

The Spirit of Ricks

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Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotional

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1. I am grateful to be with you on another great day at BYU–Idaho. I welcome you to a new semester and pray that the Lord will bless you and watch over you.
2. This is a season of revelation and a time of great change at BYU–Idaho. All around us we see the university moving forward on the steady upward course the Lord has set. In this time of change it is very important we hold onto those things that must not change. We need to understand the enduring principles and applications that define the foundation and character of BYU–Idaho.
3. Please look closely at this framework defined by a circle that represents the great whole of the university. Within that circle are the enduring characteristics of BYU–Idaho: Student Honor, the Spirit of Ricks, disciple preparation, leadership development, and inspired learning and teaching. I have chosen to focus my talk today on the Spirit of Ricks.
4. One day not long ago, I stood on the bank of the Henry’s Fork of the Snake River near Mesa Falls. As I stood and watched that beautiful river, an impression came to me: this river is a metaphor for BYU–Idaho and the Spirit of Ricks.
5. Whenever I go to the river, it looks and feels the same. I know the molecules of water flowing by me are different, but there is a character and spirit about the river that is always the same.
6. The water is amazing. It is clean and clear; it is vibrant and alive with energy. The water is guided by the strength of the riverbed, the gorge cut out of the great and powerful mountains, and the banks that channel and direct the flow.
7. There are challenges and obstacles, but the water works its way around and over and through them as though guided by an unseen hand moving forward on its journey.
8. Taken together, the vibrant water, the riverbed, the gorge, and the mountains make Henry’s Fork of the Snake River glorious.
9. You are like the water, full of life, on your journey. You are on your way, preparing to be disciples of Christ and leaders in your families, in His Kingdom, and in the world.
10. The university, with its consecrated employees, its Code of Honor, its standards, and its curriculum, is like the riverbed, the banks, and the gorge guiding you, giving you experience and direction. The prophets who support us and watch over us are like the mountains that stand as sentinels, as watchmen on the tower.
11. The spirit we feel at that glorious river is like the Spirit of Ricks. It is a spirit of the whole created by the ensemble. Every element plays an important role in creating what we feel. That Spirit has a grand and glorious purpose—to prepare you for discipleship and leadership and to help all of us pursue inspired learning and teaching in this very special place. You and I need to learn about and understand that Spirit so we might preserve it and enhance it.

12. The Spirit of Ricks is the focus of my talk today. I pray that we may counsel together under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. I know as we do, the Lord will bless us to know what He wants us to do.

The Spirit of Ricks and the Holy Ghost

1. I begin with these words from Elder David A. Bednar:
2. You will find many definitions for the Spirit of Ricks, but today I would like to reiterate the definitions I came to understand during my service here in Rexburg. The Spirit of Ricks is the Holy Ghost and its attendant spiritual gifts.
3. . . . the workings of the Holy Ghost in this sacred and set apart place are affectionately and warmly referred to as the Spirit of Ricks.¹
4. The Spirit of Ricks is the defining characteristic of BYU–Idaho. It is something we share as a university community.² We experience the Spirit of Ricks because individual students and individual employees receive spiritual light and use spiritual gifts.
5. An illustration from the realm of physics may help to sharpen our understanding of the way the spirit and the light in each individual combine to create the Spirit of Ricks.
6. The basic constituents of matter—particles like electrons and quarks—have many wonderful properties. One of them is that two such particles in an atom cannot be in exactly the same state at exactly the same time. This is a wonderful thing. It means that atoms, which are made up of these particles, have structure; and that means that matter has form and substance. It means you don't sink into the floor when you get up in the morning. It is a very useful property.
7. But light is very different. Photons, the particles that make up a beam of light, can be in exactly the same state at the same time. If you shine a beam of laser light on the wall and then take another beam and shine it in exactly the same place, what happens? The light on the wall becomes brighter.
8. I believe the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit behave like light. When individuals who act with the Spirit or use the gifts of the Spirit gather together and work together, the effects of the Spirit are magnified. The scriptures teach us that “intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence . . . [and] light cleaveth unto light.”³ Like beams of laser light shining in the same place, spiritual light shining in the same place builds and magnifies.
9. Please turn to Doctrine and Covenants, chapter 50, verses 21 and 22, where the Lord applies this principle to the preaching of the word of God.
10. Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?
11. Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.⁴

