

Work, Wandering, and Waiting  
2024 BYU Honors Graduation Address  
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By Emma Fox

Near the middle of last semester, I was dealing with the consequences of what my roommate Kate affectionately calls my “spectacular talent for academic overcommitment” while Kate was reading the writings of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus for a personal essay class. All of a sudden she started laughing—hard. Hoping that I didn’t need to add “talk my roommate through a mental breakdown” to my list of priorities, I tentatively asked what was so funny. She gestured at her computer and choked out, “Becoming is a secret process.”

As that was possibly the last thing I had expected her to say, I couldn’t help but start laughing as well. Overwhelmed and punchy as we both were, perhaps that one line got a little more mileage than Heraclitus intended.

Now, I don’t know that becoming is really a secret process, but I do think that the process of becoming should be seen as an end unto itself, an end that is just as important—if not more—than what or whoever we actually become. As President Dallin H. Oaks points out, “In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something.” I believe it is that “challenge to become” that each of us has embraced throughout our honors experience. As I’ve thought more about becoming in the context of President Reese’s focus on “becoming BYU” and BYU’s aim to “develop students of faith, intellect, and character who have the skills and the desire to *continue* learning and to serve others *throughout* their lives,” I’ve settled on three elements of “becoming” that I want to value more as I go on: work, wandering, and waiting.

That becoming involves work is kind of a “duh” statement—any physics major can tell you that all systems require work to function or change. But the day-to-day work or process of becoming is often seen as less valuable than the product at the end. It takes time for an athlete to value endless days of training just as much as the exhilaration of scoring the game-winning points, or a scientist to learn that failed experiments are just as important as successful ones, or a musician to realize that the joy of mastering scales can compare to the satisfaction of performing a longer piece. But it can be done. Listening to professors like Dr. Kristin Matthews and Dr. John Kauwe speak so highly about their *methods* of inquiry in my Honors 120 class encouraged me to approach my Great Questions essay with the same mindset and prioritize different ways of learning and thinking just as much as the essay itself.

Becoming also sometimes means a bit of wandering. A very wise man once said that “not all who wander are lost,” but that’s a lot easier to hear from a rugged ranger on the TV screen and really hard to believe when you’re suddenly faced with the reality that you have *no* idea what you want to be when you grow up. The fact that becoming often means that you don’t know your way to an exact end can be frustrating, especially in a world that prioritizes linear academic and career progression. But those terrifying moments when you realize you need to change your major in the middle of a midterm are what help us to be open to trying new things. The professors in the honors program have taught me the value of wandering. Learning

simultaneously about DNA and linguistic roots or the geology of planets and the power of literature in my Unexpected Connections courses led me down some unplanned routes in my thinking. I may not have gotten to my destination as efficiently as I would have in a regular class, but I also found far more power to become something new.

Becoming involves waiting. This is the hardest thing about becoming, in my opinion. As D&C 123:17 says, I am willing to “cheerfully (and sometimes begrudgingly or anxiously or haphazardly) do all things that lie in my power” because then, at least, I am *doing* something. I am much less comfortable with the second half of that scripture where I am told to “stand still.” And wait. And wait. And wait. There is something so frustrating about a situation that you cannot possibly do anything to sort out yourself—whether that’s waiting to hear from your date, waiting to hear from graduate schools or waiting to hear from God.

This is the situation that R.S. Thomas, a Welsh poet, finds himself in his poem “Kneeling.” Thomas muses on the frustrations of a priest “kneeling before an altar of wood in a stone church in summer, waiting for the God to speak.” “Prompt me God” he pleads. Then the unexpected twist: he adds “but not yet. When I speak, though it be you who speak through me, something is lost.” How often do we, like Thomas, learn things while waiting that we could not possibly learn anywhere else? Lessons of patience, hope, time to reflect on what we have instead of what we are waiting for—those are the very real fruits of waiting that give us what Elder Bednar calls “an inner spiritual stillness of the soul.”

Thomas’s final line drives this point home with beautiful simplicity and sincerity: “The meaning is in the waiting.”

I firmly believe that there is meaning in our waiting. There is meaning in our wandering. There is meaning in the work we have done and will do. There is meaning in who we have become as the graduating class of 2024, and there is, most of all, meaning in the becoming that has gotten us here and the becoming that we will do as we go forward, having learned to “stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.”