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Speeches

Wisdom and Order

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NEAL A. MAXWELL

Colleen and I appreciate the invitation from President Lee to be with all of you tonight. We have yet to invent better words than those expressive but well-worn words *thank you*, although we can juxtapose adverbs. Hence my major purpose in being with you tonight is simply but gratefully to say “Thank you very much” for all you have done, are doing and will yet do in accomplishing the purposes of Brigham Young University, a special university!

Since I will be speaking to the faculty tomorrow afternoon on matters appropriate to that occasion, these remarks will be somewhat different. I especially include appreciation to those of you who serve in important staff and other functions and to our special guests, the retirees. Staff are less heralded, but, in the words of the Book of Mormon, like Helaman you are certainly “no less serviceable” in the cause! (See Alma 48:19.)

In contrast, while we value nurturing at BYU, we shouldn’t be surprised that there are so many countertrends toward depersonalization in today’s world. Of the global society in the last days, it was prophesied that the “love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). Furthermore, “Peace shall be taken from the earth” (D&C 1:35). There are even wars within as well as between nations, accompanied by a

general escalation of violence and confrontation. We also see the prophesied “despair [that] cometh because of iniquity,” because we live in an age when “iniquity shall abound” (Moroni 10:22; Matthew 24:12). It is all most regrettable and soberingly foretelling! I, for one, brothers and sisters, see no secular rescue columns on the horizon.

There are many less dramatic expressions of the foregoing trends in our general society, such as the abandonment of personalization by bureaucratization. It is so easy to know people merely as functions. Further isolation is then brought about by function. Many simply pull back into their assigned cubicle and “do their own thing,” reluctant to venture forth in unrequired service. Obligations are limited by job descriptions rather than being expanded by the reflexes of the second great commandment. Even entitlements suggest exclusions.

However, such depersonalizing trends need not characterize Brigham Young University. Yes, BYU is a very large community. Yes, some mistakes have been and will be made

Neal A. Maxwell was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this address was delivered at the Wednesday evening session of the BYU Annual University Conference on 25 August 1993.

in the direction of impersonalization. But, no, being big does not automatically mean being impersonal!

Think, for a moment, of just a few of the circumstances in which students here can still experience a frame of reference that remains human sized. For instance, the student wards are deliberately kept small. Students' relationships in a room or in a dorm can still be personal. Very importantly, their contacts with many of the staff are one-on-one. Likewise, mentoring by faculty is personal. So while students and all of you are part of a large campus community, the impersonalized patterns of the world need not prevail!

In any human situation, whether large or small, each of us can be either a lubricant or an irritant. There isn't much in between. Indifference is an irritation, and neutrality can be seen as muffled hostility.

Now, because you are integral parts of BYU, precious and special assets, may I presume to encourage you briefly to preserve yourselves and your marriages and families in order to serve more individuals and for longer! People-fatigue can overtake us all, especially the conscientious, if we are not wise.

In dealing with the pressures of life, many of you have long since developed your own ways of handling stress and people-fatigue and of rejuvenating marriages, which can become "tired" if we do not nurture them. For you, I shall merely provide some confirmation and encouragement to pace yourselves. You probably have worked things out reasonably well by being aligned with the several scriptures to follow.

Furthermore, each of us has different strengths and faces different circumstances that call for calibrations that are highly individual. Many things in life act upon us over which we have no control, but there is a zone—of differing size for each of us—in which we can act for ourselves, rather than merely being acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26). This zone includes a certain

amount of disposable time, just as we have disposable income. What we do within that zone is especially up to us to determine.

Basic scriptures can guide us: "See that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength" (Mosiah 4:27). A revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith at a time when he must have been exceedingly anxious to finish the important translation of the Book of Mormon: "Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end" (D&C 10:4).

Thus, the Lord has given us what might be called the "wisdom and order" and "strength and means" tests.

