You have grown up being told you are a special generation, held back for the last days, Saturday’s Warriors, to help prepare the world for the Lord’s Second Coming. I have often wondered why you are considered better than my generation.

I think a powerful insight into your generation was given by Elder Neal A. Maxwell when he said, “The youth of this generation have a greater capacity for obedience than any other previous generation.” I think that statement is so insightful. I hope you fully understand not only your capacity of obedience but how important obedience is in developing and preparing you for your future.

If you would please turn to the scripture that was read, in Doctrine and Covenants Section 29, verse 8. The Lord says: “Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth.”

Although these scriptures refer to gathering to all centers of strength, I will use it to give insight to one of those centers—A Disciple Preparation Center, BYU-Idaho. We have all been gathered here for a very important purpose. It is that purpose and why we are gathered that I wish to discuss with you today.

If you will look at Section 29, verse 7, it reads: “And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts.”

Everyone who comes to BYU-Idaho comes in different stages of spiritual, academic, and personal development. It doesn’t take long to see that there is something different about this place. When I first arrived, two things stood out to me: first, the goodness of the people, and second, how much simpler things were here.

When I was young the prophet was David O. McKay, and I remember a profound statement he made: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ makes bad men good and good men better.”

BYU-Idaho is not a spiritual hospital; it is not designed to make bad men good. It is designed to make good men and good women better.

So these things are hard, but for this good sister to qualify for her full measure of the Atonement, she needed to go through this process.
When she has corrected her life, we hope she will want to return and fulfill her destiny. We will open our arms to her as an institution. She will be clean and better prepared, more confident to move along the path of discipleship.

If you will refer back to Doctrine and Covenants Section 29, verse 7: “for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts.”

This scripture refers to our attitudes, even our attitudes about the standards of this university. This university is part of the Lord’s Kingdom. All of the university standards—for admission, student honor, and housing—have been approved by his prophets.

I don’t believe there are any of you who are contrary to all of these things. However, I see some of you have trouble with parts of the standards. It might be curfew, not shaving daily, fashionable clothing that is tight fitting or revealing. For some, the university standards have had unintended results. Some of you are becoming more casual on Sunday. Your attitude seems to be, “I can’t wear these clothes on campus because of the strict standards, so I’ll wear them to church.”

I know you feel the term “hard heart” is a very strong term for this behavior, but some put these things in the category of, “It’s just not that big of a deal.” The scriptures talk about being double minded, double hearted, or having a divided heart. To be obedient to only parts of standards of discipleship is dangerous.

May I remind you of the example of Nephi and his brothers Laman and Lemuel in the Book of Mormon. Laman and Lemuel were always at Home Evening. The fundamental difference between Laman and Lemuel and Nephi is that Laman and Lemuel always found parts of the commandments that irritated them or didn’t agree with their personal preferences.

Listen closely to the account in the third chapter of 1 Nephi where Lehi explains to Nephi that the Lord commanded him to send his sons back to Jerusalem to secure the records.

In verse 5, Lehi says: “And now, behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord.”

Then two verses later, Nephi responds, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”

~Garth V. Hall

“BYU-Idaho is not a spiritual hospital; it is not designed to accept the spiritually sick. It is designed for those who are qualified, prepared, and are spiritually healthy to move forward quickly and intensely on the path of discipleship.”

Elder Bednar taught that murmuring is spiritual cowardliness. When you love the Honor Code, not just tolerate it, you will begin to develop power on the path of discipleship.

Shortly after Elder Bednar was called and sustained as an Apostle, he returned to BYU-Idaho and continued serving as our president for a short while. During one of our Monday meetings, he mentioned that he needed a place to go to church. I was serving as the bishop of a married student ward at the time, so I invited him to come to our ward. Think of it, the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve at the BYU-Idaho 51st Ward. During his remarks he taught a very powerful and insightful principle: “The world into which you students are going is degenerating so fast that what was required in the past will not be sufficient in the future to provide the necessary spiritual protection. The rapidity with which we respond to prophetic counsel will be an important source of protection.”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell referred to this principle as “spiritual reflex.” When our nature is to immediately respond to spiritual direction, promptings, or commands, there is spiritual protection available that may not be available if we have to take time to debate or evaluate our commitment.

You are being prepared to go into a world of tribulation and desolation stated in verse 8 of Doctrine & Covenants 29. This is a world of affliction, suffering, misery, lack of moral direction, persecution, fear, and danger. Our ability not only to make the right decisions but the speed in which we make them is a powerful principle of spiritual survival in today’s moral decline.

Let’s go back to Doctrine and Covenants Section 29, verse 8: We are gathered “to prepare [our] hearts and be prepared in all things.”

How do we prepare our hearts for discipleship? I look at your greatest capacity—obedience. You have demonstrated that quality, even as far back as the pre-existence and are now in an environment where that capacity will be developed and fine tuned. President James E. Faust taught that the price of discipleship is obedience.

Elder Bednar described obedience as a process or progression. “Obedience does not occur quickly or all at
once. Nor is it merely a matter of great personal discipline; it is a change of disposition, a change of heart.” He continues, “Closely associated with obeying with a willing heart is reaching a point where we no longer are driven or directed by rules; instead, we learn to govern our lives by principle.”

If you turn to Doctrine and Covenants 59:4: “And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few.”

In the Lord’s kingdom, what do we receive for being obedient? Blessings which are new; and more demanding commandments.

