

Preparing to Become a Beacon of Light

In August of 2021, I began one of the most impactful weeks of my life. It was the week of orientation for the MPA program at Brigham Young University. This orientation was vastly different from any I had experienced in the past. Instead of simply handing out information pamphlets, each of the professors participated with the students in activities and challenges that were intended on building team unity within our cohort.

This unique orientation was meant to prepare us for the structure of the master's program. For the entirety of the first semester, we were to work together with the same team of four students for each of our classes. Every assignment, every project, and every presentation were to be completed as a team.

This change in focus and perspective was completely new to me. During my time as an undergraduate student, my focus was placed solely on myself. The success and academic well-being of my classmates meant practically nothing to me. I was more comfortable sitting by myself, putting my head down, and just studying or working alone on projects and assignments.

But suddenly, I found myself concerned and aware of the struggles and hardships of my classmates that I was completely blind to before. Suddenly, caring for the academic welfare and success of those in my team became as high of a priority as that of my own. Suddenly, I no longer saw my classmates as obstacles or distractions from my goals, but rather, as the purpose of my goals. And to my surprise, my personal level of achievement increased higher than ever before.

How grateful I am for the MPA program! What started as mandatory team meetings to check in on our progress, quickly shifted into voluntary group study sessions and mentoring efforts. I found myself noticeably happier as I assisted my classmates to successfully navigate a vigorous test or assignment, then I did at my own personal achievements.

This experience taught me a valuable lesson, and in my opinion, it reinforced what was an eternal principle. And that principle is this, Heavenly Father does not desire for us to return to His presence alone. His purpose is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all man. While our purpose is to follow the example of His Son, and to invite and assist others to follow Him as well. And as we do so faithfully, He will help us become more than we could ever become on our own.

My experience as a graduate student at BYU, solidified this principle into my heart, and has prepared me for the roles and responsibilities I currently hold, even though I did not realize it at the time. In February of 2025, my wife and I were called into the Stake

President's office, where he extended the call for me to serve as the Bishop of our ward. This was a daunting call for me at just 31 years old.

That daunting feeling only increased as my office quickly filled with individuals and families with a wide variety of needs and concerns. Whether they were seeking for assistance in meeting their spiritual needs or their physical needs, I was now the one they came to for help.

Up to this point, it was easy to fall into the trap of focusing on just myself and my family in my religious observance. But suddenly, I am concerned and aware of the struggles and hardships of those I was completely blind to before. Suddenly, caring for the spiritual welfare and success of those in my ward became as high of a priority as that of my own. Suddenly, I no longer saw my fellow ward members as obstacles or distractions from our spiritual goals, but rather, as the purpose of my spiritual goals. And not surprisingly, I have felt closer to the Savior than ever before.

Because of this perspective shift, God has been able to use me in greater ways to share the light of the Gospel in uplifting those around me. I no longer keep my light hidden under a bushel, or just in my own house alone. Instead, I strive to place that light on a candlestick so that those around me can know where they can turn, to find peace in these trying and uncertain times.

I didn't realize at the time, how impactful my experiences as a graduate student would assist and benefit me in my future. But Heavenly Father did. He knew that in order for me face the challenges of this calling with confidence, I would need the capability to do so. Graduate school at BYU provided me with that capability, and I will be forever grateful for that blessing in my life.

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