

# Inaugural Response

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President Hinckley, to you, and President Monson, President Faust, and all the members of the Board of Trustees, to Elder Kerr, to the past presidents of this school who are here today, to President Summers, to our many honored guests, the wonderful students of BYU-Idaho, my colleagues and friends and family, my

brothers and sisters, I extend my welcome, my gratitude, and my love on this special day.

It is an honor and privilege to stand before you to respond to the charge given to me by President Hinckley. I would like to share with you for a few moments what is in my heart and what I believe it means to be the president of Brigham Young University-Idaho at this time in its history.

As I look back on what has brought us here this day, I am conscious of a legacy and heritage that comes in two parts. The first is my family. I am grateful beyond words for Sue, my eternal companion, the love of my life, who has blessed my life for 35 years. I am grateful for seven wonderful children and for their families. They teach, inspire, and support me; and I love them.

The legacy of family is a great source of inspiration to me. Sue's father, Charles Hunt, passed away four years ago. But her mother is here today, and I salute her for her faith and kindness and the example she is to us. I hope that my mom and dad who both have passed away will know of this day and of my gratitude and love for them. They sacrificed and invested so much and passed on to me many things, but one of special importance today is a love of learning and teaching. I come from a long line of teachers on both sides of my family, and I cherish that heritage.

The second part of the legacy is the history of this school. Beginning as a frontier academy in 1888 and continuing under inspired leaders for over 100 years, Ricks College established a legacy of faith, and sacrifice, and righteousness. This is a very special place, a place that the Lord has preserved and dedicated to be the home of a great university with a special and distinctive culture. There is on this campus a spirit of love and support for each individual student. There is a consecration of time and talent by the people who work here that blesses the lives of those students. In the midst of that love and that

consecration, the Holy Ghost ministers on this campus. The Spirit of Ricks is real.

Now, under the direction of the Prophet and the Board we have become Brigham Young University-Idaho. In the initial stage of that transition and under the overall guidance of the Board, Elder Eyring as Commissioner of Church Education and Elder Bednar as the president of BYU-Idaho laid down important guiding principles and powerful ideas about education in this university. As I pondered these ideas and principles in light of the challenge we now face, a scripture whose power I felt as an 18-year-old freshman at Harvard College came to mind. It is found in Luke chapter 6 verses 47-48. This is the Savior speaking:

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

We, too, must dig deep. We have been given powerful principles and an inspired framework; but we must dig deep and sink those principles into the bedrock of testimony, and faith, and consecration.

As I look forward to the future, my starting point is the mission of this university. We have a wonderful, inspired mission to build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ; to educate our students with high quality; to prepare them for the responsibilities they will face; and to create here a wholesome, righteous community in which students may thrive spiritually, intellectually, and socially.

I like to summarize our mission with two words. The first is *disciple*. Our mission, our very purpose, is to educate, develop, and prepare disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. This purpose is deeply rooted in this university. In a way that I have found remarkable, this is a student-centered university. It is that way by divine appointment. The Lord watches over this university in a direct and powerful way. He is mindful of the individual students who come here. Our purpose is to help them become His true followers, His true disciples, a light to the world.

The second word is *leader*. When I use that word I have in mind leadership with a small 'l'. This is the kind of leadership

we need in every part of every kind of organization in our society. We want our students to provide the kind of leadership that serves, and inspires—first and foremost in their families and in the Church, in their communities, and in their work. Listen to the words that Elder Eyring spoke four years ago about our students:

They will be natural leaders who know how to teach and how to learn. They will have the power to innovate and improve without requiring more of what money can buy. Those graduates of BYU-Idaho will become—and this is a prophesy that I am prepared to make and make solemnly—those graduates of BYU-Idaho will become legendary for their capacity to build the people around them and to add value wherever they serve. (Elder Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” Brigham Young University-Idaho Devotional, September 18, 2001)

That is our mission. As we pursue that mission in the years ahead, I believe there are three great imperatives before us, three great things the Lord would have us do. The first is that we must raise substantially the quality of every aspect of the experience our students have.

As good as it is today (and believe me, it is very, very good), every dimension of the BYU-Idaho experience—spiritual, intellectual, social—must increase in its quality. We must do all of this to better prepare our students for a very challenging world. This will require inspired innovation and important changes in many aspects of our work. Let me give you one example of what I see ahead.

The example is learning by faith. The Lord has commanded us to “...seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 88:118). President Harold B. Lee said this about learning by faith:

Let no one think that “learning by faith” contemplates an easy or lazy way to gain knowledge and ripen it into wisdom....

