

President Henry B. Eyring Remarks



President Henry B. Eyring
Foundational Speech
November 10, 2015

“An Influence for Good”

Brothers and Sisters, Aloha! I am so grateful for the opportunity to be with you at this historic point in the history of BYU–Hawaii.

The remarks of President John S. Tanner have touched my heart as they have yours. I am particularly grateful for the evidence that President Tanner accepted the charge I gave him the day I called him, with his wife, to come to this sacred place. He had expected prophetic marching orders from me. Instead, I invited him to ask of God for his charge.

It is traditional in university inaugurations for the president to receive a charge from his leaders. Since President Tanner and I both knew whose university this is, I was confident he would receive the charge from the Lord. It is evident by what you have heard him say today, and by what he has done in his first months on this campus, that he received and accepted that charge.

There is a divinity that shapes the remarkable development of this school. The Lord is its founder. Elder David O. McKay, in his remarks at the little school in Laie, in February of 1921, was inspired to describe in brief outline the Lord’s purposes for this university and for its students.

In prayer and in deep study of the prophetic roots of this university, President Tanner has seen a vision of a Zion university. He has seen it as a place of “purity, peace, unity, and love.” More than that, he has seen how, with our help, the Lord—the Master Architect and Builder—will create such a university here.

President Tanner knows from observation and long experience how difficult the task before us will be, and how much the Lord needs us to do our part. Time and again, the Lord has asked his people to establish a Zion community. As always, the greatest challenge has been in the hearts of the people. President Gordon B. Hinckley put it this way: “If we are to build that Zion of which the prophets have spoken and of which the Lord has given mighty promise, we must set aside our consuming selfishness. We must rise above our love for comfort and ease, and in the very process of effort and struggle, even in our extremity, we shall become better acquainted with our God” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 59).

President Tanner has long yearned to take part in the building of a Zion university. Hard as it may have been in

Kirtland and in Missouri, it is yet another challenge as the Lord builds a university. President Tanner, in his years of service as Chair of the Department of English, and as Academic Vice President at Brigham Young University in Provo, wrote thoughtful and inspired essays about the apparent conflict between achieving academic excellence, as the world measures it, and charity, the pure love of Christ, which will and must pervade a Zion university.

The world's universities create class distinctions. Titles matter. The differences are vertical. A president might feel higher than a dean. A professor might expect deference from an instructor. An instructor will hope for esteem from his or her students. Both faculty and students may feel entitled to the prompt services of support staff.

The search for educational quality can pit students against each other. Nothing was harder for me as a teacher than choosing winners and losers at exam time. The end of the term was, for me, a painful experience requiring me to judge a student as being above another student. When I was a student, one of my professors apologized to me when he learned that I had missed the highest honor of the university by one point because of his grading decision. He felt my pain, as I felt his.

Even in the Zion university we desire, there will be different outcomes for each of us. There will not be dead-level equality in all things. But God will help us to love each other so well that we will feel one another's pains and joys as if they were our own. That would bring the end of selfishness. That miraculous change in hearts will not come easily.

When it comes, even for a moment, you will have had a taste of Zion. I tasted it more than once in universities.

I was the president of Ricks College when the Teton Dam broke. A flood of water and debris destroyed homes in many communities below the dam. I still remember standing in filthy water up to my knees in the basement of the home of a professor. He, I, his next-door neighbor, plus a college employee mucked out mud together for hours. There was no hierarchy. Our shovels were the same, and we each felt that it was our basement.

The harder the work, the more we felt we needed help from God, and the more we felt that we were children of God, equal in our dependence on Him.

That same glimpse of Zion came to me once in Laie. It may have been at the home of someone in this audience. I still remember standing in a driveway with people whose homes had been flooded. I felt their loss as if it were my own. Their pain was my pain. Their hope and courage became mine. I became better acquainted with God as I prayed with them and for them. President Hinckley was right. I had tasted the savor of Zion, as President Tanner has said today. It increased an appetite in me to find that feeling of Zion wherever and whenever I could.

President Tanner, you have wisely said that the opportunities to experience a taste of Zion will come most often in small settings. It will be in local congregations, in neighborhoods, and especially in the walls of homes. It will be in classrooms and laboratories. It will be as you meet people in the temple. It may come during walks among those who work at the Polynesian Cultural Center.

