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And with All Thy Mind

John W. Welch

President Samuelson, brothers and sisters: I am humbled to address you. For almost 40 years my wife and I have been blessed by the full life of the mind offered by Brigham Young University—first as students, where we met in the library, and now as we both serve on the faculty. For 23 years I have taught in the Law School and worked in various campus assignments. We are grateful to all who have worked to make BYU so intellectually inspiring. I hope my words will in some small way repay the many to whom I am deeply indebted.

And thanks to each of you for coming and bringing the Holy Ghost with you. Brigham Young's instruction to the BYU faculty was that they "ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God" (in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928], 79). I would state a corollary to that: As students, you should not *learn* even the multiplication tables without the Holy Ghost. It does little good for someone to *teach* with the Holy Ghost if you aren't ready to *receive* with the Holy Ghost.

Today I would ask: What does it mean to you to love God with all your mind? We *feel* what it means to love Him with our heart, but what does it mean to love Him with our mind? I have asked many people this question. I get many different answers. What would your answer be?

At the outset, let me turn to a passage in Mark 12, which I find terribly important. A highly educated scribe (their equivalent of a college graduate) who had overheard Jesus reasoning with some Sadducees, asked the Savior, "Which commandment is the first of all?"

Jesus answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

"And," Jesus added, "this is the second: Love thy neighbor as thyself."

To this the scholar responded, “Teacher, you speak very well and in truth, for to love God with all one’s heart and all one’s understanding and all one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is more advantageous than all burnt offerings and sacrifice.”

Seeing that this person spoke with keen intelligence, Jesus declared, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (See Mark 12:28–34; author’s translation in part.)

This brief encounter is deeply interesting to me. Since Jesus was dealing with a craftsman of words, let me mention some notable vocabulary in their conversation. When Jesus stated the prime commandment, He carefully included the mind. The Greek word used for *mind* is *dianoia*, meaning with all your “way of thinking” or your “perception of things.” In his response the scholarly scribe used an even more dynamic word, *synesis*, meaning “understanding, getting things all together, comprehensive comprehension, synthesis, and insight.” And then, escalating a third step, Jesus told this man that he was not far from the kingdom because he spoke *nounechos*, literally “having *nous*,” the highest term in some philosophical pantheons for true, even divine, intelligence. These three words regard the mind highly, the last being especially strong.

How many lessons can we draw from this inspiring exchange between the Savior and this educated individual? Let us not pass lightly over this stunning scripture; divine declarations often come without much elaboration yet are laden with profound implications. I would speak today of seven dimensions of loving God with our all our mind, drawn from words in this account.

It Is *Possible*

First, we learn with assurance that it is *possible* to get near to the kingdom of God while having intelligence. This smart man was close to the mark, and Jesus congratulated him for it.

Likewise, we on the faculty congratulate and welcome you. At this university and in this religion, you don’t need to check your brains at the door. To be a gospel scholar, you’ll need all the brilliance you can muster, for we have the double challenge of knowing not only the ways of the world but also the ways of the Lord—and then, getting the two together. In this sense the world actually has the lighter assignment. Of course, in another sense, our task is the easier. Because of modern scriptures and the temple, we have more pieces in life’s puzzle, as well as the picture on the box.

I hope you are excited and humbled to be at Brigham Young University, where we boldly affirm that “the glory of God is intelligence” and that “to be learned is good,” so long as we avoid the vainness, the frailties, and the foolishness of men and also “hearken unto the counsels of God” (D&C 93:36; 2 Nephi 9:29). Ancient and modern prophets offer role models of highly

intelligent people who have loved the Lord with their minds. Until only recently, President Hinckley has enjoyed reading the classics in Latin and Greek, which he learned in college. Isaiah was a brilliant writer, and Paul was amazingly articulate. Alma went head-to-head against the stubborn issues of his day. As Limhi promised his people, “If ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him *with all diligence of mind . . .*, he will . . . deliver you” (Mosiah 7:33; emphasis added). Thus it is indeed possible to get near to the kingdom of God with intelligence.

