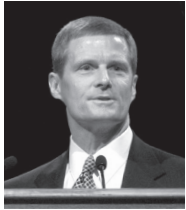


Brigham Young University-Idaho: A Disciple Preparation Center

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Brothers and sisters, I am grateful to meet and worship with you this afternoon. I pray for and invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost as together we consider some of the remarkable events that are taking place on the campus of Brigham Young University-Idaho.

After returning home from their missions, each of our sons has been blessed to teach in the missionary training center in Provo. Because of their experiences at the MTC and because of my service as a Seventy, whenever we are all together we invariably end up talking about what is happening at the MTC, about missions and missionaries and missionary work, and about what and how the new elders and sisters are being trained and taught.

As we recently were together talking about the MTC, I began to think about the 17 missionary training centers that are located throughout the world. It occurred to me that all of the missionary training centers have the following characteristics in common:

- The missionary training centers are rather isolated geographically and are few in number.
- Missionaries reside and study in the MTC for relatively short periods of time.
- The nature of the instruction in the MTCs is focused and intense.
- There are in the MTCs distinctive requirements for demeanor and dress.

Now please pay particular attention to this next characteristic:

- Most missionary training centers are located near a temple.

As I considered these similarities, I was struck by the fact that Brigham Young University-Idaho in Rexburg possesses these same characteristics.

- BYU-Idaho is located in a rather isolated geographic area.
- By and large, students are enrolled at BYU-Idaho for a relatively short period of time.
- The learning and teaching processes at BYU-Idaho are focused and intense.
- There is at BYU-Idaho a distinguishing standard of deportment and dress.
- And as was announced by the First Presidency last December, BYU-Idaho will soon be adjacent to a temple.

Brothers and sisters, it should be obvious to all of us that something spiritually significant is taking place in Rexburg, Idaho. The announcement in June of 2000 that Ricks College would become Brigham Young University-Idaho was much more than the establishing of a new baccalaureate degree granting institution. The addition of new faculty and other employees is not simply about covering classes and meeting staffing needs. The construction on and remodeling of this campus are about so much more than new laboratories and classrooms and study areas.

Let me suggest that in Rexburg, Idaho, we are in the process of creating not a missionary training center (MTC), but a disciple preparation center—a DPC. In this special and sacred and set apart place, you and I have access to unparalleled spiritual resources that can assist us in developing and deepening our devotion as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the primary and most important reason for the existence of Brigham Young University-Idaho and for its sponsorship by and affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A disciple preparation center. Let us now pay particular attention to the three words that make up the phrase I just introduced: disciple, preparation, and center.

A *disciple* is one who follows or attends upon another for the express purpose of learning (*Oxford English Dictionary On-Line*, second edition, 1989). Please note that a disciple both follows and learns, as the following scriptures highlight:

...I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
(John 8:12)

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Thus, a disciple of Christ is a follower of Jesus who learns of and from Him and lives according to His teachings. As we learn in Doctrine and Covenants 41:5:

He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you.

A disciple of Christ is one who is following and learning to be like Christ—learning to think, to feel, and to act as He does. He or she is striving to gain "...the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Becoming a true disciple of the Savior and following His ways are the most demanding learning objectives we can ever strive to achieve. No other discipline compares with His curriculum in either requirements or rewards. Discipleship demands the total transformation of a person by putting off the natural man and becoming a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord (see *Mosiah 3:19*). A disciple is one who loves the Lord and serves Him with all of his or her heart, might, mind, and strength.

The word *preparation* implies the process of making or getting ready; the previous putting or setting in order for any action or purpose (*Oxford English Dictionary On-Line*, second edition, 1989). And one of the common uses of the word *center* connotes a point from which things and influences originate or emanate (*Oxford English Dictionary On-Line*, second edition, 1989). Taken together, these three words, disciple preparation center, suggest to me a place in which followers of the Master learn and are set in order and are made ready—and from which their influence flows into the world.

What is it that makes this campus such a powerful disciple preparation center (DPC)? Let me suggest three factors that contribute to the spiritual strength that is available here. (1) This institution of higher education is a temple of learning; (2) this institution will be located next to a holy temple, even a House of the Lord; and (3) this institution is surrounded by strong stakes of Zion.

FACTOR 1: BYU-IDAHO IS A TEMPLE OF LEARNING.

Our daughter-in-law, Charlotte, graduated from the nursing program at BYU-Provo in April of 2003. Our family was delighted to attend her graduation ceremony and to celebrate her accomplishment.