We unwisely often write checks against our time accounts as we never would dare do, comparably, against our bank accounts. Sometimes we make so many commitments, they become like the vines in the allegory of Jacob, threatening to "overcome the roots," including the roots of family relationships, friendships, and relationships with God. Some "pruning-shears" suggestions follow.

On my office wall is a quote from Anne Morrow Lindbergh: "My life cannot implement in action the demands of all the people to whom my heart responds." For me, it is a needed reminder. A few years ago, already weary, I foolishly went late one afternoon to give blessings to three individuals in two different hospitals who were dying of cancer. Not only was I worn out, but, worse, the last person really didn't get much from me. Things had not been done in "wisdom and order." I was running faster than my supply of strength and energy on that occasion. I exceeded my strength. Those blessings would have been better given over two or three days, and I would have had more empathy and energy. Somehow, giving unhurried time is a greater gift even if the minutes or hours are technically the same as when hurried.

Another scripture:

And he said unto [the Twelve], Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. [Mark 6:31–32]

Jesus clearly recognized the weariness of his disciples, brought on by their conscientiousness. A renewing retreat can be difficult to arrange. But informal, brief “retreats” can still be fashioned by providing such greenbelts of time between busyness, even if these are only a few minutes long.

Illustratively, after one of the Brethren made a report to President Brigham Young, he was anxious to leave so as not to impose, but President Young said, “Please sit a spell with me. I am weary of men and things.” How often do we “sit a spell” with spouse, children, colleagues, or friends? As you know, the original Twelve were counseled that they were not to “serve tables” (Acts 6:1–4). Actually, serving tables is a lot easier. It is visible, measurable, and do-able—compared to opening up the nations of the world or keeping wolves out of the flock. But, if the Twelve were drawn away from their scriptural and constitutional duties, the whole Church would suffer. Being drawn away can happen to all of us, however, almost without our knowing it.

The “wisdom and order” test also recognizes that there are seasons in life when doing certain extra outside civic chores is more appropriate.

While professional responsibilities and formal callings come and go, it is always in season, however, to follow Jesus’ commandment: “What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Let’s all try to watch the Martha-like anxiety, which is genderless. Such anxiety can also deprive us of special experiences if we are too “cumbered about much serving.”

Conscientiousness is not an automatic guarantee that we will choose the “good part” that will not “be taken away” from us (Luke 10:38–42).

In a relaxed discussion with several faculty and their partners just last week, it was clear that our most precious remembrances were concerned with “the good part.” These had not been taken from us, whereas many of our once-pressing anxieties were long since forgotten.

Brigham Young. In periods when pressures could have filled him with Martha-like anxiety, instead made Mary-like choices:

In my experience I never did let an opportunity pass of getting with the Prophet Joseph and of hearing him speak in public or in private, so that I might draw understanding from the fountain from which he spoke, that I might have it and bring it forth when it was needed. . . . In the days of the Prophet Joseph, such moments were more precious to me than all the wealth of the world. No matter how great my poverty—if I had to borrow meal to feed my wife and children, I never let an opportunity pass of learning what the Prophet Joseph had to impart. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 12:269–70]

The yield from Brigham’s having “chosen the good part” by so listening “has not been taken from” him or from us!

Husbands and wives, please have one gospel conversation at least once a week—just between the two of you. “Sit a spell,” even though it may only last 10 or 15 minutes. A growing intellectual excitement over the gospel can do so much to help counter fatigue and to renew us. So, too, can the joys of quiet, personal Christian service—outside the realm of our formal Church duties.

When we are perplexed and puzzled, and we will be at times, let us ponder Nephi’s example: “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

LeGrand Richards once said of worry: "It's the Lord's Church, so I let Him worry about it." Some of us are not that spiritually poised yet! The Lord knows we "cannot bear all things now" (D&C 50:40). His grace is sufficient for us for each of life's seasons, if we are humble (see Ether 12:27).

Many of our daily choices are not intrinsically hard, but we make them that way. Some choices are matters of preference, not principle. We have a way, at times, of exhausting ourselves and the supply of goodwill while struggling over what are preferences—not principles!

