

# *Drawn to the Light*

JENNIFER ROCKWOOD

**W**hat an amazing opportunity it is to stand before you today. Never in a million years would I have ever thought that I would be right here, right now. I must admit that the first thing I thought when asked if I would be willing to speak was, “Really? Are you sure? I’m just a soccer coach!” And then I thought, “Oh, no—those new Marriott Center screens are way too big!”

It goes to show you that we never know what God has in store for us in the present or in the future. Life is a journey, and we must always embrace it—even when we are asked to do something that we thought was absolutely unimaginable. My journey truly has been different than what I would have ever foreseen when I once sat in your seat over thirty years ago. But what a blessed life and what a ride it has been.

I pray that I will be able to share a few thoughts and stories today that might inspire you to realize your significance and importance here on earth. I know that I will not necessarily tell you anything you haven’t heard before, but I hope that I might remind you of what you have always known and of what can so easily be forgotten in our demanding lives.

## **Follow the Light**

Does your life seem too busy at times? I know mine does. We live in a world in which our lives are busier, noisier, and more stressful than ever—a time when nothing stops or even slows down. We have more responsibilities, more pressures, more expectations, and more places to be, and we spend far too much time on our smartphones. It just seems impossible sometimes to keep up with the pace.

In order to slow down the madness of life, I love to retreat into nature. We are so blessed to live at the base of majestic mountains. We can look to the west and appreciate the view of the lake, travel east and be enveloped in the canyons, or drive south and take in the magnificence and serenity of the red rock.

I am always drawn to the light in the beauty of God’s creations, in which I can find calmness, comfort, peace, and a deeper connection to my Heavenly Father and my Savior. Just as the sun, the moon, and the stars light the landscape of this beautiful world, the light from above provides us

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*Jennifer Rockwood was the head coach of the BYU women’s soccer team when she delivered this devotional address on 15 March 2016.*

with direction and purpose. When I think about light and the many different meanings it has, I reflect on an experience I had last June.

For several years I have had the opportunity to participate in a team race that takes runners through some of the most beautiful scenery in the state. The event starts in Logan and winds through the Wasatch Back to finish in Park City. It is called the Ragnar Relay Series, and each team consists of two vans, with six people packed into each van. Each team spends more than thirty hours together with no sleep, not much food, and few rest spots. Each team member runs three different routes, and the whole team runs a total of more than 180 miles. What an adventure!

Last year I wasn't quite as prepared as usual after badly spraining my foot a few months before. Just so you know, I was the oldest on the team and by far the slowest runner. Everyone else on my team was really fast. After my first run of nearly six miles, I was okay, but it had been really hard and I had gone pretty slow.

Soon after, our van was starting to get ready for our second leg of runs when my friend Greg mentioned that maybe I should run a shorter leg that was half the length of what I was supposed to run. At first I thought, "Oh, that's thoughtful of him—he's concerned about my foot." But I soon realized that he just didn't want me to slow down the team.

So I took the shorter run. However, it put me on an unfamiliar course. It was one of the few runs that took place on a trail in the middle of nowhere at 2:00 a.m. There was no lighted path, and there were no signs or obvious markers. I wore a headlamp and a blinking red reflector. My headlamp was the only source of light through the two and a half miles of switchback trails. As you can imagine, it was a bit disconcerting, and it was very challenging to stay on the path. I had to stop a few times to shine my headlamp around for fear that I was off of the course. During the entire run I was scanning for any sign of

a light, a marker, or even a blinking reflector from someone. Occasionally I would see in the distance a small red light with an arrow and run in that direction. Once I had passed the arrow, I would scan again, trying to find another red light.

Finally, toward the end of my run, I saw a few runners ahead and followed their lights to the finish. Soon after, a couple of runners came in behind me and thanked me for leading them to the end. Evidently they had been following my light all the way in.

