

Discipleship at BYU-Idaho

An Interview with President Kim B. Clark

Since beginning his service at Brigham Young University–Idaho over two years ago, President Kim B. Clark has placed considerable emphasis on the importance of preparing students for a lifetime of faithful discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ. To help readers become better acquainted with this fundamental aspect of the university’s purpose, *BYU–Idaho* magazine sat down with President Clark for an in-depth interview.

BYU–Idaho magazine: How do you define discipleship?

President Clark: It’s helpful to begin by considering the word “disciple.” It suggests someone who follows and whose life adheres to the teachings and principles taught by the Savior. That’s the starting point. But if we look deeper, we begin to understand that following the Savior is not only to believe in Him and practice what He taught us. We also need to repent, because we all fall short and sin—even when our desire is to be one of His followers.

So discipleship also means making the Atonement of the Savior—His forgiveness, His mercy, and His grace—a living reality in our lives. We have to repent of our sins and really turn to Him, which means giving our hearts, our deepest commitments, and our deepest desires to Him.

In short, we become submissive to His will for us. We become different people. Our hearts are changed. Our very nature is turned over to the Savior, and we become increasingly more like Him—not only in our professed beliefs, but in reality. He becomes the way, the truth, and our life in the sense that we follow Him, we believe and exercise faith in Him, and we become like Him. That’s the path of discipleship.

As we walk that path, we become more like Him until that glorious day when we will stand before Him. If we have been true to our covenants and to the faith we have, and if we have walked that path of discipleship, He will embrace us and say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest of the Lord.”

BYU–Idaho magazine: What characteristics or traits does a disciple of Jesus Christ possess?

President Clark: The most fundamental traits of discipleship are captured in the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. First is having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Disciples have faith in the

Savior. As Alma taught, faith may begin with just a desire to believe. That desire then works in us, and we exercise a little particle of faith enough to plant the seed, nurture it, and let it grow.

Next is repentance, which is the recognition of our weaknesses and sins, the desire to change, confession when necessary, and obedience to the commandments of the Lord. Repentance, which I believe includes obedience, is a key characteristic of a disciple. Disciples repent when they need to, and they keep the commandments of the Lord.

The third characteristic is being true to the covenants we make at baptism and in the temple. Commitment to covenants is a vital part of discipleship—keeping our promises and being true and faithful.

The last trait is having the gift of the Holy Ghost. It’s absolutely essential that we have the powers of heaven in our lives as we exercise faith, repent, keep the commandments, and enter into covenants. We cannot do it alone. We need heaven in our lives and the great blessings contained in the Plan of Salvation.

Those are the characteristics of discipleship—the first principles of the gospel. Disciples exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they take action. They repent and obey. They are faithful. They enter into eternal covenants with God. Those covenants become commitments to which they are faithful. And they have the gift of the Holy Ghost with them to guide them, to help them make decisions, and to take action. They receive gifts of faith, hope, and whatever else the Lord has in store for them.

BYU–Idaho magazine: What makes discipleship so integral to the BYU–Idaho experience? How does discipleship fit into the broader mission and purposes of the university?

President Clark: It’s important to understand that discipleship is not just a feature of the university. It is the mission of the university. The first point of our mission statement is to help young people develop testimonies of the Savior and live the principles of the gospel. The word “mission” includes concepts like “purpose” and “reason for being.”

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many important ways, it is the university. Discipleship should permeate every aspect of what the university does. We should be able to trace everything we do back to helping young people become disciples of the Savior.

BYU-Idaho magazine: What specifically is BYU-Idaho doing to prepare students for discipleship of the Savior?

President Clark: Our overarching mission is to help students develop physically and spiritually, be well-educated, and prepare themselves for the roles that lie ahead of them. To fulfill that mission, the university engages in a wide variety of activities designed to help young people become disciples, leaders in their families, and good citizens. It's a kind of microcosm of the rest of their lives.

BYU-Idaho creates an environment for students in which they learn what it means to be a disciple of the Savior. They also have experiences here that will help them actually become a disciple. Students will come to see that discipleship must be a defining characteristic of their lives. That means discipleship cannot be something we do only on a certain day of the week or a certain time of the day. We must be disciples of the Savior every waking and sleeping moment of our lives. It has to be part of everything we do.

There are numerous ways BYU-Idaho helps students overcome the challenges they face as they work to become disciples. The first example is what we call Student Honor. It includes the Code of Honor that BYU-Idaho shares with all Church Educational System institutions. Student Honor is a commitment. The university asks each student to commit to live the standards and principles contained in the Code of Honor.

There is both protection and preparation in that commitment. There is protection from evil because students who live these commandments and guidelines stay safe spiritually and physically. It is also preparation because students learn how to be obedient. Student Honor, the Code of Honor, the Housing Guidelines, and the Dress and Grooming Standards all define a way of life that will help students learn obedience and the power of living true principles.

A second example is our weekly campus devotional. These devotionals are designed to be powerful experiences in which students are taught by the Holy Ghost in a setting shared with their classmates. The speakers who come are specifically guided and directed by the Spirit to say and teach the things students need to hear each week.

A third element of disciple preparation at BYU-Idaho is what happens on Sundays and during the week in student wards and stakes. Church participation is a very important part of the BYU-Idaho experience. The university is blessed to have great stake presidents, great bishops, and great wards. Through those wards, students experience the power of the gospel in their lives.

