

Education: Unlocking Opportunity

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I hope that you, brothers and sisters, recognize that it is not an easy assignment to give the keynote address. But it is wonderful for us to just take time out from the classes you've been attending and gather here together in this wonderful edifice and feel the excitement of what we're about and of this wonderful BYU Education Week.

As you are aware, this year's theme is "Education; Unlocking Opportunity," and I've been invited to develop that theme. I know each one of you would perhaps do it in a little different way, but the Spirit has directed me to talk about education in a broader sense—its application in our lives and our responsibility.

Temples of Learning

I want to reflect for just a moment on the history of this great institution. The impressive academy building on University Avenue was completed in 1892. Principal Karl G. Maeser knew the BYU Academy was just beginning to blossom. Prior to this, physical difficulties had brought him to the verge of leaving his post. Accordingly, his wife and daughter got things packed and sat on their trunks.

When the daughter finally mustered enough courage to ask her father when they were moving,

his response was, "I have changed my mind. I have had a dream—I have seen Temple Hill [which is the present site of this campus] filled with buildings—great temples of learning, and I have decided to remain and do my part in contributing to the fulfillment of that dream." [Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years, eds. Ernest L. Wilkinson and Leonard J. Arrington, vol. 3 (Provo: Brigham Young University Press 1976), p. 3]

President Holland has told us that the moral, spiritual, and intellectual guidance we seek can be found at BYU in large part because of the example set, the initial work performed, and the promise of the future first given us by Karl G. Maeser, a man of great personal integrity. In the foreword of Karl G. Maeser's biography, past BYU president Ernest L. Wilkinson stated, "We go to the East for learning; but the East will come to the West for wisdom" (Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953),

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p. vii). And President Holland emphasizes that that is still our pledge.

In this learning process, perhaps we can all relate to the words of Robert Fulghum:

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there is the sandbox.

These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some, and draw and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap in the afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up, and nobody really knows why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup—they all die. So do we.

And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: look. Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The golden rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and sane living.

*Think of what a better world it would be if we all had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations always to put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together. [Robert Fulghum, "We Learned It All in Kindergarten," *Reader's Digest*, October 1987, p. 115]*

We are 25,000 strong, gathered together at this great university to sharpen our instruments, to hone our tools, to refresh those lessons we learned in the sandbox, that we might be better citizens in the kingdom of God. "to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29).

Thirst for Knowledge

Eliza R. Snow asked and answered the question "What is the object of life?"

There certainly must be a grand and holy purpose at the foundation of our creation, else why this innate longing and thirst for knowledge—this perpetual desire for improvement and advancement. I have reflected upon this, and feel that our Heavenly Father has implanted these feelings and desires in our hearts, that this earthly probation may not be in vain. And the object of this life must be to test us, to try us in all things, and to make us more perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect. [Women's Exponent, vol. 7, no. 11, 1 November 1878, p. 81]

In Doctrine and Covenants 88:118 it states: "Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." And further from that same section:

Teach ye diligently . . . that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine . . . ;

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are . . . ; things which are at home, . . . abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations . . . ; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

That ye may be prepared in all things. [D&C 88:78–80]

President Holland shared some insight with us into the personal stories of two BYU

graduates in August 1984 who had a great thirst for knowledge and achieved in spite of personal barriers. I would like to share their stories.

The oldest graduate that day was Lyle M. McDonald.

Lyle was born in Salina, Utah. At the appropriate time he entered BYU, his most enduring reminder of those years still being the permanent knee injury he received playing football. Lyle later left BYU—without a degree—to become a teacher and principal at the Page Elementary School on North Canyon Road here in Provo. It is fitting irony that BYU now owns that old Page School building, which is situated directly across the street from a slightly newer, and larger, football stadium. . . .

