

“Lord God of Hosts, Be with Us Yet”

D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON

President and Sister Oaks, Elder and Sister Rasband, Elder and Sister Gilbert, President Reese, Wendy, the Reese family, distinguished guests, faculty, staff, and students: I am pleased to address a few remarks to all present on this joyous occasion. I am particularly mindful of the past presidents of Brigham Young University who have joined us today, and I extend a warm and grateful welcome to each of them and to spouses who have been able to attend. It is especially gratifying to have the immediate past president of BYU, Kevin J. Worthen, and our dear Peggy with us. In addition, I want to make special mention of the presidents and representatives of other universities who are here, manifesting by their presence a collegial welcome to our new BYU president. You honor us with your participation today.

May I state again my congratulations to President Reese on his ascension to the office of university president and on the eloquent and compelling response he has just delivered. For me, he has more than justified his appointment. It was

my privilege, along with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Elder Clark G. Gilbert, to have a role in identifying candidates to replace Kevin Worthen as his term as university president drew to a close. There were some very impressive men and women who came to our attention—President Reese, of course, high among them. It was a satisfying experience to consider the qualifications and accomplishments of those candidates—most of whom did not know they were candidates. As we worked with the First Presidency in this process, I can attest that all of us felt guided to Shane Reese as the person for this moment and time. Getting to know Wendy confirmed the rightness of that feeling.

Even more important than their remarkable talents are their willing and consecrated hearts. With that, the Lord will magnify both President and Sister Reese as they measure to the substantial expectations of this assignment. As the apostle Paul taught, “Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”¹ In the coming months and years, all of

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us in the BYU community will see President Reese filled with the light, strength, and authority that will be required to lead this university into the second half of its second century.

Now, you are all aware of President Reese's extensive background in statistics. It is said that his depth of knowledge and love for—some would say fixation on—statistics has enabled him to spark excitement for the subject even in newcomers. He calls statistics *decision-making in the presence of uncertainty*. If that is so, Shane Reese is certainly the man for the job.

I say that because of the many uncertainties of our times. There is widespread disagreement in our society about the value of long-standing institutions such as religion, marriage, family, constitutional government, and even higher education. The role of these and other institutions in modern society and the values that have long sustained them are being questioned by those who seem willing to ignore not only their spiritual significance but the considerable empirical evidence for their essential role in human flourishing.

This raises one of the central challenges of our day—what President Dallin H. Oaks has described as the need to stand for truth with love.² There is, as you know, sustained and passionate debate about political questions—and somehow everything seems to have devolved into a polarizing political question. Where will it all lead? Can a healthy pluralism be renewed and sustained?

President Russell M. Nelson's clarion counsel on this subject could not be more instructive:

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be examples of how to interact with others—especially when we have differences of opinion. One of the easiest ways to identify a true follower of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people.³

At BYU we must stand for truth in ways that show the love and concern of a true disciple.

You who remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 will probably also recall the sense of unity that came to the fore in the United States in the immediate aftermath of those attacks. We witnessed renewed feelings of patriotism, fresh concern for the welfare of one another, and

appreciation for first responders and all who make personal sacrifices to help others. A new-found sense that, even more than career success, what truly matters in life are close personal relationships—especially family relationships—seemed to hail a new day. Many resolved to give higher priority to these time-honored mores. But you will also recall how quickly those resolutions and that sense of unity faded. Whatever unity we are left with today seems much less than existed even before 9/11. Can mutual respect amid disagreement be re-enthroned? Can it be sustained?

Going forward, it appears we will be living in a different, more fractious world than any of us have experienced personally heretofore. The leadership of Brigham Young University, the leadership of the Church, and all of us individually will need to navigate and make decisions in the presence of uncertainty. Leaders such as Shane Reese will be needed. I don't know how often statistics will be needed or will play a helpful role in such leadership and decision-making, but I know what will. President Reese expressed it in his response just now. It is, in the midst of uncertainty, to focus on what *is* certain—to maintain the eternal verities.

Speaking of our “double heritage”⁴ at this university, President Reese stated:

As we strive to become the BYU of prophecy, we must develop ourselves in things both secular and sacred. When secular and sacred truths reinforce one another, we must embrace both. But when secular claims conflict with revealed truth, we must mark the difference.⁵

President Reese noted that research initiatives that advance faculty disciplines make

university life vibrant and refreshing. . . .

But in light of our Christ-centered mission, we should also support research that advances the Church's purposes and blesses our Heavenly Father's children directly. This will include strategic investments in areas in which we have natural strengths as a church and as a university, furthering recent efforts regarding the family, religion's role in human flourishing, and constitutional government—each of which is rooted in Church doctrine and is strategically aligned with the Church's

global mission. . . . As we embrace our unique identity and strive to become the BYU of prophecy, we will invest in other areas in which we have similar doctrinal roots and natural strengths. We have recently seen a campus-wide upswell in research focused on poverty—its assessment, causes, and remedies.⁶

President Reese concluded:

As we embrace our unique institutional identity, we will foster at BYU a unique learning environment that will empower us to be peacemakers in an ever more divisive society. Understanding our primary identities as children of God, children of the covenant, and disciples of Jesus Christ will permit us to ask questions and seek answers in ways that view the world and our disciplines through the lens of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ rather than through our disciplinary lens, which offers a vision-limiting view of the gospel.⁷

The truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ—which indeed embrace all truth—are the underpinnings and the lodestar of this singular university. While less appreciated—and even opposed in some quarters—these truths and principles take root here and bear beautiful fruit in the lives of students and faculty alike. May we ever humbly recognize our shortcomings, seek to serve and strengthen one another, and, in the presence of uncertainty, consistently defer to the will of God.

I am reminded of Rudyard Kipling's poem titled "Recessional," composed in 1897 in connection with the celebrations marking the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the British throne. Part of it is included in our hymnal under the title "God of Our Fathers, Known of Old." I quote two verses:

*The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.*

*Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

*Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!⁸*

Dear God in heaven, I pray as this new president and new administration take the reins at Brigham Young University that they and we and all connected to this unique institution may renew our commitment to Thee and in all the years ahead never forget the singularity of our mission and the source of our strength. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Romans 8:30.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks and Kristen M. Oaks, "Stand for Truth," worldwide devotional for young adults, 21 May 2023.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona*, May 2023; emphasis in original.
4. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.
5. C. Shane Reese, "Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response," address given at his inauguration as BYU president, 19 September 2023.
6. Reese, "Becoming BYU."
7. Reese, "Becoming BYU"; see Russell M. Nelson, "Choices for Eternity," worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022. See also Nelson, "Children of the Covenant," *Ensign*, May 1995; Nelson, "Covenants," *Ensign*, November 2011.
8. Rudyard Kipling, "Recessional" (1897); see also "God of Our Fathers, Known of Old," *Hymns*, 2002, 80.