

# *The Light of the Y*

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Welcome to the start of a new semester. We are so glad to have you students here on campus. Our community comes alive in a new way because you are here.

Most of our new students arrived two weeks ago. Many of them participated in what is now becoming a tradition: forming the Y at LaVell Edwards Stadium. This is a wonderful and symbolic reminder that you, the students, are the Y—meaning that you are both the reason why we exist as a university and, for those with whom you interact, the embodiment of what BYU stands for. You represent the Y wherever you go. I love this recent tradition.

There is another BYU tradition, one that began long before any of you were born. In 1924, students hiked up to the block Y on Y Mountain, dipped mattress stuffing in oil, placed the mattress balls around the edges of the Y, and lit them with torches they had carried up the mountain—thus lighting the Y for the very first time. Since that time the Y has been lighted every year for Homecoming, graduation, and other special events. Fortunately the torch fires never spread to the rest of the mountain in the ensuing decades.

By the 1980s, those involved decided not to tempt fate any longer, and the mattress balls and torches were replaced with a generator and a string of lightbulbs stretched around the Y, making the Y brilliantly visible throughout the

valley. This past summer, permanent lighting was literally cemented in place, and new technology was installed to allow remote lighting, thereby ensuring that the tradition of lighting the Y will continue for years to come.

Just as I hope that the more recent tradition of forming the Y in LaVell Edwards Stadium reminds you that you are the Y, I hope that the continuation of the long-standing tradition of lighting the Y reminds you of an invitation that I will give to each of you students today: Don't just light the Y; let the Y light you.

What do I mean by that? Perhaps it can best be explained by a familiar story told by President James E. Faust. In the 1980s, prior to his becoming a member of the First Presidency, President Faust worked alongside many others to establish the BYU Jerusalem Center. In a 2005 general conference address, President Faust recalled one historic meeting

*regarding the lease for the land on which the . . . Jerusalem Center . . . was later built. Before this lease could be signed, President Ezra Taft Benson and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, then president of Brigham Young University, agreed with the Israeli government on*

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*Kevin J Worthen, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this devotional address on 6 September 2016.*

*behalf of the Church and the university not to proselyte in Israel.*

President Faust then said:

*To our knowledge the Church and BYU have scrupulously and honorably kept that nonproselyting commitment. After the lease had been signed, [however,] one of our [Israeli] friends insightfully remarked, “Oh, we know that you are not going to proselyte, but what are you going to do about the light that is in their eyes?” He was referring to our students who were studying in Israel.<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, he was referring to you.

More than you may recognize, you carry with you a light—a light that others notice. You brought much of that light with you to BYU, thanks to your parents, your friends, your teachers, and the good choices you have made in your life up until now. My invitation to you today is that you *enhance* that light during your experience at BYU—or, more precisely, that you *enhance* that light *because* of your experience at BYU. My invitation is for you to let the Y light you.

### **Let the Y Light You**

How can you do that? Let me provide four suggestions, confident that if you apply them, you will receive further individualized insights through personal revelation.

#### ***Recognize the Source and the Purpose of the Light***

First, and most important, you need to recognize the source of the light and the purpose for which it is given to you. The Lord clearly identified the source of the light in the revelation recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 93:2, saying, “I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

In the words of Doctrine and Covenants 88:13, the Lord is “the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things,” including what President Faust described as the light that “shows in our countenances as well as in our eyes.”<sup>2</sup> The more

our thoughts and actions align with the Lord’s, the more we serve and love others as He does, the more His light will shine in us. If we take time each day to reflect on what Christ would have us do, He will use our experiences at BYU to enhance that light in us.

The reason the Lord provides that light to you is not just to help you but also to help you help others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Gaining light by your experiences at BYU will help you progress eternally and bring you peace and joy in this life. However, being lighted by the Y is not a selfish endeavor. The light is not given to you for your glory. It is given to help others, as they come to see the Lord through your actions. In the words of Elder Neal A. Maxwell:

*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.<sup>3</sup>*

When you accomplish something significant at BYU—which I hope happens often—think first of how what you have done can *help* others, not just how it might impress them. Maybe instead of bragging to your classmates about how well you did on an exam, you might humbly find ways to help *them* prepare for the next exam. If you do, you will increase their and your understanding of the subject. You will also increase their faith and your faith in the goodness of God and of His children. At the end of the day, Christ is the light that we are to “hold up—that which [we] have seen [Him] do” (3 Nephi 18:24). “How would Jesus react to doing well—or poorly—on an exam?” is a great question to ask ourselves if we want to be lighted by the Y.

#### ***Live in a Way That Reflects His Life***

The second suggestion flows from the first. As we recognize that Christ is the true source of the light and as we remember that He desires

His light to shine through us so that others may come unto Him, we can easily see that one way to increase the extent to which our experience at BYU lights us is by living our lives in a way that reflects His.

Our mission statement challenges us to create “an environment . . . sustained by those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God.”<sup>4</sup> That is one of the principal reasons for our Honor Code: to create an environment in which we are reminded of the kind of individuals and community we hope to become—a community reflecting the teachings of the Savior. In that regard, I call particular attention to our personal and collective commitment to treat with respect, dignity, and love all those with whom we interact, both on and off campus, including, and especially, those with whom we may disagree, even on very important matters.

