

Gifts of Light

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Years ago I worked as an undergraduate research assistant for a beloved BYU professor who had recently begun serving as academic vice president. One day, when I reported to his office for our regular research meeting, he regretfully told me that he needed to reschedule. Something urgent had arisen, requiring his immediate attention. As I retraced my steps down the northeast corridor of the third floor of the Administration Building, I thought about this good man—about the long hours he worked, the endless meetings he attended, and the administrivia that wrenched him away from the worlds he loved: the worlds of teaching and writing, language and literature, history and ideas. “I don’t really know what an academic vice president does,” I thought to myself, “but I *never* want that job.”

Friends and colleagues, I am delighted to greet you at the start of another school year. Something there is in the pre-autumn air that stirs the soul

and tingles the spine with a sense that school is about to begin. I am grateful to renew this annual adventure with all of you. We offer a special welcome to the 108 new faculty members who have joined us since January. Will you please stand so we can welcome you with warm applause? Thank you for choosing, among many attractive options, to join us here at BYU. Welcome to the greatest university on earth.

I have loved BYU for a very long time. When I was six, our family moved to Provo, and my parents started teaching in the BYU Statistics Department. Several years later, when the annual meetings of the American Statistical Association were held in Orlando, Florida, Mom decided to take my sisters and me along and make a vacation of it. On the Sunday morning after our arrival, a foursome of impecunious graduate students—all of them BYU alums—hitched a ride with us to the nearest Latter-day Saint chapel for Sabbath

Justin Collings, BYU academic vice president, delivered this address in the faculty session of university conference on August 28, 2023.

meetings. Somehow we all piled into the back seat of our rental car—in defiance of Florida seat belt laws and global norms about personal space.

Sensing something of our discomfort, the most sociable of the graduate students decided to break the ice. “Hi!” he said warmly, flashing a wide grin. “I’m Shane!”

Over the next few days—and across the ensuing decades—Shane Reese became something of a hero to me. Back then he took an interest in me, early-teenaged awkwardness and all, and helped me feel noticed and important. In those far-off days, he was moderately opinionated, which I found entertaining. And he was a charismatic statistician, which I found almost unfathomable.

In the years since I joined the BYU faculty, he has resumed his role as mentor, exemplar, and friend. To me he represents the very best that this university has to offer. I am thrilled by his appointment to lead BYU into the second half of our second century and humbled by his invitation to me to assist in that effort.

It is something unusual in our history—perhaps unprecedented—to begin a new academic year with both a new president and a new academic vice president. Such a transition in leadership naturally prompts questions about what it might mean for the university’s policies, programs, and overarching direction.

When Winston Churchill became prime minister of Great Britain in May 1940, amid the storm and fury of the Second World War, he anticipated and answered similar questions about his new government’s policy and aims:

*You ask, [he said,] what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be.*¹

Now, I am no Churchill, and neither (though he comes closer) is President Reese. But I believe that we can state our policy and aim with similar concision and singularity of purpose.

You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to advance the inspired mission and achieve the prophetic destiny of Brigham Young University. It is to do everything that lies within our power—and many things possible only with heaven’s help—to keep the BYU banner flying high, to keep our fire burning bright, to keep the magnificent dream alive. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer with President Reese’s marvelous two-word mantra: it is *becoming BYU*.

Becoming the “educational Everest” toward which prophets have beckoned.²

Becoming “the school in Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 97:3) about which professors have dreamed.

Becoming, “in the process of time, . . . the fully anointed university of the Lord about which so much has been spoken in the past.”³

That is our aim.

Some of what was spoken in the past was spoken by the Prophet Joseph Smith, the founding oracle of the Restoration and “the spiritual architect” of this school.⁴ With his “extravagant thirst after knowledge,”⁵ Joseph dreamed of founding a great university that would harness the thrilling theology of the Restoration to the pursuit of truth in every domain. In an 1841 prospectus, he and his counselors announced their bold intentions:

*The “University of the City of Nauvoo,” [they wrote,] will enable us to teach our children wisdom—to instruct them in **all** knowledge, and [all] learning, in the Arts, Sciences and Learned Professions. We hope to make this institution one of the great lights of the world, and by [it] and through it, to diffuse that kind of knowledge which will be of practical utility, and for the public good, and also for private and individual happiness.*⁶

Our aim is to help BYU become just such a school.