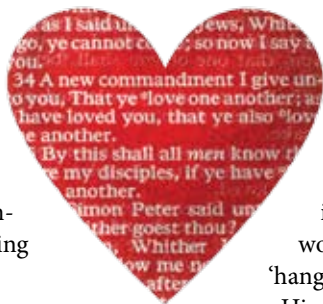
Another dimension is our Student Activities Program. Some of these activities are not directly focused on discipleship, but they're carried out in a way that draws on discipleship while encouraging and supporting its development. Students learn how to help each other, how to love each other, how to take good care of each other, how to treat each other with respect and love.

My wife Sue and I attended a banquet last fall for students who participated in the Activities Program's competitive football league. One young man, a freshman, said with tears in his eyes, "I didn't understand this when I came here, but now I know that football at BYU-Idaho is discipleship in pads." What did he mean?

He said, "When I went to my first practice, we had prayer. I went to my second practice, and we had prayer. I went to my first game, and we had prayer. At the end of the game, we had prayer. When we hit each other in a hard tackle, we reached down and picked the other person up. When they'd knock us over, they'd reach down and pick us up. We played hard and had fun. It was tough. We played football. But in the end, it was done in great sportsmanship, love, and discipleship. We're trying to live the gospel in our lives."

Another example of disciple preparation at BYU-Idaho is our academic offerings. The university's Learning Model requires faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, prayerful preparation, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It all draws heavily on your experience as a disciple of the Savior. What does that look like in the classroom?

You would see students who have prayed the night before as they've studied. They've exercised their faith—not in their teacher or the textbook, but in the Lord Jesus Christ that through the power of His Atonement they can be worthy to receive guidance from the Holy Ghost. They have faith in Him that that will happen. You would see students who are talking, answering questions, and making comments. You would see the Spirit is teaching them as they speak. The Holy Ghost is there.



Is that discipleship? Absolutely. It's discipleship in action. It's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's repentance, being true and faithful to covenants, and being worthy to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

BYU-Idaho magazine: What role do faculty members have in preparing students for discipleship?

President Clark: The role of faculty in discipleship is two-fold. First, they must be disciples of the Savior themselves—living, teaching, and working with their students in that way. In every interaction they have with students, they are living models of discipleship of the Savior. The students can actually see a true disciple in action.

Secondly, as they teach their subject matter, no matter what it is, they can “lay hold upon the word of God,” letting the gospel, its teachings, and principles be both a lens and a framework for what they’re teaching. So in a subject that seems far removed from the gospel, like math, students can still see the power of gospel principles. The teacher will help them see how mathematical principles have analogs in the gospel.

Students come away with a wonderful appreciation not only for the specific content but for the wonders of God and the majesty of His creations. Their faith in Him is increased. That’s how faculty can teach by the Spirit—by bringing the Spirit into their classrooms and helping students feel that power of heaven.

BYU-Idaho magazine: Having been part of the disciple preparation process here, what do BYU-Idaho graduates have to offer their families, the Church, and their communities?

President Clark: That’s a question I’m asked quite often. “What do BYU-Idaho students bring to the world? What is distinctive about them?” I had an experience recently that answers that question. It illustrates exactly what BYU-Idaho students bring to the places where they serve.

I was talking to a woman who lives in Utah. She said, “In the last 18 months we’ve had three BYU-Idaho couples move into our ward. You cannot imagine what a difference these three couples have made in our ward.”

She talked about one of the BYU-Idaho graduates and his wife who had moved there. He had been put into the Young Men presidency in the ward. She said, “He’s the answer to my prayers, because I have a 15-year-old boy.”

She said this BYU-Idaho graduate comes to church every Sunday in a white shirt and tie. He’s clean shaven. He looks great. She said, “The Spirit just radiates from him. He has an enthu-

siasm about the gospel and about life that is just inspiring. He’s just so solid. He’s excited about the work, he’s active, and the kids love him. He doesn’t ‘hang out’ with them on their level, but he raises them up. His enthusiasm for the gospel and his faith are just infectious. I prayed for some help for my young son, and this BYU-Idaho student is the answer to my prayer.”

Another interesting thing about this BYU-Idaho graduate is what’s happening to him at work. He’s well-trained and disciplined. He’s responsible and shows up on time. He’s creative, has energy, wants to learn, and he’s humble. And the employer is promoting him. He’s only been there about 18 months or so, and he’s already been promoted two or three times. He’s being given more responsibility because he can do it. He knows how to be a leader. He’s someone people trust.

So what do BYU-Idaho students bring? They bring fire—a fire in their hearts and a love of the Lord. They’ve been in an environment here that has taught them what it means to be a disciple of the Savior. They’ve been around it; they’ve felt it. BYU-Idaho truly is a “disciple preparation center.” They’ve been surrounded by thousands of young people who have that commitment.

Imagine what’s going to happen as literally thousands and thousands of people like this move out into the world and into the kingdom, where the Lord can use them to strengthen and build it up. It’s pretty exciting.

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BYU-Idaho magazine: How does this concept of discipleship relate to alumni and friends of BYU-Idaho? What can they do to help BYU-Idaho students in their preparation as disciples?

President Clark: Because of their association with BYU-Idaho, the bar is raised for them as well. They’re BYU-Idaho graduates. They have that mark. And so what they can do is be disciples of the Savior themselves. Put into practice what they know is true and live their lives in that way. We need their love, their prayers, and most of all we need them to be disciples of the Savior.