

*October 11, 2018***“BYU-Pathway Worldwide: A School in Zion”**

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It is a privilege and a blessing to share a few remarks with you tonight. I begin with two stories about the beginnings of what is now BYU-Pathway Worldwide.

The first took place in Mesa Arizona, one of the first three PathwayConnect sites. After the program had been running for a year or so, the missionaries at the site declared, “This program will never work. There is little interest in it, and the priesthood leaders don’t support it.” And in fact, the priesthood leaders did not support it because they saw little need for it. There seemed to be many opportunities for education of their young people right there in the valley and of course there was BYU.

Now, hold that thought as I tell you the second story. This one I experienced personally. It took place in Washington DC, a couple of years later. One of the Area Seventies there said to me, “We don’t need Pathway here. We have a great scholarship program with Southern Virginia University that works fine.” I asked him, “How many students are involved in that program?” His answer: about 25. I then asked, “Do you have any young adults in your area who are struggling in their lives, who are not making progress.” He said, “Oh yes, there are thousands of them.” My response: Pathway is for them. He looked at me in surprise, and said, “Oh, I didn’t see it that way.”

In both of these cases and in many others we encountered in the early days, the people we sought to reach with Pathway were simply invisible to the leaders, at least as far as higher education was concerned. We were after those who had never been to college, or who had been but were no longer attending. Many, many of them were struggling in their lives both spiritually and temporally.

One of the wonderful things BYU-Pathway has done is to open the opportunity for education to those who have been invisible; who believed that education, especially a Church education, was for someone else, not for them; who had little hope for a better future.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a day of miracles, when our Heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ are moving with power in the earth to build up the Kingdom of God and establish Zion in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.¹ I believe BYU-Pathway is one of those miracles. It has a role to play in strengthening the Kingdom of God and establishing Zion.

In 1832, in Independence Missouri, the Lord gave the Prophet Joseph the following revelation. As I read this, please keep in mind what happened in Mesa and Washington DC:

For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments.

Therefore, I give unto you this commandment, that ye bind yourselves by this covenant...
And you are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have equal claims on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his wants are just—

And all this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold, to be cast into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church— Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.²

This is the spirit and power of the law of consecration. It is essential in establishing Zion, where there are no poor – in spirit, in opportunity, in necessities of life – among us.³

What the Lord describes in these verses stands in sharp contrast to this scene from the Book of Mormon:

But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.⁴

Like that time in the land of the Nephites, we live in a world society in which there is great inequality in opportunities to learn.⁵ Even in a country as developed and wealthy as the United States of America, 40 percent of people age 18-30 have a high school education or less, and almost 20 percent have some college, but left without getting any kind of degree.⁶ This is a time when education beyond high school and the acquisition of valuable skills developed through higher education are more important than ever. Those with a high school education or less, or who have started but not finished a program of higher education face a large gap in opportunities for productive work and income.⁷ We know from our experience with BYU-Pathway and the studies of many others that much of this gap has its roots in the absence of access to, and opportunity for, learning.⁸

The Lord has put BYU-Pathway on the earth to open up those opportunities for our brothers and sisters who have been educationally invisible for a long time. Many of them fear they cannot do the work of higher education. Many of them see the cost of education as a huge barrier. Many of them have been told all of their lives that education and learning is not for them. Many of them have believed that false doctrine, until now.

Along with all of the institutions of the Church Educational System, BYU-Pathway is here so that those who choose to participate will find new hope for the future. If they choose to enroll and work hard they will improve upon their God-given talents, and gain other talents, even an hundred fold. BYU-Pathway has come in this time so that our brothers and sisters can strengthen themselves and their families, and contribute in a more powerful way to the building up of the Kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion. And all this, so that Zion may grow in beauty and holiness, her stakes strengthened and her people prepared for the Second Coming of the Lord.

President Russell M. Nelson has made it clear that to prepare for the Lord all of us must rise up and

- Do our duty as God's mighty army
- Truly receive the Holy Ghost
- Open the heavens through personal purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting in the Book of Mormon and commitment to family history and temple work.
- Stretch beyond our current ability to receive personal revelation
- Minister to our brothers and sisters in the Lord's way, with His power and His love.