A school conceived in revelation and dedicated to the proposition that the glory of God is intelligence.

A school where every subject is taught by the Spirit of God and “bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel.”⁷

A school fired by the all-consuming vision that we can combine rigorous academic inquiry with

unwavering religious faith—that we can become a truly great university that remains unequivocally loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁸

A school that shines, as Joseph dreamed it would, as “one of the great lights of the world.”

Gifts of Light

With this aim in mind, I turn to our conference theme: “Search diligently in the light of Christ [and] lay hold upon every good thing” (Moroni 7:19).

Mormon’s valedictory injunction mirrors our institutional aims. With every instrument in the academic arsenal and illumined by the brilliant light of Christ, we strive at BYU to lay hold upon every good thing and to follow Him who is the Source of every good thing—the Fount of every blessing and the Giver of all good gifts.

Some of His gifts, including the Light of Christ, He freely bestows upon every soul who comes into the world (see Moroni 7:16; Doctrine and Covenants 84:46). Others are universally offered but must be individually claimed. I speak today of five such gifts—five gifts of light that the Lord lovingly offers to every member of the BYU faculty:

1. The gift of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ
2. The gift of the holy temple
3. The gift of living prophets
4. The gift of our BYU students
5. The gift of the Son of God

In connection with each gift, I will extend a concrete invitation. I don’t expect anyone to accept all five invitations, but I hope that you will listen for at least one invitation—from me or from the Spirit—that you feel prompted to embrace this year with full purpose of heart.

The Gift of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ

At BYU, the Savior’s restored gospel supplies the unifying framework for everything that we do. We view our academic disciplines through the lens of the restored gospel rather than view the restored gospel through the lens of our academic

disciplines. In his great book *The Idea of a University*, John Henry Newman rebuked those who

*scatter infidel principles under the garb and colour of Christianity; and this, simply because they have made their own science, whatever it is, Political Economy, or Geology, or Astronomy, to the neglect of Theology, the centre of all truth, and [they] view every part or the chief parts of knowledge as if developed from it, and to be tested and determined by its principles.*⁹

Newman warned that all academic disciplines lead to colossal error unless they are tempered by other disciplines and ordered by revealed truth.

As a university ineradicably grounded in the restored gospel, BYU can resist the trends that Newman decried. Because we are a *university*, we can integrate truth from all disciplines into one harmonious whole. (Remember that the Latin term *universitas* denotes universality, totality, and wholeness.) And because we are a *Restoration* university, we can order and unite all truth under the grand, unifying head of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

This inspired perspective enables us to “shine a ‘unique light’”¹⁰ into every one of our disciplines. In words as familiar as they are inspired, President Spencer W. Kimball described how this will take place:

*In [some] instances, [he said,] 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.*¹¹

Relatedly, President Kimball affirmed that “the key of knowledge . . . [is] ‘the fulness of [the] scriptures,’” adding evocatively that “the scriptures contain the master concepts for mankind.”¹²

Over the past year, many of you have responded thoughtfully and energetically to President Reese’s invitation to discuss within your departments what “gospel methodology”

might mean for your discipline and how it might inform your disciplinary work.¹³ I applaud these efforts and encourage their continuance. This year I invite us all to claim more completely President Kimball's promise that "the scriptures contain the master concepts for mankind."

My invitation in this respect is simple. For a designated time each morning, immerse yourself in the holy scriptures, especially the scriptures of the Restoration. In connection with your study, petition the Lord for guidance in your various stewardships, including your BYU stewardships. Jot down whatever "sudden strokes of ideas"¹⁴ come into your mind and heart. Consider what scriptural insights might illuminate your scholarly or creative work. Ponder what scriptural truths you might share with your students. I am convinced that if we persist in this practice over the course of the year, we will grow further into the principle of revelation, be guided in our faculty labors, and flourish in our work as never before.¹⁵

Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost[, Nephi declared,] wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, . . . feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. [2 Nephi 32:3]

I believe that Nephi's promise applies just as powerfully to our university work as to our other stewardships.

A recent pilot question in our survey of graduating seniors disclosed that only about a quarter of them—just 26 percent—report reading their scriptures every day. Although the number of students sampled was small, this is an alarming result. No wonder so many seem swayed by secular perspectives and tossed about by the ideological winds of our time.

