

Success and Well Doing ... Some Small and Simple Observations  
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A wonderful good morning to all of you – to Vice President Webb, to Dean Magleby, to all the faculty and staff of this great college, particularly to all of the graduates who are seated before me, and a very special greeting to all of the family and friends of these good graduates. I have always felt that graduation exercises at BYU are very special days – in fact they are at the top of my list of favorite days. I have always looked forward to them and enjoyed being a part of them. It is a time of satisfaction, happiness, celebration, and accomplishment and there is always a great spirit on campus at this time.

I was very humbled, but pleased to be asked to share a message with you today. I want you to know that I have not taken this assignment lightly and hope that some of the things I will share with you might be of help to you as you now prepare leave this great institution and – as the motto states – “Go forth to Serve.” The general message I wish to leave with you today is about you and some observations I have made about how you can do well in your chosen field. I’ve entitled my message – “Success and Well Doing... Some Small and Simple Observations.” I would like to do this by sharing with you some favorite examples and stories of mine that capture this message.

First let me say a few words about a very important gospel principle that is central to my topic. The principle is that “out of small things, great things come to pass.” The principle is clearly explained in no less than four instances in our scriptures. It was given through Nephi<sup>1</sup> when he explained the workings of the Liahona and that by simply adhering to its direction great things would follow. It was give in the book of James<sup>2</sup> where it explains that the bits in horses’ mouths and the helms of ships are both very small things that, by their very nature, they actually set the course for very large and powerful things. The principle was explained very clearly by Alma<sup>3</sup> as he passed the responsibility of keeping the records to his son Helaman. Alma first indicated that these records would be the means of a very important work; he then referred back to the Liahona and the miracles and marvelous works it brought about by small means. The Prophet Joseph Smith used the principle<sup>4</sup> as he counseled a company of brethren, who were commanded to journey to Missouri. He implored them that they shouldn’t be weary in well doing, because out of small things proceedeth that which is great. From

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 16:29

<sup>2</sup> James 3:4

<sup>3</sup> Alma 37:6, 41

<sup>4</sup> D&C 64:33

Liberty Jail<sup>5</sup> the prophet Joseph again taught this principle. He used the reference of the small helm and told the saints to attend with great earnestness to small things.

Now, the first example I want to share with you is what I believe is a clear application of this principle - it is the incredible example of the computer. I've had a chance to both watch and be a beneficiary of this outstanding technology. My career has spanned the growth of the computer industry and I have pleasantly watched its contribution to not only our engineering and technology disciplines, but to the improvement of many aspects of society. To consider what this machine can do - in relation to small and simple things - it is important to understand the very basics of the architecture of a computer. Essentially all a computer can do is to count to 2 - and it is even a bit simpler than that, it can only count between 0 and 1. The secret of its success is that it can do it so fast, without error, and also very importantly, it doesn't get weary in doing this small and simple thing - it just keeps on doing it over and over again. To augment this, computer scientists, engineers, and technologists have found so many ways to use and expand this simple concept. The message here is clear, what you are able to do may not seem to be very profound, but if you do it well, and are consistent - your success is virtually guaranteed.

Next let me tell you of Bella - a little Yorkshire dog that lives next to my wife and I in Rexburg. I haven't had a chance to observe Bella as long I have computers, but she is another powerful example to me. She is a very lively, happy, and active dog. She runs around like she owns the world. After I got better acquainted with Bella, I noticed something about her that I hadn't seen originally - she has only three legs! Now I am sure that Bella doesn't even think that she is different than other dogs, and I don't think she would even care. She has what most of us would consider a very severe shortcoming, but she goes on with her life without a second thought about it. What a great example she is of showing that success and happiness can easily be attained even though life may not have been "fair."

