

Becoming New Creatures

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We are pleased to welcome the 101 new faculty members who have joined our ranks since January 2022. We are grateful for your willingness to join us in pursuing the unique mission of BYU. Each college in the university welcomes new faculty today, and we look forward to teaching with you, researching with you, developing creative works with you, and growing with you.

We gather today after a year filled with significant individual and institutional accomplishments. As a faculty, we mentored more than ten thousand students in all departments and colleges around campus. Our students were coauthors on a large majority of our faculty publications. Our faculty colleagues were recognized for exemplary accomplishments within their disciplines. Many of our departments were highly ranked. Each department has worked hard to hire faculty with a distinct sense of and alignment with our inspired mission. It has truly been a remarkable year, and today I am so grateful for each one of you and for

your contributions to our campus community. I am grateful to be counted among your ranks.

I am particularly humbled by the continued support, both financial and advisory, from our board of trustees. As is often the case, we find ourselves starting the year with a remarkably generous raise pool, a healthy student wage increase, and wonderful additions to our nonsalary budgets. We are so richly blessed to be led by those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators—philosophically, financially, and otherwise.

I am thrilled to see each of you here today! I mean it. You look amazing! The excitement around a new school year is palpable. As you walk around campus this week, I hope you will take time to notice the excitement (and some anxiousness) in the eyes of our incoming students, the enthusiasm that is sparked with the rekindling of renewed relationships, the feel of fall weather, and the powerful sense of anticipation for a new school year. I marvel that, as faculty, we so wearily and gratefully approach the end of the winter semester

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with feelings of exhaustion and the desperate need for respite. But then, each fall, after having had some short rest from our regular labors, we feel renewed and excited for a new start, and we welcome new opportunities. There is such a feeling of brightness, and we are filled with light and hope—both for students and for us as faculty members. How appropriate that our theme for our university conference this year is “Come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord.”¹ The brightness of the dawning of a new school year is upon us, and what a thrill it is to be here with each of you today.

Earlier this year, Jonathan Haidt published in the *Atlantic* a haunting article with a condemning title: “Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid.”² Haidt offered a stinging indictment of our collective life as he tracked the fraying of our core institutions, including institutions of higher education. While many modern pundits love to point out problems without proposing solutions, Haidt concluded the article with a clear remedy:

*We must harden democratic institutions so that they can withstand chronic anger and mistrust, reform social media so that it becomes less socially corrosive, and better prepare the next generation for democratic citizenship in this new age.*³

Later in my remarks, I will discuss some core institutions that need hardening, including some that we as a university are well positioned to help fortify. But my theme comes from Haidt’s final prescription:

*When Tocqueville toured the United States in the 1830s, he was impressed by the American habit of forming voluntary associations to fix local problems, rather than waiting for kings or nobles to act, as Europeans would do. That habit is still with us today. . . . We cannot expect Congress and the tech companies to save us. We must change ourselves and our communities.*⁴

It is this opportunity for change that I believe has power for us today. Haidt correctly suggested that such change must occur both individually

and collectively as communities. My message today is a call to look to this new school year with a desire to do better, to think better, and to *be* better. Some of that will involve changing ourselves. The apostle Paul put this more succinctly in his letter to the Corinthians when he described how the gospel of Jesus Christ could offer reconciliation. “Therefore,” Paul wrote, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”⁵

In addressing the faculty, I hope to explore some ways in which we can become “new creature[s].” Specifically, I want to discuss how our use of “gospel methodology”⁶ can inform our plans institutionally—that is, as communities—and in our work as faculty—that is, individually.

Opportunities to Become New Creatures *Our Use of Gospel Methodology*

In his address “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” President Spencer W. Kimball described our charge as faculty members at BYU:

In [some] instances, we must be willing to break with the educational establishment (not foolishly or cavalierly, but thoughtfully and for good reason) in order to find gospel ways to help mankind. Gospel methodology, concepts, and insights can help us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference.

*In some ways the Church Educational System, in order to be unique in the years that lie ahead, may have to break with certain patterns of the educational establishment. When the world has lost its way on matters of principle, we have an obligation to point the way. We can, as Brigham Young hoped we would, “be a people of profound learning pertaining to the things of the world,” but without being tainted by what he regarded as “the pernicious, atheistic influences” that flood in unless we are watchful. Our scholars, therefore, must be sentries as well as teachers!*⁷

I have been trying to understand this idea of “gospel methodology.” As President Kevin J. Worthen mentioned this morning,⁸ the President’s Council has been trying every week for four months to better understand the implications of President Kimball’s address for the people,

functions, and focus of our various university units. During this extensive study of the second-century address, we have regularly asked, “What does it mean for us to use ‘gospel methodology, concepts, and insights’ in our work as a university?” And I am asking today what it means particularly in our work as faculty.