It Is Commanded

Second, Jesus makes it clear that we are *commanded* to love God with our mind. Pondering this, I realized that I should approach this commandment as a responsibility, not just as an opportunity or privilege. I wondered: Do you think of this commandment when you partake of the sacrament or when you answer the recommend question about striving to keep the Lord’s commandments?

Like keeping any commandment, keeping this one will surely take conscious effort. We don’t keep the Word of Wisdom by accident. We don’t keep the Sabbath day without planning and devotion. So what do you do to keep this commandment deliberately? Do you earnestly strive to love God with all your mind? I doubt that a flimsy “Well, I guess so,” is going to be good enough. Speaking to the pure in heart in the city of Nephi, Jacob exhorted them to “look unto God with firmness of mind” (Jacob 3:1). And Alma made it clear that God will give people knowledge of His mysteries only “according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” (Alma 12:9). There is a direct connection between answers obtained and our effort in keeping this commandment.

I know that God will help us keep this commandment, for He will give no commandment save He shall prepare a way for us that we can keep it (see 1 Nephi 3:7).

With All Thy Mind

Third, the word *all* is all important here. It appears seven times in this scripture—itself a symbolic number of completion, often associated with sacrifice in Leviticus. Keeping this commandment requires genuine, dedicated completeness. You are commanded to love God with *all* thy heart, *all* thy might, and *all* thy mind. We have a word *wholeheartedly*. Maybe we should coin a word *wholemindedly*.

The gospel is not a cafeteria plan. We can’t just pick and choose the parts we like.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has spoken often about discipleship, submissiveness, and consecration, especially in intellectual settings. He has sensitized us to the dangers of what he calls “holding back,” of not loving God with all the mind that we could. He said in a talk at a banquet for the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) on September 27, 1991:

Whatever our particular fields of scholarship, the real test is individual discipleship, not scholarship. . . .

. . . We usually tend to think of consecration in terms of property. . . . But there are so many ways of keeping back part and so many things we can withhold a portion of besides property. All things [including our minds] really ought to be put on the altar. [“Discipleship and Scholarship,” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (summer 1992): 7]

Minds must bend, as well as knees.

An idea is often the last thing we are willing to let go of. Our pet ideas are often the beginning of our undoing. A wise drama teacher once said, “Forget your best idea.” Clinging to it will often block the flow of even greater creativity and more expansive inspiration.

Fortunately, each of us has been blessed with definite mental talents, with plenty to give forth. And remember, in the world of the New Testament, even one talent of gold or silver was an enormous sum, worth several million dollars in today’s markets. It is true that some minds work better in one mode than in another, but that’s irrelevant: we can and must love God with our weakest mental abilities, as well as by playing to our strengths. Surely God cares less about what we give Him than if we have brought all of our best, whatever that may be.

Many Ways to Love

Fourth, this all has to do with *love*. Sister Welch and I have a pillow on our bed. On it are words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” With similar fervor, let us count the ways we love God with our minds and love Him “to the depth and breadth and height / My [mind] can reach, when feeling out of sight / For the ends of Being and [eternal] Grace . . . to the level of everyday’s / Most quiet need, . . . freely, . . . purely, . . . with the passion put to use, . . . and, if God choose, [even] better after death” (*Sonnets from the Portuguese* [1850], no. 43).

We love Him with our minds by being observant of the things He has created—by appreciating the amazing things that He has given us in the worlds of chemistry or geology, scriptures or linguistics. If you love a person, you notice and admire the fantastic things he or she has done. President Hunter once said, “He loves God with all his mind who . . . sees God in all things and acknowledges him in all ways” (*Conference Report*,

April 1965, 58; also “And God Spake All These Words,” *Improvement Era* 68, no. 6 [June 1965]: 512).

We love God with our mind by caring about the problems He cares about. We love God with our mind by embracing His work, giving it the best of our planning, research, and problem solving. Figuring out what you can do as a home teacher to motivate someone to repent is truly a challenging intellectual task, and learning the names of everyone in your ward is another way to love God with your mind.

When we love God, we want to be like Him—and remember, He knows everyone’s name. It takes careful thought to internalize all that we can know of Him.

It takes mental effort to forgive other people as He does, for that begins by thinking nonjudgmental thoughts about them and seeing them as He does.