The following story transpired shortly after I began serving as a faculty member in this college. Previously I had been enjoying my career as a member of the technical staff at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico and had made many professional contacts there. One of these contacts was another BYU alumnus who was a recruiter for Sandia. I need to preface this by telling you a little bit about the engineering staff at Sandia. At that time the hiring policy required a potential engineering employee to have either a MS or PhD and a minimum 3.7 GPA. They recruited their new employees from all of the prestigious engineering universities across the nation - MIT, Cal Tech, U of California, Texas, etc. It was Sandia's practice every year to go through a complete evaluation of each employee prior to awarding an annual raise. In this process each engineer employee would be ranked based on his or her performance for the past year. Basically you were numbered from 1 to n (n being the

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<sup>5</sup> D&C 123:16

number of engineers employed) and this ranking was used to set your salary increase. Well – to make a long story short, my recruiter friend told me that the Sandia Management had decided to use this ranking to see which of their employees advanced and moved to management most quickly – so they did that and obtained a list of highly valuable employees. With this information, the management thought it would be a good idea to see where these employees came from – in other words where did they get their degrees. To their surprise, they found the most highly desired employees came from – they would not have guessed it – Brigham Young University. I understand that some of the management even wondered where BYU was and why they recruited there. This story tells me many things, but for my point today it is that you have received much from your education here and you will be given many opportunities because of that which has been given.

My last example is also a BYU story and it is about the “Civil Engineering Scholarship Society.” You graduates may have seen the photos of this group outside the Civil Engineering Office in the Clyde Building. Let me tell you a bit about them. This society began when a small group of alumni and a visionary department chair wanted to find a way to give back to the University and the Civil Engineering Department and their students. They set about to provide endowed scholarships for Civil Engineering students – and with their 22 years of dedicated efforts have now established endowed accounts totaling about \$3.5 million. This group embodies what I believe are successful engineers. Many of them own their own consulting businesses, they have established strong ethical reputations in their profession, they love and care for their families, they faithfully serve the church - many of them have served or are now serving as mission presidents, they are more than happy to give back to the university in any way that they can, and they are leaders in their communities. They are really my heroes. A very interesting tidbit of information about them (one that they are not ashamed of) is that their cumulative GPA, as a whole, is just a bit above a 3.0. This group has surely found success as engineers in well doing.

So, let me summarize. What can we learn from these examples?

From the members of the Civil Engineering Scholarship Society I am reminded of many of the cardinal principles of leadership. I know that as graduates of this college you understand these principles. You are likely acquainted with Jim Collins<sup>6</sup> - a recognized authority of understanding and explaining leadership and his “Levels of Leadership.” Collins identifies a Level 5 leader (i.e. the very best you can get) as an Executive who “Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional will.” I assure you that Collins theory and Level 5 leadership is manifest in the individuals of the Civil Engineering Scholarship Society.

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<sup>6</sup> Collins, James C., *Good to Great*

In addition, we saw from the Sandia recruiter's story that the skills and character attributes that you possess and the reputation of those who have preceded you will open many doors for you to rise to high levels in your profession. These opportunities for success and leadership will be available to you because of your unique ability to very tightly couple your education with all the gifts your Heavenly Father has given you.

From Bella, the three-legged dog – we see that success and happiness is not dependent upon what others think you may be able to do, but what you have prepared yourself to do. Bella truly followed President Kimball's admonition to just "Do It."

From the Computer – we see that success can come from the wise application of very small and simple things and that these simple things must be done very well. We have all been taught of this principle in conjunction with the Liahona, which I spoke of earlier. It was an amazing device, it didn't do much, but what it did do was remarkable – and it only worked by the faith of those who used it.

So, what are some of the small and simple things that can assure our success? – *Humility and professional will* - as acknowledged by Jim Collins and demonstrated by the members of the Civil Engineering Scholarship Society as well as the BYU Sandia recruits, *faith in ourselves* as shown by Bella the three legged dog, and *consistency and sticking with* small and simple things as is done by our computing equipment. Indeed these small and simple things can bring to pass great things

In closing let me share a statement from Kim Clark, the President of BYU-Idaho. He said:

"Well-doing occurs through small things; great things come from small things. It is natural to grow weary in doing small things; but if we give our hearts and minds to the Lord, we will not grow weary, we will do the small things that make great things happen, and we will build Zion."<sup>7</sup>

It is my sincere hope and prayer that you all will be able to make the most of what you have been given, in doing this you will indeed find happiness in well doing. May you have the blessings of our Lord as you go forth to serve.

It's been my pleasure to be with you today, thank you.

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, Kim, "Out of Small Things Proceedeth That Which Is Great," BYU-I Devotional, Jan 10, 2006.