I find it interesting that President Kimball refers to gospel methodology in the singular but to concepts and insights in the plural. Why is *gospel methodology* singular? And what exactly are the concepts and insights that inform the gospel methodology that we need to incorporate into our work as BYU faculty “to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference”? Before I explore how we might employ gospel methodology, I want to offer one possible explanation for its singular nature. I might be overinterpreting a prophet’s grammar, but I wonder if the singular form is a reminder that the gospel of Jesus Christ should be at the center of all that we do. The gospel is the methodology that we should use, and that should form the basis of all our efforts to do the work of the faculty. When we are looking for solutions to help our campus community in particular and also humankind in general, using gospel methodology may mean that we turn to the gospel of Jesus Christ for the insights and concepts we will use as the basis of our solutions. The notion that we view our disciplines through the gospel lens (rather than vice versa) is clearly articulated by President David O. McKay, whose name our School of Education bears. President McKay said:

Brigham Young University is primarily a religious institution. It was established for the sole purpose of associating with facts of science, art, literature, and philosophy the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . .

*In making religion its paramount objective, the university touches the very heart of all true progress.*⁹

Attaching such meaning to President Kimball’s use of “gospel methodology” may be an overreach, but it does reframe how we might approach our collective work of helping students, faculty, and staff “in their quest for perfection and eternal life.”¹⁰

As I offer some humble suggestions for how we might appropriately incorporate “gospel methodology, concepts, and insights” to help us accomplish what others cannot, I want to reiterate something shared by President Worthen this morning, which is that I do not know exactly what gospel methodology means for each of you in your own disciplinary context. In fact, I suspect that the specific concepts and insights that are most meaningful for your work in your context will come to you through personal revelation. That revelation will likely be different for each of you individually. But I do know that if we use a gospel framework as the basis for our methodology, we will receive heaven’s help. So although I don’t have a definitive answer to the question “What is gospel methodology?” I would like to share some examples of how gospel concepts and insights have benefited some of our faculty colleagues in various aspects of their work.

Becoming New Institutionally

I want to start by talking about how we can become new institutionally. As I mentioned, as a President’s Council, we have been revisiting our strategic plan in order to help the entire university become, as an institution, a new creature in Christ. This process of examining how we might more closely align our efforts to realize our prophet’s incredible vision for the second half of the second century at BYU has led us to embrace specific strategic initiatives to help us get there.

As you might imagine, much of this university-wide plan of action will involve those most directly involved in the academic endeavor: our faculty. Today we share our university strategic plan with an invitation to all to “lift where you stand.”¹¹ In our roles as faculty members, this invitation is particularly pointed. The vast majority of our strategic plan comes as a direct result of counseling with our board of trustees and from reading, pondering, and seeking to realize the vision set forth in President Kimball’s second-century address.

Before I share my invitations today for us as faculty, I want to express my gratitude for the efforts of departments and colleges across campus

to address meaningfully the charge to hire mission-aligned faculty. As I interview prospective faculty members, they regularly tell me of the inspiring experiences they have had during their interviews with faculty, department chairs, and deans. They frequently express enthusiasm for the mission of the university and a sincere desire to participate in that mission. They also often humbly admit that they may not understand exactly how to combine matters of faith with the work of their discipline but that they are excited to learn how to do so. It has been thrilling to hear their expressions of support for and willingness to contribute to the mission of BYU.

The existence of a deep pool of mission-aligned prospective faculty is surely a product of your continued and concerted efforts as BYU faculty to prepare students for graduate school and to maintain contact with them throughout their graduate programs. I want to thank you for those efforts. I am grateful to colleges that plan events for prospective faculty candidates. We even have colleges and departments that sponsor events to build faith among prospective faculty and prepare them to navigate the intense pressures that they will face in graduate programs at other universities—pressures that may challenge their faith in the Savior and encourage them to question the truths of the restored gospel. For all these efforts, I express my gratitude.

