

Convocation April 22, 2011

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Thank you Brother Jones, I appreciate those kind remarks. Brothers and sisters, what a sight you are! And especially these young people behind me. What marvelous inspiration they give me at this moment for their young lives. It is such a blessing, privilege and honor to be with you this morning. As I was sitting here, enjoying this Convocation, a thought came to my mind which I am reminded of every morning as I sit in my study at home. It's a little plaque on my desk which simply says "Home is where Dad can say anything he wants because nobody listens." My children gave me that years and years ago. Now, I thought of that perhaps because this feels much like home. Graduating here back in 1985, twenty-six years ago, I sat where these young men and women are sitting today and had the opportunity to be able to walk this stage, with my parents sitting up there in the upper rows. I remember their screams loudly.

It has been an absolute blessing, brothers and sisters, over the years as I have travelled here and there and everywhere covering various stories around the globe. I look back upon the experience of BYU and upon those things which provided a solid foundation and realize *that* is what has guided my life since then. Days after my graduation, I was married. Then a few days after that, we moved to Abilene, TX where we had our first child, moved to El Paso, TX where we had another child, moved to San Antonio, TX where we had another child, moved to Los Angeles (we were there long enough to have two children), moved to Miami where we had another child. I turned to my wife and I said "we have to stop moving." We moved again, this time to Houston. We didn't have a child there, but it is where I've been working since. I look back on these years of covering the nation and the world and without question, I know in my heart and mind that we could have never done what we have done without the guidance of the spirit. Without the Lord's guidance in our footsteps daily, we cannot accomplish what he would like us to accomplish.

My first point, brothers and sisters and to you young people especially is simply; follow the direction of the spirit. Joseph Smith said, "This is a privilege upon which the government of heaven is conducted, by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom live."ⁱ So in whatever course of life you are following, in whatever city you live, in whatever direction you might be headed, the circumstances and the revelation adapted to those circumstances is paramount in your young lives. And if ignored, can lead you into disastrous paths.

We live, brothers and sisters, in terrific times. What a great time to be alive. The priesthood of God is restored to the earth. These aren't the days of Renaissance or Reformation but the days of

Restoration. The days in which we can call upon the blessings of heaven, salvation, and exaltation through the priesthood which has been restored. The days of all things being able to be accomplished. What a great time to be alive. But yet we look out upon the world and as I cover the world and have a witness to history over the past 25 years, I think what an awful time to be alive. These are the worst of times, which of course brings us to that great literary novel written back in 1859 when Charles Dickens simply wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities*, “this is the best of times, this is the worst of times, it is the age of wisdom, it is the age of foolishness.”ⁱⁱ Those words were written more than 150 years ago but how deeply they apply today, don’t they? Yes, we do live in wonderful times, but we live in awful times as well and that is why the spirit of the Lord is so necessary in guiding your young footsteps. Because without the spirit’s guidance, one can be lost forever. Elder Bednar said recently in the last general conference, “as we strive ever more consistently to do good and become better, we can walk with confidence that God will guide our steps. And we can speak with assurance that God will inspire our utterances.”ⁱⁱⁱ But in order to make that happen, we must strive consistently to obey and to listen and to strive in every way for that spiritual guidance.

I enjoy history and I’ve been reading about Marcus Tullius Cicero, who you might be familiar with, one of the great Roman statesmen, a great politician, a great philosopher who lived during the 1st century B.C. One of the great mandates in his life which was most important, was that “we do not recklessly and presumptuously assume something to be true.”^{iv} If we go through life doing that, then of course we will find ourselves in dangerous paths. But if we are more careful and more deliberate, and study more and pray more and seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost in all we do then we will have that guidance that will lead, as Elder Bednar said, our footsteps daily.

