

# Out of Small Things Proceedeth That Which is Great

President Kim B. Clark  
Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotional  
January 10, 2006

1. My dear brothers and sisters, it is a wonderful thing to be with you, to welcome you to a new semester at BYU–Idaho. Over the last few months, Sister Clark and I have come to know and appreciate you and the great spirit that is on this campus. This is a very special place of faith, devotion, and obedience. It is a school of inspired learning and teaching, a place where the Lord prepares true disciples and trusted servants.
2. I would like to talk today about principles that are central to the special character of BYU–Idaho, and central to your lives now, and to the glorious future that awaits you. These principles are laid out in a beautiful and powerful way in the 64th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Let’s turn to that section and read together verses 33 and 34:
3. Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.
4. Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.
5. In these short verses the Lord teaches principles that have profound implications for you and for me.
6. Well-doing occurs through small things; great things come from small things. It is natural to grow weary in doing small things; but if we give our hearts and minds to the Lord, we will not grow weary, we will do the small things that make great things happen, and we will build Zion.
7. I would like to focus today on how small things bring about that which is great, and what it means to give our hearts and minds to the Lord. I want to apply these principles to BYU–Idaho and, specifically, to the Honor Code.

## **Small to Great: Two Patterns**

1. In the scriptures there are two patterns of the principle that small things lead to great things. In the first pattern, the Lord’s work gets done in small miracles and simple acts of kindness, service, and obedience sustained over long periods of time. Alma taught this pattern and the principle to his son Helaman in the 37th chapter of Alma. Speaking of the brass plates, Alma said:
2. . . . behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.
3. And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes . . . (Alma 37:6-7).

4. This principle is at work all around us. We grow personally and the kingdom grows through small things sustained. There are many examples: an act of kindness, an invitation to church, a word of testimony, a family prayer, an inspired verse. Sustained over time, these become a source of great power and influence for righteousness and good.
5. It is also true, however, that this principle works in the other direction as well. Small acts of disobedience or meanness, sustained over time, lead to great evil and destruction. This we also know. Listen to Nephi's description of Satan and his evil designs:
6. . . . and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.
7. . . . until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance (2 Nephi 28:21-22).
8. The chains of hell do not come clanking down around us in one fell swoop. They come softly, quietly, in lulling whispers, and deadening flattery, a little wickedness at a time. But if sustained, small wicked things lead to great evil.
9. There is a second pattern of small things leading to great things, less talked about, perhaps less well understood. And yet it, too, is in operation all around us. In this second pattern small things lead to great things quite suddenly, even dramatically. Let me illustrate this pattern with two diagrams.
10. The first diagram simulates the number of people who would die from a deadly, infectious disease in a population. The disease grows very slowly, but persistently. Then, when the number of infected people gets to a critical point, the number who die increases dramatically and we have a full-fledged epidemic.
11. The second diagram depicts the number of deaths in Kansas in October of 1918 during the worldwide flu epidemic. Here, in an actual epidemic, we see the same pattern—slow development when the disease first hits and then a dramatic increase once the disease gets to a critical point.
12. This dramatic effect on the population depicted here comes about because of small things—a little virus; a few people who transmit it; the few contact others, and they in turn contact a few more until many have been infected. It is also small things that can stop the disease: reduce the number of contacts people have; isolate those we know are infected; wash hands; don't gather in large meetings in closed places, and so forth.
13. The epidemic pattern—small things producing large, dramatic effects—shows up in many other contexts. It is what lies behind fashion and fads in music and entertainment, dress and grooming, and other aspects of social behavior. I first ran into this personally in the mid-1950s in the form of the Hula Hoop. It seemed like almost overnight otherwise mature and sane people were buying plastic hoops and gyrating everywhere. Today, you can find this pattern all around you, if you look. Why, for example, would anyone who is not a catcher on a baseball team wear a baseball cap backwards? It probably started in some obscure place by someone now long forgotten. But that social behavior has swept across society, affecting millions of people.