In this experience and in life, the lighted path is not always easy to follow, but it is the only way to reach our desired destination. During the run it was important to stay strong, positive, and confident, even though there were continual doubts. I had to intently search for the light of others to help me find the way and point me in the right direction. And although I wasn't even aware of it at the time, I was actually a light for others.

We have been sent to this earth as part of a remarkable plan to prove ourselves—to learn, to grow, and to develop into our best selves. We are here to build the kingdom of God and to help our family and friends reach their highest potential. We know and have been taught that the light leads us through this journey. We have all been blessed with the Light of Christ—to know right from wrong and good from evil and to have a knowledge of our Heavenly Father's and our Savior's love.

President Harold B. Lee stated:

*Every soul who walks the earth, wherever he lives, in whatever nation he may have been born, no matter whether he be in riches or in poverty, had at birth an endowment of that first light which is called the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, or the Spirit of God—that universal light of intelligence with which every soul is blessed. [Stand Ye in Holy Places: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 115]*

As surely as there is light, there is darkness. As surely as there is God, there is Satan. If we don't continuously search for the light and stay on the path, we can just as easily be led into darkness and off the course. We all know that we live in a world in which there is increasing darkness, in which lines are blurred and the separation between the light and the dark is getting larger. Our society is trending away from the spiritual and becoming more secular than ever. It is even becoming apparent that those who choose to follow the light are often mocked, ridiculed, and looked down upon.

We must always stay on the lighted path and search for those things that we know to be true. As it says in the thirteenth article of faith, "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things" (Articles of Faith 1:13).

President Wilford Woodruff once said:

*We have . . . no time to be drawn away from the things of the kingdom of God. . . . While enjoying the spirit of the Lord, we want the light all the time. Without the light no man can see. . . . While I walk in the light of God my mind is open. I can comprehend it and understand the signs of the time and the working of the Spirit of God, and when a thing is presented to me by [the] servants of God, I can receive a testimony of the truth of that; but when I lose the light I don't comprehend those things. I am liable to find fault with this, that, and the other. We want to walk in the light. We want the Spirit of [the] Lord to be with us in order for us to live our religion, fulfill our mission as [sisters and] elders in Israel, and do the will of God—to fulfill this great, high calling in the building up of this kingdom. We can't do it **unless** we walk in the light of the Lord. ["Sermon to the Saints in Farmington," 9 January 1864, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, 1 March 2013, [history.lds.org/article/lost-sermons-wilford-woodruff-january-1864?lang=eng](http://history.lds.org/article/lost-sermons-wilford-woodruff-january-1864?lang=eng); emphasis in original]*

### Seek After the Light

Clinging to the light is a choice, and often that choice is challenging. We have heard the saying "I never said it would be easy, but it will be worth it." We all face challenges, and Satan loves to prey on us, especially during the difficult times. He wants us to feel as if there are different paths. He wants us to give up, and he places opportunities for missteps along our way.

I believe that one of his greatest tools is to provide situations in which we doubt ourselves, our unique spirit, and our mission here on earth. We then let those negative voices speak loudly in our heads—with phrases such as "I'm not good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, or skinny enough. I'm not worthy enough or strong enough. Life is too hard!"

Yes, life is hard and we are all challenged, and at certain times we are challenged more than at other times. We get scared of failure, we fear the unknown, and we are burdened with losses, sickness, and pain. All of these emotions leave us vulnerable, questioning, and sometimes searching for easy fixes. This often leads us to complain, blame, talk badly of others, and make excuses, and the light gets smaller and smaller and smaller.

We are in a battle between the light and the darkness each and every day. We have more and more forces working against us, and Satan will always give us his best shot. Sometimes the more progress we make toward the light, the more temptations may come. As members of the Church trying to build the kingdom, we can be assured that we are prime targets.

However, no matter what is thrown at us or whatever temptations and obstacles and kinds of darkness come our way, we always have a choice. Which voices do we let in? Which voices can drown out the darkness and fill our minds and souls with the light?