Now, after a full and fitting life, Brother McDonald returned to school . . . to finish that degree begun so long ago because “he wanted to improve himself, he wanted to help others, and he wanted more association with the ‘great and qualified’ professors at BYU.” (Those are his words.) Furthermore, he wanted a university diploma to go along with his Master M-Man award and his World War I discharge papers. That’s right. “The Great War. Old WW I,” as Colonel Sherman Potter would say—“The war to end all wars.” . . . Yes, our soldier returned to school for a diploma partly so his World War I discharge papers wouldn’t be lonely. But an even loftier purpose ultimately prompted our veteran to return. He says simply and directly, “I wanted knowledge. We can’t get into the celestial kingdom without knowledge. Knowledge is about the only thing we are allowed to take with us.” [Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU commencement address, 17 August 1984, pp. 3–4]

The other student President Holland told about that day was Sauan Sukhan. He was not as old as Lyle McDonald; he was only thirty-five years old. But that same day he received

A Ph.D. degree in sociology. There is nothing very startling about that except he . . . has a personal

story of valor and triumph in which private or public challenges have been overcome.

Sauan was born in a remote village in Thailand some 350 miles northeast of Bangkok. To say his parents, and indeed his entire village, were poor is to pathetically understate the case. Their home was a shelter of bamboo and grass. At three years of age Sauan was working full days tending water buffalo and cultivating rice paddies. To this very day there is still no such luxury in that village as running water or electricity. The closest hospital is a hundred miles away—four days by foot and ox cart, the only available means of transportation. It is something of a miracle that Sauan survived the myriad childhood diseases so common to that country. Eight of his fourteen brothers and sisters did not, and he watched his devout Buddhist parents bury them one by one.

At his village school there were no textbooks, no library, not paper or pencils. Two teachers helped 400 children practice their lessons on slate or dry clay. Only four years of even that rudimentary education were available in their small village. But like . . . you, Sauan wanted knowledge—as much as he could get. So from grades five through ten he walked fifteen miles to a school in the neighboring village. That was, he says, three hours each way in the dry season, but considerably more than that when it rained. Later, his parents spent virtually all of their savings (which, as you might guess, wasn’t much for a family whose income bought Sauan a second-hand bicycle so that his quest for an education might not be so burdensome.

They gave him everything they had; when that was gone, they gave him encouragement.

But after the tenth grade there was no money for him to go to the city. So, like untold generations of his ancestors before him, he returned to the water buffalo and rice paddies that would forever mark the dimensions of his very narrow world. But even in the remote reaches of rural Thailand the Spirit of the Lord bears sway. Un a story too long to tell here, Sauan did, with the encouragement of these

destitute but faithful Buddhist parents, get to the city briefly. And in the most providential of moments, he opened his door one day to two young Americans who had short hair, wore white shirts, and spoke impeccable Thai. The rest is history — sweet history. [Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU commencement address, 17 August 1984, pp. 5–6]

Education, we see, is not merely gaining knowledge or skills helpful toward productive work, though certainly that is a part of it. Rather it is a replenishment and an expansion of the natural thirst of the mind and soul. Learning is a gradual process of growth, each step building upon the other. It is a process whereby the learner organizes and integrates not only facts but attitudes and values. The Lord has told us that we must open our minds and our hearts to learn. There is a Chinese proverb: “Wisdom is as the moon rises, perceptible not in progress but in result.” As our knowledge is converted to wisdom, the door to opportunity is unlocked.

Converting Knowledge into Wisdom

Some years ago, in an article about Admiral Peary’s effort to reach the North Pole, the writer suggested an analogy that has great significance to our time.

On this trip, [Admiral Peary] traveled a whole day toward the North, his sled dogs unflagging in their speed. At night, when he checked his bearings to determine his latitude, he found to his surprise that he was much further South than he had been in the morning.

All day, it seems he had been driving toward the North on an immense iceberg drawn southward by an ocean current.

And sometimes it occurs to me that we are all standing on this iceberg, racing forward in one direction, while the very ground beneath us moves implacably in the other direction.

With tremendous speed and power, we are moving toward discoveries and inventions that utterly

dwarf Peary’s conquest of the North Pole. In medicine, in technology, in food supply, in materials and techniques and processes, we have made more progress in the last fifty years than was made in the previous five hundred.

Yet, at the same time, the ground we are standing on steadily seems to move backward, drawn not by ocean currents, but by social currents too vast and deep for us to comprehend, much less to control.