14. This pattern of dramatic change produced by small things is a pattern we see over and over again in the Book of Mormon. Please turn with me to Alma chapter 4 and look at verses 6-12. Here we find a description of a people descending into wickedness. It begins with small things, like the wearing of expensive clothes, and pride in “. . . all manner of precious things . . .” (verse 6), and gossip, and unkind words. Look at verse 8, “. . . the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another . . .” (emphasis added).
15. Later in verse 11 Mormon tells us that wickedness in the Church led “. . . unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people” (emphasis added). This great wickedness did not happen all at once. It began with small things, but these small things grew into great evil in the space of a single year.
16. We find this same pattern repeated many times. In the book of Helaman chapters 3 and 4, in Helaman chapter 6, in 3 Nephi chapter 6, we read of wonderful periods of prosperity and righteousness followed by a decline into wickedness that begins with small things. Describing the power of small things, Mormon writes that wickedness “. . . did grow upon them from day to day” (Helaman 3:36) until it hit a critical point and then, in just a few months, great evil almost exploded into the society.
17. The Book of Mormon also shows us how these epidemics of wickedness and evil may be stopped. Some are stopped by war and great destruction. But in some, intervention by the prophets of God works through small things to bring about great and dramatic repentance and righteousness, also in a very short time. (See, for example, Helaman 5:50-52.)
18. I believe that Mormon included so many of these stories of the power of small things for a very good reason. He saw our day and knew of the forces that would be at work on us in our time. We live in a day when changes in fashion and fads in dress and grooming, in music and entertainment, and social behavior of all kinds happen very quickly. Moreover, the media through which all of this occurs is very powerful. Satan uses these forces in our day to wreak havoc in our society, and thus bring about great evil. The Lord inspired Mormon to teach us these principles that we might be warned and forewarned. The Lord also has given us the admonition in the revelation we started with today: be not weary in well-doing. Well-doing can stop the spread of the small things that lead to great evil. And it lays the foundation for great righteousness.
19. Which brings me to BYU–Idaho and the Honor Code. The principles we have discussed are at work on this campus. The Honor Code includes many things that we might describe as great: honesty and integrity, avoiding pornography, living the law of chastity, and the Word of Wisdom, indeed, the gospel of Jesus Christ. But it also contains many rules against things that we might describe as small: flip-flops; curfew; torn or ragged jeans; long sideburns; shorts and capris; form-fitting tops and pants and other immodest styles; beards; “underwear styles” of clothing; and much else. Some of you may wonder why we have such small things in the Honor Code.
20. It is true that flip-flops and an unshaven face are not big things. But it is just like the stories of pride and greed in the Book of Mormon: failure to do the small things can, in a short period of time, lead to failure on the big things. The principle is so very clear: obedience to the small things creates a spirit of obedience in all things, and thus protects against evil and invites the blessings of heaven. Following the rules about the small things establishes a great spirit of

obedience on the campus. It creates a context of respect for learning and for the university that encourages a spirit of order and reverence. In that context of obedience and reverence and order, the Holy Ghost can minister on this campus. These blessings come to you individually and to us as a community.