Learning by faith requires the bending of the whole soul through worthy living to become attuned to the Holy Spirit of the Lord, the calling up from the depths of one’s own mental searching, and the linking of our own efforts to receive the true witness of the Spirit. (Harold B. Lee, “The Iron Rod,” *Ensign*, June 1971, p. 5)

Faith is at the heart of almost every line in that statement. It is in the “bending” of the soul in righteous obedience; it is in the diligent searching, in the “calling up,” and in the “linking” of personal effort to the Spirit. In all this there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in the power of His Atonement, faith in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as the Savior said, to “...teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance...” (*John* 14:26). That faith moves the student to action: to obey, to bend, to search, to call up, to link. That is learning by faith.

Now, there is a great spirit of learning on this campus and much learning by faith. Our challenge is to take that spirit deeper, to make learning by faith a pervasive, everyday reality. This will require much of our students. But it also will require much of the faculty and staff. Indeed, it will require new ways of learning and teaching based on inspired scholarship.

This university has a wonderful faculty. They are teachers of skill, passion, and commitment. We have a loyal and dedicated staff, people of talent and goodness. They do great work today. The challenge before us is to create even more powerful and effective learning experiences in which students learn by faith. This requires, but is more than, teaching by the Spirit. To learn by faith, students need opportunities to take action. Some of those opportunities will come in a stronger, even more effective Activities program where students lead and teach one another and participate broadly. Some of them will come in the classroom, where prepared students, exercising faith, step out beyond the light they already possess, to speak, to contribute, and to teach one another. It is precisely in that moment of faith that President Lee’s “calling up” and “linking” of personal effort to the Spirit occurs. It is in that moment that the Spirit teaches.

To create that kind of classroom, with that kind of learning, will require more than new methods and approaches to teaching. It will require new learning experiences based on the creative development of new materials and new courses. I see ahead a great season of creativity and innovation, a season of powerful new ideas and new curricula all across this campus. I see inquiry and scholarship that is blessed with inspiration because it is done by faculty whose hearts are right, whose eyes are single to the glory of God, and who desire nothing in their work but to bless the lives of their students.

The second great imperative is to make a BYU-Idaho education available to many more of the young people of the Church. But this must be accomplished within the resources that the Board already has given us. We have begun this process with the three-track admission system. Because we learn and teach on this campus year-round, we serve many more students than the 11,600 or so who are on the campus at any one time. But we must continue to search for creative ways to organize, schedule, and calendar the educational experiences of our students so that more of them may come.

As we do so, I am convinced that we will find new ways to use information technology to reach more students and to deepen the learning experience of those we touch. In a day not far from now, we will be able to break down the barriers of time and space and connect our students on internships or between semesters to the university and to each other and create outstanding, interactive educational experiences. In these experiences students will teach one another in new and powerful ways. This capacity to educate effectively across time and space will allow us to leverage the capacity of the university and reach many more young people.

Imperative number three: we must lower the relative cost of education. BYU-Idaho is already a remarkably efficient school. We have taken to heart and learned well the lessons of

the pioneers: modest, disciplined, doing more with less, taking good care of what we have, willing to consecrate what we have, and trust in the Lord. In the years ahead we must continue to put our culture and those pioneer lessons to good use. Even as we seek to increase quality and serve more students, we must pursue new ways to be more productive. We will not get there just by squeezing the organization, nor will we get there by cutting corners. Our path is one of consecration and deeper knowledge of the processes of learning and teaching. With that depth and that consecration will come new ways of learning and teaching that will yield a higher quality experience while requiring relatively fewer resources per student.

There is great power on that path—power to weather adversity, power to extend the resources of the Church, and power to realize the mission of the university more effectively. But I believe there is something more at stake even than this.

When I think of this third imperative, I see little girls and boys sitting in Primary classes in this country and, indeed, all over the world. These children will make and keep sacred covenants with the Lord. I believe the Lord desires to bless them and, like the army of Helaman, raise them up as a righteous generation of disciple-leaders all across the earth. That will take education—higher education of the kind we have talked about today. Now, I realize that most of these young people will never come to BYU-Idaho. But they will be blessed by what we learn here about learning by faith and delivering a high-quality education at relatively low cost.

That blessing will come in different ways. It may come through educational activities and programs initiated by the Church—in wards and branches, in stakes, and in seminaries and institutes. That blessing also may come to the young people of the Church, and to young people not of our faith, through universities outside the Church that take what we do here and apply it to their educational programs.