While others, perhaps well intentioned, may deride us and our values, we must respond the way the Savior did, without compromising either eternal truths and values or the eternal reality that “all human beings [are] beloved spirit son[s] or daughter[s] of heavenly parents,” each with “a divine nature and destiny.”<sup>5</sup> Our mission statement makes clear that “all relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor.”<sup>6</sup> The light of the Y will be most evident in your lives if you live in accordance with that charge and with all the other principles of the Honor Code to which you have committed your integrity.

There are other daily activities—not expressly included in the Honor Code—that can enhance the light of the Y in your lives. Regular scripture study is one example. I was reminded of that truth by one of our football players a number of years ago.

Brian Logan transferred to BYU in 2009 after two years at a junior college. I first met him shortly before the opening game of the season against then third-ranked Oklahoma. I quickly discovered that Brian was a person who was full of enthusiasm, energy, and a love of God. Though

not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Brian fully embraced the opportunity to be a part of our covenant community and sought to influence others for good in that regard. He was also a very good defensive back.

Let me show you a picture of Brian after the Oklahoma game—which BYU won. You can see what I mean about enthusiasm. Like you, I noticed that there was a message written on the eye black beneath his eyes. It was Philippians 4:13. I must admit I did not know off the top of my head what that scripture said, and in the excitement of the victory I did not have a chance to ask Brian. Later that night I looked up the scripture. It reads, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” I imagined in my own mind how this scripture provided Brian with optimism in preparing for a game in which BYU was the decided underdog.

As I attended the next game, I saw that Brian had again applied the eye black and that there was writing on it. I was at such a distance that I couldn’t read the writing. After the game—a resounding victory over an opponent we were expected to defeat—I approached Brian, fully expecting that I would find the same scriptural reference on the eye black and assuming that it was his favorite. Much to my surprise, the writing referred to a different scripture: Luke 14:11. Again, not knowing right off what that particular scripture said, I asked Brian.

He quickly replied, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

I then asked him why he had changed the scripture reference. He told me that as he read the scriptures each day, he sought inspiration about what message God wanted him to focus on for the game that week. Against a highly ranked opponent the first week, it was the message of courage in Philippians 4:13; against an opponent that some players might be tempted to overlook the following week, it was the message of humility found in Luke.

For the rest of that season I looked forward to my postgame interaction with Brian. I would grab

him by the shoulder pads, look him straight on, and say, “Let me read your eyes!” In the ensuing weeks I saw references to Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 54:17, and other relevant scriptures, each reflecting personal inspiration that Brian had experienced as a result of his regular Bible study. For one game he even threw in a Book of Mormon scripture—maybe just for my sake.

I am confident that many of you have had similar revelatory experiences as you have regularly studied the scriptures in light of your own personal circumstances. I invite all of you to do so. If you do, it will be reflected in your eyes, even if it is not written on eye black.

I also urge you to engage in other activities that will invite the Spirit in your life, such as involvement in service opportunities through your ward or other organizations such as Y-Serve. As you seek to contribute to an environment that reflects those virtues that characterize the life and teachings of the Savior, your BYU experiences will create new light in you.

### ***Discover and Develop Your Talents and Skills***

Third, I urge you to discover and develop your talents and skills at BYU. This is one of the main purposes of this distinctive portion of your earth life. Your time at BYU is, as the mission statement says, to be “a period of intensive learning.”<sup>7</sup> Such focused learning is designed, in large part, to help you acquire and enhance new knowledge, skills, and attributes.

All of you have already discovered and refined many of your talents and gifts. You would not be here if you had not. Let me suggest, however, that the Lord sent you here—to BYU—knowing that you could both discover new gifts and enhance those you already know about.

In the Book of Mormon in the sermon at the temple—in which Christ in His visit to the Americas repeated many of the teachings He had provided in the Sermon on the Mount to those in the Old World—the Savior repeated the essence of the commandment in Matthew that we are to be a light to the world. However, as my son recently

pointed out to me, there is a slight but significant clarification in the message in the Book of Mormon.

In Matthew 5:14 the Lord stated simply, “Ye are the light of the world.”

In 3 Nephi 12:14 the Lord said, “I give unto you to be the light of this people.”

This sounds more like a gift—more like an opportunity than a commandment. Like all divinely provided opportunities, it implies confidence in our abilities. God often gives us opportunities because He knows He has prepared us in ways we may not fully recognize or appreciate at the time.

In that regard, the language the Savior used in 3 Nephi—“I give unto you”—is instructively similar to that in the Doctrine and Covenants when the Lord stated that “to every man [and woman] *is given* a gift by the Spirit of God. To some *is given* one, and to some *is given* another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:11–12; emphasis added).

God has given each of you individualized gifts to prepare you to contribute to His work in individual ways. God has given other people other individualized gifts so that they can contribute in their own individual ways. When you apply these truths to this educational phase of your life, two things become apparent.

