



Elder Robert C. Gay

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Let Your Light Shine

BY ELDER ROBERT C. GAY

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From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on April 10, 2015.

You are an inspirational sight not only because of what you have accomplished but also because of how you’ve chosen to conduct your life by attending BYU–Idaho. This makes your degree doubly impressive. You offer hope to an ever-darkening world. You are those who the Savior referred to as “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) and those He then challenged to “shine before men” (Matthew 5:16).

At the time of my graduation from Harvard, I was particularly reminded of this special charge for each of us to shine as a light before this world.

I was in the office of my thesis adviser. He was a kind, devout Christian. We had never spoken about religion, but that afternoon he said, “Bob, I want you to stay and teach here at the business school, but I don’t want you to stay for the reasons you may think. I don’t want you here because I believe you’ll make some great contribution to the literature because I don’t believe you

will.” He continued, “You’re smart but not that kind of smart.” I said something like, “Okay.”

My adviser then walked very slowly from behind his desk and circled behind me. He then walked a second time around both his desk and me saying, “Bob, I think I know you. I believe I know you. I feel I know you. I want you to stay and teach here because I want you to teach our students about God. That is what I do every day during my office hours. I need someone to help me teach them about life.” I was stunned.

My vision of my degree changed. I knew that no matter what else I might do with my schooling—whether it be teaching, business, supporting a family—I needed to apply it in a way that added light to others and not myself.

Interestingly, about eight years ago, I had a similar experience. I had just returned home from serving as a mission president and began seeking advice from others as to what to do next. At that time, I received a note from Elder Dallin H. Oaks. It reads, in part: “Bob, . . . it is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors. . . . Wise are those who make this commitment: I will put the Lord first in my life, and I will keep His commandments. . . . This is the ultimate significance of taking upon you the name of Jesus Christ, and this is what we should ponder.”¹

As you move forward, yours too is a choice of how best to apply your degree and talents. As both my thesis adviser and Elder Oaks taught me, you can either use your training to bring light to yourself or to bring the Savior’s light to others.

How to do this should be deeply pondered. To that end, I would like to commend two fundamental principles for your consideration. The first principle is that you hear and follow the Spirit, doing things in the Lord’s way, not your way; the second is that you embrace the marginalized of this world, or, as Christ said, the lost, the last, and the least.

First, Act According to the Spirit

Years ago at another commencement, my father said the following to the graduates: “The real challenge today is not in outer space but in inner man. To reconcile the how of our living with the why of our existence and in the synthesis to emerge the child of God that we know we are. . . . May your life bear an unalterable testimony that there is knowledge—independent of

reason—[a knowledge that is able to alter lives and which can only be found through obedience] to the voice of the God within us.”²

The ultimate foundation of all you do in life should be to live so that the voice and integrity of the Spirit takes precedence as the powerful, necessary force in determining your actions, both professionally and personally.

You are graduates of a time that needs a profound inner spiritual rebirth. Yours is a time that calls for men and women willing to assert their birthright of choice to alter and shape lives and institutions in a way that reflects the moral and spiritual values dictated by the Spirit of God. Unless you can arrive at that point, you will idolize and surround yourself with the trivial.

Acting according to the Spirit, however, is not always easy. It often requires significant sacrifice and at times deep obedience against the purely rational mind.

Some years ago, the late Truman G. Madsen introduced me at a talk I delivered at BYU. He shared the following story:

You’ve all heard of Jesse Knight. There’s a BYU building named for Jesse. He did his successful work in mining; . . . [he] was generous in his use of what he managed to earn. When a crisis arose [in the Church] Heber J. Grant, later president, was sent out to try to raise funding just to keep the Church going.

He went to Jesse and said, “We need five thousand dollars from you.” And Jesse said, “You know, I’ve given a lot and helped a lot, and at the moment I sort of feel like I’m paid up.” Brother Grant said, “I only ask one thing. I want you to go home and pray about it. That’s all I ask. You pray about it, and I’ll come and see you tomorrow.”

Jesse promised. That night he prayed and had a strong impression, “Give my servant Heber ten thousand dollars.” And he said aloud, “Lord, he only asked for five thousand dollars!” And the message was repeated. So when Brother Grant showed up, Brother Jesse Knight had a check for ten thousand dollars. [Jesse] then said, “But (Heber) don’t ever ask me to pray again.”³

I am sure each of you has given thought to your future. For some it will be off to jobs or graduate school or other opportunities. It may be returning home to concentrate on raising a family, and for others it may be more exploring and pondering the question, “What do I do now?” More than this, most of you have probably thought, “It’s now time to become part of the real world.” Let me assure you it is not and never will be that time. Rather, this is the time to resolve forever to stand above the world—your goal must not be assimilation into the real world but to disrupt it.

The Lord himself has invited each of you to do so, saying, “Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38).