We must intentionally use our voices that say, "I am strong. I can do this. I am a fighter, and I choose to walk in the light."

One of my favorite songs is titled “I Will” and is written and performed by Hilary Weeks. To me it emphasizes the importance of making a personal commitment to stay strong in our faith. I wish she were here to sing it, but the lyrics include the following:

*I've made my choice  
You can mark this day  
The day I pledge  
To take His name*

*I will be strong  
I will be brave  
Standing for Him  
As I take my place*

...

*I will stand  
I will not fall  
In a world that's weak  
I will be strong  
I'll be true,  
I will choose His way  
I know what's right  
And I will not change  
In a world where so many will not  
I will*

["I Will," *Every Step* (Shadow Mountain Records: 2011)]

There are so many times throughout our lives when we have experiences that shake our commitments and cause us to doubt our abilities. As a coach, I am in a position in which difficult decisions have to be made that can significantly impact young people's lives. Whether these are choices about who to recruit or about playing time, these decisions often cause issues with players, parents, and families—who, needless to say, are not too happy with me.

Many years ago I was in the middle of some very challenging situations that not only

caused me much doubt in my abilities but also made me question my own path. Fortunately I was blessed by the tender mercy of a friend who must have been inspired to send me a poem that appealed to Mother Teresa. The poem reminded me that we always have the ability to make positive choices and see the light, even in the midst of darkness. This poem has had a profound impact on my life, and I refer to it often. I love to share it at every possible opportunity.

*People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.  
Love them anyway.*

*If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish  
ulterior motives.  
Do good anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win false friends and  
true enemies.  
Succeed anyway.*

*The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway.*

*Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas  
can be shot down by the smallest men and  
women with the smallest minds.  
Think big anyway.*

*People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.  
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.*

*What you spend years building may be destroyed  
overnight.  
Build anyway.*

*People really need help but may attack you if you do  
help them.  
Help people anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.*

*Give the world the best you have anyway.*

[Kent M. Keith, "The Paradoxical Commandments" (1968), [kentmkeith.com/commandments.html](http://kentmkeith.com/commandments.html); see also Kent M. Keith, "The Mother Teresa Connection," [kentmkeith.com/mother\\_teresa.html](http://kentmkeith.com/mother_teresa.html); Kent M. Keith, *The Silent Revolution in the Seventies: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council* (Washington, DC: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1972), 8]

God has sent each of us here with a purpose, a plan, and a specific life to live. He also sent us here with all the tools we need to find success, happiness, and peace. But we must choose to surround ourselves with light. We must search the scriptures and the words of our prophets and leaders and seek after the truth. We must be disciplined and dedicated, and we must look for opportunities to learn and grow. And we must be willing to do all the little things in order to reap the bigger rewards.

When I was younger, one of my first coaching jobs was for a high school boys' soccer team. What an amazing and growing experience that was! Can you imagine a young girl, twenty-five years ago, who had just graduated from college, coaching a high school boys' soccer team? I loved it. I loved those guys, and we had a great time.

Back then we had to do everything on our own. Some of our competitions were hours away. I used to drive the team around in a fifteen-passenger van—just me and fourteen high school boys.

A few weeks ago I heard from a former player from those days who wrote me an email telling me of an experience he remembered and a lesson he learned that has helped him over the years. He referenced a situation when I let the guys do what they wanted at practice for a few minutes, and they chose to stand around the front of the goal taking shots.

He remembers me saying, "What makes you think you will ever get those shots off in a game if you can't even pass, trap, or control the ball?"

Although I don't remember saying those specific words, he does, and he not only applied them to soccer but to life. He understands and he reminded me that "we can't expect to have chances to succeed at the 'game-changing' visible things unless we are working to master the 'little things,' and the 'big things' are ultimately dependent on how hard we are willing to work."

To me, this is a great example of someone who was able to apply a simple concept to his life and who continues to share that lesson with those he teaches. He searched for deeper meaning in his experiences, and he learned from some of life's simple truths. This is one way we can search for the light.