As we check our bearings to determine the latitude of the human condition at this point in history, we are more surprised and appalled than Peary to learn that we are “farther South” than our fathers or grandfathers were. [Sydney J. Harris, “Moving Forward in Backward Direction,” *Deseret News*, 7 January 1964, p. A-14]

In talking about this story, Marion G. Romney stated:

Certainly mankind is more knowledgeable in many areas than it has ever been before. “In medicine, in technology, in food supply, in materials and techniques and processes,” we have made and are making unprecedented progress. Not only is knowledge in these areas being accumulated so fast that one can hardly keep abreast of it, even in a very narrow field, but the application of much of it is literally transforming our way of life.

We are also gaining knowledge in other fields—those, for instance, which relate to men’s personal conduct and to their dealings with one another. Unfortunately, however, we do not seem able to put the knowledge we acquire in these areas to similar beneficial use. An example of this is the continued use of tobacco in the face of knowledge that it greatly increases the incidence of lung cancer.

Another example is found in the area of family relations. In spite of all we know about the causes and evils of divorce, and in spite of the tremendous work done by marriage counselors and other welfare agencies, the divorce rate is still going up.

These are but two of many illustrations which could be cited to sustain the conclusion that “as we check our bearings to determine the latitude of the

human condition at this point in history, we are more surprised and appalled than Peary to learn that we are 'farther South' than our fathers or grandfathers were." [Marion G. Romney, "Converting Knowledge into Wisdom," *Ensign*, July 1983, p. 4]

Never before have we had so many opportunities to be educated in the learning of the world. Our weakness seems to be our inability to apply with wisdom the knowledge we have in its practical relationship to life and its problems. The development of the capacity to convert knowledge into wisdom is a blessing that comes from the Holy Spirit as we gain profound reverence for the Lord and hearken to his counsels. As we seek learning by study and by faith, we are taught that we will receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost and be organized according to his laws and be prepared to obtain every needful thing.

Service and Dedication

Walsh McDermott, one of the most renowned physicians of the twentieth century, was an extraordinary human being. While widely acclaimed for the contributions he made to the rise of modern medicine, he is equally well remembered and endeared for the personal impact he made on the lives of many. He offered the gift of himself, which ultimately was profoundly sacred and spiritually enriching for those whose lives he touched. When McDermott died in 1981, it was said of him: "He was a people builder—a teacher-counselor of the young, the old, and the in-between. His understanding of the human condition and his affection for his fellow man was his most endearing and compelling quality." It was his caring and his sharing, his conduct in dealing with others that mattered most. (Taken from Claudia B. Cluff, "Spiritual Intervention Reconsidered," *Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation*, vol. 1, no. 2, January 1986, pp. 77–82.)

Built long after the original academy on University Avenue, BYU's continuing education building was appropriately named for a woman of profound reverence for the Lord as she continued to serve with great wisdom and long-suffering, gentleness and meekness, kindness and pure knowledge throughout her life. Caroline Hemenway Harman teaches much about moving northward in human relationships.

Elaine S. McKay tells the story of this remarkable woman, Aunt Carrie, in the *Ensign*.

Aunt Carrie would not have expected to be remembered by anyone but her family. She lived quietly in a small Utah community. [In fact, the family home is still standing just down the road from our home.] To anyone outside an area twelve miles square, she was and is a stranger. And yet, there is something familiar about her uncommon courage. She is like our mother, our grandmother, an aunt, a niece or sister. Aunt Carrie represents countless women, unknown and unsung, who patiently do the thing that needs to be done and who in reality accomplish the important work of the world. She reminds us that deeds need not be great to be heroic. . . .

. . . On 26 January 1895 George [Reese Harman] and Caroline were married in the Salt Lake Temple. [Caroline was twenty-two.] During the next fourteen years they bought land, built a home, and became parents of seven children. Happiness grew out of industry, and they sorrowed only at the loss of their eldest child, George Luther, who died when he was four months old. . . .

During irrigation turns, George often worked at night. One evening, wet and chilled, he caught a cold which developed into pleurisy. He died 12 August 1912, and Caroline, at 39, was left with the responsibility of a farm and six children. Her oldest daughter, Annie, was fifteen; the baby, Maurice, had just turned three.