To build up His kingdom, you must forsake and sacrifice to establish every needful thing of conscience. You have to stand up and bear witness and testimony in uncomfortable and even threatening circumstances. In His kingdom you can no longer say, like Jesse Knight, “I think I’m paid up.”

By the voice of the Spirit, you will be asked to walk unmarked paths, many times needing to do things that make little sense. Like Jesse Knight, you will need to pay ten thousand dollars instead of five thousand dollars. You will have to build a Kirtland Temple, like Joseph, with no money, or retrieve brass plates, like Nephi, against an army of fifty.

The Church would have never risen above its own debts if the Saints were unwilling to sacrifice what was asked by the voice of the Spirit and instead did only that which they could afford.

It is not the maximization of wealth or success that underpins the command to let your light “shine before men”; rather, it is Spirit-directed acts of sacrifice and courage that build and edify. These also are the acts that blaze new pathways that astonish this world.

The intimate and absolute test of your life will not be the job or career ahead, not even whether you marry or serve in the Church, but rather the test is will you “hear” or “hearken” and act upon the voice of the Spirit of God within you with exactness—using all the talents and gifts and education He has given you—to bring to pass His work and His glory and not your work and your glory. The great charge to Joseph Smith as he opened this dispensation was to “hear Him!”

Unless you hear and follow the voice of the Spirit, you cannot and will not survive this day and time—and you will certainly never achieve the impact your life can otherwise realize.

As a young business professional on Wall Street one evening, while in a lawyer’s office, I had a prominent investment banker ask me this question: “Bob, do you think I ought to buy a summer home in East Long Island New York or one in France?” I said, “You live in New York. You can drive to that home.” He said, “I know, but the traffic is so bad on the Long Island Expressway, I think I can go to the airport and take the Concorde jet to Paris quicker.” I said, “Are you serious?” He said, “Absolutely!” I then heard a voice

shout inside me, “You need to leave this place and this job immediately or you are going to become like him.”

I did not doubt that voice, and while it made neither logical or financial sense, I walked out on Wall Street a few weeks later—leaving a large bonus on the table—and joined a small boutique investment company in Boston that paid me less than half of what I was then earning. It made no sense to many of my friends, and I could not fully explain it to them.

In time, though, as I followed the voice of the Spirit to walk away, doors opened that allowed me literally to become an instrument in the hand of the Lord in helping lift countless people out of poverty, disease and hopelessness. The decision to leave only made sense in hindsight, but being true to the voice changed everything.

If you understand nothing else tonight, understand this—whether you are on the farm pitching hay and harvesting potatoes, or in the home raising a family, or working as a manager in business—you will not be whole and healed and fully empowered unless you receive His voice and go and do whatever it directs. In a very real sense, it does not matter what you have studied and leave here to do. What matters is that you make whatever you do one with the Lord and His voice.

Second, Embrace the Marginalized

For better or worse, the reality of our world is that we live in a day and hour where both good and powerful evil share the geography of our time.

Incredible as this may seem, you are not here by accident. You are here by choice. You wanted the opportunity to prove yourself in this time of morally twisted opposition that calls evil “good,” and good “evil.” You elected to stand here to give service and to love.

Today we have great divisions before us. Within and without the Church there exist real stumbling blocks. Outside we are pressed daily by violence, invasion of individual liberty, discrimination, poverty, immorality, disease, and so much more. Inside the Church, many struggle to reconcile and understand same-gender attraction, the role of women, or certain Church doctrines or history. Many struggle with doubt, lack of confidence or resources, zealotry, commitment, meeting schedules, leaders who offend, friends or children who stray, prayers that seem unanswered, and broken trusts through emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

Some would like to ignore or diminish these issues by contending with those that challenge our orthodoxy or by delivering dismissive sermons or by saying to those that struggle temporally or spiritually with doubt or depression to “just be patient; things will work out.” The Lord, however, expects much more of us than words. He expects our personal ministry despite discomfort or any personal rejection. He expects an outreach of charity. He expects us to go into the “highways and byways” of people’s lives and to bring them to the Sacred Grove and to Gethsemane and Calvary.

The scriptures teach us that Jesus showed forth “an increase of love” to those He rebuked and to those that denied Him (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:43). Against norms, he dined with sinners and ministered to the outcast, the grieved, and unbeliever.

There is nothing that has more power to affect our lives than the pure love of Christ, which is charity. Charity looks beyond self, choosing to “bear” and “endure all things.” If we live without charity, if we live indifferently, our Heavenly Father says we are “nothing” (see 1 Corinthians 13:2, 7). That is, we live a life of vanity.

Two of my favorite chapters in the New Testament are the thirteenth chapter of John and the fifth chapter of Mark. As described in John, the night of the Atonement began with the Savior commanding the disciples to make and renew a covenant to always remember and honor His sacrifice. He then knelt down and washed the feet of those who would in a few short hours betray Him, deny Him, or fall asleep in His most needed hour. He never condemned for this but exhorted them to be one with Him, to forgive, to wash the feet of others, and to love their neighbors as He loved them. He asked that we raise our vision to His vision.