Earlier this year, the Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, president of Yeshiva University, explained at a BYU campus forum how Yeshiva students devote hours each day to an intensive, disciplined, collaborative study of the Torah.¹⁶ I am not suggesting that we adopt that same pattern at BYU, but I do believe that we can learn from the example of our Jewish peers. Even more, I believe that we

will never fulfill our university mission unless our students are more consistently immersed in the word of God, especially the scriptures of the Restoration. I am convinced that few things, in this respect, will encourage our students more than the exuberant example of their BYU professors.

The Gift of the Holy Temple

Many crowning Restoration scriptures direct our attention to the holy temple. This is especially true of the Olive Leaf, section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which President Dallin H. Oaks once called "the basic constitution of Church education."¹⁷ This soaring revelation is precious to us at BYU. It binds us institutionally to the Prophet Joseph Smith, to the School of the Prophets, and, in a particular way, to the house of the Lord.¹⁸

In the Olive Leaf,

it is not always clear which verses are talking about the school and which about the temple. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. In the Lord's economy, temple and school cannot be neatly divided. At BYU, we nurture a temple-like school in the shadow of a school-like temple.¹⁹

Years ago, when I was an overwhelmed graduate student pursuing joint doctoral degrees in history and law, my wife, Lia, shared with me her strong impression that we needed to be in the temple more often—once a month, she suggested.

Initially I demurred. Our assigned temple was more than two hours away. With three little girls who required frequent pit stops and potty breaks, as well as the constant audio sustenance of our three-volume CD set of Disney princess greatest hits, those two hours sometimes felt like twelve. Our temple trips took the whole day, and I wasn't sure I could survive academically if we sacrificed a full Saturday every month to worship in the temple.

Thankfully, as with most good things in my life, I borrowed from Lia's faith, and we acted on her prompting.

Those monthly pilgrimages to the Boston temple soon became my saving grace. During a season when I felt bombarded by secular

propaganda and worldly ideologies, consistent time in the temple riveted my mind on enduring truths and rooted my heart in eternal covenants.

Those temple trips helped me to repent and fix my focus on the Savior of the world.

They stiffened my resolve to embrace the pure doctrine of Christ, undiluted by the philosophies of men.

They helped me to see the Savior’s special witnesses “as they really are” (Jacob 4:13)—chosen messengers of my Father in Heaven and commissioned apostles of the Living Christ.

Above all, they helped me to lift my gaze beyond the cloud, fog, and confusion of mortality and to glimpse above the gathering gloom the towering, resplendent, indomitable figure of the Son of God. The temple connected me by covenant to Him.

On the western façade of the Salt Lake Temple is a representation of the Big Dipper, crowned by its polar star. For many blessed years, the Savior and His temple have been a fixed and guiding star for me. I know that the same is true for many of you.

I believe that the Lord wants BYU to become a dedicated campus with a consecrated faculty. I believe that He will be pleased if we as a faculty spend more time with Him in His holy house.

“If you don’t yet love to attend the temple,” our prophet has implored, “go more often—not less. . . . I promise you that over time, the temple will become a place of safety, solace, and revelation.”²⁰ President Nelson has further pleaded:

*If you have reasonable access to a temple, I urge you to find a way to make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy. I promise you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples.*²¹

Today I make the prophet’s invitation my own. I invite us all to make a regular appointment to be with the Lord in His temple and to “keep that appointment with exactness and joy.” The Lord’s promise is that doing so will bring miracles—including, I believe, miracles in our teaching and

our scholarship, as well as miracles for our families and our students.

The Gift of Living Prophets

These promises from President Nelson highlight how blessed we are at BYU to be led by living prophets and fortified by a rich legacy of prophetic declarations about this university. BYU is a school of destiny and prophecy. We do not lack for prophetic direction about our future. Our greatest need is to hear and heed the prophetic direction that has been already and abundantly given.

Much of that direction has now been compiled in *Envisioning BYU*²²—a magisterial compendium of our founding documents and canonical texts—the second volume of which will be published this January. These volumes will bless generations of BYU faculty, staff, and students. They will supply the core texts for the new two-credit course called BYU Foundations for Student Success that President Reese mentioned this morning and that will be required for every incoming student beginning winter semester 2024.