We have our agency to obey or not, but it is clear that the Lord gives us commandments in a fashion that helps us grow, develop, progress, and become better disciples. This is how it works in God’s kingdom, and it is the pattern at His University.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has taught: “Obedience is the first law of heaven, the cornerstone upon which all righteousness and progression rest. It consists in compliance with divine law, in conformity to the mind and will of Deity, in complete subjection to God and His commands. To obey gospel law is to yield obedience to the Lord, to execute the commands of and be ruled by Him whose we are.”

I believe there are two significant dimensions that are essential for spiritual development: the level of our obedience and the level of standards or commandments.

The pattern of complying to commandments and gospel standards allows us to develop spiritual characteristics that change our nature. This change of nature results in a desire to conform to the mind and will of God. As this desire is fully developed, we subject our will to His will. The scriptures refer to this progression as a change of heart.

Now I know some of you are separating university standards from commandments and laws of Deity. Initially there appears to be some justification for that argument. May I share an observation? Many of the university standards we dilute or ignore are in fact very important in our progress as disciple learners. They are foundational for our preparation, progression, and protection.

As you all know, obedience is closely connected with the law of sacrifice. Obedience alone can be just a change in behavior. As commendable as that may be, obedience without sacrifice does not produce the spiritual development required by the Lord’s disciples. Man’s love of God is measured in terms of obedience. Sacrifice is God’s gift to allow us to truly see ourselves as He sees us.

Elder Russell M. Nelson taught: “We are still commanded to sacrifice, but not by shedding blood of animals. Our highest sense of sacrifice is achieved as we make ourselves more sacred or holy. This we do by our obedience to the commandments of God. Thus, the laws of obedience and sacrifice are indelibly intertwined . . . . As we comply with these and other commandments, something wonderful happens to us . . . . We become more sacred and holy—like our Lord!”

So maybe, in a sense, those few students and employees who struggle with the standards of the university may have to sacrifice more to be in compliance. At the same time, maybe they are blessed to have more to give and will experience more personal growth.

Now returning to Doctrine and Covenants Section 29, verse 8. While preparing their hearts is at the core, you are to be prepared in all things. As a university we have the responsibility to prepare you with skills and knowledge to be successful in your professions, family, and community. In addition, a Disciple Preparation Center develops skills in leadership, analytical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communications, team work, and quantitative analysis.

You are also developing a personal character of integrity, work ethic, positive attitude, service to others, personal health and well-being, and cultural awareness.

Let’s return to Doctrine & Covenants 29:6: “Whatsoever ye shall ask in faith, being united in prayer according to my command, ye shall receive.”

When you love the Lord, you will love and serve others. If you truly love others you will pray for them. At a Disciple Preparation Center we should be united—and especially united in prayer. Then as the Lord promises in this scripture, you shall receive.

When we learn how to truly love, serve, and teach others, we develop capacities of discipleship. The following statement by President Henry B. Eyring helps us understand this principle. “I’ll make you a prophecy. I will simply tell you: The day will come that that capacity to influence people around you for good will have you singled out as one of the great leaders in whatever place you’re in. They will not quite know why, but you will know that the reasons you
are being singled out is not because of your innate gifts as a leader but because you have done what the Savior would do—reach out to those around you to lift them, to help them to be better, even when it might be a little difficult and you might not have been received very well.”

As we have discussed, you have been gathered here to change your hearts and to be prepared in all things to become a disciple leader in God’s kingdom.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf described this preparation this way. “Discipleship is a journey. We need the refining lessons of the journey to craft our character and purify our hearts. By patiently walking in the path of discipleship, we demonstrate to ourselves the measure of our faith and our willingness to accept God’s will rather than ours.”

There will be a time when we will all be required to leave BYU-Idaho. Under the direction of the Spirit, we will be guided to the four corners of the earth to consecrate our time and talents. The talents we have developed here will be key in building God’s kingdom and assisting in establishing Zion.

You will be going into a world of turbulence and tribulation, a world that will challenge and even attack the fundamentals of our faith. God is preparing you in a very special way to stand against the powers of evil.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson described this challenge in these words: “We need strong Christians who can persevere against hardship, who can sustain hope through tragedy, who can lift others by their example and their compassion, and who can consistently overcome temptations. We need strong Christians who can make important things happen by their faith and who can defend the truth of Jesus Christ against moral relativism and militant atheism.”

Finally, in closing, let’s return to Doctrine and Covenants Section 29, verse 5: “Lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst.”

We should all have glad hearts. Jesus Christ knows us, and he knows His work. He has gathered us here for a special and sacred purpose. What happens here is important to Him. So much so He is in our midst, He is among us. I pray that each of you will see yourselves as your Heavenly Father sees you—His elect.

I pray that because of your special capacity of obedience to small and simple things you will develop and flourish at this special, sacred, and set apart place.

You are being prepared to be trusted, consecrated disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be instruments in His hands to build His kingdom and establish Zion in preparation for His Second Coming. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Notes:
1. David A. Bednar, “Brigham Young University-Idaho: A Disciple Preparation Center (DPC), BYU-Idaho Devotional, Aug. 2004
3. Doctrine & Covenants 29:8 (emphasis added)
4. Doctrine & Covenants 29:7
5. 1 Nephi 3:3 (emphasis added)
6. 1 Nephi 3:7 (emphasis added)
7. 1 Nephi 3:6 (emphasis added)
9. Doctrine & Covenants 29:8
12. Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, April 1958, 539

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