Loving God also means loving His words. I love the scriptures, although admittedly some chapters are harder to love than others. We love God with our mind by memorizing scriptures. The conversation between Jesus and the scribe was possible because both of them knew that scripture by heart. We rely too much on our books, notes, and hard drives. Your mind can actually retain far more than you imagine. One of the best things I ever did was to take a challenge from my leader in the MTC to memorize all of the Sermon on the Mount. In an honors Book of Mormon class, I had my students memorize most of King Benjamin’s speech. One student recalled: “When we first got the assignment, it was overwhelming; but it was probably the most rewarding assignment I’ve ever had at BYU.”

We love God with our mind by skillful analysis of problems; it is often said that “God is in the details.” But don’t forget also to love God by skillful synthesis as well, seeing things as one great whole. When I go to the temple, I give attention to its tiniest details and carefully presented words; at the same time, my mind sees the temple as a huge pattern and cosmic road map that tells me where I am and where I need to go.

We love God with our mind by asking good and righteous questions. There is nothing wrong with asking. In fact, we are commanded to ask, seek, and knock (see Matthew 7:7). Our scribe in Mark asked Jesus a good question, much better in fact than the unlikely hypothetical one posed by the Sadducees about a supposed seven-time widow who had remarried six of her husband’s brothers (see Mark 12:18–27). We need to spend more time discerning between good questions and bad ones. It won’t do to be knocking on the wrong door. For examples of good questions, look at the 50 questions Alma asked in Alma 5 (see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* [Provo: FARMS, 1999], charts 61–65). Or look at the many questions Jesus asked people in the New Testament gospels, and then go and do

likewise (see John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* [Provo: FARMS, 2002], chart 9-16).

We love God by listening better to Him and to those who speak for Him. A good measure of people who love each other is how well they listen to each other. Listening is a mental process. It involves attentively processing what we hear. Notice that the scribe repeated back (a good communication strategy) what Jesus said, and thoughtfully commented on its implication.

How do we love God? Let us count the many ways. It is here at BYU, more than at any other place, that you can specialize in learning how to love God with all your mind and as an integrated soul.

It is here that we see no irreconcilable conflict between the heart and the mind. The restored gospel of Jesus Christ exquisitely harmonizes the traditional paradoxes of life, embracing both study and faith, reason and revelation, truth and goodness, thought and action, spirit and mind. The one is not without the other in the Lord. The gospel strives, above all, for the fullness of eternal life, not just either half of it. An incomplete view is partial in more ways than one.

Getting the heart and the mind together is a joyous experience. It is not easy to describe the collaborative workings of the two, but analogies can help. Getting the spirit and intellect together is like seeing with two eyes, allowing depth perception lacking through a single lens. It is like playing a violin that requires two hands, each performing its own function to produce a harmonious melody (see John W. Welch, “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch [Provo: FARMS, 2002], 17–53). Or, as a student suggested, it’s like chocolate and milk: they taste fine alone, but better together.

With All Thy *Mind*

Fifth, I learn from the conversation in Mark that Jesus cares very much about our *minds*. He carefully noticed that the scribe answered with great intelligence. This means that He notices and cares what we think, write, and teach. I know that God watches over our intellectual endeavors. The surgical testimony of Elder Nelson shows that God will help things happen that far exceed human ability (see Russell M. Nelson, “Sweet Power of Prayer,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 7–9). Have miracles ceased? No. In fact, Mormon says that miracles are ministered “unto them of strong faith *and a firm mind* in every form of godliness” (Moroni 7:30; emphasis added).

I have asked for and have received His support in many academic pursuits, often through the unimaginable help of other people. One day, with no appointment, a person walked into my office with the precise skill set I had been praying for, only to tell me she didn’t know why she had

come but that she had decided not to stay with another job and wondered if I needed any help.

Last Christmas, facing a crucial year-end deadline after months of work, my staff finally downloaded a huge collection of scanned Church historical documents onto 74 DVD production masters; with those master disks safely in hand, they watched as our linked hard drives crashed irrecoverably only a few hours later.

I cannot believe that these things were mere coincidences.

I know that God will support us as we strive to love Him with our minds. My colleagues and I have attended and presented papers at many academic conferences. Not infrequently, results have been transformational in ways that we gladly attribute to the Spirit of the Lord.

