

Brigham Young University



And My Grace Shall Attend You

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This is the thirty-eighth Annual University Conference since I became a BYU faculty member. Each Conference has been memorable and exhilarating. Each has given me fresh optimism and hope. Each year I have learned once again what I forgot to fully remember throughout the previous year; namely, that the Lord has generously blessed this place and those who serve here and “of him unto whom much is given much is required.”¹

To the “first laborers in [his] last kingdom” the Lord gave a commandment to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” and “all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God.” In addition, they were instructed to teach the theories, principles, and laws “of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.” Then the Lord gave them a promise, conditioned, as one should expect, on obedience. “Teach ye diligently,” he said, “and my grace shall attend you.”²

Diligence is a “constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken.”³ Earnest effort requires serious intent, clear purpose, and resolute action.

Constant effort requires regular, recurrent, persistent, sustained attention. Those who are constant and earnest in meeting their teaching responsibilities will qualify for the Lord’s grace. Diligent teachers prepare to receive this blessing. There is no such promise to those who are not diligent.

For what purpose did the Lord promise grace to those who teach diligently? “That [they and their students] may be instructed more perfectly...in all things...that are expedient for [them] to understand.”⁴ Knowing the difference between those things that are expedient and those that are not is essential in developing a meaningful, effective curriculum. Course content must be earnestly considered and constantly honed. Student needs must take precedence over teacher preference. And courses must fit together seamlessly within programs that are developmentally sound and carefully aligned with the mission of the university. This requires diligence; a constant, earnest effort directed toward curricular clarity and teaching excellence.

Our Board of Trustees has defined BYU as “a Church-related, very large, national, academically selective, teaching-oriented, undergraduate university offering both liberal arts and occupational degrees, with

4 D&C 88:78.

K. Newell Dayley was associate academic vice president - undergraduate studies when this address was delivered at the BYU Annual University Conference faculty session on 23 August 2005.

1 D&C 82:3.

2 D&C 88:74, 77-79 (italics added).

3 *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* (1992), s.v. “diligence.”

sufficiently strong graduate programs and research work to be a major university, but insufficient sponsored research and academic doctoral programs to be a graduate research institution.”⁵ A teaching-oriented university will focus on student needs and aspirations. It will encourage, support, recognize, and reward diligent teaching. It will strive to develop courses and programs of real significance that carefully prepare students for future conditions and opportunities.

Consider the Lord’s instruction to teach “things which must shortly come to pass.”⁶ One of the ways we do this is through curricular planning. Planning is to project into the future. It has to do with things we hope to bring to pass. Diligent planning builds faith and guides action. A teacher who plans carefully and wisely has the power to fill students with faith and confidence. A student with confidence in a teacher’s learning plan is more apt to engage in the processes essential to reaching specific learning goals. At the beginning of a course a diligent teacher will be able to help students envision those “things that must shortly come to pass” if they will be diligent in their studies. This vision engenders hope and faith in essential learning processes and leads toward a life-long engagement with the subject being learned.

A diligent teacher at BYU will frequently read and contemplate its Mission Statement and the Aims of a BYU Education. These documents are visionary and inspirational. They guide curricular planning and motivate excellent teaching. Diligent contemplation of their meaning while planning a course or program invites an outpouring of spiritual enlightenment.

Diligent teachers will think deeply about subject matter. As they do, they will also think constantly about how students learn, why students might choose a particular course, when students should take that course, and what courses or experiences need to precede or follow it. They will be as concerned about student readiness and engagement as they are about course content.

Teachers who truly care about students want to know what they are learning. They are diligent in gathering evidence of learning. What they learn from assessing and evaluating this evidence is used to help current students learn better and to refine courses and programs to benefit their future students.

Diligent teachers are concerned about things that might inhibit learning. They care about space, time, student access, and equipment. Students who show less rigor or motivation than others concern them. They pay attention to individuals and individual needs. They are available when students are ready to learn.

Diligent teachers are great learners. They engage continually in rigorous research and creative activity that adds substance and energy to their teaching. They seek ideas and periodic correction from their associates and students. Continual improvement is not a troubling annoyance. It is their quest!

While engaged in our self-study to prepare for our upcoming accreditation review by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, I have been amazed by our progress over the past ten years. Self-directed, periodic unit reviews now enable us to engage in continuous institutional correction and change. Forty-three specialized accrediting bodies, in addition to the Northwest Commission, are periodically invited to help us improve in specific areas of our work. But we are no longer dependent on these external accreditation bodies to motivate change and improvement. We welcome them here to evaluate our efforts, validate our strengths, and help us find ways to overcome our challenges. But, as an institution, we have become more diligent.

While reviewing the Program Level Documentation that has been gathered and analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of our educational programs, I have been impressed with the diligence that is evident in much of that documentation. Some of our colleagues are truly exemplary. They are prepared to teach us a lot about diligent curricular planning and teaching. I invite each of you to visit our accreditation website and find Program Level Documentation under Standard Two. Take time to browse through the rich variety of program documentation found there. You will be stimulated by the work of your colleagues and encouraged to increase your own diligence.

While you’re on the web, take time to visit the Faculty Center and the Center for Instructional Design websites. You will find valuable information and access to resources that will help you be a more diligent teacher. In both places you will be able to connect with professionals who are prepared to assist you.

5 Board of Trustees, 5 June 1991 (italics added).

6 D&C 88:79.

I once expressed frustration about the pressure I was feeling in this academic setting to a colleague and valued friend. He listened so attentively that I fully expected sympathy, if not empathy. To my surprise, he simply said: "There's only pressure where there's resistance." I've seldom felt pressure since. That wise colleague helped me understand that diligence and resistance to improvement are not compatible.

I hope each of us will remember the Lord's commandment and promise to the early laborers in His kingdom. If we are diligent teachers, we will enjoy the Lord's grace in our work. That each of us will qualify for this precious blessing is my sincere prayer and constant hope in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.