This course will bless our students in myriad ways. It will connect them to a faculty mentor and to a tight-knit group of fellow students. It will instill in them a sense of covenant belonging. It will introduce them to the rich advisement resources available on campus. It will orient them toward the college experience and help them to succeed throughout their BYU studies and beyond. Additionally, it will transform the lives of the nearly three hundred full-time faculty members who will teach it. All these blessings, however, will be happy byproducts of a course whose primary purpose is to plant the inspired mission of this university deep within the soul of every single student. Our students will imbibe that mission from the words of latter-day prophets. And they will see it modeled in the lives of their professors.

Thankfully, the same inspiration that illuminates our founding documents continues to flow to this university through the Lord’s living oracles. How grateful we are for an inspired board of trustees comprising prophets, seers, and revelators, along with other inspired women and men.

Our mission statement declares that “to succeed in [its] mission [BYU] *must provide* an environment enlightened by living prophets.”²³

I invite all of us this year to foster such an environment. We might do so by studying *Envisioning BYU*—prayerfully, thoughtfully, and with an eye to helping fulfill its prophetic vision. We might also study recent messages delivered to the BYU community and to the Church at large by members of the First Presidency, members of the Quorum of the Twelve, and other members of the board of trustees. In each case, we can prayerfully seek to apply prophetic counsel to our personal BYU stewardships. You might try writing your own synthesis essay outlining what the mission of BYU means to you and how you hope to advance it in your work as a faculty member. Or you might create a commonplace book collecting your personal BYU touchstones, including thoughts you might apply in your research or share with your students.

The Gift of Our BYU Students

Speaking of our students, they are themselves a gift of light destined to shine for all the world. They represent the greatest trust that has been bestowed on this university—greater even than the Church’s enormous financial outlays for our impressive campus facilities and our generous faculty salaries. Our students will always remain our highest priority. As President Kevin J. Worthen unforgettably reminded us at university conference a year ago, they are the reason this university exists.²⁴

President Nelson has taught that each of our students is a child of God with infinite promise, a child of the covenant with unlimited possibilities, and a disciple of Jesus Christ with immeasurable capacity for good.²⁵ Unfortunately, our students do not always see themselves that way. Although we are all “united by our common primary identity as children of God,”²⁶ many of our students haven’t yet fully realized that identity. And the temptation to lead with other secondary identities is persistent and strong.

May I suggest that one of the best things we can do in this regard—one of the best ways we can

promote a sense of covenant belonging in Christ for every member of our community—is to help our students identify and cultivate the unique spiritual gifts with which the Lord has endowed them. I hope that this year we can “search diligently in the light of Christ” to discern what good things have been given to our students and that we can help them recognize and lay hold upon their own divine gifts.

One way to do this is by extending what Isaiah called “the garment of praise” (Isaiah 61:3). Sometimes a few words of encouragement can go a long way. A few years ago I taught an undergraduate course in which one of my best students was majoring in a field almost totally unrelated to constitutional law. On the back of her term paper, I wrote something like this: “You should know that you are very good at this. I realize that you have a lot of attractive options ahead of you, but if you have never considered law school, I hope you will.” I am happy to report that this student is about to begin her third year of law school here at BYU. This was a very modest gesture on my part. I know that many of you are doing much, much more to help give our students a glimpse of who they truly are and what they might ultimately become.

One particularly powerful way to help our students discover their gifts is to involve them in our research and creative work. As a university, we remain unswervingly committed to faculty scholarship and creative expression. Our mission statement declares without qualification that “scholarly research and creative endeavor *among both faculty and students* . . . are essential and will be encouraged.”²⁷ Many of you are making path-breaking scholarly and creative contributions, and I applaud your efforts to discover goodness, truth, and beauty in your disciplines, as well as to alleviate the suffering of and foster the flourishing of all our Father in Heaven’s children. The work you do brings blessings to the world and adds luster to our school. Many of you are multiplying those blessings by involving students in your work.

I wonder if any faculty anywhere on earth is as devoted to student mentoring as you are. Thank you for your tireless efforts to minister to students in small out-of-class settings. Such settings allow

students to observe you closely—to see who you are, how you live, what you treasure, and where you stand. That kind of scrutiny can be unnerving, but you are blessing your students more than you can imagine through such close-range observation of the goodness of your lives and the eloquence of your example.