Four months later Caroline's sorrow deepened as she endured the death of her mother. But Caroline rallied to the responsibilities of life. Each day she

arose at 5:00a.m. —to tend to household duties and to work in the fields and orchards. During the weekly irrigation turns, she would make beds in the wagon, hitch up the horses, and drive with her young sons to the fields to set the water. Three or four times during the night, Caroline would awaken the boys and help them “change” the water. Only during haying season did they hire help. Caroline wanted her family to develop and use its own resources

During World War I, Caroline’s Relief Society responsibilities multiplied. In 1914, the sisters began meeting one day a week to knit sweaters for soldiers, roll bandages, and prepare other Red Cross supplies to be shipped overseas. In 1917, Caroline became Relief Society president of the Granger Ward.

When the war ended, the deadly flu epidemic followed the soldiers home. Funerals were frequent. The Granger Relief Society made burial clothing, lined caskets, draped the chapel podium in white, cared for the sick, and comforted the bereaved.

David and Grace [her sister and brother-in-law] were both stricken. In January of 1919, Grace gave birth to a son; a few hours later, weakened by the flu, she died. Grieving for her beloved sister, Caroline brought to her own home a six-hour-old baby boy—her sister’s child, but a child whom she would always look upon as her own.

Less than a month after Grace’s death, . . . in February, her daughter Annie died of the flu, a month before she expected her first child. . . .

When Annie, with her unborn child, died, Caroline’s health broke. Weeks later, she arose from her bed, calm and determined. The doctor diagnosed her illness as sugar diabetes. From that time on, she gave herself three insulin shots daily and carefully weighed her food. It was a private matter; she never spoke of her health. In the years to come, she maintained energy, strength, a cheerful countenance, and an indomitable sense of humor.

Following Grace’s death, David came to Caroline’s home each day to see his baby son, Pete. . . . David’s nine children needed a mother and he, a wife. On 29 October 1919, David and Caroline were

married in the Salt Lake Temple. So, seven years after George’s death, Caroline and her five children came to live in the big house on 3600 West and 4100 South.

For many years this house was a central gathering place for neighborhood children who liked teeter-totters, swings made of rubber tires, kick-the-can games, and run-sheepie-run. Like all visitors, the children seldom left without a “bit to eat.” . . .

But at least twice a day the house was quiet. At breakfast and dinner time, all the leaves of the sixteen-foot-square table came out of the closet, the meal was spread, and it was time for family prayer. The huge Harman household tolerated teasing, wrestling, and noise. But quarrels were not permitted. Family members felt a unity that had begun long before David and Caroline married. Caroline honored David as patriarch, supported him as first counselor in the bishopric, and loved him deeply.

In the spring of 1924, an itching rash spread over David’s body. Despite his discomfort, he worked long hours. While dipping sacks of potatoes (or wheat, depending on the account) in a solution to prevent the disease, he noted that the rash on his hands healed. After checking with a doctor, David decided to bathe in the solution. Accounts differ as to what and how much he used, but the result was the solution literally ate him alive. His skin came off on clothing and bed sheets; his tongue and teeth fell out; his internal organs were burned beyond use. After one week, during which David never lost consciousness, he passed away from this world.

David died with great courage and little complaint. Caroline lived in the same manner. At age 51, she was again a widow. She was now responsible for fourteen children, the youngest of whom was five-year-old Pete. She suffered complications from Diabetes. She was also Relief Society president of a ward with 948 members, 22 of whom were widows; and for Caroline, who served in the days before Welfare Services, this meant “mothering” the entire twelve-mile-square ward. Her way was not to ask for help, but to give it. Always someone was being born or someone was dying; someone was ill or unhappy or hungry. Caroline knew what to do

about illness, childbirth, and death. And she knew how to find happiness. When others were wild with grief, she was there to make beds, mop floors, fix meals, and sit up through the night with the bereaved to comfort them with her quiet strength. She became known throughout the territory as Aunt Carrie—kind, cheerful, loving, wise.