Another way to search for the light is to surround ourselves with individuals who inspire us and lift us to great places. We must choose our friends and those we associate with very carefully. We must ask ourselves: "Are these individuals helping us to move toward the light, or are they allowing us to let some darkness slip in? Are they motivating and inspiring us, or are they bringing us down? Do they help us see what is great about the world, or do they cast a shadow of negativity?" We mostly have a choice of who we spend our time with.

A big part of my job and our staff's job is to recruit players to BYU. It is truly one of the hardest and most time-consuming aspects of our job, but it is also one of the most rewarding because we have the opportunity to recruit some of the finest young women who are playing at the highest level in their sport. We know that the players we bring in will not only be spending a large amount of time with us but will also be a significant part of the lives of their teammates for the course of their college career. They will spend countless hours together at practices, in the weight room, and on the road throughout almost every weekend

during the season and the summer. Each new season of recruits will be a major influence in our lives, so we must choose wisely.

When you seek after the light by surrounding yourself with positive and great individuals, you provide yourself with more opportunities to learn and grow. I have been blessed to work with so many inspiring student athletes. They continue to teach me so much, but one player truly stands out.

Many years ago we recruited a young lady who had a special talent and gift for the game. She was raised a long way from Provo, Utah, and had never really been around many Latter-day Saint players. She was also someone who was so good that she had never really been held accountable to some of our athletic standards, such as fitness tests, work rate, and being on time—or even things such as what to wear to soccer clinics and service projects. She was her own person, had her own ideas, and marched to her own drum—which was fine, but at the same time, it was holding her back from reaching her highest potential.

We did not see eye to eye on many things early on. It actually came to a point at which I had to make the decision to ask her to leave the team. She was good enough to play at other universities, and I told her I would help her find a place. However, I also mentioned that if this was where she really wanted to be and if she was willing to embrace her opportunity here and make some changes, then she would have the opportunity to join us again the following semester. After a short time she told me that she really wanted to come back and learn from all those around her.

It was not an easy journey for her, and there were many times when she knew it would be easier somewhere else. But through the struggles, the fight, the dedication, and the choices, she was able to develop, mature, and grow. She made the decision to stay and surround herself with great friends, teammates, professors, ward members, and the environment at BYU, and it

ultimately led to an opportunity to change her life and her future.

One of the most rewarding and proud moments of my coaching career was to give Jenavieve Phillips a big hug on the field after her last game as a Cougar and congratulate her on an amazing journey. During her senior year she helped lead our team to a number fourteen ranking before we were knocked out of the tournament by the University of Portland, the defending national champion at that time.

What a blessing and unbelievable inspiration Jenavieve was to me, my staff, her teammates, and all those who knew her. She went on to graduate from BYU, serve a mission, and bless the lives of all those she came in contact with. She lived her life to the fullest, fulfilled her mission on this earth, and was taken home to her Heavenly Father after a car accident in 2012.

Not only can we choose to surround ourselves with good people, but we are also blessed to have a God who intentionally places certain individuals in our path to provide opportunities and open doors to the future. He wants so badly to help us reach our potential, and He will, if only we will let Him.

I would like each of you to think about some of the individuals who have helped you get to where you are today. Some have had big roles, some small, and some have made all the difference. It is important to remember that at no time do we accomplish things on our own.

I remember Ken Marshall, a high school soccer coach who taught me to push myself, work harder, and achieve more than I thought was possible. He challenged me in every way to get better and always expected success. He hired me as a sixteen-year-old to help work his youth soccer camps throughout the summer, and that opportunity gave me the knowledge and experience I needed to direct the camps here at BYU with the more than 2,500 kids who attend each year.