President Worthen has said that during his tenure as president, the most important decisions we make as a university are the faculty we hire. Thank you for your efforts to help us hire well. You will continue to see an emphasis on hiring faculty who understand and are enthusiastic about our unique mission, who are exceptional teachers and excellent scholars, and who are conscientious and collegial citizens.

Once again I would like to extend a special welcome to our new faculty. I know that we ask a lot of you, but I am grateful that you are here. Your presence here at BYU is no coincidence. Elder David A. Bednar said in a leadership meeting at BYU that there are no “coincidence[s] in the work of the Lord.”¹² That same statement could be made about your arrival here at BYU. Thank you for

being here. Thank you for your commitment to our shared mission.

As a prelude to becoming new institutionally, I thought it might be instructive to provide some updates on existing initiatives and to share some important additions to our strategic planning at the university.

We have a board-approved goal to increase student FTE by 10 percent over a six-year period. Student FTE is measured by (1) adding up all credit hours taken by all part- or full-time students during a given semester and (2) dividing the total credit hours by fifteen.

This calculation assumes an “expected credit load” of fifteen hours. If the average credit load turns out to be less than fifteen hours, then the number of students here—the student head count—will exceed our student FTE. That is the case currently: actual average credit hours for winter semester 2021 across full- and part-time students was 13.02.

That is the first math lesson for the day—and yes, that means there is a second one coming.

Our efforts to increase student FTE have sputtered for two principal reasons. The first is that our students are taking fewer credits per semester. In fact, the average credit load per semester has dropped by almost a full credit hour over the last two years. When average credits drop, so does student FTE. The second factor hampering our efforts to expand student FTE is a national trend of reduced college applications. Although we have not seen dramatic reductions in applications here at BYU, especially relative to our peer institutions, the recent trend upward in applications the last couple of years has flattened a bit this year. The combination of reduced credit hours and no increase in applications has stalled our expanded enrollment initiative. Our colleagues in Enrollment Services are working hard to explore ways to get us back on track.

As we consider these enrollment challenges, I want to express my gratitude to a select group of faculty members. We have recently initiated a program in which faculty members make personal phone calls to admitted students in an effort to persuade them to accept our offer of admittance.

The goal is to increase our overall yield—that is, the percentage of admitted students who actually matriculate—by helping admitted students feel seen, valued, and important through a personal phone conversation with a faculty member who conveys our excitement in welcoming them to campus. This remarkably successful program was initiated by faculty members who wanted to make a difference in helping admitted students decide to enroll. To all who have contributed to this meaningful effort, I say thank you!

As many of you know, all colleges and departments on campus are currently working to update their rank and status documents in response to the new BYU rank and status policy. Although the revised documents will appropriately vary from one college or department to another, I hope every revised document will do at least three things:

1. Lean into the university mission and the Aims of a BYU Education, explaining clearly and boldly how faculty expectations at BYU are distinct from those at other universities. Every rank and status file at BYU should be readily identifiable as a BYU rank and status file.

2. Enthroned superior teaching as the principal responsibility of all faculty members who have a teaching assignment. In laying out the standards for promotion at BYU, teaching should come first—literally and substantively.

3. Highlight the centrality of student mentoring in all areas of faculty stewardship: teaching, scholarship, and citizenship. In this respect, rank and status documents should underscore the importance of what President Worthen has called “student-centered research.”¹³

Where applicable, revised rank and status documents should also explain how scholarship and creative work that directly advance the prophetic priorities of our sponsoring Church will be recognized and rewarded.

I wish to express my gratitude for the amazing efforts of faculty to engage with students in inspiring learning. We are so grateful to see faculty and students interacting in a wide variety of inspiring learning efforts all across campus. We love to

hear about student experiences in study abroad programs; we are thrilled by the work of faculty and students on collaborative projects, whether they lead to peer-reviewed publications or simply expand learning beyond classrooms; we marvel at the expansive networks that facilitate students’ participation in internships around the country and around the world; and we are humbled by your firm commitment to expanding opportunities to include even more of our students in these activities.

As we continue to broaden the inspiring learning initiative in our departments and colleges, I invite you to consider how we might assess the quality of those activities. We are impressed by the quantity of students who participate: last year more than ten thousand students participated in inspiring learning activities funded by the university. In addition, we know that more than 95 percent of our students participate in at least two high-impact practices during their BYU experience. We want to enlarge both of these groups, and we want to focus our attention on the things that matter most. At present, we don’t yet know what things matter most, so we have work to do to better understand where our limited investments can make the biggest difference. We invite you to counsel together as colleges and departments to find the best ways to bless the lives of our students through the inspiring learning initiative. This will necessitate understanding the quality of the activities in which we currently engage so that we know what matters most.