Can you see that the great charge of the Atonement is to love as He loved? To love those who betray, who offend, who fall asleep, who deny, who doubt, who are zealous and cut off an ear with a sword or a heart with a harsh deed; to be longsuffering with those who will not hear and who will not love back.

On the night of the Atonement, Pilate did things the world’s way—he washed his hands of the matter of justice and sold out while Christ pleaded mercy for those who nailed Him to the cross.

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5, the Savior comes to a man who is an outcast. Nobody will have anything to do with him because he is untamed and cut “himself with stones” (verse 5). The Savior, however, embraces him,

heals him, and sends him home with the command to bear witness of God’s compassion.

The Savior then passes over the sea. There a religious leader, Jairus, asks him to give a blessing to his daughter who was dying. As He begins the journey to Jairus’ home, a crowd of people walks with Him. In the crowd, another outcast, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years with an issue of blood, touches His garment.

She had been to all the doctors and could not be healed. In her culture this made her unclean and required her to live apart from her husband and children. She was completely isolated. In this humiliating situation, she touched the Savior’s garment hoping to be cured. Jesus sensed her presence, turned and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” (verse 30).

Desperate but faithful, she then falls down before Him. He then envelops her with His grace, saying, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (verse 34). In doing this, not only did the Savior heal her physically, He also healed her spiritually. Through His ministry she was no longer a “nobody” but now a “daughter,” a member of the family of God and once again a member of her own family and society.

While the Savior lingered, however, Jairus’ daughter died. Undeterred, He still goes forward to minister. He finds family and friends weeping over her and asks why. He tells them the young girl is not dead but sleeping. The scriptures record that they then “laughed him to scorn” (verse 40). Ignoring them, He raised the girl from the dead.

I keep in a frame on the wall in my home office these words of Elbert Hubbard: “God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas but for scars.” This is the pattern that Jesus places before us as we work to do His work to lift others: we will be called upon to suffer innocently, if we are to achieve what He needs us to achieve as His light before men.

We have many who are spiritually dead around us, and you must be willing to be laughed at “to scorn.” Like Jesus, you must move forward against a world that does not believe and not “shrink” before the taunting of our secular world.

In the parable of the great supper, the Savior said, “And whosoever doth not bear [my] cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

In opening this last dispensation, He reminded us that He “partook” of “the bitter” and also “finished” the required ascent to the cross (D&C 19:18–19). God expects engagement. You are to be a finisher and not an observer in

His battle for the souls of men. Scars are more important than diplomas. This is how we show our love to Him and “shine before men” and how we receive His enabling power and grace in our own lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me share one final thought. Let me return to my friend Truman Madsen. After Truman shared the story of Jesse Knight, who gave ten thousand dollars, he then said the following, which I feel impressed to share with you:

Ann and I were present one night at the Jerusalem Center. Sitting next to us were Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, not yet in the Twelve, and Elder James E. Faust, not yet in the First Presidency.

Brother Faust turned to Jeff and said, “Talk about Abraham.” And he began, as if on cue, and described . . . [how] both Abraham and Isaac had demonstrated their willingness to accept the will of God at all hazards. . . .

The footnote on Brother Holland is that he was in a meeting somewhere in a university, and from the audience, a student cried out in a mocking way, “Brother Holland! Would you give your life for Jesus?” And he thought a minute and then said, “That’s what I thought I was doing.”⁴

Truman then said, “[There] are two ways of giving our lives, brothers and sisters, one is in the emergency where we give our life in death. But the other way is to give through our lives [in the *how* of our living].”⁵

May you have the resolve to live as a witness for Christ by letting your light “shine before men.” May you know that this will require you to “hear Him” and to bear with love the outcast, the enemy, the marginalized. May you understand that this is not a journey into the known but the unknown—it is a path of faith and integrity to the voice of the Holy Ghost that ultimately demands your sacrifice to be more than just good or less sinful, but to become holy and consecrated.

In all of this my prayer is that each of you may find the strength to obey and repent as needed to live a life, dictated by the Spirit within, that bears witness that He is your priority.

In Primary we learned the words and sang the song “I’m Trying to Be like Jesus.” I simply ask, “Are you trying to be like Jesus?” I believe that there is no more important graduation message than that simple Primary graduation message.

I leave you my testimony that you are loved, deeply loved, as well as an invitation to leave here resolved to live beyond a career to a life of discipleship that takes upon you His name as directed by conscience with charity to all.

I also leave you my personal testimony, born of experience and His voice to me, that He lives and that He can and will lift you beyond any losses you suffer for His name’s sake. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

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Notes

1. Dallin H. Oaks to Robert C. Gay, November 1, 2007.
2. Frank William Gay, speech at University of Utah, May 2000.
3. Truman G. Madsen, remarks at Investment Professionals Conference, BYU, September 12, 2008.
4. Madsen, remarks.
5. Madsen, remarks.