When people enroll in and complete PathwayConnect, and continue on to do a certificate, and even a degree, they rise up as the Prophet has called us to do. Many of the students are not active in the Church when they start PathwayConnect. Many face serious struggles spiritually and temporally. Even those who are active in the Church step up to a greater level of spirituality and faithfulness.

Let me describe what happens to these good people when they fully engage in the weekly gatherings, the online courses and the religious education classes in Pathway.

First, the Gospel goes down deeper into their hearts

- They exercise greater faith in Jesus Christ and have greater hope in Him. They see the opportunity and they feel that wonderful hope that the Savior gives us. But they have to act on that faith and that hope.
- PathwayConnect and the certificate programs are real school and they can be hard. The students have to overcome their fears, and they have to develop new understanding and new skills. They have to study! And they have to sustain all of that over many, many months, even years. They see that they cannot realize their hopes without prayer and without the Lord's blessings. The Atonement of Jesus Christ becomes immediate and real in their daily lives.
- They are immersed in the scriptures, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of the Lord. This is a central part of PathwayConnect.
- I believe one of the most important things that happens to our students is the gratitude that wells up in them as they experience the Lord's love. For them, PathwayConnect is an expression of the love of Jesus Christ for them. They go to Church and partake of the sacrament with renewed love for Him, and gratitude for His blessings.

Second, they learn how to learn deeply; they become lifelong learners

- The courses are well designed and full of useful knowledge to be sure, but there is more in the design than the knowledge in the courses. The model of learning that underlies BYU-Pathway calls for the students to take responsibility for their learning and to take action. They learn how to learn deeply: to gain knowledge, to take effective righteous action, and with the Lord's help to become more and more like Him.
- The students grow in confidence -- confidence in the Lord, and confidence that with His help they can do hard things. They grow in diligence, and capacity for hard work. They grow in humility in their reliance on the Lord. They develop their talents, and new skills that have value in work, in their communities and in their families.
- I believe one of the most important things they learn is the power of unity of heart and mind. The Thursday night gatherings are remarkable experiences. Students bond together, learn to help each other succeed, and learn how to love and appreciate one another. Every week they see the power of the Lord's promise: "...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."⁹

Third, Pathway students strengthen their capacity to lead and support their families

- Of course, everything I have noted so far will help students find better jobs to support their families. But Pathway is also a powerful leadership development experience. Students learn how to establish a vision

for their lives and their families, how to set goals, how to plan, and how to carry out their plans. The students learn how to teach, and how to engage others in learning together.

- All of these experiences will help them lead their families. But there is one thing more I want to emphasize. Their very participation in the program, their very diligence in carrying it through, their work, their prayers, their righteousness, their seeking the Holy Ghost, all of this sets a powerful example for their families. In this way, the students who truly engage in PathwayConnect, and go on to certificates and degrees, will establish in their homes a house of learning. As the Gospel goes down deep in their hearts, as they learn to learn deeply for a lifetime, and as they strengthen their support of their families in righteousness, God will bless them to lead their families to eternal life, and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

When you think about BYU-Pathway I want you to think about it this way. It is not just another online educational organization. It is a critical part of the Lord's plan for the gathering of scattered Israel, for strengthening the stakes of Zion, and for preparing the world for His return. It joins with all the other amazing things the Lord is doing in Church Education, in family history and temple work, in teaching in the Lord's way, in missionary work, in doctrinal mastery in seminary, in focusing our attention on the ordinance of the sacrament and keeping the sabbath day holy, and many other things. This is the Lord's holy work, and He is hastening His work.

Let me illustrate the hastening with this fact. When the Pathway program that eventually became BYU-Pathway Worldwide was officially approved by the Church Board of Education in April of 2011, there were 365 students enrolled, in 23 sites. In 2018, we have served 42,000 students, in 575 sites. Think about that for a moment. In seven years, we have gone from 365 students to 42,000.

I also am happy to tell you that BYU-Pathway is flourishing in Mesa, Arizona, and in Washington DC. In Mesa we have over 400 students enrolled this term, and more than 3400 have been served to date. In Washington DC, we have 125 students enrolled and almost 1000 have been served to date.