Over the years of our service together, I have developed a great affection for and relationship with Elder Merrill Bateman; and I knew this graduation ceremony was to be his final commencement as the president of that institution. So I listened with particular attention to his message to the graduates. I was most intrigued by his use of a verse from Isaiah and his explication of that verse:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
(Isaiah 2:2-3)

Elder Bateman then proceeded to describe how the instructional facilities on the campuses of the universities affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been dedicated to the God of Jacob and are a portion of what is referred to in Isaiah—a part of the Lord's house that has been established in the tops of the mountains wherein He will teach us of His ways. Now, we all know that these verses refer to the House of the Lord, to the holy temples. But what came into my mind as I listened to Elder Bateman was this thought: we are blessed to have the House of the Lord, and we also are blessed to have temples of learning.

BYU-Idaho, brothers and sisters, is a temple of learning. I have tried to use that phrase carefully so as to not confuse the House of the Lord with a temple of learning. But there are important patterns and parallels between the House of the Lord and temples of learning, with temples of learning referring specifically to the institutions of higher education sponsored by and affiliated with the Church.

In both the House of the Lord and in the temples of learning, a standard of worthiness must be met in order to enter and to learn what is being taught. For a member who desires a temple recommend and for a student who wishes to enter into one of the temples of learning, there is a standard of worthiness.

Interestingly, in both the holy temple and in temples of learning, a significant personal commitment is linked to the learning process. Consider, brothers and sisters, that in the House of the Lord we come under covenant and bind

ourselves to act in all holiness. In a similar way, students who are admitted to study and learn in the temples of learning make a commitment to keep the commandments of God and to abide by the university honor and dress codes. Thus, covenants and commitments expand our education in the House of the Lord and in the Church's temples of learning.

In both the House of the Lord and in a temple of learning, as a result of what we experience and what we learn and what we feel, we then strive to heed a higher standard. That is the outcome and the result of what we learn. Consequently, we prepare a little harder, dress a little nicer, act a little better, and think more deeply about things that really matter.

Please turn with me to Doctrine and Covenants 97:1-3. Parley P. Pratt had the responsibility in Kirtland at this time to direct the School of the Elders and to assist the elders in preparing for the work of proclaiming the gospel. I draw your attention to verses 1, 2, and 3—with particular emphasis on verse 3. Think in terms of this institution as a temple of learning as we read these verses together.

Verily I say unto you my friends, I speak unto you with my voice, even the voice of my Spirit, that I may show unto you my will concerning your brethren in the land of Zion, many of whom are truly humble and are seeking diligently to learn wisdom and to find truth.

Verily, verily I say unto you, blessed are such, for they shall obtain; for I, the Lord, show mercy unto all the meek, and upon all whomsoever I will, that I may be justified when I shall bring them unto judgment.

Behold, I say unto you, concerning the school in Zion, *I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion....(emphasis added)*

In this school in Zion in Rexburg—in this temple of learning—disciples can follow the Savior and learn of and from Him the lessons that will prepare them for effective service in their homes, in the Church, and in their communities and careers.

FACTOR 2: BYU-IDAHO WILL BE LOCATED NEXT TO A HOUSE OF THE LORD.

Let us now focus on the second key factor that contributes to the spiritual strength that is available in this disciple preparation center. Section 97 of the Doctrine and Covenants, from which we have just read, highlights the importance of both a school in Zion and of the holy temple. Please now turn with me to verse 10:

Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that a house should be built unto me in the land of Zion, like unto the pattern which I have given you.

verses 13-14:

For a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry in all their several callings and offices;

That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth, the keys of which kingdom have been conferred upon you.

And verse 16:

Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God. (*Doctrine and Covenants 97:10, 13-14, 16*)

At the time of his call to become the fourteenth president of the Church, President Howard W. Hunter issued an invitation for

...all members of the Church to establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants. (Howard W. Hunter, "The Great Symbol of Our Membership," *Ensign*, October 1994, p. 2)

Brothers and sisters, temples are holy; temples are sacred places for learning about and entering into eternal covenants; temples are places of peace and of revelation. Temples are eternal links between heaven and earth; between past, present, and future; between the living and the dead; between time and eternity; between husbands and wives, parents and children; and between men and women with Christ. It is in the House of the Lord that things of the earth are joined with the things of heaven.