We express gratitude to those of you in our limited enrollment programs who are finding creative ways to increase the reach of your amazing influence. We are grateful for those who have increased the number of students whose lives are blessed by your work as faculty.

As we have mentioned in this meeting in previous years, the number of professional faculty will need to increase to meet the demands for teaching and mentoring more students. We have begun work on a faculty development program specifically formulated for professional faculty that will soon be shared with faculty campus-wide.

As a university, we will work to provide additional funding for inspiring learning. We were fortunate to be able to increase funding for inspiring learning to all the colleges this year by 5 percent. We hope to continue that trend going forward. We are committed to providing this ongoing university funding to help you continue your exceptional efforts to engage with students in a wide range of inspiring learning activities at increased rates.

Our new vice president for belonging, Carl Hernandez III, will be working on a comprehensive plan rooted in gospel principles to direct campus-wide belonging efforts. This will be a plan that deliberately and intentionally incorporates “gospel methodology, concepts, and insights” and that underscores our shared primary identity as children of God.¹⁴ Vice President Hernandez has expressed his willingness and enthusiasm to work closely with colleges and departments in this endeavor. As you might imagine, his calendar is filling up fast! Welcome, Vice President Hernandez. I pledge my efforts to assist you in your quest to build a community of covenant-keepers at BYU, each of whom feels a strong sense of belonging and a powerful responsibility to help others feel the same.

To help “harden” society’s core institutions (borrowing language from Jonathan Haidt), we as a university announce today that we will make a strategic investment in fortifying the institutions of family, religion, and constitutional government. We see these institutions as critical to society and important to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a recent devotional at Ensign College, President Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Clark G. Gilbert emphasized the importance of these three institutions. President Oaks said:

Family. *The family is a core institution of civil society. As we read in the family proclamation, it “is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” Of course the adversary will attack such a central part of the plan and try to persuade the children of God to depart from it.*

Religion. *Religion stands as a firewall against the adversary’s onslaughts on many other key institutions*

and ideas in the world. We know from experience that the teachings and practices of religion strengthen society generally, including such needs as humanitarian assistance, law observance, the ability of individual citizens to act for the benefit of the overall community, and the effectiveness of other democratic institutions.

Constitution. *The Constitution’s Bill of Rights guarantees and protects the good that religious believers and their churches, synagogues, and mosques can do. These protections include the precious freedoms of speech and conscience and the free exercise of religion. I’ve spoken often on this subject—in this country and in other countries. It is vital for all of us to understand the importance of these protections and our democratic form of government.¹⁵*

Our institutional investment in hardening the core institutions of family, religion, and constitutional government is rooted in our BYU mission statement. According to the mission statement, the four educational goals of Brigham Young University are (1) teaching “the gospel of Jesus Christ,” (2) providing “a broad university education,” (3) imparting “instruction in . . . [specialized] fields,” and (4) conducting “scholarly research and . . . selected graduate programs.”¹⁶ The mission statement then articulates the driving motivation for our efforts to strengthen and fortify these core institutions. It reads:

In meeting these objectives BYU’s faculty, staff, students, and administrators should also be anxious to make their service and scholarship available to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in furthering its work worldwide. In an era of limited enrollments, BYU can continue to expand its influence both by encouraging programs that are central to the Church’s purposes and by making its resources available to the Church when called upon to do so.¹⁷

Consistent with this aspect of our mission, we are committed and eager to make our service and scholarship available to the Church. Accordingly, we are making a significant investment in shoring up these core institutions through the Wheatley Institute. As we look to the future, we further anticipate making our “service and scholarship”

and resources available to the Church in other important areas, such as alleviating poverty. We are grateful to all who have contributed meaningfully to the purposes of the Church, and we look forward to strengthening these commitments in years to come.

I now shift my attention from institutional plans to become a new creature in Christ to how we, as individual faculty members, can become new creatures by embracing and employing gospel methodology.