21. This is why we have such seemingly small things in the Honor Code. This is why such a small thing like wearing flip-flops on campus or going to class with a little beard or breaking curfew is so deadly. This is why if you are on campus and discover that you have on flip-flops, or realize you have not shaved, the images of the great destruction in the Book of Mormon should come to mind. You should immediately think to yourself: my small act of disobedience is opening a crack in the great protective power of the Honor Code. I am personally in great danger; and if everyone behaved like me, the community would be in peril. And then you should immediately turn around, go back to your apartment, repenting as you go, and change your shoes, or shave, and come back living both the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code.
22. This is also why if you ever hear sarcastic words coming out of your mouth like: “So, what are you, the Honor Code Nazi?” or “Why are you so dressed up?” or any other words of scorn and ridicule directed at your classmates who are living the Honor Code, you should immediately recall the words of Mormon, repent on the spot, apologize to them, and ask their forgiveness.
23. Because of its importance and its power in this community and in your life, I invite you to take a personal inventory of your relationship to the Honor Code. In order to help you do this, I have prepared what I call the Honor Code Map. The first dimension of the map is obedience to the letter of the Honor Code, represented by the horizontal line. In the middle of the line, I have marked the boundary between obedience on the right and disobedience on the left. The second dimension of the map is the spirit of the Honor Code, represented by the vertical line. Above the horizontal line are those who live the spirit of the Honor Code; below the line are those who do not. These two dimensions establish the four quadrants of the Honor Code Map. As I explain each one, I want you to reflect on your own situation. I want you to ask yourself: Where am I in the map, and where am I going?
24. Let’s begin in the upper left-hand quadrant. Students in this part of the map live the spirit, but not the letter of the Honor Code. How is that possible? I believe this occurs when students desire to do what is right, but do not know about or do not understand the standards. I will call this quadrant the Zone of Ignorance. If you think you might be in this zone, I encourage you to get educated. Go and read the Honor Code carefully. There are many people who will help you. The Zone of Ignorance is not a good place to be.
25. Moving counterclockwise, we come to the lower left-hand quadrant. Here are students who live neither the letter, nor the spirit of the Honor Code. This is the Zone of Rebellion. Students in this zone know the standards, and yet choose to willfully rebel against them. If you are in this zone, I invite you to do one of two things. Number 1: repent and get out of the zone; in other words, change your ways. You will find many around you willing to help you and support you, including your bishop and the Lord. If you are in the Zone of Rebellion and do not want to change, I invite you to do Number 2: attend another university. If you are in rebellion against the Honor Code and if you persist in that rebellion, this is not the university for you. You have no right to be here, and there are many worthy students who would like to take your place. It is not good to be in the Zone of Rebellion.

26. The lower right-hand quadrant is next. In this zone, students are in compliance with the letter of the Honor Code, but they do not live its spirit. Their hearts are not in it. I call this the Zone of Hypocrisy. Students in this zone often live near the edge of compliance. They don't want to be in violation, but they often get as close as they can without going over the line. While it is better to be in compliance than not, it is not good to be in the Zone of Hypocrisy. Such students have “. . . a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (JS-H 1:19). And with that denial, students lose the protection and blessings they might have had. The Zone of Hypocrisy is not a good place to be.
27. The last quadrant is the one we all should strive to be in. I call this quadrant the Zone of Discipleship. I am happy to say that the vast majority of students are in this quadrant.
28. Students in the Zone of Discipleship are in compliance with the letter of the Honor Code, and they live its spirit as well. Some, in the lower part of the zone, are at an early stage of their discipleship and are working to live its principles more fully. As they do so, they travel the Path of Discipleship. The same is true of those who take my invitation to get out of the Zones of Ignorance, or Rebellion, or Hypocrisy. All students who seek to increase in obedience to the letter and to the spirit of the Honor Code travel the Path of Discipleship. They see the connection between the small things and the things that are great. They understand the importance of obedience, and they see the Honor Code as a preparation for the higher laws and covenants the Lord desires to give them.

### **Giving Our Hearts and Minds to the Lord**

1. It is my deep hope that all of you will move forward on the Path of Discipleship. Living the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code requires vigilance and diligence and obedience. One of the biggest challenges is exactly what the Lord warned us about in the 64th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: we grow “. . . weary in well-doing . . .” (verse 33). There are always temptations to let the Honor Code slide, even if only a little bit. It may be tempting to break curfew just a little bit; to have your girlfriend or boyfriend in your bedroom so you can talk privately for just a little while; to copy that one small paragraph from the Internet and present it as your own; to let your beard grow on the weekends; to wear that stylish but low-cut sweater on Saturday night. It may seem easier to dress down, to not shave, to slip on the flip-flops like an old habit, to wear that old ragged pair of jeans that are so comfortable.
2. The solution to this problem is also exactly what the Lord said it was: to give our hearts to Him. So, what exactly does this mean, to give our hearts to the Lord? I would like to close today with an answer to that question, in the hope that you will see and understand the connection between living the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code and giving your heart to the Lord.
3. Throughout the scriptures when the prophets talk about our relationship to the Lord, they often use the image of the heart to capture something deep and profound in our very nature. Physically, the heart pumps blood throughout the body, bringing life-giving oxygen and nutrients to every part of us. It is there in the quiet times, even when we are asleep. It is there when we are active, giving us whatever we need. We can feel it, and hear it, beating away, giving us life.
4. For all of these reasons, the prophets have used the image of the heart to capture what is at the very core of our emotional and spiritual life—our innermost desires, our central drives,