I remember a brilliant lady, Nancy Heuston, head of the Waterford School, who hired me to

begin teaching at a middle school and coaching at a high school during my senior year at BYU. I was a finance major, and I had no teaching credentials, no education classes, and no real experience. However, she believed in me, and she believed that I had a future in education and coaching. This opportunity eventually opened doors for me to set a new career path.

I remember the legendary coaches and administrators of the BYU women's athletic department. These were great women—including Lu Wallace, Elaine Michealis, and Ann Valentine—who in 1995 took a chance on a young coach who had no real NCAA coaching, recruiting, or managerial experience but who had a dream and a vision of what BYU soccer could someday be. So many amazing people have crossed my path over the years, as I am sure many have crossed yours.

### **Be the Light**

With so much that has been provided for us by a loving Heavenly Father, much is expected. What a blessing for all of us to be at this great institution. As part of my job, I have the opportunity almost every week to tell young people, their coaches, and their parents what an amazing place this is: a university where students can reach their highest potential athletically, academically, socially, and spiritually and where everyone understands that they are not perfect but where they are committed to being their best.

I am sure that we all have worked extremely hard and sacrificed much to be a part of this BYU community. I am sure that we all are qualified and have had numerous opportunities to be elsewhere, but we have chosen to be here at Brigham Young University and to stand for something more than ourselves.

Several years ago President Gordon B. Hinckley said at a BYU devotional:

*You came because you wanted the BYU experience, although perhaps you could not define it. Having*

*gained it, never lose it. Cultivate it in your lives and hold its very essence until you grow old and gray. Even then you can sit on the wall on a warm summer day and think of the things you are still learning in light of the great experience you had. ["The BYU Experience," BYU devotional address, 4 November 1997]*

Are we making the most of our opportunities here at BYU? Are we doing everything we can to build the kingdom of God? Are we being a light to others?

Years ago President James E. Faust gave a talk titled "The Light in Their Eyes." He recalled a historic meeting in Jerusalem about the new lease for the land on which the BYU Jerusalem Center would be built. President Ezra Taft Benson and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland agreed with the Israeli government that the university would not proselyte in Israel. After the lease was signed, someone remarked, "Oh, we know that you are not going to proselyte, but what are you going to do about the light that is in their eyes?" He was referring to the BYU students who would be studying in Israel. ("The Light in Their Eyes," *Ensign*, November 2005.)

Do you have that light in your eyes? Would someone who doesn't know you know that you have the light within you?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. . . .*

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 5:14, 16]*

President Thomas S. Monson has said:

*Our opportunities to shine are limitless. They surround us each day, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. As we follow the example of the Savior, ours will be the opportunity to be a light, as it were, in the lives of those around us—whether they be our own family members, our coworkers,*

*mere acquaintances, or total strangers.* [“Be a Light to the World,” BYU devotional address, 1 November 2011]

On our team, we often talk about the importance of representing ourselves at the highest level—about how wearing the name Brigham Young University on our jerseys means much more than just being another college team. We are aware that people are watching us, and you never know which lives can be touched, which doors can be opened, and what inspiration can be provided. Although we are not perfect, we try to represent BYU the best we can. We want to play at the highest level, win championships, and be nationally relevant so that people will know who we are and what we represent. As President Monson stated, we want to be a light even to “total strangers.”

A few months ago I received a package from one of the state prisons in Utah. I thought it was unusual, but I opened the package. Inside was a beautiful hand-knitted blanket with the full BYU Cougar logo in the middle. There was a handwritten note on top, and part of it read:

*I am an inmate of the Utah State Prison. I am fifty-four years old, and in all my life I never was interested in watching any sports on TV. That was until 2009, when I was running channels and came across a BYU women’s soccer game just as someone did a flip throw. I stopped to watch to see what was going on, and I was hooked. To this day, the only sport I really watch is BYU women’s soccer.*

*There is something about the way they play. It is very hard to describe. They play with heart, for the love of the game, and just for fun and enjoyment. It is something that you cannot put into words.*

*I will never get to see a game in person. So please accept this blanket as a token of my appreciation. It is for the entire team.*

This was such a kind gift and note that touched our team and reminded us that we are capable of reaching individuals who we would

never have thought of. Our reach goes so far, whether in sports, music, dance, research, science, or education. In whatever we are involved with here at BYU, we can make a difference.