In this connection, I thank all who have been involved in developing and deepening our inspiring learning initiative. When we speak of inspiring learning on this campus, we don't mean *inspiring* in a loose, colloquial sense that describes anything that might broaden one's horizons or lift one's spirits. No, we mean *inspiring* in a thick and theologically ambitious sense. We mean, as President Worthen put it, "learning that leads to . . . revelation."²⁸ To that end, please be intentional about incorporating explicit spiritual goals in the learning outcomes of your inspiring learning efforts, and please provide opportunities for students to reflect about the revelatory, spiritual impact of those experiences. Many inspiring learning opportunities allow students to honor the second great commandment. Please ensure that they are also opportunities for students to honor the first great commandment—and to understand how that first commandment encompasses, orders, and amplifies the second.²⁹

In this context, it is worth reiterating that *inspiring learning* and *experiential learning* are not synonyms. We hope to do more to ensure that experiential learning opportunities are also inspiring. But much of the inspiring learning on this campus will continue to unfold, as it always has, within the sacred precincts of the BYU classroom. Our commitment to superior, faith-filled classroom teaching remains total, even as we seek to provide more opportunities for more students to apply in service to others the lessons they first learn in class.

Where possible, we can also bless our students by inviting them into our homes. Lia and I both had unforgettable experiences when our most influential BYU professors did just this. Lia had a transformative, freshman-year experience in the classroom and, on one occasion, in the home of our colleague Cecilia Peek from the Department

of Comparative Arts and Letters. Lia was so enchanted with the subject—and so inspired by Dr. Peek's example of combining rigorous scholarship with dedicated discipleship—that she changed her major to classics. The impact of that encounter has been intergenerational: our missionary daughter, Julia, plans to major in classics when she returns to BYU from the Germany Frankfurt Mission, which happens to be the same mission in which Dr. Peek once served.

I invite you this year to get proximate to your students. If you find in them "anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Articles of Faith 1:13), I hope you will praise and encourage the good you discover. Find ways to engage with students outside of class and to involve them in your research or creative work. Invite them into your hearts and, if possible, into your homes. Let them see you leading with your primary identity, and let them warm their hands by the fire of your faith. In this respect I echo the prayer of President J. Reuben Clark: "May [God] give you entrance to the hearts of those you teach and then make you know that as you enter there, you stand in holy places."³⁰

The Gift of the Son of God

The kinds of experiences I have just described will help BYU to mean as much for our students as the Waters of Mormon meant for the people of Alma:

Yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer. [Mosiah 18:30]

The fervent prayer of my heart is that this sacred campus will become the beautiful place where all of our students, without exception, come to the knowledge of their Redeemer.

In a stirring devotional address last September, our colleague Kendra Hall-Kenyon, dean of the McKay School of Education, recounted this moving episode from her prior career as a primary school teacher:

When I was a student teacher in an inner-city school in Washington, DC, [Kendra recalled,] two children from the school were tragically killed as a result of gang violence. The principal of our school asked each teacher to lead a class discussion about how to stay safe and protect others from such violence.

As we started the discussion, one student enthusiastically said, “We have to save them.”

Not knowing exactly what she meant, I said, “Yes, that is what we are talking about. How do we protect ourselves and others and stay safe?”

She responded emphatically, “No, no, Ms. Hall. We have to save them by the Lord Jesus Christ.”³¹

And so it is with us and with our students.

Our mission statement affirms: “Any education is inadequate which does not emphasize that His is the only name given under heaven whereby mankind can be saved.”³² I submit that this is the grand truth that infuses each element of our mission and every one of our aims.

The “quest for perfection and eternal life”³³ leads to Him.

“The balanced development of the total person”³⁴ runs through Him.

“The full realization of human potential”³⁵ flows from Him.

Our “influence in a world we wish to improve”³⁶ depends upon “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8).

We seek to strengthen our students through His Spirit.

We seek to enlarge their intellects by His light.

We seek to build their characters after His example.

And we seek to cultivate consecrated, covenant-keeping disciples who will spend the rest of their lives learning for His glory and serving in His name.

I invite all of us in the coming year to bear witness of Him more frequently and more fervently. In her farewell message as Young Women general president, Bonnie H. Cordon, who also served on our board of trustees, implored us “never [to] give up an opportunity to testify of Jesus Christ.”³⁷ I invite us all to heed President Cordon’s charge, as well as that of President Kimball, who urged all

BYU faculty to “grasp the opportunity occasionally to bear formal testimony of the truth”³⁸— formal testimony, in this case, of “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Friends, I hope that you have felt prompted today with specific ideas for how you can lay hold this year on at least one of these glorious gifts of light: the gift of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, the gift of the holy temple, the gift of living prophets, the gift of our incomparable BYU students, and the gift of the Son of God. I believe that miracles will attend us as we lay hold upon these gifts and share them with our students.