our deepest emotional commitments, and our capacity for love. Like the physical heart that delivers life-giving blood to every part of us, the metaphorical heart delivers life-giving motivation and emotional energy and commitment to what we are and what we do. This is what we must give to the Lord—our deepest commitments, our innermost desires—if we are not to be weary in well-doing.

5. The word commitment is crucial here. We give our hearts to the Lord through the covenants we make with Him. Paul teaches us that the promises we make to our Heavenly Father are not just words written on paper, or even on plates of gold, or on tablets of stone. If those promises are to be the foundation of our discipleship, they must be written in our hearts. To the Corinthian disciples, Paul said, “. . . ye are . . . the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).
6. Speaking of the new and everlasting covenant of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . .” (Hebrews 8:10).
7. I want you to look very carefully at the words in that verse. When we give our hearts to the Lord, He writes the covenants and the promises in our heart. Through the power of the Spirit, those promises become our deepest commitments and the motivating force in our lives. When we repent and come to Him in humility, seeking His forgiveness, we come to Him with hearts that are broken. Through the ordinance of baptism, and through its renewal each week in the sacrament, we express our willingness to take upon ourselves His name and we promise to keep His commandments and always remember Him. The Lord changes our hearts through the power of the Atonement and the ministry of the Holy Ghost. What was there before is changed through His mercy and grace and power. This mighty change of heart comes as He writes the new covenant and His new promises there. Our hearts become His, because He makes our hearts anew.
8. That marvelous, miraculous process is not a one-time event. All throughout our lives the Lord gives us opportunities to grow and change through our covenants to become like Him. After baptism come the blessings of the priesthood, and the temple, and eternal marriage, and the creation of an eternal family. In all of this, there will be higher covenants and more powerful promises written in our hearts, if we are true and faithful.
9. This process of giving your heart to the Lord is the great key to understanding the purpose of the Honor Code and its place in your life. The Honor Code is a preparatory commitment to live the gospel and conduct your lives in a spirit of obedience. It not only protects against evil and invites the blessings of heaven here and now, but it will help you to prepare to live the higher law. In that spirit of preparation, you not only need to live the letter, but also the spirit of the Honor Code. You need to be in the Zone and on the Path of Discipleship. For that to happen, the Honor Code needs to get into your heart. Don’t let it be just a set of rules written on paper or on the Web that you have to live to be in good standing in this university. I pray that you may give your heart to the Lord and see and feel the Honor Code as a blessing, as a source of strength and protection and a preparatory gateway to the marvelous blessings of the new and everlasting covenant that the Lord desires to give you.
10. In these higher covenants we promise all that we have or might have to the Lord and His work. We promise all that we are or might become to our eternal companion. There is no

room there for a partial or halfhearted commitment. There is no place in these eternal covenants for living at the edge of obedience. The Lord will have all of you, all of your heart, all of your might, all of your mind, and all of your will. But His promise to you is likewise all encompassing: if you are true and faithful to those covenants, you will be endowed with power from on high; you will be joint heirs with Christ; you will receive all that the Father has. Can you understand it? Can you begin to comprehend it?

11. Please turn with me to the 78th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 17-19, and listen to the words of the Lord given to the Prophet Joseph Smith. As I read, apply what is said to yourselves and the Honor Code in this university:
12. Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;
13. And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.
14. And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more (emphasis added).
15. My brothers and sisters, these promises are yours. Through your faithful obedience you really are laying the foundation of a great work. Small things really do matter. Out of small things proceedeth that which is great. May God our Father bless you to see and know of the power of small things. And may you give your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that if you do, you will be of good cheer as He leads you along in love and peace on the Path of Discipleship. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen