

# *Beauties of the Earth*

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As a young girl, one of my favorite Primary songs was “My Heavenly Father Loves Me” (*Children’s Songbook*, 228) because I could imagine all of the beautiful creations of God in that song—“hear[ing] the song of a bird,” “look[ing] at the blue . . . sky,” having eyes to “see The color of butterfly wings,” and feeling “the wind as it rushes by.” Throughout my life I have lived in and traveled to places that have allowed me to experience different beauties of the earth, including various landscapes and cultures. Beyond the physical beauties of the earth, God has given us other beauties to help strengthen us and bring us joy. Today I want to share four beauties of the earth with you.

## **The Beauty of Education**

Coming to teach at Brigham Young University was a new experience for me because I had never attended BYU as a student. Starting as a faculty member at BYU, I quickly realized there was a unique culture that existed at BYU. I remember the first time someone mentioned meeting at the SWKT. I thought to myself, “What is a SWKT?” I am happy to report that since that time, I have become familiar with the SKWT and many other campus buildings and with BYU lingo.

Not having attended a religious university before, the idea of combining spiritual learning into a secular classroom was foreign to me.

Through the help of faculty in my department, new faculty seminars, and practice, I have come to treasure the beauty of bringing spiritual insights into a classroom setting.

Through the past several years of being at BYU, I have been blessed to read and listen to incredible, inspiring stories that are the foundation of this institution. Many miracles occurred throughout the history of this university that have helped me catch the vision that embodies BYU. Let me recount one of these stories.

During the era of the Great Depression, BYU, like many areas of the United States, was impacted by this part of history. In a *BYU Magazine* article several years ago, the following was published about this time:

*The university wrestled with its own financial challenges—including a 22.5 percent pay cut for faculty and the recurrent threat of closure. Yet, partly because most Church junior colleges had closed by 1933, BYU enrollments increased 50 percent during the 1930s. By using federal grant money to fund hundreds of campus jobs, and by reaching out in other ways, faculty and administrators did what*

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they could to help students who struggled. [“Stories of the Century,” comp. Mary Lynn Bahr, *BYU Magazine*, Winter 1999–2000, 24]

The *BYU Magazine* article also quoted Wilford Lee’s memories of his early experiences when he registered at BYU in 1931:

*The school was struggling. . . . They were still accepting gallon jugs of blackstrap molasses from the Dixie [Southern Utah] students as part payment on the student’s tuition. . . .*

*I will always remember the Y as the poor man’s school; and since I was one of the poorest of the poor, I will always remember those days as a real struggle for existence.* [Wilford Lee to James R. Clark, 23 January 1974, BYU Centennial History Faculty Survey Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU; quoted in Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo: BYU Press, 1975–76), 2:258]

Now I am guessing none of you paid for your tuition this year with molasses, but my hope is that this story gives you a glimpse of the impressive history of this university and the sacrifices made by students, faculty, and administration to keep it thriving. While you are at BYU, I hope you will cherish the opportunities given to you that are unique to this university. I hope you catch the vision of BYU.

The most important educator we have in this life is the Holy Ghost. One of my favorite scriptures in the New Testament is when Christ taught His apostles that once He departed this earth life, He would provide them with “another Comforter” that “may abide with [them] for ever” (John 14:16). Because of this other comforter—the Holy Ghost—we can receive guidance to know the path we should take in life. If we are willing to do all we can to pursue our dreams and then put our trust in God to take us on the path that He knows will lead to our greatest growth, we will be where

God knows we need to be to become the person He intends us to become.

Before I came to teach at BYU, I—like many of you—had decisions before me as to which major to choose and, eventually, what to do with my life after graduation. I am thankful for prayer and for the inspiration that came through the Holy Ghost. When answers about which path to pursue did not come in the time I had hoped for, I learned to rely on faith and trust in God that whatever decision I moved forward with, He would guide me differently if that path was not the one I should take.

In my undergraduate years I initially started out in one major. However, in my second year, after receiving mostly C grades in a couple of courses for my major, I thought that I should be doing better in my major. I began seeking other avenues. In the university’s career center I searched through a book for potential career options. I stumbled across a description of a pediatric nutritionist. I became more excited as I read, and I felt that this might be my answer. I recalled taking a nutrition course in high school and thoroughly enjoying the class. After meeting with the academic counselor for nutrition science, I decided to switch majors. Given my current faculty position, you can probably guess that this major stuck. The course content was exciting to study, and I felt like I couldn’t wait to learn more in each class.