1. You should search broadly to discover and develop all the gifts God has given you, lest you not accomplish all God wants you to do. We know from the scriptural promise in section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants that all of you have at least one gift, and I am confident that for all of you the number can be multiplied many times. I am also confident that you don’t know all the talents you have. And the only way you can know what those talents are is to explore a variety of topics—which our general education requirement encourages you to do—and to take some chances in doing new things that may stretch you in new ways. Don’t become so concerned with protecting your GPA that you miss out on one of the most exciting parts of your education: discovering and enhancing the gifts God gave you so that you can better serve Him and His children.

2. Because your gifts are individually tailored to you, don't measure your progress or importance by comparing yourself to others. Such comparisons will not only cause you to miss out on some of the important things you can learn from others but also interfere with your ability to develop productive, joyful relationships with the many good people around you. If you view everyone as a potential competitor, you will soon find yourself surrounded by enemies. If you view those around you as guides who can help you learn, you will soon find yourself surrounded by friends.

### *Never Underestimate the Power Your Light Can Have*

Fourth, and finally, never underestimate the power your light can have on others. Let me illustrate this with a reference to a lighthouse. All of us are familiar with lighthouses. They send out a beacon of light that can hopefully be seen in the worst weather. They mark the line where the sea ends and the land begins—a very important marker for those who are piloting boats, especially in bad weather.

But lighthouses also have another role to play for those who are piloting boats. In addition to marking the place at which the sea ends and the land begins, lighthouses can, with the help of other lights, guide sailors through treacherous waters in which reefs and other unseen barriers might sink the ship. In such situations there is often only one safe passage to the harbor, and the only way the pilot knows the ship is in that passage is by maneuvering the ship so that the light at the top of the lighthouse aligns with a carefully placed light on the shore. Once the ship is in that position, it can proceed safely as long as those lights—the one in the lighthouse and the one on the shore—are in alignment with each other. If they are out of alignment, the ship is off course, and there is considerable risk of a tragic shipwreck.

One writer related the following true example:

*More than a hundred years ago, a well-known Protestant preacher, Dwight L. Moody, shared a story*

*of a ship trying to enter the Cleveland harbor on a very stormy night.*

*The ship's captain could see the bright light of the Cleveland harbor lighthouse. However, the lower lights weren't visible at all. The lower lights were the way that ships identified the centerline of the safe entry to a harbor.*

*Because the lower lights were not burning that night, the ship missed the entrance to the harbor and crashed into rocks. Many lives were lost.*

*At the end of his sermon, Moody said, "Brethren, the Master will take care of the great lighthouse; let us keep the lower lights burning."<sup>8</sup>*

One of the members of Moody's congregation that day was a man named Philip Paul Bliss, a musician. Bliss was so inspired by the lesson in Moody's sermon that he wrote a hymn, which in our hymnbook is entitled "Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy." Many of you will be familiar with the hymn. All of you should be. With the image of the lighthouse and this experience in mind, consider the message of the first verse of that hymn:

*Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
From his lighthouse evermore,  
But to us he gives the keeping  
Of the lights along the shore.*

*Let the lower lights be burning;  
Send a gleam across the wave.  
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman  
You may rescue, you may save.<sup>9</sup>*

The lighthouse of God's love for His children is ever present and never moving. It is constant and always available. Some people will see it and will be drawn to it, but they may not know how to get to it. Your example may provide the lower light they need to see the safe passage. More may depend on how you use your time at BYU than just your own well-being. The light you gain here may influence others for eternity.

There is a remarkable promise in Doctrine and Covenants 88:67, a promise Elder Dallin H. Oaks

once called “the most significant promise ever given pertaining to education.”<sup>10</sup> It reads:

*And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.*

I urge you to let the Y light you in such a way that you are filled with that light. You will then be successful not only in this particular educational endeavor but also in the rest of your life.

As I recently told the faculty and staff, and as I also recently told those at new student orientation, I now say to you all: You are not here by accident. God has a work to perform through you. Make Him the center of your efforts. Do what He would want you to do. Let His light shine more brightly through you as a result of your experiences at BYU. If you do, miracles will happen in your life and you will see the majesty of the Lord work in the lives of others. May you realize this blessing—may the light in you shine more brilliantly because of what you do at BYU—is my prayer, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. James E. Faust, “The Light in Their Eyes,” *Ensign*, November 2005.
2. Faust, “Light in Their Eyes.”
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Greetings to the President,” *Addresses Delivered at the Inauguration of Dallin Harris Oaks*, 12 November 1971 (Provo: BYU Press, 1971), 1.
4. *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014), 1.
5. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995.
6. *Mission and Aims*, 1–2.
7. *Mission and Aims*, 1.
8. Nicole Sheahan, “Inside Mormon Music: The Lower Lights—‘A Hymn Revival,’” *Deseret News*, 29 October 2010, [deseretnews.com/article/705386498/Inside-Mormon-Music-The-Lower-Lights-2-A-Hymn-Revival.html](http://deseretnews.com/article/705386498/Inside-Mormon-Music-The-Lower-Lights-2-A-Hymn-Revival.html); see also Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2002), 93.
9. “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 335; emphasis added.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, “A House of Faith,” BYU annual university conference address, 31 August 1977, 9.