Consider the spiritual poise of Jesus, our Exemplar, in all things. Jesus, who accomplished the most, was never hectically involved. This is all the more marvelous when we realize that so much of his mortal messiahship was crowded into only three very busy years. He had empathy for others even amid his agony in Gethsemane and on the cross. He restored a severed ear. He made certain that his mother, Mary, would be cared for by the Apostle John. He reassured a suffering thief about tomorrow. Self-pity can constrain us severely, but there was none of it in Jesus.

Jesus individualized during what could have seemed to others to be repeated experiences. Even in the midst of his universalness, Jesus, our "great and true shepherd" (Helaman 15:13), cares for each one:

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. [Acts 23:11]

He was especially disclosing to a believing, solitary woman of Samaria:

The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he. [John 4:25–26]

Will we individualize? Since we are all poised at the edge of another academic year, it would be quite human for us to say resignedly, "Here we go again!" I am so glad Heavenly Father doesn't have such feelings! Even though his course is "one eternal round," as the plan of salvation is executed and re-executed again and again in realms beyond our purview, his love is constant and personal. I am so glad that Jesus did not vie each healing as merely one more duty. For him, such a duty was delight.

G. K. Chesterton concluded, "God has never grown tired of making all daisies alike, because God has never grown tired of daisies." Nor must we grow tired of students—or of each other.

Please keep yourselves spiritually and otherwise intact in order to continue as part of this special university. Keeping spiritually intact is of great value, especially when things seem somewhat bleak. Imagine, for instance, what the wrenching feelings of some of Jesus' followers must have been as he was arrested in Gethsemane! Worst still, what was it like for his followers to see him die on the cross? Surely those would be the bleakest hours in Christian history!

Also bleak would have been the time of the Prophet Joseph's imprisonment in Liberty Jail. His followers had been driven from the state of Missouri, and he appeared to be finished. Even so, the Lord told him that "the ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name" (D&C 122:1). What a stunning declaration!

John Taylor said of one who faltered in the bleakness:

We were driven out of Missouri. . . . I know some men who thought the work was at an end. I remember a remark made by Sidney Rigdon—I suppose he did not live his religion—I do not think he did—his knees began to shake in Missouri, and on one occasion he said, "Brethren, every one of you take your own way, for the work seems as though

*it ha[s] come to an end.” [John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 11:25]*

Then came bleaker Carthage! It looked as though the work of Joseph was finished! Elder George A. Smith gave counsel we should all heed:

*Some men in their hours of darkness may feel — I have heard of men feeling so — that the work is about done, that the enemies of the Saints have become so powerful, and bring such vast wealth and energy to bear against them that we are all going to be crushed out pretty soon. I will say to such brethren, it is very bad policy for you, because you think the old ship Zion is going to sink, to jump overboard. [George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses* 17:199–200]*

Those of little faith frequently mistake local cloud cover for general darkness.

The motto “The world is our campus” is true of this university, and I rejoice in the way the men and women in its family give so much—sometimes under spartan circumstances. A former member of your faculty and his partner are among the six couples now working in Mongolia in providing humanitarian service.

Likewise, our mission president in the India Bangalore Mission and his wife are part of the BYU family. They serve among a people who number nearly one billion, approaching one-fourth of the human family.

Our mission president in Moscow, Gary Browning, served among the Russian people, who he loved long before it was fashionable to love them. He did so in the midst of some severe physical problems that would have stopped a lesser man, but he simply went on serving.

I think too of Spencer and Shirley Palmer teaching amid spartan circumstances at a University in Beijing, China, in what should be the easy years of retirement. They will be followed by Brother and Sister Paul Hyer, who will enter upon the same service in several months.

Such individuals remind me of how good and decent the members of the BYU family are. But as good as the Y is now, it is going to become much better. Wide as its wingspan already is, it will become much wider. I can only be grateful to have association with all of you as members of that special family.

Again, thank you. May God bless you, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