Looking back, I have been able to identify what made the difference, and this realization is the advice I share with students when they mention trying to decide on a major: find your passion and then work hard at it.

Most aspiring graduates will recognize this all-too-familiar question: “What are you going to do after you graduate?” Sometimes it can be scary to think of what is next, but if we have an open mind and heart, God can lead us to great things.

During my master’s program work, I had an opportunity to intern at a federal public health

agency, and I thoroughly enjoyed the work. I was excited about the impact this work could have on individuals across the nation.

During my doctoral program I had every intention of applying for employment at this agency, and I kept my contacts active within the division I had worked in as an intern. However, God had different plans for me. I knew that if I was offered a faculty position at BYU, this is where God wanted me to be. BYU extended me the job and, obviously, I accepted.

This is just one of many experiences I have had in my life when, if I have been willing to accept the Lord's will and listen, He has guided me to the path that is best for me. He does this for all of us. Christ taught, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (3 Nephi 14:7). All that is required of us is to ask, to listen, and to accept His timing.

### **The Beauty of God's Creations**

Over many years of studying nutrition, I have come to stand in awe of God's creations. He truly has given us the gift of a mortal body and the beauties of this earth to sustain and strengthen it. Food is one of those beauties. Not only does food give us life, but it also was created for our enjoyment and pleasure. This last year, as I was reading in the Doctrine and Covenants, a series of scriptures stuck out in my mind. I know I have read these verses before, but they took on a different meaning when I read them this time. They state:

*All things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; . . . For taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. [D&C 59:18–19]*

This concept is one that I aim to teach my students. Food is wonderful and truly something to rejoice in! The colors and textures and variety make food pleasing to the eye and can

truly gladden our hearts. The nutrients that food provides strengthen and enliven us.

In the Book of Mormon we learn that "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). God created us so that we could have joy on this earth. However, at times life brings challenges that may make it seem hard to find joy. A few years ago at a ward Relief Society activity, a panel of women in varying life stages and situations were asked to answer a series of questions. One of those questions was whether their life had turned out as they had planned. Regardless of age or situation, their experiences affirmed that life rarely turns out as we have planned or anticipated. I have come to better understand that despite what we might consider setbacks or disappointments, God wants us to find joy where we currently are in life and to recognize that He has a plan tailor-made for us.

Finding joy in our current circumstances is a message that President Dieter F. Uchtdorf recently taught. He said:

*Everyone's situation is different, and the details of each life are unique. Nevertheless, I have learned that there is something that would take away the bitterness that may come into our lives. There is one thing we can do to make life sweeter, more joyful, even glorious.*

*We can be grateful!*

*It might sound contrary to the wisdom of the world to suggest that one who is burdened with sorrow should give thanks to God. But those who set aside the bottle of bitterness and lift instead the goblet of gratitude can find a purifying drink of healing, peace, and understanding. . . .*

*. . . Our loving Heavenly Father knows that choosing to develop a spirit of gratitude will bring us true joy and great happiness.*

*But some might say, "What do I have to be grateful for when my world is falling apart?"*

*Perhaps focusing on what we are grateful for is the wrong approach. . . .*

*Could I suggest that we see gratitude as a disposition, a way of life that stands independent of our*

*current situation? In other words, I'm suggesting that instead of being thankful **for** things, we focus on being thankful **in** our circumstances—whatever they may be. ["Grateful in Any Circumstances," Ensign, May 2014; emphasis in original]*

Finding joy in our circumstances may seem difficult at times, but as President Uchtdorf taught, we can still find an attitude of gratitude at these times. Some may ask, "How is this possible?" President Uchtdorf further taught that "being grateful in times of distress does *not* mean that we are pleased with our circumstances" but "that through the eyes of faith we look beyond our present-day challenges" and recognize that even if "we do not always understand the trials" we are facing, we can still put our trust in God "that one day we will" ("Grateful in Any Circumstances"; emphasis in original).

Through personal experience I have learned that when we do not feel that attitude of gratitude that President Uchtdorf talked about, we can pray to God for His help in seeing beyond today or a particular moment. We can ask for God's help in opening our eyes and hearts to help us find an attitude of gratitude so that we can better endure the trials that are bound to come.

