

“By Whom We are Led”

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The creation of BYU-Pathway has generated considerable attention both in the Church and across the higher education landscape. In the Church, BYU-Pathway has stirred the hopes of those who thought education was beyond their reach. In higher education, observers have looked at the program’s affordability, its dramatic growth, and the high completion rates of our students as patterns to emulate. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* stated, “[BYU-Pathway] is a model worth paying attention to. Several features of the program could make it relevant ... to other institutions, religious or not.”¹ Indeed, BYU-Pathway has employed key innovations, including targeted mentoring, the “scaffolding” of student confidence, and a certificate-first degree structure.

But to really understand why our students succeed, we must remember by whom we are led. Recall the Lord’s instruction to Nephi as he prepared for his journey: “And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you ... Ye shall be led toward the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that you are led.”²

Today I will focus on three of the ways that we can remember by whom we are led:

- First, let your deeper spiritual purpose ground your learning.
- Second, maintain high expectations of your divine potential.
- Third, make God your partner in BYU-Pathway.

Let your deeper spiritual purpose ground your learning

Education also allows us to serve more effectively in the kingdom. President Russell M. Nelson has taught: “In the Church, obtaining an education and getting knowledge are a religious responsibility. We educate our minds so that one day we can render service of worth to somebody else.”³ These are the deeper purposes of education. It’s not just about income, or prestige, or validation. One of the reasons students in BYU-Pathway realize such remarkable outcomes in their lives is that they are fighting for a higher purpose. Like Moroni’s army, they are “inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all.”⁴ One question our mentors ask our students is: “Why are you doing BYU-Pathway?” If you haven’t already, write down your “why” — your deeper purpose for learning. If you don’t know it yet, then find it. Then post it in your journal or on your mirror; share it with someone. When times get difficult — and they will — BYU-Pathway students turn back to their deeper spiritual purpose and find an added motivation to keep going.

Maintain high expectations of your divine potential

Students in BYU-Pathway often face difficult challenges in pursuing their education. I often hear people put forth the false idea that, with such difficult challenges, maybe we shouldn’t expect as much from our students. I remember years ago serving with a remarkable group of young men from inner-city Boston. Many of them were first generation members of the Church. Some came from broken homes. Many faced financial struggles. Given these and other obstacles, some of their leaders wondered if we should hold them to different expectations regarding seminary attendance, college attainment, missionary service, and Church service. This did not feel right to me. In fact, the more I reflected on it, it even angered me because it seemed to deny the divine potential in each of them. This is a picture of three of them in college. They have since gone on to serve missions, graduate from college, serve in significant assignments in the Church, and develop meaningful careers. Not once did I ever let them think I expected anything less from each of them. Similarly, as a BYU-Pathway student, we expect you to work hard, to do your best, learn and progress, and complete not only PathwayConnect, but a certificate and

eventually a degree. And we expect you to learn to lift and build others because we know of your divine nature and potential.

Make God your partner

I can hear some of our students saying, “President Gilbert, come on, don’t you know how hard it is to do what you are asking us to do?” The answer is, “Yes, I do.” I have wept first-hand as I observed the struggles of so many of you. But I have also sat in awe at your resiliency and faith. I believe in you and in what you are learning and know it will change your life forever. More importantly, I believe you have the right to call on heaven’s help. In an earlier BYU-Pathway Devotional, Elder D. Todd Christofferson said: “You need to remember always that you are not alone in this. [Y]our Heavenly Father and your Savior know you and can and will grant you heavenly help. Make God your partner in BYU-Pathway.”⁵ I promise you that, as you involve the Lord in your studies, He will lift you to places you never thought possible.

To all of our BYU-Pathway students who worry whether you can make it: Have confidence that you are in a well-designed program that draws on the best thinking in higher education. But that alone is not why you will succeed. Let your deeper spiritual purpose ground your learning. Set high expectations and realize your divine potential. Above all, make God your partner in BYU-Pathway, and He will lift you and magnify your efforts in ways that will be hard for others to understand. At BYU-Pathway, we know by whom we are led. And it is by that light that He will prepare our way. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Goldie Blumenstyk, “[How a BYU Campus is Reshaping Online Education — and the Mormon Faith](#),” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 13, 2017

² [1 Nephi 17:13](#)

³ Russell M. Nelson, “[Focus on Values](#),” *Liahona*, Feb. 2013

⁴ [Alma 43:45](#)

⁵ D. Todd Christofferson, “[The Will to Prepare](#)” (BYU-Pathway Worldwide devotional, Nov. 12, 2019), byupathway.org/speeches