I know that God inspires us, but most often only after we have studied things out in our minds (see D&C 9:8) and have paid the price of thorough research directed by the light of faith. Many LDS scholars and regular members as well can tell of sacred experiences they have had in discovering things through study and faith that they never would have found on their own.

I myself treasure several such discoveries. I remember searching for an answer to a recurring criticism of the Book of Mormon about the resurrected Savior's use of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi. As I dug into the task, confident that there must be an answer, the apparent problem turned into a strength as the temple and covenant settings of both texts distilled upon me as the dews from heaven (see John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* [PROVO: FARMS, 1999]).

I also remember one early missionary morning in Germany when the significant literary feature of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon amazingly unfolded to my view. Outside study and spiritual promptings had set the stage, but a mind firmly and tenaciously pursuing the implications of my testimony of the Book of Mormon caused that discovery actually to happen (see John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 [autumn 1969]: 69–84).

My testimony does not depend on finding such things; rather, my mind looks with confidence for such things precisely because I know the Book of Mormon and the gospel are true. Faith precedes the miracle of insightful understanding. As President Packer has cautioned and encouraged, we should not say, "I know the gospel is true, however . . ." Rather, say, "I know the gospel is true, therefore . . ." And for me, that has made all the difference. (See Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 [summer 1981]: 270; also *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 113.)

I also know that God rewards us after long hours of service. Some of my favorite scriptural insights—making intellectual sense and dissolving

spiritual challenges throughout my life—have come at weary hours of the night during my service as a bishop. Ironically, my most productive years as a scholar have been the years when I have been busiest as a bishop.

It Is the *First* Commandment

Sixth, what of the fact that this is part of the *first* commandment? Loving God is the prime commandment because all else follows from it. Loving God is the wellspring of all righteousness. Loving Him with all our mind is the taproot of true intelligence. Loving Him with all of the integrated faculties of our whole being echoes the integrated harmony of the Godhead and godhood itself.

John 14:15 can also be translated “If you love me, you *will* keep my commandments.” When you love God with all your mind, you will mind Him and mind all His precepts. And by minding Him always, by obeying Him always, you remember Him always. In Hebrew, the same word, *zakhor*, means “to remember” as well as “to obey” (see “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” chapter 35 in John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: FARMS, 1992], 127–29).

If you love God, you will think of Him often. You will want to share with Him your whole day, every day and every night, Fridays as well as Sundays, everything you have thought, said, and done. You miss Him and hope to see Him again.

You will think kind and loving things about Him. In the face of any type of inconclusive uncertainty, love gives the benefit of the doubt.

You will also think correct things about Him. Although you cannot talk yourself into loving God or anyone else, it is possible to talk yourself out of love, so give heed to what you think.

Loving God leads to all else that is of the divine nature.

It Is Possible to Break This Commandment

Finally, we must also acknowledge that it is possible to disobey this commandment. How do we break the commandment to love God with all our mind, and, if we have transgressed, what must we do?

We break this commandment when we think contrary to the degree of knowledge we have received, when we know better.

We break this commandment when we promote ideas that injure other people, for with knowledge comes power, and with any power comes duty and accountability.

We break this commandment when we harbor in our mind errors or excuses that deny the existence, love, power, or knowledge of God. As a bishop, I’ve heard people say: “Everyone is doing it.” “I couldn’t stop.” “It’s

my life, I can do what I want with it.” “Every point of view is equally valid.” “I have no friends.” “No one will notice.” But where do these mental mistakes leave God? Is God doing it? Couldn’t God help you stop? Is it really your life? Does God’s view count? Isn’t He your friend? Doesn’t God know and notice everything, including your thoughts?

We break this commandment whenever we believe Satan, the enemy of all righteousness. Beware: Satan is the father of lies. And he’s a good liar. Take the lie of pornography. Satan tells us we will find satisfaction by staring at pornography. This is simply a lie. Can we love God with *all* our mind if even part of our mind is filled with this pollution? When I came to BYU in the sixties, we were just beginning to worry about environmental pollution. Previous generations had foolishly believed that the oceans could absorb an endless amount of garbage and waste. We learned that pollution doesn’t just go away.