### **The Beauty of Scriptures and Modern-Day Prophets**

The first recollection I have of reading the scriptures on my own was when I was about seven or eight years of age. At the time, we lived in a house in which the living room had bookshelves that covered one wall. Although many books were out of my reach because of my height, I remember some, including the children's version of the scriptures, being placed within my reach. In that version of the scriptures I came to thoroughly enjoy the graphics and the stories of the prophets and of the Savior that were told. Since that time I have again and again come to treasure the words of the scriptures.

A few years ago I felt a strong desire to reread all the standard works; at that time I did not realize that God was preparing me for something yet to come. I began with the Doctrine and Covenants and learned new insights that I had not considered before. I can truly say that I came to better understand the idea of feasting on the words of Christ: every day I was thrilled to read more, and reading rekindled my testimony of the Savior and of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Shortly after starting to study the Doctrine and Covenants, I was called to teach a youth Sunday School class, and, to my surprise, which of the standard works were they studying that year? Yes, the Doctrine and Covenants. I knew that it was not by coincidence that I had felt the inclination to read the Doctrine and Covenants at that particular moment. If we allow Him to, God directs our lives and prepares us for what is yet to come.

After finishing the Doctrine and Covenants, I turned to the New Testament and then to the Old Testament—which I am currently reading. I remember thinking as I read certain passages in the Old Testament that the Savior I had come to learn about and love through the Book of Mormon and the New Testament was the same Being of the Old Testament. I made connections stronger than at any time before between the doctrine and principles in the standard works, and my testimony and knowledge of Jesus Christ expanded.

During this time I also pondered how difficult my life would be without the scriptures. I was reminded of a time long ago when people did not have access to the scriptures in their own language to read on their own. Elder M. Russell Ballard related the events of that time in history:

*The Dark Ages were dark because the light of the gospel was hidden from the people. They did not have the apostles or prophets, nor did they have access to the Bible. The clergy kept the scriptures*

*secret and unavailable to the people. We owe much to the many brave martyrs and reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Huss who demanded freedom to worship and common access to the holy books.*

Elder Ballard also said:

*Men like John Wycliffe, the courageous William Tyndale, and Johannes Gutenberg were prompted against much opposition to translate the Bible into language people could understand and to publish it in books people could read. I believe even the scholars of King James had spiritual promptings in their translation work. . . .*

*Because of the efforts of the reformers, "the Bible became a household possession. The word of God was read around the family fireside of the lowly as well as the parlors of the great." ["The Miracle of the Holy Bible," Ensign, May 2007; quoting John A. Widtsoe, CR, April 1939, 20]*

We are truly blessed to have access to ancient scriptures and also living prophets and apostles who teach us God's words every six months. We have a wealth of knowledge and resources literally at our fingertips. What could fill shelves and shelves of bookcases we now hold in the palm of our hand. On this subject Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught:

*Consider the magnitude of our blessing to have the Holy Bible and some 900 additional pages of scripture, including the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Then consider that, in addition, the words of prophets spoken as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost . . . , which the Lord calls scripture . . . , flow to us almost constantly by television, radio, Internet, satellite, CD, DVD, and in print. I suppose that never in history has a people been blessed with such a quantity of holy writ. And not only that, but every man, woman, and child may possess and study his or her own personal copy of these sacred texts,*

*most in his or her own language. ["The Blessing of Scripture," Ensign, May 2010]*

As Elder Christofferson reminded us, we have easier access to Church doctrine than ever before. However, with this abundance I think this counsel applies: "Unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3). We are so blessed to have readily available resources to access scriptures, general conference talks, and much more, but do we utilize them to their full potential? Do we truly cherish what they offer us? Alma counseled Helaman about the scriptures, speaking of the Liahona that Lehi and his family used to journey through the wilderness to the promised land. He said:

*For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.*

*And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.*

*O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever. [Alma 37:44–46]*

I know that if we sincerely look at the marvelous resources available to us through ancient and modern scriptures, we will find Christ. We will truly be able to live—a joyous life now on this earth and into the eternities. Christ brings us life, and His words bring us to Him. We look to the scriptures and the prophets just as Nephi and his family had to look for the words on the Liahona to guide them to the promised land. As we look to the scriptures and the



prophets, we will stay on the “strait and narrow path” (1 Nephi 8:20) that leads to God, and He will help us to become the son or daughter He intends for us to become.