The students in your classroom or the people you meet at the PCC and the temple may not be the victims of a disaster, but they have needs you can choose to make your own. You can say, "How do you do?" and they can feel that you really mean, "I love you, can I help?" It will slow down your walk at the PCC, you will listen more carefully in a classroom discussion, and you will linger longer in the temple.

Now, you may well ask how this increase in unselfishness and charity leads to a better university. I saw it once at the University of Utah. One of my father's Ph.D. candidates was speaking with him in Dad's office. I listened

in amazement as the man said that he was wondering which university he would honor by accepting an offer to teach there. I knew that my father had labored long hours for years just to get him through his examinations and his thesis.

When he left, I asked my father, “Dad, why didn’t you tell him he was lucky to get any offer at all?” Dad chuckled softly and said, “Hal, my job is to build them up. Life will break them down.” For him there was no conflict between academic excellence and charity. Like President Tanner, Dad had worked his way through college and knew how much he owed to those who had encouraged him as he waited on tables in the cafeteria, sent money home to keep the family farm from foreclosure, and worked through the night to learn all he could.

President Tanner, you have your charge to help the Lord build a Zion community here. I have known six of your predecessors. I sat in the president’s home during the tenure of J. Elliott Cameron as dozens of students stood around the white piano as his wife, Maxine, played, and they sang as if they were in their own home. I listened as Diana, the wife of President Alton Wade, brought the Holy Ghost into a seminary class in Laie. I have never forgotten the love and the feeling of the spirit in the home of Eric and Carolyn Shumway in Tonga and in Laie.

I savored a glimpse of Zion with Steve and Margaret Wheelwright at Stanford University when we were all very young. Steve was one of two Ph.D. candidates that another professor and I supervised. We set out to develop a computer application intended to multiply the power of leaders and teachers across the world. We now know that our vision required technology that would not be developed for five decades.

We labored night and day. We chose to rise above comfort and ease. We needed each other. If one solved a part of the puzzle, it was a victory for each of us equally. Selfishness was set aside. If you had been there to watch us, you would not have been able to tell who was a student and who was a professor.

We were pushed to our human extremity. I knew where I could turn for help, because I felt that we were trying to accomplish something God would want for his children. Steve and I became better acquainted with Him in the process. And the four of us had a chance to savor, for a short time, what a small pocket of Zion would feel like inside a great university.

Steve experienced that blessing again with Commissioner Clark at Harvard and at BYU–Idaho. And he felt it here when he labored with you to solve the puzzle of how this small campus and its graduates will leaven the lives of the billions of people in the Pacific Basin and along the Asian rim and beyond. I was not here to watch, but he surely touched you as he did our little group of problem solvers with his enthusiasm, his unselfishness, and his faith.

All the presidents of BYU–Hawaii I have known have felt the same charge that President Tanner has received and all have felt the appreciation of the Lord whose school this is. Each has made a personal contribution to the university’s rising to its destiny as a Zion university. And each has found ways to allow students to be transformed into men and women of character who have become an influence for good across the world wherever they have served God and those around them.

President Tanner, you have been prepared with unique gifts and experiences to move this university to its destiny. Years ago you wrote these words to describe the glimpse you had of teaching in a Zion university:

“As our students sense our enthusiastic love of learning, they too glimpse God within us. For me, teaching with enthusiasm is an aspect of teaching with the Spirit. I feel the Spirit’s presence in those moments when my classes come alive with learning. At such times, the classroom can feel almost holy. And I sense that I am not simply covering material but uncovering it with my students and, in the process, discovering again the joy that first drew me to my field” (John S. Tanner, Religious Studies, *God Within*, “Discipleship in the Disciplines,”

BYU press and Deseret Book, 2011).

That is the joy that has drawn President Tanner here. It is a joy his students and yours will feel, and they will then be inspired to bless others.

First and foremost, it will come because they will have the gospel of Jesus Christ planted so deeply in their hearts that their natures will be transformed by the Savior's atoning sacrifice. Consecration and sacrifice will become part of their characters.

President and Sister Tanner, your service here will help the Lord spread an influence for good across the world through your students. And because I know you so well, I know that you will ascribe the glory to those who serve with you, and to the God whom you serve. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.