Conclusion

I hope that you will forgive me for a personal conclusion.

I am not a dreamer—at least I have not been a dreamer for most of my life. I can probably count all of my meaningful dreams on the fingers of one hand. But one night, not long before my appointment as academic vice president, I had a dream about this school.

“BYU is and ever has been built of dreams and ideals,” John S. Tanner once said. “Our house of learning is also a house of dreams.”³⁹

Some of those dreams are justly famous, such as those of Karl G. Maeser and Alfred Kelly, who both saw “Temple Hill filled with buildings— great temples of learning”⁴⁰—and thronged by “thousands of young people,”⁴¹ striding beneath the morning sun, “their arms laden with books.”⁴²

My dream was more modest, but for me it was life changing. I dreamed that I sat in a room between a former president of this university and a man whom I understood to be his assistant. There was an assignment to be fulfilled, which the assistant carefully explained. Then the former president, seated to my right, turned his head toward me and peered into my soul with a pair of piercing eyes.

“Well, Justin,” he simply said, “will you help?”

Bolder in my dreams than in waking life, I responded by thrusting my arm around this good man’s shoulders and squeezing him tightly in a kind of sidewise hug until my alarm clock sounded and the beautiful dream vanished.

As I regained consciousness, I felt flooded with sweetness and light. The Spirit stirred my soul and seemed to whisper the interpretation of my dream. It was a dream about BYU. The saintly former leader was asking me something like this:

Justin, will you help? Will you help keep our BYU banner flying high and our fire burning bright? Will you sound the trumpet long and loud while you have life and breath? Will you in your generation, as we in our generation, help keep the Good Ship BYU shipshape and seaworthy, sailing strong and true toward our millennial port of destiny and promise? Will you help keep our colors nailed invincibly to the mast?

My answer to all such questions is an emphatic yes. My answer to all such questions is a solemn and sacred vow. Yes, I will help—all of us will. We will toil and hope and labor and sweat toward the same all-consuming vision toward which our forebears struggled and fought and yearned and dreamed—from Zina Young Williams and Alice Louise Reynolds to Truman G. Madsen and Arthur Henry King to countless others besides.

“Deep down in the heart of this great school,” said one of Karl G. Maeser’s inaugural students, “there are noble deeds untold.”⁴³

With gratitude for the unsung heroes and heroines of our past and in anticipation of the unborn heroines and heroes of our future, may we here highly resolve to do our part, each according to our station, in our time and season, to help this university become what prophets of God have said it must become.

Friends, colleagues, will you help?

Toward the end of this past winter semester, Dean Ed Adams of the College of Fine Arts and Communications graciously guided the Academic Vice President’s Council, then chaired by president-designate C. Shane Reese, on a tour of this magnificent new music building. We were left duly in awe by this stupendous structure—its delicate woodwork and elegant classrooms, its technical marvels and acoustic wonders.

At the end of our tour, Ed invited us to peek into the new choral hall. A class was in session;

one of our choirs was rehearsing. The music was breathtakingly beautiful. The light in our students’ eyes was blindingly bright. We heard in their voices something very like the fulfillment of prophecy.

As tears formed in my eyes and a lump swelled in my throat, I realized that they were singing the words of a poem I faintly remembered: “Jerusalem” by William Blake. The poem is best known for its implacable excoriation of England’s “dark Satanic Mills.”⁴⁴ But I was stirred on this occasion by its closing quatrain:

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England’s green & pleasant Land.*⁴⁵

Friends, we will not from our labors cease, nor shall we rest from waking dreams; we will not flag nor fail nor cede nor yield till we have built fair Zion’s school in Provo’s green and pleasant land.

Welcome to this new school year. Welcome to this new chapter in the grand and glorious cause.

I bear witness of the inspired mission and prophetic destiny of Brigham Young University. More importantly, I bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose disciples we are and whose school this is. In the unconquerable name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Winston Churchill, “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat,” first speech to the House of Commons as prime minister of Great Britain, 13 May 1940.

2. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975; also in *Foundations and Dreams*, ed. John S. Tanner, vol. 1, *Envisioning BYU* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2022), 45. See Spencer W. Kimball, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” address at the inauguration of Jeffrey R. Holland as BYU president, 14 November 1980.