We have been given the opportunity to find the truthfulness of the scriptures and the prophets for ourselves. We do not need to rely on others to learn of Christ and His teachings. We have been given a promise that if we “ask with a sincere heart [and] with real intent . . . , he will manifest the truth of it unto [us]” (Moroni 10:4). We can each know for ourselves. That is truly beautiful!

### The Beauty of Temples

The temple is the house of the Lord, “a place of love and beauty” (“I Love to See the Temple,” *Children’s Songbook*, 95). To me, the temple is also a symbol of power and peace. As most of you here know, not too long ago the beloved Provo Tabernacle was burned. The sadness of the community was real, but when President Thomas S. Monson announced rebuilding it to become a temple, those tears of sadness became great tears of joy and rejoicing (see “As We Meet Again,” *Ensign*, November 2011).

Recently I had the opportunity to visit the Provo City Center Temple during the open house. The beauty of this building is breathtaking, and although the Spirit of God is found there, I couldn’t help but be reminded that the true power comes after its dedication. The work we do in the temple for ourselves and for those who have passed from this life is where the true power lies and is the real intent of building temples.

This year we have the privilege of studying the teachings of President Howard W. Hunter in Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood. Although President Hunter was a prophet for only a short time, his impression on me in his love for the temple was great. I clearly remember his admonition for every person to “be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend”; this symbolized

a person’s commitment to the Lord, even if distance or life circumstances prevented him or her from attending as frequently as desired (“First Presidency Message: The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” *Ensign*, October 1994; also in Jay M. Todd, “President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church,” *Ensign*, July 1994).

I think of his foresight as the prophet in preparing a people for a time that would come later under President Gordon B. Hinckley. I recall the day when President Hinckley announced that he had received revelation on how to increase the building of temples and to lessen the distance in which people had to travel to get to the temple. President Hinckley explained that the Church would “construct small temples . . . , buildings with all of the facilities to administer all of the ordinances” (“Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service,” *Ensign*, November 1997). Since that time, numerous temples have been built—so many, in fact, that Elder Quentin L. Cook reported in the April 2014 general conference that “85 percent of the Church members now live within 200 miles . . . of a temple” (“Roots and Branches,” *Ensign*, May 2014). And as you know, we have been blessed here locally to have two temples within minutes of each other. However, I wonder too if our lives become so busy that we forget the great blessing that awaits us just minutes away. The Lord has a great work for us to do in the temple—we just need to be willing to give our time. As we do that, God will bless us abundantly.

President Monson shared his thoughts on the blessings that come through the temple. He said:

*As we enter through the doors of the temple, we leave behind us the distractions and confusion of the world. Inside this sacred sanctuary, we find beauty and order. There is rest for our souls and a respite from the cares of our lives.*

*As we attend the temple, there can come to us a dimension of spirituality and a feeling of peace which will transcend any other feeling which could come into the human heart. . . .*

*Such peace can permeate any heart—hearts that are troubled, hearts that are burdened down with grief, hearts that feel confusion, hearts that plead for help. [“Blessings of the Temple,” Ensign, May 2015]*

Every one of us will experience trials, challenges, and heartaches as a part of mortality, but our loving God has given us a place where we can go to leave the world behind and to feel of His love. The temple reminds us of who we once were before this life, what our purpose is on this earth, and what the possibilities for our future life can be. It helps us keep the right perspective in life—to not get caught up in the day-to-day difficulties but to remember that this earth life is but a part of God’s plan for us. We are reminded that God’s plan for us is much

grandeur. His ultimate goal is for us to become like Him.

### **Eyes to See and Ears to Hear**

Today I shared four beauties of the earth that have helped to shape my life: the beauty of education, the beauty of God’s creations, the beauty of scriptures and modern-day prophets, and the beauty of temples. However, as I thought of these beauties, many other beauties of the earth that have blessed my life came to mind. I realized that God’s beauties of the earth are all around us and that He wants us to find them and feel gratitude for them.

All we have to do is open our eyes to see them or our ears to hear them (see Matthew 13:16). We can ask God to help us find and cherish the beauties found in each of our lives. As we do so, we will find joy, meaning, and purpose in our lives and become ever closer to and more like our loving Heavenly Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.