We cannot become personally sanctified if we are not edifying others, and God’s process of unification naturally emerges out of the edifying actions of sanctified individuals.

It is clear that when Joseph and William were out of sorts with one another, they were out of touch with the Lord. Furthermore, as their rancor impaired their motivation and ability to serve each other, their usefulness as servants of the Lord was diminished. William’s confession letter suggests that although he had been ordained an apostle, he was still struggling to subdue his violent temper—and this lack of self-control made it difficult for him to edify others. Fearing that his lack of personal sanctification would foster disharmony and disunity among Church leaders and members, he requested a release from his church leadership responsibilities. Joseph’s journal entries reflect similar concerns about the adversary’s use of adversity to create disharmony in the Smith family. He despaired that the darkness and gloom of persecution were causing his

siblings to lose sight of their spiritual goals, which prevented them from “seeing things as they really are.” He was also concerned that jealousies and bickerings among Church members were delaying plans for their receiving the endowment, which is an essential step in the process of becoming one with God. It is instructive that the Spirit returned, and Joseph’s despair about the effect of this incident on the spiritual welfare of his family and the Church dissipated when he and his brother forgave each other and promised to reconcile their differences directly, to not listen to evil reports about each other, and to edify each other in all circumstances.

Based on my study of these three organizing laws, I am convinced that if we enter BYU to learn how to become more sanctified, edified, and unified, we will go forth to serve more willingly and more effectively.

Actually, my daughter Shauna got me thinking about this proposition several years ago, when we lived in Illinois. After each of her semesters at BYU I would ask her what significant lessons she had learned that term. Generally, she reported on her inspiring teachers, her interesting courses, her caring ward leaders, or her challenging part-time job. But one of her answers broke this pattern. She said, “The most valuable thing I learned this term was how to be charitable, and I learned that lesson from my roommate. She has established for me a model of service and compassion that has changed my life.” Two weeks ago my daughter graduated from BYU. As a parent I appreciate the outstanding education she received. I’m especially grateful for how her BYU experience, including her association with an inspiring group of friends and roommates, prepared her for a life of willing and effective service.

To better understand how all of our students can have an equally enriched learning experience, I propose that we examine each of these three key organizing processes separately and then explore their critical interdependencies.

*To sanctify* means to make sacred and holy through purification. It is an intensely personal development process, as reflected in the prophet Helaman’s description of his sanctified Saints.

*Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. [Helaman 3:35]*

The process of sanctification both requires and permits purifying catalytic exchanges with the Lord, as characterized in the following instructions for organizing the School of the Prophets.

*And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you assemble yourselves together, and organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean. [D&C 88:74; emphasis added]*

*To edify* means to build up, especially in regards to moral development. Edification is what we do for others that supports and enables their personal sanctification process. The Lord has counseled:

*He that preacheth and he that receiveth [according to the Spirit of truth], understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.*

*And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. [D&C 50:23–24]*

As the Saints prepared to leave Nauvoo 150 years ago this spring, the Lord gave Brigham Young a set of specific instructions for organizing their journey, recorded in section 136 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Verses 23 and 24 read:

*Cease to contend one with another; cease to speak evil one of another.*

*Cease drunkenness; and let your words tend to edifying one another.*

*To unify* means to bring together into one, to organize properly. The importance of unity is reflected in the Lord’s admonition “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). Hugh Nibley helps us better understand the relationship between God’s laws of organizing and God’s directive to become one:

*God’s forces organize, while Satan tries to disorganize. The natural state of order is one of disorder. Therefore, God’s influence is necessary to achieve order and unity. Unity means to harmonize with something or someone. We are the most united when we are in harmony with God. [Personal Notes]*

In a recent general conference address, Elder Dallin Oaks expressed similar views. He first quoted Brigham Young: “The difference between God and the Devil is that God creates and organizes, while the whole study of the Devil is to destroy” (DBY, p. 69). Elder Oaks then offered this counsel, “Whatever builds people up serves the cause of the Master, and whatever tears people down serves the cause of the adversary. We support one cause or the other every day, by our patronage” (“Powerful Ideas,” *Ensign*, November 1995, pp. 26–27).