Gospel Methodology in the Work of the Faculty Teaching

I begin, deliberately, with teaching. By so doing, I hope to reinforce that Brigham Young University is primarily an undergraduate teaching university. That does not undermine our unique place in the Church Educational System (CES) as the only CES institution with a robust research program. But our strong emphasis as an undergraduate teaching university reminds us that we are different and distinct from many of the places where you and I went to graduate school. At times we may be tempted to adopt a worldly view that we cannot be primarily focused on teaching undergraduates and simultaneously produce superb scholarship. Said differently, those who would disparage our strong emphasis on undergraduate teaching would have us believe that we must choose between being an R1 research institution and a BYU–Idaho model that fixes the faculty’s exclusive focus on teaching undergraduates. We love and admire our colleagues in Rexburg, but we are not BYU–Idaho. As Tennyson’s Ulysses said of his son, Telemachus, “He works his work, I mine.”¹⁸ They have their unique mission; we have ours.

In a recent BYU leadership summit, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who chairs the executive committee of the BYU Board of Education, shared the following:

*I hope nobody panics about the idea of an undergraduate focus and a teaching emphasis at BYU. . . . We will never be able to afford to do the kind of research that a truly distinctive research university does.*¹⁹

In the same session, Elder Gilbert, commissioner of the Church Educational System, responded to a question about the “system” nature of the CES and said:

*The system construct allows us to be more different across the institutions [that constitute the system]. It would be a complete mistake to assume that the undergraduate teaching focus we want on this campus means we want it to be BYU–Idaho. That is just not true. This is the only place where we are really going to do concerted scholarship as part of our mission. . . . BYU is the flagship. You are the hope of Israel.*²⁰

I love the clarity that this brings us for our place in the Church Educational System. Just last week, Elder Gilbert told a BYU Education Week audience, “Not only do the CES institutions need to be different from the world, but they also need to be different from each other.”²¹ He said that BYU must serve the kingdom as an educational ambassador, and we cannot do that if we do not produce superb scholarship.

Now, for the role of gospel methodology—with its illuminating insights and concepts—in our teaching, I will try to offer some examples to illustrate core principles. But because the application of these principles will vary across disciplines, I invite you to spend time in upcoming faculty meetings discussing what gospel methodology might look like in your particular disciplinary context. I further invite you to consider what concepts and insights you might incorporate into your personal teaching. And I invite you to share with one another what has worked but also to be humble and honest enough to share about times when your efforts to incorporate gospel concepts and insights didn’t work.

Now for some examples of faculty teaching that incorporate gospel concepts, insights, and methodology. I reiterate that these examples are meant to be illustrative and are certainly not comprehensive.

While it will certainly not be the only way, nor even by itself sufficient, opening class with a prayer has been an important part of my teaching at BYU. I am not suggesting that prayers be

required in every class on campus. But I have found it meaningful to invite students to petition Heavenly Father for additional help in understanding the course material (and enduring the instructor!). I have found that it fosters unity for everyone in my class to hear their classmates pray—often in their mission language—not only for their own understanding but for the understanding of their classmates. An added benefit of this seemingly simple effort is the opportunity for young people to look beyond themselves and their own circumstances and petition heaven for blessings upon others.

Other colleagues have found it helpful to invite brief discussion about recent campus devotionals as part of classroom instruction. This has a dual benefit. As a campus community, we experience a strong unifying effect when we pause all campus activities each week during a peak hour of the day—Tuesday morning at 11:00 a.m.—to join together and participate in the spiritually strengthening endeavor of hearing words of devotion. It seems like a missed opportunity to compartmentalize this incredible opportunity and investment in that single hour. Wouldn't we be even more richly blessed if we were to use even a small amount of class time to review the devotional with our students? Again, this may not have obvious applicability in all classes, but it serves as an example of how we might engage with gospel methodology in our classrooms. Discussing campus devotionals with our students can help build faith in Jesus Christ, which is central to our university mission.

Another insight that may prove helpful in our development as teachers is to pray for our students and develop our eyes to see our students as beloved sons and daughters of God.²² Taking this view of our students and helping our students to view themselves in this way will do more to increase belonging on this campus than any other concept or insight.

