

Planting Gardens
2024 BYU Honors Graduation Address
April 25, 2024

By Hunter Lindsay

Good afternoon administration, distinguished guests, Honors faculty, friends, family, and, most importantly, fellow 2024 BYU Honors graduates! It is an honor and privilege to share this day with you. Honors is unique because of its small, collaborative classes. Because of this, as I look out, I see many familiar faces, faculty and students alike, from the classes we've shared. I am so grateful for everything you taught me; you are giants who have lifted me. And everyone else, I recognize you from the library at 11:45 PM as blaring music forced us out. You are giants in your own right.

As I think about this day, I can't help but feel commencement is the threshold of our lives. For many, it is the end of decades of school and the start of being a "real" adult. No more exams, homework, or TA office hours. Time for mortgages, deliverables, and 409Ks. For others, it is the beginning of another decade of school as we pursue master's and doctorate degrees. *Sorry*. However, for all of us, it is the blank page between chapters, a time to reflect on the last couple of years and to look forward to future adventures. As we reminisce, it's tempting to measure these years solely by our successes or failures. By the number of stairs we climbed by the Richardson building. By the grades we got or didn't get. By our nationally recognized research. By our leadership positions. And looking ahead, we may fixate on that dream job, that aspirational salary, or that beautified retirement. But being at this threshold begs the question: what should our reflections and future dreams focus on?

As I've considered this question, I am reminded of a childhood memory on the small farm I grew up on. Part of the property was a garden my siblings, my dad, and I planted annually. It was not anything grand; however, it did take a day and a half to weed, mulch, cover, and plant. One year stands out particularly when I was much younger. I was at the age where I thought I knew best and had no problem vocalizing it. *Now, my parents probably think I'm still at that age*. Halfway into the first day, I was working alongside one of my siblings while my dad was tending to something else. For some reason, I felt my sibling was not working as effectively as they could, even though they were. However, I didn't see it that way, and we started to argue. Eventually, I told him, "If you are not going to do it right, you should just leave," as though I had any right to dismiss him. In his right, he went inside, and I got back to work. When my dad noticed I was working alone, he asked what happened. I explained the situation, feeling justified and expecting my dad's approval. However, he looked sad and said, "Now he will never learn." I must have looked confused because he continued, saying, "Hunter, it was never about planting a garden. It was about who we become as we plant it."

Those words fundamentally shaped my perspective then and now. My father didn't have us plant a garden for the vegetables, though those were nice. He had us plant a garden to instill virtues of hard work, determination, responsibility, and patience and to teach us the principle of working in the present for future rewards. We could only acquire these things through the experience of planting. It was never about planting a garden. It was about who we became as we planted it.

Turning our attention back to commencement and reflecting on our time at BYU, I urge us to look past our accomplishments and ask ourselves, who have we become because we have attended BYU? This may seem like a weird commencement question until you realize that BYU's mission is to "assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life."¹ It was never about the knowledge we gained, although that was important. Nor was it about the social events we attended, the accolades we won, or our extracurricular activities. We can get these from any other institution. What is more important are the Christlike attributes we acquired because we attended BYU. Did we learn diligence as we studied for our classes? Did we acquire integrity as we followed the Honor Code? Did we exemplify charity at sporting events? Did we become more like Jesus Christ and acquire his attributes? It was never about earning a degree. It was about who we became as we earned it.

Looking forward, it is easy to set goals for jobs we will have, money we will acquire, or awards we will receive. And we may convince ourselves to compromise values for those aims, rationalizing that it's just "part of the job." However, I contend that "a world yearning for hope and joy needs the graduates of Brigham Young University"² not only because of what we accomplish but because of who we are as we accomplish them. We should be graduates prepared not just to make a living but to make a difference in the world and to be a force for good. The world desperately needs ethical researchers, honest leaders, charitable entrepreneurs, caring workers, and faithful parents. These are not oxymorons but potential realities as we prioritize acquiring Christlike attributes. Despite what the world may tell us, it is possible to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and be successful in our worldly labors. It was never about our accomplishments. It is about who we are and who we become as we accomplish them.

I do not wish to diminish what we have accomplished. We should be proud of our degrees. But as celebrations end and before life begins, let us each find a moment to contemplate how BYU has changed us. And more importantly, let us reflect upon and record who we want to be and become. Becoming is not easy. But we were prepared here. Prepared to apply gospel habits of diligence, integrity, and charity. Prepared to feel enduring "divine discontent"³ to propel us toward our ultimate eternal potential as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through Christ's Atonement, we can meet every professional and personal challenge while continually becoming more consecrated versions of ourselves. Remember, it isn't about planting a garden; it's about who we will yet become as we plant it.

¹ See [Mission & Aims of BYU](#)

² See [BYU Brand Message](#)

³ Neal A. Maxwell, "[Becoming a Disciple](#)," *Ensign*, June 1996, 18.