In reviewing the BYU foundation documents, it is clear that the processes of sanctification, edification, and unification are central to the mission of BYU. At his inauguration, President Dallin H. Oaks stated:

*Our reason for being is to be a university. But our reason for being a university is to encourage and prepare young men and women to rise to their full spiritual potential as sons and daughters of God. [“Inaugural Response,” 12 November 1971, p. 18; emphasis in original]*

During the same inauguration, then Commissioner Neal A. Maxwell declared, “Brigham Young University seeks to improve and ‘sanctify’ itself for the sake of others—not for the praise of the world, but to serve the world better” (“Inaugural Greeting,” 12 November 1971, p. 1).

At my first annual university conference as a new faculty member, Todd Britsch, who was serving as academic vice president, helped me understand that the mission of BYU is broader and more important than what an outsider might conclude from observing our day-to-day campus routines. He said:

*I have a deep desire for [Brigham Young University] to be excellent, for everything about it to be exemplary. But as I have been forced by circumstances to think beyond football victories, academic prizes, important publications, or brilliant lectures, I have returned to the conviction that for BYU to be excellent, it must first be good. That is, that we will never maintain or improve any important standard of academic achievement if we do not first attain the Lord’s standards of virtue. . . . I am convinced that our value as a university is dependent on our capacity to live together in charity.* [Todd A. Britsch, “Excellence, Charity, and the University,” 1994 Annual University Conference, pp. 19–20]

To help us attain the Lord’s standards of virtue so that we can improve our standards of academic achievement, let us now turn our attention to three lawlike propositions that illustrate the necessary interdependence between sanctification, edification, and unification. The first of these is, *The edification of others is an essential requirement for personal sanctification*. In other words, to become good we must do good.

If I understand correctly the plan of spiritual development outlined in section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants, it involves the use of grace as both a process and an outcome. In

verses 12 and 13 of section 93, John the Revelator tells us that Christ progressed from “grace to grace” by receiving “grace for grace.” I take that to mean that Christ progressed from a lower state of perfection to a higher state of perfection through the process of receiving grace from God according to the grace Christ extended to others. Using our terminology, this interpretation indicates that our level of sanctification is directly related to our willingness to edify others by extending our grace to them, and, just as important, by graciously receiving grace from them.

A definition of grace that I learned as a student is “Doing something for someone else that they can’t do for themselves and that they don’t entirely merit.” What is it that others at BYU need from us that they can’t provide for themselves and for which they are not completely deserving? Roommates, shop clerks, teachers, security officers, coaches, administrators, and ward leaders need precisely the same things from us that we need from God and for which we are undeserving—including forgiveness for offense, overlooking the indiscretions inherent in immaturity, encouragement during periods of despair, and the motivation and power to transform weaknesses into strengths.

Last year I was asked to teach the core organizational behavior course in our Executive MBA Program. One evening, toward the end of the term, one of my students blurted out, “I am frustrated by my constant inability to implement the good ideas I’m learning in this program because I have a boss who is over the hill, out of touch, defensive, and unsupportive of change. Would you please tell me how to solve this problem?”

I can’t remember the first time I was asked this type of question by a participant in a management seminar or course, but I will always remember the first time it came up in a BYU class, because I was startled by my response.

At the University of Illinois I was asked this question so often that I actually developed a



set of rehearsed answers, centered around the image of “fencing in the dinosaurs.” Half joking, I told my students that they would probably have to wait for a meteor to hit their organization before they would be permanently rid of all their “dinosaur managers,” but in the meantime they could construct barriers around them to keep them from sabotaging organizational change initiatives.

In contrast, my response to this question as a BYU professor was quite different. I said something like, “Have you considered how your boss feels? Here is a person who once was competent, energetic, and successful. But now the changes he once enthusiastically promoted have doubled back on him, and he feels alone, scared, and defensive. Keeping in mind important personal and organizational objectives, why don’t you prayerfully consider the acts of charity that might restore your boss’s faith and hope.” I express appreciation for the learning environment at BYU that prompted this uncharacteristic but edifying response.

The second of the three lawlike propositions is, *Personal sanctification is a necessary condition for the edification of others*. In other words, we must be good in order to do good. Soon after the organization of the Church, the Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery in the proper discharge of his role as counselor and colleague to Joseph Smith. This instruction established a pattern for creating edifying relationships, even with those who have faults and weaknesses.