These examples are intended as illustrations. I trust that the Spirit will guide how you apply them—and adopt others—in your individual situations. Our use of gospel methodology in our teaching will facilitate revelation. I am confident

that as you consider the students in your classes and pray for inspiration for how to help them, you will be inspired to know how best to bless their lives. You will be enlightened by the Spirit and led to the best concepts and insights from gospel methodology to help your students learn “by study and also by faith.”²³

Scholarship

Now I am going to move from teaching to scholarship. At most universities, the natural tendency of faculty is to gravitate toward a scholarship-first model, with all its rewards, recognitions, and awards. But gospel methodology runs counter to that trend. Indeed, perhaps the heart of gospel methodology is the gospel's grounding paradox: we find ourselves by losing ourselves. We will find greater knowledge if we are motivated by love and the desire to impart our knowledge to our students than if we aspire to the honors of men and seek knowledge for the sake of worldly applause. In this respect, student-centered research is a quintessential example of gospel methodology. If our focus on rigorous scholarship distinguishes us from our CES counterparts, our focus on student-centered scholarship should distinguish us from our peers elsewhere in the academy.

Some of our confusion about this term *gospel methodology* might stem from our instinctive (at least my instinctive) association of methodology with technique. But even dictionary definitions of methodology point to something broader and more fundamental: “a set or system of methods, principles, and rules for regulating a given discipline” or “the underlying principles and rules of organization of a philosophical system or inquiry procedure” or “the study of the principles underlying the organization of the various sciences and the conduct of scientific inquiry.”²⁴ Gospel methodology might thus be more about underlying principles than about procedures or techniques. Our underlying principles focus on our motives (love for God, for our students, and for truth) and our objective (“to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life”²⁵).

Perhaps our scholarship needs to be distinctive—less in its technique than in its

motivation and purpose. But it will also be distinct because our efforts will be illuminated by gospel concepts and insights, which will give us a better sense of where to look and what to look for. Insofar as gospel methodology is about technique, it might primarily mean that we seek learning by study *and by faith*. In this respect, the principal technical aspect of gospel methodology is surely personal revelation. This is not an excuse for shirking the hard work of disciplined scholarly technique; it is an imperative to supplement such discipline with the spiritual work of seeking heaven's help.

What is true of teaching is also true of scholarship: "gospel methodology, concepts, and insights" are likely to be best applied at a local level rather than at a general level. Individual faculty members' efforts to guide students through the portal of discovery can be made more seamless, more effective, and more profound through personal revelation. Student-centered scholarship enlivened by revelation is also likely to lead to superior outcomes. Let me share an example that illustrates this point.

Thomas W. Sederberg, an emeritus faculty member in computer science, is a friend and an exceptional example of a scholar who understands gospel methodology. Before I share a story about his experience using gospel methodology, I want to share some of what I know about Tom Sederberg's scholarship. Tom was given a lifetime achievement award from the computer graphics organization SIGGRAPH in 2006. In 2013, Tom received the Pierre Bézier Award for his contributions to solid modeling. He is one of the most highly cited researchers in his field of computer graphics and in 2014 was designated as one of the 108 most highly cited computer scientists in the world. To put it simply, Tom is a brilliant scientist. In his BYU forum "Computer Graphics and Mentoring," Tom described how he arrived at a major advance in computer graphics called the T-spline. His story is a perfect illustration of today's topic. [A video was shown of the telling of this story.]

One evening in the fall of 2003, I drove to campus for a research meeting with a graduate student from

Kyrgyzstan named Almaz and a visiting professor from China whose American name is Jimmy. We had been working for several years on a vexing research problem, and I despaired of grappling with the problem yet again because all our past efforts had failed. I was mentally exhausted, and further work on the problem seemed futile. The thought struck me, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?"

When I got to my office, I asked Jimmy and Almaz if they would mind if I began our research meeting with a prayer. They agreed, and I asked Heavenly Father to grant us a clear understanding. We went to work for several hours and found some fresh ideas. When we concluded, I felt exuberant and remarked that we had made noticeable progress.

Almaz immediately reminded me, "Of course, Tom, it was because of the prayer."

We thus agreed to begin each subsequent research meeting with prayer. Almaz and Jimmy even took turns, even though prayer was not part of their backgrounds. We continued work for several more weeks, and although we felt encouraged, we also felt like the solution was still very far away. A major breakthrough was needed.

Then one day in early December, Jimmy and I were again wrestling with the problem when suddenly the complete solution seemed to flash into my mind. I exclaimed in astonishment, "Jimmy, could it be that the answer is far more simple and elegant than we ever dreamed possible?"

I explained the new idea to Jimmy, and he got excited also. But when we analyzed it, we found a flaw. The mathematics didn't quite work. I was confused and crestfallen, and we abandoned the idea.