Now please consider the spiritual significance of having a House of the Lord on the campus of Brigham Young University-Idaho. Ponder the impact of a holy temple on the campus of this school in Zion. President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught:

Every temple that this Church has built has in effect stood as a monument to our belief in the immortality of the human soul, that this phase of mortal life through which we pass is part of a continuous upward climb... and that as certain as there is life here, there will be life there. That is our firm belief. It comes about through the Atonement of the Savior, and the temple becomes...the bridge from this life to the next. The temple is concerned with things of immortality. We wouldn't have to build a temple for marriages if we didn't believe in the eternity of the family. We build it so the family may be eternal. All of the ordinances which take place in the house

of the Lord become expressions of our belief in that fundamental and basic doctrine. The temple therefore becomes the ultimate in our system of worship and therefore is of great and significant importance to us. (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, April 2002, p. 3)

The temple as a quiet but consistent reminder in our midst of the centrality of Jesus Christ and of the immortality of the soul cannot but elevate the quality of our education and the depth and beauty of our associations.

Several years ago, Elder L. Tom Perry visited our campus and was asked the following question by a faculty member: “Elder Perry, what do you see as the looming storm clouds on the horizon about which we should know so we can better teach and prepare the young people of the Church?” With no hesitation his answer was, “Worldliness.” The next question: “What can we do, Elder Perry, to best help the young people combat worldliness?” His answer: “Help them prepare to worship properly in the temple.”

As you are well aware, we have devotional speakers every Tuesday—many of whom are emeritus General Authorities or Brethren who have been released after serving in the Second Quorum of the Seventy. A significant number of those Brethren, after being released as General Authorities, have served as temple presidents. As Sister Bednar and I host these Brethren, I ask each one of them this question: “What did you learn serving in the temple that you wish you had better known or understood or appreciated when you were a General Authority?” I have asked that question to many of the Brethren, and the consistency of their answers is striking! The following response by Elder J. Ballard Washburn is representative of so many of the answers I have received:

I have come to better and more fully understand the protection available in the temple and through our covenants. I have come to better and more fully understand what it means to make an acceptable offering of temple worship. There is a difference between church-attending, tithe-paying members who occasionally rush into the temple to go through a session and those members who faithfully and consistently worship in the temple.

Brothers and sisters, please remember that penetrating statement by Elder Washburn: “...the protection available in the temple and through our covenants.” I pray that we will begin to understand the significance of what was announced last December. The Rexburg temple will contribute to a potent and powerfully protected place of preparation for disciples of Christ who will be an influence for good all over the earth.

FACTOR 3: BYU-IDAHO IS SURROUNDED BY STRONG STAKES OF ZION.

Stakes are established as places of refuge and protection. Please turn with me to Doctrine and Covenants 115:5-6:

Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations;

And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.

Please consider that during your tenure as a student at Brigham Young University-Idaho, you also are a member of a stake of Zion. We have on this campus at the present time more than 70 wards organized into seven stakes, and the protection promised in the verses we just read applies specifically to you. Additionally, in the surrounding city of Rexburg and in the neighboring communities of Southeastern Idaho are additional strong stakes of Zion. Truly we are blessed to reside in an area of such spiritual stability and strength.

Your experiences and service in the stakes of Zion on this campus contribute in important ways to your preparation as a disciple of the Savior. Each of you will learn lessons here that will bless you and those you influence throughout your entire life.

UNPARALLELED SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

Brothers and sisters, consider the spiritual strength and power that are available in a single location where we find (1) a temple of learning, i.e., this institution; (2) a House of the Lord; and (3) strong stakes of Zion on campus and in Rexburg and in the surrounding communities. I only know of four places which the Lord has so prepared: Provo, Utah; Laie, Hawaii; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Rexburg, Idaho. And with the opportunity and privilege to study and learn here come a tremendous responsibility.

I am fully aware that not all young people in the Church can or want to attend a Church-sponsored institution of higher education. And I certainly am not suggesting that these institutions are the only places where latter-day disciples are prepared and tutored and trained. Ultimately, the best disciple preparation center is located within the walls of our own homes. Nevertheless, these institutions do have an important role to play today in the building of the kingdom of God on the earth.

In the midst of an increasing downpour of devilish devastation across the earth, you are blessed to be here at one of the Lord’s disciple preparation centers. BYU-Idaho is not just a university. You are not merely university students. Studying here involves much more than taking tests and performing well in academic classes—although your academic development and performance truly are important. But there

are essential lessons to be learned and preparations to be made at this DPC by the Lord's latter-day disciples. Let me suggest three primary lessons I hope every student will take away from his or her experience at this disciple preparation center that we call Brigham Young University-Idaho.