*Therefore be diligent; stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully, in whatsoever difficult circumstances he may be for the word’s sake.*

*Admonish him in his faults, and also receive admonition of him. Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope and charity.* [D&C 6:18–19]

The definition of *admonition* is “counsel, advice, or caution; a gentle reproof or warning;

to urge to duty, to remind of an obligation.” Compare the tone of this definition with the definition of *criticism*: “The act of passing severe judgment; censure; faultfinding.”

William and Joseph Smith were fortunate to have a righteous and sensitive counselor—their father. Who knows how much longer their disharmony would have lasted or how much more damage to their relationship and to the purposes of the Lord might have occurred if their father had not taken the initiative to organize the process of reconciliation. I don’t think it is by chance that Father Smith was the one who offered the opening prayer at their meeting, or that he counseled and admonished a prophet and an apostle to remember their duty as brothers rather than chastising them for their immature behavior as his sons. Because this counselor was in tune with the Spirit, the Spirit was present when hearts were ready to change in response to admonition and counsel.

As I contemplated Father Smith’s key role in this story, I was drawn to one of the classic talks on this subject given by my colleague Bonner Ritchie in a 1991 BYU devotional. He used as his text Psalms 55:14: “We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.” There are three noteworthy elements in this instructive verse. First, the operating verb *take* suggests that we should focus more on receiving and listening to counsel than on giving and enforcing counsel. Second, the instruction includes the modifier *sweet*, lest we are tempted to construe this verse to justify the use of harsh, critical counsel. Third, we are taught that the goal of sweet counsel should not be to advance our own self-interest but to encourage and prepare us to walk into the house of God in company.

In reflecting on how difficult it is as a scholar to resist the temptation to believe that because I am deemed wise I need not hearken to God’s counsel (2 Nephi 9:28) and I am qualified to “seek to counsel in [my] own ways”

(D&C 56:14), I have concluded that the best thing I can do to edify my students is to sanctify their teacher.

We now turn to the final proposition: *The goal of unification with others is made possible through a combination of personal sanctification and interpersonal edification.* One of the few descriptions we have of a Zion society is recorded in 4 Nephi. You have all read the account of this blessed people who lived together in righteous harmony for two centuries. One of the most telling characteristics of this society was, according to verse 17, the fact that “neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.” I take this to mean that, as a result of their transcendent state of unity with God and his teachings, the Saints achieved an almost incomprehensible oneness with each other, exemplified by their lack of social distinctions, referred to here as “-ites.”

I assume that although the Nephites “had all things in common,” some of their families were still larger than others, some adults were single and others were married, some were raised in a rural culture and others were raised in large cities, some lived in large houses and some lived in small houses, some wore traditional clothing and others preferred more modern attire, some could read and write and others could not, some were beautiful and others were homely, and some could trace their lineage back to Nephi and others were new converts, but, as a result of their superior level of spiritual conversion and personal maturity, members of this Zion community chose to ignore these differences—because they saw no need for distinctions.

A difference is something that you observe; a distinction is something that you make. Distinctions are commonly used to include and to exclude, for the purpose of creating status and privilege. Because there was no more desire for personal advantage left in the hearts

of these sanctified Saints, they saw no need to affix nonedifying labels to their neighbors, and hence there were no “manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.”

Recently I have had several conversations with students and staff on campus that have helped me better understand the need to eliminate one of the most divisive and pernicious ite-like distinctions that divides most universities—the difference between faculty and staff. Are you aware that nearly a third of our students work part-time on campus and that the majority of them work under the supervision of one full-time staff member for 10 to 20 hours a week? I sought out this information regarding the scope of student employment on campus after learning about a number of life-changing experiences centered around a student employment relationship.

The story of Joe, a freshman from a broken home and impoverished circumstances, is illustrative. After weeks of struggling with classes that assumed a level of understanding far surpassing his academic preparation, on top of working 20 hours a week and worrying about how to promote reconciliation among his disaffected and dispersed family members, his stressful circumstances finally overpowered his will to succeed. Late one night this frightened and distraught member of our community made a desperate call for help to the one person he felt would be willing to listen and to care—his custodial supervisor. Fortunately he received the reassurance and counsel he needed and expected and was able to complete the semester.

