

## “Faith and Optimism for the Unknown”

*J.D. Griffith*

*Vice President of Administration, BYU-Pathway Worldwide*

Displayed on one of the walls of the offices of BYU-Pathway Worldwide are six defining characteristics. As I pass this wall every morning on my way into work, I am reminded of the unique opportunity I have to work for a school in Zion.<sup>1</sup>

Today I would like to briefly talk about one of my favorite characteristics on that wall, “Faith and Optimism for the Unknown.” How many times in your life have you moved forward with faith and optimism for the unknown? I believe if you really took the time to ponder this question, you’d be surprised at all the moments in your life where your personal path was defined and shaped as you moved forward with faith.

I can look back at such a defining moment in my life. It was just over 10 years ago, on September 10, 2009, that the very first BYU-Pathway gathering was held. On that night, a total of 50 students in three different locations started their Pathway journey. Because of time zones, the first official Pathway gathering was in Manhattan, New York. I know, because I was there.

On that special night, there were many employees from BYU-Idaho involved in helping launch BYU-Pathway, but I was fortunate enough to be the first employee dedicated to working solely on the Pathway program. I remember feeling a distinct excitement in the air as the students walked into the institute building. The classroom was filled with optimism. It was as if the students knew that they were part of something big, part of what Elder Holland would call, 10 years later, a “monumental moment.”<sup>2</sup> I was very nervous; we were all a little nervous.

Those first students from New York; Mesa, Arizona; and Nampa, Idaho, moved forward with faith. I recall many of the students describing promptings they had received to go back to school or to start school, but I also recall hearing high levels of doubt and fear of the unknown. Like many of you, those first students were working, raising families, volunteering in their communities, and serving in the Church. Doubt crept in, irrational thoughts took over, anxieties increased.

Today’s world is full of negativity, pessimism, and declining faith in our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Don’t let doubt keep you from your divine potential. With optimism, we take our first step into the dark. With faith in Jesus Christ, we continue walking.

Trust me, I know what it is like to feel these anxieties about going back to school. Several years ago, just prior to launching BYU-Pathway, I began having promptings that I too should go back to school and earn another degree. However, with working full-time, and having five young children at home and a Church calling that took a significant amount of time, I could not comprehend the idea of also enrolling in school. However, like they did for many of you, the thoughts persisted until I finally approached my wife and shared with her some of my feelings. Through humble prayer, we moved forward with faith and I enrolled in an online graduate program.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kim B Clark, “[BYU-Pathway Worldwide: A School in Zion](#),” (BYU-Pathway Worldwide Devotional, Oct. 11, 2018), [byupathway.org/speeches](http://byupathway.org/speeches)

<sup>2</sup> Church Board of Education Executive Committee, “[Special Broadcast](#),” (BYU-Pathway Worldwide Devotional, Nov. 1, 2018), [byupathway.org/speeches](http://byupathway.org/speeches)

Before starting the program however, my wife did have one request: that my studying and homework would not get in the way of family time. So, after more prayers of faith, I realized the most logical thing for me to do was to study when the rest of the family was asleep. I set a plan to get up early in the morning and study from 4:30 to 6:30 a.m. every day, except for Sundays. I did this for four years. It was not easy. There were several times that I wanted to give up. However, my wife encouraged me along the way. We relied heavily on faith and optimism.

Not long after my graduation, my wife began having impressions to finish her bachelor’s degree, something that she had put off once we started having children. She had faithfully and patiently supported me, and it was now my turn to support her. I watched with complete amazement her dedication to moving forward with faith and optimism. After lots of tears and many long nights, she did it! On her graduation day, because of my role at BYU-Pathway, I had the opportunity to sit on the stand as she was awarded her degree. She shook Elder Jeffery R. Holland’s hand, but I got a hug! We have both witnessed firsthand the blessings of education in our lives and the blessings of moving forward with faith and optimism.

Elder Jeffery R. Holland reminded us, “If [the decision] was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don’t give up when the pressure mounts.... Face your doubts. Master your fears.... Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you.”<sup>3</sup>

Dear BYU- Pathway students, press forward with faith in Jesus Christ; doubt not, fear not<sup>4</sup>; and keep moving when everything appears to be against you. Let faith in Jesus Christ and optimism for the unknown guide your path. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jeffery R. Holland, “[Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence](#),” (Brigham Young University devotional, Mar. 2, 1999) [speeches.byu.edu](https://speeches.byu.edu)

<sup>4</sup> [Doctrine and Covenants 6:36](#)