12. Here, two people who act with the Spirit are “edified . . . together.” They are built up and strengthened because of the interaction of the spiritual light which each possesses. If the receiver had not received by the Spirit, the preacher would not have been edified in the same way, even though the preacher might have preached by the Spirit. There is power in the interaction of spiritual light.
13. This principle applies with particular force in a community of people like the people of BYU–Idaho who love, serve, and teach one another with and by the Spirit. I believe this is one of the reasons the Lord has commanded his disciples to “gather together, and stand in holy places.”⁵ In gathering together in holy places with the guidance and power of the Spirit, we strengthen and support each other. This is the first principle that connects our individual spirituality to the Spirit of Ricks.
14. A second principle is closely related. When we use our spiritual gifts to serve each other, the effects of those gifts are multiplied in a great community network of love, concern, and service. For example, let’s suppose you see a need in one of your family home evening sisters through the gift of discernment and so you do something to help her. She, in turn, not only feels blessed, but the Spirit guides her and helps her to share the kindness she experienced with someone else. Those she touches likewise bless others. Thus, your act of kindness grows in a powerful way through the community network.
15. The first two principles are closely connected to a third: “edif[ying] and rejoic[ing] together”⁶ helps build the spiritual unity essential to disciple preparation and to the establishment of Zion. As we act with and through the Holy Ghost, we develop a common base of spiritual experience, sensitivity, and perspective. This is precisely how Paul defined “perfecting . . . the Saints,”
16. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.⁷
17. Nurturing that spiritual unity of heart and mind helps us establish Zion and qualifies us as a community for blessings from heaven—divine protection, power, and peace.
18. To summarize, the Spirit of Ricks comes: 1) from the gathering of faithful and obedient Latter-day Saints who have the gift of the Holy Ghost and who spiritually edify and strengthen one another; 2) from the application of spiritual gifts that comes through the Holy Ghost and is magnified through a network of love and service; and 3) from spiritual unity of heart and mind that comes through the ministry and power of the Holy Ghost. That spirit is absolutely critical to BYU–Idaho as a center of disciple preparation and leadership development and as a place of inspired learning and teaching.⁸
19. Like the water in Henry’s Fork, you are personally important to building and strengthening the Spirit of Ricks at BYU–Idaho. Your faith, your obedience, and your spirituality are vital. The contributions you make and the blessings you in turn derive depend on the power of the Holy Ghost in your life and the way you use the spiritual gifts the Lord gives you. The question for you and for me is: what must we do to strengthen the power of the Spirit in our lives? To answer that question we need to understand the ministry of the Holy Ghost.

The Ministry of the Holy Ghost

1. The Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit and the third member of the Godhead. He has a unique role in Heavenly Father's plan for our happiness and salvation. The Holy Ghost is the great connector and communicator between heaven and earth. He conveys and manifests the powers of heaven to those who qualify for the gifts of God. These gifts come from Jesus Christ through the power of His atonement and through His mercy and grace. In the words of Moroni, "Every good gift cometh of Christ."⁹ The gifts of the Spirit come from Christ but are manifest in our lives through the ministry of the Holy Ghost.
2. Once we have been baptized and have had the Holy Ghost conferred upon us, it is our privilege to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost and to receive gifts of the Spirit. These are privileges of exceptional power and importance. Because we are spiritual beings in a very challenging and trying mortal experience, all of us have a deep need for the powers of heaven in our lives. All of us need the gifts of the Spirit. And there are many, many such gifts.
3. The Holy Ghost can bring us gifts of knowledge, insight, understanding, testimony, enlightenment, and guidance. As Moroni proclaimed, "By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."¹⁰
4. The Holy Ghost can bring gifts of peace and comfort and can sanctify and purify our hearts and transform our very natures. This is the promise to everyone who "yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love . . ."¹¹
5. The Holy Ghost can bring us gifts of capacity and talent—the capacity to heal, teach, discern, forgive, prophesy, and learn. Gifts of faith, charity, empathy, kindness, and much, much more can come to us as instruments in the Lord's hands.
6. All of these gifts come through the ministry of the Holy Ghost and are governed by divine laws and conditions. They may not come all at once, complete and finished. They may come a little at a time, line upon line. They come as we follow the pattern the Lord Himself has set. They come in a recurring process of acting in faith and growing in righteousness and spiritual capacity. But if we follow the conditions the Lord has set, they do come.
7. I believe there are three things we must do to obtain these gifts and put them to use in the way the Lord intends.