Since hearing about many similar experiences, I am both amused and disturbed by my arrogant presumption that BYU was organized for the primary purpose of providing an opportunity for the *faculty* to influence the lives of our students. As I enter the Tanner Building early in the morning and observe our custodial student employees completing their work

shifts, I am sobered by the realization that their work supervisor has in many cases already had more personal contact with them than they will have with any other full-time BYU employee for the rest of the day. Although I am familiar with an equally inspiring set of stories about the impact of caring faculty, I now realize that having a PhD or a faculty office is a difference that warrants no distinction on a campus that is dedicated to preparing its graduates for a life of continuous personal development characterized by effective relationships, righteous living, and dedicated service.

Paul Cox, dean of General Education and Honors, recently shared with me an experience that exemplifies how well and how routinely the BYU faculty, staff, administration, and the board of trustees work together to model God's laws of organizing. Last October one of our students, Mary Frances Marsden, graduated magna cum laude with University Honors under highly unusual circumstances.

A year and a half ago, Mary's mission to Spain was cut short by a recurrence of melanoma cancer. Although the doctors gave her little hope of living more than a few months, she was determined to complete her college degree. It is difficult enough to complete an honors undergraduate program at BYU or to undergo aggressive cancer treatments, but to intermingle these activities requires supreme personal commitment and a dedicated, loving support network of friends, roommates, ward members, and faculty. It was apparently not uncommon for her to leave a class in a mad dash for the rest room, where she would in the privacy of a bathroom stall suffer the painful effects of her medical condition and its treatment.

After learning more about Mary, I can understand why Paul expresses such fondness and admiration for this young lady who had worked as his research assistant and had become an "adopted" member of his family. In early October Paul learned from Mary's

oncologist that she had been admitted to the University of Utah hospital, probably for the last time. When Paul found out that she was only a few credits short of graduating, he requested permission from the administration to hold a special graduation ceremony at Mary's hospital.

Elder Henry Eyring, commissioner of the Church Educational System, not only endorsed the proposal but requested the privilege of being the commencement speaker. As representatives of the faculty and administration entered the hospital chapel in their academic robes, they barely had room to squeeze in among the overflowing group of campus and ward friends. Those in attendance recall Mary's profound insights and tender feelings as she spoke to them from the perspective of a person approaching the chasm between time and eternity and sensing the myth of discontinuity giving way to the certainty of continuity. They also recall how Elder Eyring spoke lovingly and intimately of Mary's integrity and courage in completing with highest honors the requirements for her college degree and her mortal life. Mary Frances Marsden's funeral was held less than one month after her BYU graduation.

This unusually caring response to an unusual set of challenges should inspire us all to contribute more time and more thought to our common goal of becoming a sanctified, edified, and unified academic community. It is important to remember that offense is a necessary and inevitable component of our mortal experience, including our time at BYU. In fact, given the complexity of values embedded in our mission, the potential for offense may be higher at BYU than at other universities. However, given the richness of the counsel contained in our scriptures, including the words of our living prophets, we are also better prepared to respond to provocation in a constructive, edifying manner.

To that end I propose that we make a commitment to organize and govern ourselves



according to the principles contained in the covenant entered into by Joseph and William Smith on New Year's Day, 1836. These include:

1. Build each other up in righteousness in all things.
2. Do not listen to evil reports concerning each other.
3. Go to each other with our grievances in the spirit of meekness and reconciliation.

As reflected in the experience of Joseph and William Smith, I testify that acting in accordance with God's laws of organizing enables us to sanctify ourselves, to edify others, and to unify all. I further testify that these three organizing processes compose a matched set—the effectiveness of each requires the efficacy of the others.

In conclusion, as the Saints gathered in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1831, they were issued the difficult challenge of organizing a

Zion community. The Lord's instructions for guiding the process included this counsel: "Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause . . . of their own free will . . . and bring to pass much righteousness" (D&C 58:27). Contemporary members of the BYU community have been invited by our leaders to engage in an equally difficult and good cause—namely, organizing ourselves in such a manner that we will transform a "university in Zion" into a "Zion university." To guide our communal efforts to bring to pass much righteousness at BYU, as we pass by the signboards at the entrance of our campus each day, I invite all of us to consider how we might "enter to learn how to go forth to serve more willingly and more effectively." I pray that the Lord's spirit will inspire and direct this important developmental process, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.