I wonder if people aren’t just as naïve today. They foolishly think that the human mind can absorb an endless amount of filth and violence and that somehow we can just push a delete key in our brain and erase all that. You have been blessed with an amazing brain, with incredible retentive powers. Whether or not you can recall that information during a test, it’s all still there. Old folks often find that their brains retain things they haven’t thought of for decades. Mental pollution sticks; there are no Teflon brains. Just as it is true that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18), so, too, whatever degree of unrepented smut or cynicism we attain unto, it will rise with us as well.

Thus, Moroni says, “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; . . . and love God with all your might, mind and strength” (Moroni 10:32). He says, “Be perfected *in him*.” We cannot perfect our minds without His help. We know the effects of the Fall on our bodies, but our minds are also in a fallen state. Our minds must also be redeemed. This happens by repenting of our bad or erroneous thoughts and submitting to the mind and will of Christ.

We must repent of our academic pride. Pride is the main occupational hazard for scholars, who too quickly suppose “they know of themselves” (2 Nephi 9:28). Being right is part, but only part, of being righteous.

We must overcome our rebellious thoughts every bit as much as our disobedient actions. We must pray “and lead us not into *intellectual* temptation” as much as any other kind of temptation (see Matthew 6:13). Satan knows a lot of truth, but that’s not enough, for he still rebels.

We must feel godly sorrow for our mental sins. Like Zeezrom, we must suffer spiritual migraines over our intellectual mistakes (see Alma 15:3, 5). In many ways, their effects on ourselves and on others are the hardest to undo, but through the Atonement, the human intellect can be transformed into an instrument for loving God.

So the question becomes: Has your mind been sanctified by the atoning blood of Christ? (see Welch, *Echoes and Evidences*, 44–47). As described in Mosiah 3:19, has your mind “yield[ed] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit”? Or, as stated in Mosiah 5:2, have you “no more disposition” to think evil? Has the finger of the Lord touched our inert cerebral stones and turned them into light-giving gems? To use the words of Paul in Romans 12:2, have you been “transformed by the renewing of your mind [your *nous*]”?

If so, the Lord will light up your mind, as He did King Lamoni’s (see Alma 19:6). He will cause your mind to expand, as Alma promised (see Alma 32:34). He will write His covenants upon your mind, as Jeremiah guaranteed (quoted in Hebrews 8:10; see Jeremiah 31:33). He will bless your heart and mind with peace that passes all understanding, as Paul assured (see Philippians 4:7–9).

And in the end, if you love God with all your mind, you will be fit for the *kingdom*. What a promise! At BYU we are playing for keeps, “for as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7), and in the day of judgment, our unrepented thoughts will weigh against us (see Alma 12:14). But if you “worship him with all your . . . mind,” the scriptures say, “ye shall in nowise be cast out” (2 Nephi 25:29) and “the hope of his glory and of eternal life [shall] rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

A Final Blessing

In conclusion, as a bishop and teacher, may I offer a prayer in your behalf?

May you not just pass through BYU, but may the spirit of this university pass through you.

May you know it is possible to love God with all your mind.

May you love Him with invigorating questions.

May you perceptively discern between truth and error.

May your intellect be keen and sharp but never harm even the least intelligent of the children of God.

In your academic freedom, may you intellectually “choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men,” not “captivity and death” (2 Nephi 2:27).

May you pray over your books, as you would bless food for thought.

May you pray as you go to class, and not just as you enter the Testing Center.

May your love of God give harmony, value, and joy to all that you think and do, that you may become perfected in Christ.

And in all of this may God find you, too, not far from His kingdom.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

This devotional address was given to the BYU student body on September 30, 2003. Reprinted from Brigham Young University Speeches 2003–2004, 105–112 and the Clark Memorandum, spring 2004, 16–23.

John W. Welch was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at Oxford University 1970–72 and received his JD from Duke University in 1975. He was founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies in 1979, served on the board of editors for the Encyclopedia of Mormonism (1992), and has served as editor in chief of BYU Studies since 1991. He is currently Robert K. Thomas University Professor of Law at J. Reuben Clark Law School.