Qualify

8. First, we must qualify. Once we have entered into the covenant of baptism, we must remain worthy of the companionship of the Spirit. We must exercise our faith, repent of our sins, keep the commandments of the Lord, and be true and faithful to our covenants. We must do nothing that would offend the Spirit. Remember, as the prophets have taught, "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you"¹² and "the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples."¹³
9. At BYU–Idaho this is one of the great blessings of the Code of Honor: through obedience we qualify for the blessings of the Spirit. Obedience is the great foundation of the gifts we seek. Each of you has made covenants with the Lord to be obedient to His commandments. Each of you has made a commitment that you will live by the Code of Honor.

10. My dear brothers and sisters, I pray you will keep your promises with exactness and with honor and, by so doing, qualify for the gifts of God.

Seek

11. Second, we must diligently seek spiritual gifts. It may seem paradoxical that a gift, especially a heavenly gift, should be sought after. But that is exactly what the Lord commanded when he said, “Seek ye earnestly the best gifts.”¹⁴ It is what Moroni taught when he admonished us to “come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift.”¹⁵ President George Q. Cannon said it clearly and a little bluntly this way:
12. How many of you are seeking for these gifts that God has promised to bestow? . . . How many of you ask the Father in the name of Jesus to manifest Himself to you through these powers and these gifts?
13. If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections.¹⁶
14. President Cannon counsels us to pray diligently for the gifts we need—needs that come because of our imperfections and the challenges and opportunities we face. But we must not seek with a sense of entitlement, nor should we seek for signs, nor for the honors of men. We must prayerfully seek in the Lord’s way according to His will and purpose, trusting in Him, guided by the Spirit, in humility, and in faith.
15. Righteous seeking requires diligent prayer, but it also requires that we get up off our knees and act in faith. Enoch’s call to be a prophet illustrates this principle. Please turn to Moses 6:31-32
16. And . . . Enoch . . . spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?
17. And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance¹⁷
18. Notice the Lord’s pattern: go forth in faith and speak and teach and the gifts will follow. That pattern is evident all throughout the scriptures. The blessings of heaven come after we seek, after we act in faith.¹⁸

Receive

19. Third, we must receive the gifts the Holy Ghost gives us. As the Lord said, “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?”¹⁹ The Holy Ghost may bestow upon us a spiritual gift; but unless we embrace the gift and use the gift the way the Lord intends, we have not received it. A spiritual gift does not come so that we might “consume it on [our] lusts.”²⁰ Rather, it comes “from God, for the benefit of the children of God.”²¹ It must be used for the purpose the Lord intends and in the way the Lord intends.
20. This means that there must be a powerful alignment between our actions and our attitudes if we are truly to receive spiritual gifts.²² Both actions and attitudes are subject to our personal choice.

21. When it comes to spiritual gifts, the Lord wants righteous action. He wants you to use the gifts He gives you to help others, but He also wants you to take that action with an uplifting attitude. In fact, He commands us to receive His spiritual gifts and use them “not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”²³ Paul underscored this connection between attitude and action when he admonished Timothy:
22. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.
23. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.
24. Nor has God given us the spirit of cynicism, or grumpiness, or entitlement, or any of those other poor attitudes that lead to sin and unhappiness. If we “stir up the gift” that is in us, if we invite the Holy Ghost to work in us, we can act in faith to bless others. We can choose not to be angry, or cynical, or arrogant, or lazy, or take on any other attitude that would dim the light, offend the Spirit, and send us down the wrong path. Rather, we may choose Christ always and in every situation. Even in the face of trials or adversity, even when things don’t go quite like we had hoped, we may choose to qualify for, seek, receive, and use His gifts with an attitude born of His Spirit.

The Gifts of the Spirit at BYU–Idaho

1. The ministry of the Holy Ghost and these wonderful gifts of the Spirit are manifest at BYU–Idaho as the Spirit of Ricks. That spirit has a very distinctive character because BYU–Idaho has a very distinctive mission. Moroni taught this principle in Moroni 10:8:
2. And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them.
3. The ministry of the Holy Ghost and the manifestations of the Spirit at BYU–Idaho are particularly focused on disciple preparation, leadership development, and inspired learning and teaching. I believe that by looking closely at the gifts of the Spirit—which give the Spirit of Ricks its distinctive character—we might gain some deeper insight into what the Lord wants each of us to do to preserve and enhance it.
4. I have organized these gifts and their manifestation into four clusters: Love, Humility, Obedience, and Learning by Faith. As I review them with you, I pray that the Spirit will teach you where you need to focus your efforts to qualify for, seek, and receive spiritual gifts.

Cluster 1—Love

5. The first cluster is Love. This cluster is manifested in a willingness to sacrifice self-interest in order to serve and help others. It shows up in everyday life as a spirit of personal interest in and concern for others. It includes friendliness, kindness, service, openness and warmth, happy greetings, ready smiles, and a sense of being among good friends.
6. The gifts associated with this cluster are many and include: charity, discernment, a desire to serve, empathy, kindness, cheerfulness, seeing the best in people, an interest in other people, and remembering names.

7. As I think about these gifts, I see a young sister experiencing a very difficult time. She is spiritually wounded, discouraged, and feeling alone. As she walks across campus, one of our teachers sees her, greets her by name, and asks her how she is doing. Those simple words of kindness and concern are the beginning of healing and redemption.
8. This example illustrates the friendliness, concern for others, and service that have been hallmarks of this campus for decades. These simple acts of love and kindness help to forge bonds of charity essential to inspired learning. They help us to feel the Savior's love, to see His loving hand in our lives, and to learn to lead as He would lead. These precious gifts help us to know Him and to be more like Him. This is the Spirit of Ricks.

Cluster 2—Humility

9. Cluster number two is Humility. This cluster includes the spirit of meekness, forgiveness, modesty, and frugality.
10. The gifts of the Spirit that are part of this cluster include: humility, meekness, modesty, living within our means, a forgiving spirit, not caring who gets the credit, listening to the enticings of the Spirit, not feeling entitled, and seeing ourselves as we really are.
11. As I think about this cluster, I see a former student body president applying for a leadership position in the Student Activities Program. He is not selected; but his friend, a quiet young man from a small town in Oklahoma, gets the assignment. Happy for his friend who has had little leadership experience on campus, the former student body president decides to volunteer in that organization. He takes on assignments and makes a valuable contribution. He supports and prays for his friend and rejoices to see him develop as a strong leader.
12. The power of this cluster lies in its connection to Christ. When we approach life with a spirit of humility and meekness, we open the way for the Savior to be our guide and our strength. It is in Him and through Him that we work and accomplish His purposes. Like Ammon of old, "in [the] strength [of the Lord we] can do all things."²⁶ This is the Spirit of Ricks.

Cluster 3—Obedience

13. I have called the third cluster Obedience. It, too, includes a willingness to sacrifice, not only self-interest as in the cluster I called Love but whatever else the Lord requires. It also includes a spirit of consecration, integrity, hard work, high standards, and personal responsibility.
14. The gifts of the Spirit associated with this cluster include: an honest, obedient heart; a willingness to sacrifice; dedication; patience; diligence; a capacity to work hard; a sense of responsibility.
15. When I think of this cluster, I see a married student couple on their knees not knowing how they will meet all the expenses of their new baby or get all their homework done or cope with their very complex lives. But there they are praying morning and night, studying the scriptures, keeping the commandments, paying their tithing, attending the temple, serving in the ward, holding down two jobs, doing their home and visiting teaching, staying up late to write papers, working very hard, doing their very best, and trusting in the Lord.

16. Brothers and sisters, there is a great spirit of obedience on this campus. It is evident all around us. Willing obedience is the foundation for so much else that is good. Speaking of the willingly obedient, the Lord said:
17. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.
18. At BYU–Idaho we dig deep and set our foundation on the rock of Christ. These gifts are the lifeblood of discipleship—a willingness to sacrifice, consecration of time and resources, hard work, patience, diligence, and a devotion to the Lord and His work. This is the Spirit of Ricks.

Cluster 4—Learning by Faith

19. The last cluster is Learning by Faith. Inspired learning and teaching have been part of this campus for decades. But with the advent of the BYU–Idaho Learning Model, the Lord would have us make learning by faith a more common, daily, and pervasive experience in our lives. For that to happen, all of us will need the gifts of the Spirit that are part of this cluster: exceedingly great faith, courage, listening by the Spirit, teaching by the Spirit, asking and seeking by the Spirit, charity, guidance, understanding, and knowledge.
20. When I think of this cluster, I see a young student preparing for class. She has never spoken in a classroom in her whole life. She studies and then prays in faith for help. In her Foundations of Science class the next day, she musters her courage and responds to a comment about scientific discovery. She begins, tentatively, to speak about the role of intuition. As she speaks, she hears in her mind words of scripture: “whatsoever is truth is light;”²⁸ “the Spirit giveth light to every man;”²⁹ “this is the Light of Christ.”³⁰ She incorporates those words, and her comment sparks a powerful discussion of the light of Christ and scientific discovery.
21. Brothers and sisters, there is a great spirit of revelation on this campus because the gifts of learning by faith are absolutely essential to our mission. At BYU–Idaho we take action in faith. We study, prepare, engage, speak up, contribute, and teach one another in faith that the Lord will bless us through the power of the Holy Ghost with gifts of courage, knowledge, understanding, and insight. And the wonderful thing is—He does. We do all we can; we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we learn by faith. This is the Spirit of Ricks.

Conclusion

1. In conclusion, I would like to read to you an excerpt from a letter we received from the mother of a student:
2. [When] our son . . . came to BYU–Idaho . . . he had struggled with his testimony for many years and . . . lack[ed] direction. While on campus one time . . . I . . . observed . . . professors . . . greeting my son and even hugging him. That was amazing . . . His schoolwork improved. His outlook improved and his spirit soared. He was anxiously working on sending in his papers for his mission . . .
3. In the summer of 2006 while attending Summer Semester, our son went tubing and drowned. In our sorrow and grief, BYU–Idaho was extraordinary. They helped us meet with the boys

that were with him so we might all find comfort together We were overwhelmed with the support and love from these students We flew out a week later for a memorial on campus, . . . and we marveled that we could have been so blessed to have him attend this campus. You will never know what peace it has brought to our hearts to know just how much our son was loved His peers, his professors, his bishop . . . all helped us to feel the spirit of [Ricks at] BYU–Idaho.

4. Brothers and sisters, this is the Spirit of Ricks. This is BYU–Idaho. This is who we are and what we do.
5. I leave you with my witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Savior and Redeemer, the Light and the Life of the world. In Him and through Him come all good things and all good gifts. I bear witness of the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph. Because of the Restoration we may enjoy the marvelous power of the Holy Ghost and the supernal gifts of the Spirit.
6. May God bless us always to cherish the Spirit of Ricks at BYU–Idaho. May we qualify for, seek, and receive the gifts God intends for us to have; and may we use them to preserve and enhance the great spirit of love, humility, obedience, and learning by faith that is on this campus.
7. I pray that the Spirit of Ricks will always be among us here in great power, and I pray that it may burn in your hearts like a mighty fire as it does in mine. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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