

“Building Zion”

Brian K. and Melinda Ashton

President Ashton: Our dear BYU-Pathway Worldwide students, instructors, missionaries, academic partners, and employees, welcome to a new semester! We hope and pray that this will be a productive and joyful semester for each of you. May you have the Holy Ghost to help you with your studies and in all your righteous efforts.

A Description of Zion

Sister Ashton: Today, we would like to talk about building Zion. Zion is the Lord’s name for His people who are “pure in heart.”¹ Zion can be “both a place and a people.”² In its fullness, Zion is both a people among which and a place where Jesus Christ would be comfortable dwelling.³

In the Book of Mormon, the people of the Lord built a Zion society. Here is how the scriptures describe it:

- “... [E]very man did deal justly one with another.”⁴
- “And ... there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.”⁵
- “And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men ... in the name of Jesus.”⁶
- “And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land...”⁷
- “And now, behold, it came to pass that the people ... did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people.”⁸
- “And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.”⁹
- “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.”¹⁰
- “And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people....”¹¹

¹ [Doctrine and Covenants 97:21](#)

² D. Todd Christofferson, “[Come to Zion](#),” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008

³ [Moses 7:16, 64](#). In February 1977, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said the following: “[The Lord’s] work includes the building up of Zion in the last days. He has commissioned us to do that work for him. The foundations of Zion have already been laid...in every place where there are stakes of Zion. But Zion is not yet perfected in any of these places. When she is perfected, it will be as it was with Zion of old—the Lord will come and dwell with his people” (“[Come, Let Israel Build Zion](#),” *Ensign*, April 1977).

⁴ [4 Nephi 1:2](#)

⁵ [4 Nephi 1:3](#)

⁶ [4 Nephi 1:5](#)

⁷ [4 Nephi 1:7](#)

⁸ [4 Nephi 1:10](#)

⁹ [4 Nephi 1:11](#)

¹⁰ [4 Nephi 1:15](#)

¹¹ [4 Nephi 1:16](#)

- “There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.”¹²
- “And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings....”¹³

President Ashton: Can you imagine what it would be like to live in such a place? I think it would be absolutely wonderful!

Brothers and sisters, prior to the Second Coming of the Lord — an event that prophets have identified will come in the latter days — we will have to build Zion anew.¹⁴ By building Zion and observing the Lord’s commandments, we will also be enabled to escape the judgments of God upon the wicked in the last days.¹⁵

BYU-Pathway’s Role in Building Zion

Sister Ashton: Doctrine and Covenants 97 gives a list of requirements that Zion must fulfill so that “she shall prosper, and spread herself, and become very glorious, very great, and very terrible.”¹⁶ Those requirements include having a school (or schools) in Zion. In fact, the Savior declared, “I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion....”¹⁷

Elder Kim B. Clark, former Commissioner of the Church Education System, taught, “BYU-Pathway is a school in Zion, wherever Zion is.”¹⁸ Therefore the requirements in Doctrine and Covenants 97 and the responsibility to help build Zion apply to BYU-Pathway, its students, instructors, employees, missionaries, and academic partners.

President Ashton: So, what is our role in building Zion? Doctrine and Covenants 97 gives us one answer. Speaking of BYU-Pathway students, students of other Church Educational System entities, and others, the Lord said:

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.¹⁹

Did you catch that? We should have honest and broken hearts, contrite spirits, and observe our covenants even by sacrifice. BYU-Pathway then must produce graduates who are covenant-keeping “disciples of Jesus Christ who are leaders in their homes, the Church, and their communities.”²⁰

Sister Ashton: Elder D. Todd Christofferson, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, gives us another answer to the question, “What is our role in building Zion?” He taught:

Zion is Zion because of the character, attributes, and faithfulness of her citizens. Remember, “the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and

¹² [4 Nephi 1:17](#)

¹³ [4 Nephi 1:18](#)

¹⁴ See for example, [Psalms 102:16](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 45:68–71](#); [97:22–25](#); [115:5–6](#); [Moses 7:62–64](#); D. Todd Christofferson, “[Preparing for the Lord’s Return](#),” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019

¹⁵ [Doctrine and Covenants 97:22–25](#)

¹⁶ [Doctrine and Covenants 97:18](#)

¹⁷ [Doctrine and Covenants 97:3](#)

¹⁸ Kim B. Clark, “[BYU-Pathway Worldwide: A School in Zion](#),” (BYU-Pathway President’s Dinner, Oct. 11, 2018), byupathway.org/speeches

¹⁹ [Doctrine and Covenants 97:8–9](#)

²⁰ “[BYU-Pathway Worldwide Mission Statement](#),” byupathway.org/about-byu-pathway-worldwide

there was no poor among them” ([Moses 7:18](#)). If we would establish Zion in our homes, branches, wards, and stakes, we must rise to this standard. It will be necessary (1) to become unified in one heart and one mind; (2) to become, individually and collectively, a holy people; and (3) to care for the poor and needy with such effectiveness that we eliminate poverty among us. We cannot wait until Zion comes for these things to happen — Zion will come only as they happen.²¹

BYU-Pathway, along with parents, families, and other Church entities and programs, must help students to learn to be of one heart and of one mind and to live righteously. Learning these skills is a crucial part of your education and helping you to do so is essential to our mission as an institution.

In addition, BYU-Pathway has a unique role in making sure that there are no poor among us. No other Church institution has the worldwide reach and access to spiritually-based, job-ready certificates and degrees like BYU-Pathway. BYU-Pathway can provide higher education that will help our students get out of spiritual and temporal poverty in nearly every place that the Church is organized. Those students in turn can help others to become self-reliant until there are no poor among us.

Some Thoughts on Where You Can Start

President Ashton: So, what can you do today to build Zion?

We want to start by addressing BYU-Pathway’s instructors, missionaries, employees, and academic partners. Because we must help our students learn to build Zion in their lives, homes, congregations, and communities, we must begin by first building Zion in our own lives and homes. We must be pure in heart. We must incorporate Zion principles into our curriculum and teaching models. And we must do all we can to help students get jobs. We invite each of you to examine your lives, teaching, curriculum, and programs to see if they are in harmony with building Zion and then seek the Lord’s help to make necessary changes.

To our students, we want to discuss with you four things that you will learn to do during your time at BYU-Pathway. These things will help you become of one heart and one mind, live righteously, and lift out of spiritual and temporal poverty the poor among us. In doing so, you will help create Zion.

Sister Ashton: The first of the four is to make and keep covenants with Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father. This begins with the ordinances and covenants of baptism. Baptism opens the door to receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost guides us and gives us the strength to live righteously and keep the covenants we have made. If you haven’t been baptized by someone holding the proper authority, we invite you to do so. Other covenants follow as we prepare to enter the House of the Lord — the holy temples. If you have been baptized but haven’t made covenants in the House of the Lord, we invite you to prepare to do so now. After making these covenants, we receive additional power to keep our covenants as we partake of the sacrament each week at church and return to the House of the Lord to do work for our ancestors.²²

President Ashton: Second, invite the Holy Ghost into your life to a greater degree by praying and reading scriptures daily, repenting, avoiding contention, and serving others. Doing these things not as a checklist but with the intent to draw closer to Jesus Christ will cause Jesus Christ to draw near unto you.²³ Having the Holy Ghost in your life and drawing closer to Jesus Christ will give you greater strength, wisdom, capacity, and peace in your life. It will also make it easier for you to receive the revelation you need.²⁴ And, it will help you to do better in your studies.

²¹ D. Todd Christofferson, “[Come to Zion](#),” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008

²² See Henry B. Eyring, “[Steady in the Storms](#),” *Liahona*, May 2022; see also [Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21](#)

²³ See [Doctrine and Covenants 88:63](#)

²⁴ See [2 Nephi 32:5](#)

Sister Ashton: Third, follow the counsel of God’s living prophet on the earth — President Russell M. Nelson. The Lord has promised that He will inspire His prophet “to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good....”²⁵ President Nelson is doing that. Recently, he counseled:

[Y]ou need to understand three fundamental truths that will help you prepare your future course:

1. First, know the truth about who you are.
2. Second, know the truth about what Heavenly Father and His Son have offered you.
3. And third, know the truth related to your conversion.²⁶

Throughout this year, we invite you to pay attention to what you learn both in your academic and spiritual studies about being a child of God and Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness, including the role of Jesus Christ in that plan. As you ponder these things, take responsibility for finding out if they are true. Seek for revelation about how they apply to you and what God would have you do. Share what you learn with others. We promise that as you do these things, you will receive answers to your heartfelt questions, and you will come to know your Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ better.

President Ashton: Finally, fourth, persist in getting the education you need to support a family and have a successful career even when it is difficult. Having no poor among us begins with each individual developing the skills to be spiritually and temporally self-reliant. As we become self-reliant, we can bless others, including future generations.²⁷

My paternal grandfather, Earnest Lamar Ashton, grew up in the small town of Woodruff, Utah, in the United States. His family was poor. They had no running water, and no central heat even though the temperature in the winter would drop to negative 40 degrees.²⁸ When my Grandpa Ashton’s father retired, he realized that he had no money on which to live. He died just a few days later. My grandmother believed he died from desperation.

My Grandpa Ashton determined that he was going to change his family’s circumstances. He got enough education to become an auto mechanic. He worked so hard that, even during the worst economic downturn in the history of the United States, people wanted to hire him. Eventually he was able to start his own automotive repair shop. He was never rich, but he had enough to support his family, send his children to school, and help others. I’ve heard my father tell stories about going with his dad after work to take food and other necessities to local widows who were struggling.

Because my grandfather got an education, my father was able to get a bachelor’s degree. My father then received a scholarship to attend business school at Northwestern University. Because my dad got a Master of Business Administration degree, he had a successful career working for some of the largest corporations in the United States. I know of many instances where my parents helped others overcome spiritual and financial poverty in their lives.

²⁵ [Doctrine and Covenants 21:1–7](#)

²⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “[Choices for Eternity](#),” (Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 15, 2022), devotionals.churchofjesuschrist.org

²⁷ Joseph B. Wirthlin taught: “Our ability to reach out to others is made possible only to the extent that we are self-reliant. When we are self-reliant, we will use the material blessings we receive from God to take care of ourselves and our families and be in a position to help others.... The foundation of self-reliance is hard work” (“[Fruits of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ](#),” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991).

²⁸ Negative 40 degrees Fahrenheit is equal to negative 40 degrees Celsius.

My father's education provided me with opportunities to attend Brigham Young University and Harvard University. These and other blessings of the Lord upon me and my family have made it possible for me to have a successful career, serve in the Church, and spend much of my life helping others become spiritually and temporally self-reliant.

Sister Ashton: If you will seek the Lord's help, you too can have the blessings of being self-reliant. You can support a family, educate your children, and help lift others out of spiritual and temporal poverty. There may be times when you will be tempted to drop out of your degree program. But if you will seek the Lord's help, even when your situation seems impossible, He will provide you with hope and the means to continue on the timetable that is right for you. As you stay faithful to Jesus Christ, He will draw near unto you and help you to build Zion.

President Ashton: Please know that we love you. You are a child of God with divine potential. You were born on earth at this time to help build Zion. Your education at BYU-Pathway will help you to do so. This, in turn, will help prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Sister Ashton: I know that creating Zion is not only God's will for us but will bring joy and peace into our lives. As we strive to love, serve, and lift others, we will more fully recognize the Lord's hand in our lives. Our Heavenly Father and Savior love us and will help us to progress so that we can enjoy the blessings of living in Zion. They know and love each of you individually.

President Ashton: I know that Jesus Christ lives. He lived a perfect life, fulfilled all the demands of justice, and voluntarily gave His life so that we might be able to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father clean and pure. As our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ wants to bless you both spiritually and temporally. He will come again. My prayer is that we will seek to build Zion by being of one heart and one mind, living righteously, and eliminating spiritual and temporal poverty.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.