DPC LESSON 1

A disciple's faith is focused upon the Son of God. Brothers and sisters, the first principle of the gospel is not simply faith; rather, the first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saving faith centers in the Savior and through Him in the Father (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p. 164). The faith of a true disciple is focused upon and rooted in the Savior and Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ. As we read in Hebrews 12:2:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

DPC LESSON 2

A disciple recognizes that faith in the Savior is a spiritual gift and appropriately seeks for that gift in his or her life. Faith is not a trait to be developed or a reward to be earned. Rather, it is a gift we receive from God. Scriptural synonyms for faith include trust, confidence, and reliance. Thus, the spiritual gift of faith enables us to trust in Christ and to have confidence in His power to cleanse, to renew, to redeem, and to strengthen us. Faith means we are beginning to rely upon His merits, mercy, and grace (*2 Nephi 2:8; 31:19; Moroni 6:4*). Indeed, you and I have a responsibility to properly seek after this gift; and we must do all that we can do to qualify for the gift of faith. Ultimately, however, the gift is bestowed upon us by a loving and caring God. Elder James E. Talmage indicated in his classic book *The Articles of Faith* that faith is a gift from God.

Though within the reach of all who diligently strive to gain it, faith is nevertheless a divine gift [and can be obtained only from God (*Matthew 16:17; John 6:44, 65; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Romans 12:3; Moroni 10:11*)]. As is fitting for so priceless a pearl, it is given to those only who show by their sincerity that they are worthy of it, and who give promise of abiding by its dictates.

...No compulsion is used in bringing men to a knowledge of God; yet, as fast as we open our hearts to the influences of righteousness, the faith that leads to life eternal will be given us of our Father. (*The Articles of Faith*, p. 107)

President Joseph F. Smith also has taught:

Faith is always a gift of God to man, which is obtained by obedience, as all other blessings are. (*Gospel Doctrine*, p. 212)

...Faith does not come without works; faith does not come without obedience to the commandments of God. (*Conference Report*, October 1903, p. 4)

Young people of your age can and will and do receive this supernal gift. You need not be called to a visible or responsible position in the Church, and you do not have to be "old" to qualify for this gift. An 18-year-old disciple at BYU-Idaho can and should be blessed with great faith in the Savior.

DPC LESSON 3

A disciple's faith in the Savior and spiritual preparation dispel fear. Brothers and sisters, we live in troubled and turbulent times. The days described in Doctrine and Covenants 45:26 are indeed the days in which we now find ourselves.

And in that day shall be heard of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men's hearts shall fail them,...

And President Boyd K. Packer recently put present world conditions into perspective for all of us:

The world is spiraling downward at an ever-quicken pace. I am sorry to tell you that it will not get better.

...I know of nothing in the history of the Church or in the history of the world to compare with our present circumstances. Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which exceeds in wickedness and depravity that which surrounds us now.

Words of profanity, vulgarity, and blasphemy are heard everywhere. Unspeakable wickedness and perversion were once hidden in dark places; now they are in the open, even accorded legal protection.

At Sodom and Gomorrah these things were localized. Now they are spread across the world, and they are among us. ("The One Pure Defense," Address to CES Religious Educators, 6 February 2004, p. 4)

Such descriptions may cause the hearts of some men and women to fail them. But as the Lord states, "...my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved..." (*Doctrine and Covenants 45:32*). Protected by "...the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (*Doctrine and Covenants 27:17*) and prepared with the "...gospel of peace..." (*Doctrine and Covenants 27:16*), the Lord's disciples will not fear. Precisely because such disciples are prepared, they shall not fear (*Doctrine and Covenants 38:30*).

Brothers and sisters, we are blessed to be in a special place—a disciple preparation center—and to be engaged at a pivotal time in an essential work. As disciples we have important lessons to learn; we have an eternally important work to do. And in these tumultuous times, we will follow the Master.

I conclude with a teaching by the Prophet Joseph Smith that I consider to be the latter-day disciple’s mission statement:

...the Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done. (“Statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Wentworth Letter,” written March 1, 1842, *History of the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 540)

I testify and witness that God the Eternal Father lives and that Jesus is the Christ. He lives. I know He lives. May each of us use to the fullest the opportunities we have at this disciple preparation center to learn of Him, to learn from Him, and to follow Him. The supernal promise contained in section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 23, is ever before us:

Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ✠