Which brings me to a second point of discussion. Never lose the desire to learn – never. And you young people as you graduate here today, some of you perhaps are continuing your education and others perhaps might be going off to jobs and others even already have jobs, but never lose the desire to learn. There are so many books out there. There is so much knowledge to be gained. I look back on history and look at the great founding fathers of this wonderful nation – those whom were inspired and given the gifts of God to establish the Constitution of this great land. John Adams, who spoke before Congress in Philadelphia, was the verbal voice, the fighter of freedom, declaring before delegates Independence, and then rallied around by others unanimously to support him in his cause. He said at age 91, only days perhaps before he passed away on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence which he was admittedly inspired to be a contributor of, said these words to his granddaughter, “the longer I live, the more I read, the more patiently I think, the more anxiously I inquire, the less I seem to know.”^v A bit of a paradox don’t you think? But it’s so true, brothers and sisters, and to especially you young people. As we move forward in life, search for knowledge and gain knowledge, the more we realize how much we need

to learn. This concept is also true when following the direction of the spirit. We should be taught daily by the spirit. The spirit has been a guide throughout my life and I know in various circumstances I would not be here today had it not been for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We must dig our roots deep, brothers and sisters, young people. We must understand the importance of digging those roots so deep that when the waves and the winds come, and there will be many of them throughout your young lives, that we can simply hold on and hold on tightly. I don't know what is going to be coming and what is going to be shaping your young lives but without question, there will be much turmoil. There will be many struggles and as I look out and witness what is happening around us in this great big world, there is no doubt about the importance of being founded in correct principles.

This reminds me of covering disasters throughout the world and being on the coast of Banda Aceh, Indonesia after a Tsunami swept through that region. I stood there amazed at the devastation of this land before me. Everything had been swept out to sea. There was nothing left but awful remains of dirt and mud and a few trees. Walking up to one individual, I asked, "How did you survive?" "Here, let me show you." he said. I followed him through the debris. "I clung to this tree right here." "And how did you do that?" I asked. He said, "When the waves were coming, there were about two or three dozen of us who grabbed a hold of this tree as tightly as we possibly could and there we hung on for dear life. The Tsunami came and it swept some out to sea. It just surrounded us and immersed us. Each time the Tsunamis would come, there would be less people on that tree." By the time it was all over, there were only six out of possibly two or three dozen who had originally clung to that tree. I looked at that tree. It had a large trunk in the middle and then branches that extended from that trunk in all directions and from each one of those branches this indigenous tree had an amazing root system that stemmed from each of these branches. Dozens even hundreds of roots were on this tree, all sinking deep into the earth. Those were the only trees to survive. They withstood those series of Tsunamis more so than the concrete buildings. That's how these people survived.

So in like manner, we must dig our roots deep because you young people are in for a long and windy, and winding road. We must hang on because there are a lot of trials and struggles out there and we must root ourselves deeply. Remember this always, that outside of making sure we are following the direction of the spirit and ensuring as well that we are never losing the desire to learn, understand that the worth of a soul, the worth of your young souls, is much more than the accolades and honors which may line your office, your home study, much more than the financial success that you may have, much more than the power and influence that you might gain throughout your community or wherever you might live. Instead, the worth of a soul is measured

through meekness and humility, through understanding the importance of helping and loving others, and by understanding the importance of following God’s guidance.

What a privilege it is to be here this morning brothers and sisters and to share this moment with our son as well who is graduating and walking these final steps. I am honored to be able to share this moment with you. I leave you my testimony that whatever we do in our lives, especially to you young people, remember always that your life is not your own. You have a maker, a God who loves you, who is watching out over you and whatever you do in your life, look to Him and live. “Walk in the spirit” as the apostle Paul says. It is my testimony that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that this is His restored kingdom. God bless you young people for you deserve it and you need it and of course, as long as you desire it you will have His spirit with you always. Thank you brothers and sisters. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

ⁱ Joseph Smith

ⁱⁱ Charles Dickens. *A Tale of Two Cities*. 1859.

ⁱⁱⁱ David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation”, *Ensign*, May 2011, p. 90.

^{iv} Anthony Everett. *Cicero—the life and times of Rome’s greatest politician*. 2001.

^v David McCullough. *John Adams*. Simon & Schuster: 2001.