I believe that at BYU-Idaho we must learn to use new technologies and develop methods, materials, programs, and concepts that not only can be applied to our students on and off our campus, but also can be effectively and efficiently applied by others across the Church and, indeed, across the world. I am convinced that this university is in this valley where our pioneer heritage is deeply ingrained, where the people are humble and faithful, so that we can be a proving ground of great fidelity for education that will bless the young people of the Church worldwide.

As we reflect on these three wonderful imperatives, you might imagine that to do them all—to raise quality, to serve more students, and to lower relative costs—would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, it is traditional and even natural to see in these three imperatives only dichotomies and trade-offs—higher quality but only with higher, not lower costs; serve more students, but only by raising costs, or reducing quality. But we are not bound by tradition, nor are we limited to our own understanding or to the wisdom of men. In short, this is a very unusual university.

Seven and a half years ago, Elder David Bednar stood where I am standing today and likened Ricks College to the ship that the great prophet Nephi built under the direction of the Lord. Elder Bednar noted that this was a ship of “curious workmanship” that was “not built after the manner of men,” and was, when complete, “exceedingly fine” (*1 Nephi 18:14*). He then said these words about Ricks College:

May I suggest that Nephi’s experience in building that ship is a model for us at Ricks College as we prepare for and move into the next century. We, too, must build something we have never built before in order to go someplace we have never been before. (President David A. Bednar, “Inaugural Response,” February 27, 1998)

How prophetic those words would be. The ship of curious workmanship that was Ricks College is now BYU-Idaho. It is a great ship. And we are going places we have never been before. Indeed, we are going places no one has ever been before.

As I look forward to the work before us, I take great comfort in another item of “curious workmanship” that was vital to the success of Nephi’s journey: the Liahona. Here is how Nephi described the Liahona:

...As my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.

And...they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord. (*1 Nephi 16:10, 28-29*)

With the ship that was like no other and with the advanced technology of the Liahona, Nephi made his journey and went exactly where the Lord wanted him to go. And so will we. To meet all three imperatives will require deep knowledge about learning and teaching and much greater understanding of the development of disciple-leaders. We will need new technologies, innovative ideas, new concepts, and inspired scholarship of “curious workmanship.” And we will have them! I doubt they will appear on our doorstep one bright morning. But I know they will come. They will come because of the faith and devotion and the unity of heart and mind in this university. They will come because of the love the Lord has for the precious young people who come here and those who will learn from what we do here. They will come as we move forward on the appointed course the Lord has set. When we have done all that we can with what we have, they will come. Of that I have no doubt.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you a passage of scripture that has come to have a special place in my heart. I believe it has great meaning for BYU-Idaho. The passage begins in the third verse of section 97 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

Behold, I say unto you, concerning the school in Zion, I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion...

This is an inspiring verse. But as I read this passage on a recent morning, my eyes moved down the page, and I came to verses 8 and 9:

Verily I say unto you, all among them [everyone associated with the school] who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.

For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit.

As I read those verses, the strong impression came to me: this describes the Spirit of Ricks; this is BYU-Idaho. This is a school full of people united in their commitment to the Lord, striving to do His will, humble and teachable, willing to consecrate of their time and their talents in His work. And I believe that the promise in verse 9 is our promise: We have been “planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream...[and we shall bring forth] much precious fruit.”

President Hinckley, it is in the spirit of these verses in the Doctrine and Covenants that I accept—no, I embrace—the charge you have given me. And I pledge to you and the Board and to my colleagues, to our students, to the alumni, to all who love this school, that I will live my life to be inspired to lead this university in a way worthy of your trust. I am committed to pursue the mission of BYU-Idaho with every bit of energy and ability the Lord has given me. I know that with all of us working as one, with the inspired guidance of the Board, this university will move forward on the steady, upward course the Lord has set. It will be Brigham Young University–Idaho, a university true to its heritage, true to its mission, everything the Lord wants it to be.

I leave you my testimony that God, our Father in Heaven, lives; that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the promised Messiah. He is the Redeemer and Savior of the world. I know that my Redeemer lives. His Church has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. BYU-Idaho is an important part of the Restoration and of the great unfolding work of the Lord in our day. In that work, in this Church, Gordon B. Hinckley stands today where the Prophet Joseph stood.

He is the prophet of the Lord and leads the Lord’s church on the earth. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. 🙏