A month later I heard a talk by Elder Neal A. Maxwell in which he spoke about personal revelation. He quoted Joseph Smith's statement "A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas."

As soon as I heard that familiar quote, I thought of the experience I had had with Jimmy a month earlier. The phrase "pure intelligence flowing into you" seemed to exactly describe what I had felt.

On Monday morning I went directly to Jimmy's office. I told him about Elder Maxwell's talk and suggested that we revisit the idea. Within minutes we saw

*that with a very minor adjustment the solution did indeed work. It was breathtakingly beautiful to us and a huge boost to our research. The light-handed nature of the help we received is evident in the fact that we spent the next seven years trying to understand the ramifications of that minor adjustment and are only now succeeding.*²⁶

Each time I review how Tom combined tireless academic expertise with humble reliance on prayer and personal revelation, I am reminded that he truly understood how to incorporate gospel concepts and insights into not only his teaching but his research as well. Tom's example is certainly illustrative of similar experiences that many of you have had with incorporating gospel methodology into your scholarly work. The most compelling characteristic about Tom that is not illustrated in the story is the way he lives his life. As impressive as his scholarship is, it pales in comparison to his example of Christlike living. Thank you, Tom, for your example to us as faculty.

I hope we will find opportunities to discuss ways in which we might better incorporate gospel concepts and insights into our scholarship.

Citizenship

While we may not talk as often about citizenship as perhaps we should, it too can be improved by our effective use of "gospel methodology, concepts, and insights." The methods for these improvements are wide and varied, but I want to focus on one important gospel concept that might be unusual to address in a room full of academics, and that is meekness. Faculty roles are often rooted in self-promotion and bravado. (Consider the construction of and emphasis on a curriculum vitae.) But while colleagues at the institutions where we attended graduate school might accentuate brashness and pride, the gospel context shifts that emphasis to meekness and humility. In a seminal address on this campus a few years ago, Elder Bednar underscored our need for meekness:

First, Brigham Young University will only fulfill its divine mission as all employees on this campus learn of Christ, listen to His words, and walk in the meekness

of His Spirit. The Lord's invitation to walk in meekness is important for every person who interacts with or supports students in any way at BYU. Meekness is central to and essential for inspiring and experiential learning. And it is the unique combination of meekness and academic excellence that will set Brigham Young University apart from all other institutions of higher education.

Walking in meekness will help us to press forward through the messy middle.

Second, each of us should seek continually for heavenly help to avoid and overcome the selfish, negatively competitive, and adulation-seeking pride that is so common in our contemporary world. Personal pride is the greatest obstacle to walking in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit and twists accomplishment into arrogance, scholarship into intellectual priestcraft, and counsel and correction into causes for offense. The instruction from the Lord to Emma Smith in 1830 applies equally to all of us today: "Continue in the spirit of meekness, and beware of pride."²⁷

As we begin this school year, perhaps we can pause to consider ways in which we might be meeker in our work. Whether in teaching, scholarship, mentoring, or citizenship, there is room for more meekness. Implicit in Elder Bednar's description of the role meekness must play in the work of BYU faculty is the need for balance. Elder Bednar pointed to "the unique combination of meekness and academic excellence" that will distinguish BYU faculty members from faculty at other institutions. With a nod to my colleagues in math and statistics, I invite you to think (as you would surely be tempted to do anyway) about convex combinations. A convex combination of two points (x_1, x_2) is $\alpha x_1 + (1 - \alpha)x_2$. Has everybody got that?

Convex combinations are useful because they represent all the points lying on the line between the two endpoints x_1 and x_2 . The choice of α determines whether you are situated closer to x_1 or x_2 . For example, if α is closer to its largest value of 1, then you will be very close to x_1 . On the other hand, if α is closer to its smallest value of 0, then you will be very close to x_2 . Choosing an α of 0.5 means that you are exactly halfway between x_1

and x_2 . In other words, if we choose an α of 0.5, the result is the midpoint between the two points x_1 and x_2 .