How did she do it all with her large family? She did it with her large family. Year after year, the Harman sons drove her in a horse and buggy to visit every home in the ward—many times. Her black buggy would go to the houses of those who had “enough and to spare” to gather goods to be shared with those who had little or nothing. The Harman girls frequently cooked and served meals to neighbors in need, and the boys stayed overnight with the aged or afflicted when Aunt Carrie could not be there.

Aunt Carrie was a resourceful manager, and the children learned her ways. They had no money to spend, but the Harmans did not think of themselves as being “poor.” They made bread, butter, cheese, horse radish, corned beef, apple cider, vinegar, and soap. Both sons and daughters farmed the land and cared for their animals, their orchard, and their garden. Every fall they bottled fruit, meat, and tomatoes and buried turnips, parsnips, carrots, and potatoes beneath the sawdust in the basement ice room. The girls sewed their few articles of clothing and kept their home scrubbed and orderly. If their chores were not done before the school bus came, they finished their tasks and walked to school. Aunt Carrie believed that idleness was a sin and taught that selfishness was the seed of misery. Everyone in the family learned to work—and more important, they learned to share.

Within [a few weeks following a third marriage on 11 March 1925, her new husband] Eugene suffered a stroke, and became an invalid. For five years until his death in October 1930, Aunt Carrie prepared his food, helped him bathe and dress, and ministered to his many needs.

In 1929 Aunt Carrie was released as president of the Relief Society. She has served in that organization under three bishops for some eighteen years. . . .

Aunt Carrie devoted much of her time to developing her chicken business. Her chickens had become a symbol of her doctrine of hard work and independence. During the worst of the Great Depression, the well which provided water for the house and chicken coops went dry. Aunt Carrie refused the help of the government programs under which she qualified for a new well; so Pete, Jack, and Jake carried water from across the road. Carrying water for the house was one thing, but quenching the thirst of hundreds of chickens was quite another. Finally, when Aunt Carrie had saved sufficient funds, she had the well repaired.

Years later, when all the children were gone, the pump sometimes failed. During winter time, Aunt Carrie would scoop snow into a big oval “boiler,” melt it on the back of her coal stove, and carry warm water to her flock. . . .

. . . Aunt Carrie expected everything around her to be productive, and she would not have a lazy chicken. A hen who lacked commitment was invited for Sunday dinner. . . .

[As she neared the end of her life, Aunt Carrie said,] “I can face Grace . . . because I know that I did all she would have done if I had been called away and she had stayed. I have no regrets. Of course,” she added quietly, “in some ways all our children could do better. And they will. We taught them right.” . . .

. . . Aunt Carrie, . . . according to her son Leon Weston (Pete) Harman, “had every reason to be waited on. Yet she continually served others. She never complained. She never quit. Aunt Carrie asked for so little, and gave so much.” [Elaine S. McKay, “Remembering Aunt Carrie,” *Ensign*, October 1982, pp. 56–60]

What can we learn from Caroline Harman’s life? She exemplified service and dedication to life’s responsibilities. She had no college degrees but learned from experiences thrust upon her to respond to human needs. She truly knew the importance of family and the relationships between members of the family. She learned and taught principles of

self-reliance, opening opportunities for herself and her family. She learned and taught principles of self-reliance, opening opportunities for herself and her family. And she learned wisdom and the application of knowledge. From Aunt Carrie, from Karl Maeser, from Lyle McDonald, from Dr. McDermott, and from Sauan Sukhan, and from the countless others we have learned from, it is important that one's life become a reflection of the possibilities of hope, of meaning, of purpose—a reflection of God. It is, after all, not so much what we know but what we are willing to share that makes the difference. This is the challenge for each of us here today.

We have come to seek knowledge, both spiritual and temporal, to help those around us respond to life's challenges. The usefulness of

this learning comes in wise application as we become better able to fill our responsibilities to serve, that we might get a little closer to our destination, that north latitude.

Here we are in these beautiful temples of learning with qualified teachers, countless books, and resources. All of this and the Spirit, too. Yes, "Because [we] have been given much, [we] too must give" ("Because I Have Been Given Much," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 219).

May we each receive the knowledge that is here. Use it in wisdom to unlock eternal opportunities. I know we are engaged in the work of the Lord, and it is my prayer that this knowledge we gain will be used in building the kingdom on earth today. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.