Now let me put all of this in context for you. Those 42,000 students include young adults 18-30, and older adults over 30. This is a remarkable number of students all across the world. But let's look at the size of the target group for BYU-Pathway — that is members of the Church who have not had any higher education, and those who have had some but are no longer in school. How big would that group be?

A rough and ready answer for 2018 is 3-4 million.¹⁰ 42,000 in seven years is amazing, but there is a lot of opportunity out there, and a lot of work to be done.

In 1833, during a time of severe persecution, the Lord gave this revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, recorded in the 97th section 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...

Verily I say unto you, all among them 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.¹¹

In our day the stakes of Zion are the strength of Zion. Zion is everywhere the Lord has established His Church. Brothers and sisters, it is a miracle that we can say today that BYU-Pathway is a school in Zion, wherever Zion is. This scripture captures in a beautiful way the people of BYU-Pathway -- the students, the teachers, the missionaries, the developers, the leaders. They are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice, yea every sacrifice which the Lord commands. I hope it is clear to all of you that the Lord has caused them already, and will continue to cause them to bring forth as a fruitful tree...that yieldeth much precious fruit.

The fruit of BYU-Pathway is manifest in faithful, consecrated, self-reliant individuals and families, creating houses of learning, building up the Kingdom of God and establishing Zion. It is a joy to see the Lord work with such love and power to prepare the world for His Second Coming.

I bear you my witness that our Father in Heaven's plan is marvelous and perfect. Jesus is the Christ, our glorious, redeeming Lord, whose love never fails, and who has all power to sanctify, bless, strengthen, and lift us up. BYU-Pathway Worldwide is on His errand. I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ See Doctrine and Covenants 1:17-39. This is the thrust of these verses in Section 1. There are many other passages in the Doctrine and Covenants that send the same message. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 84:119. We live in a day when we can see the hand of the Lord exerting the powers of heaven to prepare the earth for His return.

² Doctrine and Covenants 82:14-15, 17-19

³ See: Moses 7:18

⁴ 3 Nephi 6:12-14

⁵ For a comprehensive review of the learning and education in the world, see: World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. The report highlights the distinction between schooling, or attending school, and learning. There is a lot of school, but not a lot of learning in the developing world.

⁶ See: Report on 2017 Educational Attainment Based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2017, Annual Social and Economic Supplement: OECD (2017), Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>.

⁷ There is no question about the lower earning capacity of individuals with less than a high school education, or even graduates of high school. It does vary with the economic cycle, but over the longer term there is no doubt that these individuals will have difficulty supporting a family. See: <https://www.goodcall.com/news/wage-gap-09776> and <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/01/12/pay-gap-between-college-grads-and-everyone-else-record/96493348/> for recent analyses and data on this issue. Note also that the wage gap is only part of the story, since college graduates tend to have much better benefit packages than high school grads or those with less than a high school education. When the analysis is based on total compensation, the gap is much wider. It is also important to recognize that the advantage conferred by a college degree depends very much on the field of study. There are some college majors that confer very little earnings advantage over high school graduates, while some fields in high demand like engineering or information technology can earn 2-3 times what a high school graduate will earn.

⁸ Access and opportunity depend both on the availability of educational programs, and the extent to which a prospective student is prepared, ready and perceives themselves able to take advantage of the program. See, for example: Laura W. Perna and Anthony Jones (eds.) *The State of College Access and Completion: Improving College Success for Students from Underrepresented Groups* (Routledge, New York, New York, 2013).

⁹ Matthew 18:20

¹⁰ There are about 2.7 million Latter-day Saints 18-30 years old; and about 7.2 million Latter-day Saints over 30. Based on current rates of high school graduation, leaving college before getting a degree, and degree completion, on average about 70 percent of those people are potential students in BYU-Pathway. If we adjust for activity in the Church, that percentage will be lower, although many PathwayConnect students are not active in the Church when they enroll. These adjustments result in a rough estimate of 3-4 million potential students in BYU-Pathway.

¹¹ Doctrine and Covenants 97:8-9