3. Kimball, “Second Century”; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 55.

4. John S. Tanner, “‘One of the Great Lights of the World’: Seeking Learning by Study and

Faith at BYU,” BYU annual university conference faculty session address, 23 August 2005.

5. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons;) Including an Account of Their Doctrine and Discipline; with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church* (St. Louis: John Corrill, 1839), 23; quoted in Tanner, “One of the Great Lights.”

6. Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith, “A Proclamation, to the Saints Scattered Abroad,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 January 1841, 274; emphasis added; quoted in Tanner, “One of the Great Lights.”

7. Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 173.

8. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “A School in Zion,” BYU annual university conference address, 22 August 1988.

9. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 83.

10. C. Shane Reese, “On the Uniqueness of BYU,” BYU university conference faculty session address, 23 August 2021; emphasis in original; quoting Kimball, “Second Century”; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 46.

11. Kimball, “Second Century”; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 55.

12. Kimball, “Second Century”; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 57; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 42:15.

13. See C. Shane Reese, “Becoming New Creatures,” BYU university conference faculty session address, 22 August 2022.

14. *Teachings*, 151.

15. President Nelson extended a similar invitation and promise to all members of the Church in his first general conference message as president of the Church (see Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018).

16. See Ari Berman, “Covenant Versus Consumer Education,” BYU forum address, 31 January 2023; audio, 30:18–30:42.

17. Dallin H. Oaks, “A House of Faith,” BYU annual university conference address, 31 August 1977.

18. See introduction to “The Basic Constitution of Church Education,” in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 3–4.

19. Justin Collings, “A Certain Idea of BYU,” BYU devotional address, 1 February 2022.

20. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

21. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 2018.

22. See *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*.

23. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981); emphasis added; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 65.

24. See Kevin J Worthen, “This Is a Student,” BYU university conference address, 22 August 2022.

25. See Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022.

26. BYU Statement on Belonging (23 August 2021); see also Dale G. Renlund, “The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

27. Mission of BYU; emphasis added; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 66.

28. Kevin J Worthen, “Inspiring Learning,” BYU university conference address, 22 August 2016; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 89.

29. See D. Todd Christofferson, “The First Commandment First,” BYU devotional address, 22 March 2022. Elder Christofferson said:

Putting the first commandment first does not diminish or limit our ability to keep the second commandment. To the contrary, it amplifies and strengthens it. It means that we enhance our love by anchoring it in divine purpose and power. It means that we have the Holy Ghost to inspire us in ways to reach out that we would never have seen on our own. Our love of God elevates our ability to love others more fully and perfectly because we in essence partner with God in the care of His children.

30. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” address to Church

seminary and institute leaders, 8 August 1938; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 40.

31. Kendra M. Hall-Kenyon, "Finding Strength in the Lord," BYU devotional address, 27 September 2022.

32. Mission of BYU; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 65.

33. Mission of BYU; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 65.

34. Mission of BYU; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 65.

35. Mission of BYU; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 65.

36. Mission of BYU; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 66.

37. Bonnie H. Cordon, "Never Give Up an Opportunity to Testify of Christ," *Liahona*, May 2023.

38. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 173.

39. John S. Tanner, "A House of Dreams," BYU annual university conference faculty session address, 28 August 2007; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 237.

40. Karl G. Maeser, taken from Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young*

University: A School of Destiny (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 85; quoted in Tanner, "House of Dreams"; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 238.

41. B. F. Larsen, "Fifty Years Ago," speech given at a BYU alumni meeting, 25 May 1962, B. F. Larsen biographical file, BYU Archives, 4; quoted in Tanner, "House of Dreams"; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 248.

42. Excerpt from DVD *Passport to Destiny*, BYU history documentary, September 2005 update; taken from Larsen, "Fifty Years Ago," 4; quoted in Tanner, "House of Dreams"; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 248.

43. Joseph B. Keeler, in *Collection* (ca. 1840–1935), address given in honor of Susa Young Gates, undated spelling tablet manuscript, MSS 2016, box 1, folder 11, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU; quoted in John S. Tanner, "Learning in the Light," BYU annual university conference faculty session address, 26 August 2008; also in *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams*, 266.

44. William Blake, "Jerusalem ('And did those feet in ancient time')," in *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* (London: William Blake, 1804/1808), preface.

45. Blake, "Jerusalem."