How does this relate to our topic of meekness and academic excellence? Well, we might let x_1 = meekness and x_2 = academic excellence. We know that $\alpha = 0$ and $\alpha = 1$ are inadmissible—we cannot choose, respectively, to be academically excellent with no meekness ($\alpha = 0$), nor can we choose to be meek without any attention to academic excellence ($\alpha = 1$). We must preserve our uniqueness. We have to do the hard work of determining the optimal choice of α to preserve our uniqueness. Our challenge is to choose α such that we find a unique and optimal combination. This challenge is made more difficult by the constant pressure from the academy to choose α near zero—that is, to place our entire emphasis on academic excellence. To help guide in finding the optimum α , Elder Bednar posed several questions that I commend to all of you as you prepare for the new school year:

1. *Is the mission of BYU changing me or am I trying to change the mission of BYU?*
2. *How does walking in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit facilitate inspiring and experiential learning?*
3. *What steps should I take to walk more fully in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit?*
4. *What can I do to help students walk more fully in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit?*²⁸

And to Elder Bednar's questions, I add a couple more:

5. *How can we walk more fully in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit in our scholarly endeavors?*
6. *What might be preventing me from not only balancing meekness and academic excellence but also cultivating meekness in a way that **enhances** academic excellence through greater access to inspiration and deeper engagement with "gospel methodology, concepts, and insights"?*

As we embark on a new fall semester, I want to express my gratitude for the many ways you bless the lives of our students. I want to thank you for the monumental efforts to enlarge the influence

of this university through your individual efforts. I am invigorated to further develop our use of "gospel methodology, concepts, and insights" in our work together as faculty. The university's strategic plans will remain mere words on a page without the consecrated work of the faculty. I cannot think of any other group of individuals that I would rather have as my teammates in the bold and noble endeavor of fulfilling the prophetic mission of BYU in the second half of the second century.

I know this university has a prophetically declared mission to become uniquely great. I know that as we embrace and apply "gospel methodology, concepts, and insights" in our individual and collective work, we will be entitled to heaven's help, including personal revelation directing how this is to occur. As we view our work through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will receive His image in our countenances. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 12:5.
2. See Jonathan Haidt, electronic publication, "Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid," *Atlantic*, 11 April 2022; also Haidt, "After Babel: How Social Media Dissolved the Mortar of Society and Made America Stupid," *Atlantic* 329, no. 4 (May 2022): 54–66.
3. Haidt, "Why the Past"; also "After Babel," 64.
4. Haidt, "Why the Past"; also "After Babel," 66.
5. 2 Corinthians 5:17.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland also discussed the meaning of "gospel methodology" in a BYU leadership meeting (15 April 2022).
7. Kimball, "Second Century"; quoting, first, Brigham Young, "Remarks," *Deseret News Weekly*, 6 June 1860, 97; second, Brigham Young, in letter to his son Alfaes Young, 20 October 1875.
8. See Kevin J Worthen, "This Is a Student," BYU university conference address, 22 August 2022.
9. David O. McKay, "The Church University," *Messenger* 11, no. 10 (October 1937): 3; see also

Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo: BYU Press, 1975–76), 4:185.

10. Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).

11. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign*, November 2008.

12. David A. Bednar, “Look unto Me in Every Thought; Doubt Not, Fear Not,” BYU leadership meeting address, 16 April 2021.

13. Kevin J Worthen, “BYU: A Unique Kind of Education,” BYU university conference address, 28 August 2017.

14. See Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson).

15. Dallin H. Oaks in Dallin H. Oaks and Clark G. Gilbert, Discussion No. 3: Attacks on Core Institutions, in “Stand Fast with Love in Proclaiming Truth,” Ensign College devotional address, 17 May 2022; quoting “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (23 September 1995).

16. Mission of BYU.

17. Mission of BYU.

18. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses* (1842), line 43.

19. Holland, remarks, BYU leadership meeting, 15 April 2022.

20. Clark G. Gilbert, remarks, BYU leadership meeting, 15 April 2022.

21. Clark G. Gilbert, “Why Are There So Many ‘BYUs?’” BYU Education Week address, 15 August 2022.

22. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”; see also Nelson, “Choices for Eternity.”

23. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.

24. Dictionary.com, s.v. “methodology”; emphasis added.

25. Mission of BYU.

26. The video clip shown was from Thomas W. Sederberg, “Computer Graphics and Mentoring,” BYU forum address, 18 May 2010, video, 28:01–31:33, audio 30:44–34:15; quoting Joseph Smith, *HC* 3:381 (27 June 1839). See also Thomas W. Sederberg, “Faith and Joy,” BYU devotional address, 29 March 2005.

27. David A. Bednar, “‘Walk in the Meekness of My Spirit’ (D&C 19:23),” BYU university conference address, 28 August 2017; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 25:14.

28. Bednar, “Meekness.”