Each year our players work as camp coaches for young players who love the sport and often have dreams of someday attending and playing soccer at BYU. Most of our players attended camps when they were younger, so they know how exciting it is for young campers to come and hang out with them for a week. In fact, I first met several of the current players on our team at camp when they were only ten or eleven years old.

One summer several years ago we had a young girl attend who was shy but also uncooperative, and she didn’t want to participate in the drills or games with her group. A couple of my players who were coaching her weren’t sure what to do with her. I mentioned that maybe they should just spend a little more time with her, get to know her, and sit with her at lunch or dinner. I told them that maybe she just needed a little extra love and attention.

The girls did a great job, and toward the end of the week she was much more engaged in the training and seemed to be having a lot of fun with her team.

A week or so after the camp, I received a thank-you note from her mom, explaining that this young girl had not wanted to come to camp. Her mom basically had made her attend. Obviously, this is one reason why she had gotten off to a rough start. Her mom went on to explain that her daughter loved soccer but was from an area where there weren’t any members who played, and she was slowly losing interest in attending her Young Women group, seminary, and even church on Sunday. It was becoming a battle for her parents to keep her moving in the right direction.

Her parents thought maybe it would be good for her to be around some members of the Church who also loved soccer. Her mom was quick to point out that her daughter’s



experience at camp that week had been life changing. Her daughter had found new motivation, inspiration, and direction. She wanted to be like the campers and players on the team and go to BYU someday.

She continued to attend camp for several summers after that. Although she was never quite at a level to play college soccer, she was inspired at a young age to make good choices during her high school experience, and she ended up attending BYU.

You never know what light you might spark in others just through your kindness and your example. It is so important that we find ways in which we can inspire others. It is our responsibility. We are to use our gifts and our individual talents to share the light and bring the light to others. It is what we have been taught and counseled to do.

Our prophet recently challenged all of us to be an example and a light to the world. President Monson stated:

*We become examples of the believers by living the gospel of Jesus Christ in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. . . .*

*. . . As we follow the example of the Savior and live as He lived and as He taught, that light will burn within us and will light the way for others. [“Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign*, November 2015]*

### **Remember Who You Are and What You Came to Do**

Are you lighting the way for others? Are you an example of the Savior in your words, thoughts, and actions? These are questions we must ask ourselves on a daily basis. In order for us to hold up our light, we must believe and remember who we are, where we came from, and what we were sent here to do.

I have the opportunity several times throughout the year—whether at practice, before a game, or at halftime—to try to motivate, inspire, and remind the girls of what they are capable of and how amazing they are.

I have often thought about what simple and direct words of encouragement might come from our Heavenly Father to remind us how capable and amazing we are. Something most of you know and something I have come to learn over the years is that your mother and father are always your biggest fans. I know that our Heavenly Father and our Savior are our biggest fans. They want nothing more than for us to find happiness and peace and to return home to Them someday.

Here are some words of wisdom that I believe They want us to know, to repeat to ourselves, and to always remember:

- You are a beautiful child of God, made in His perfect image.
- You are loved, appreciated, and valued more than you will ever know.
- You are unique and capable of more success than you can ever imagine.
- Dream big dreams and find your passion—it is never too late.
- Never let fear hold you back. Do the hard things.
- Always give everything your best effort.
- Be kind to yourself so that you can be kind to others.
- Love yourself so that you can love others.
- Follow the light, seek after the light, and be the light.

Brothers and sisters, I know that life is challenging, but we can and must stay on the lighted path that is always provided for us. We must always seek for the light, and we must light the way for others—today more than ever.

I leave you with my testimony that I know we have a loving Heavenly Father who knows us by our names, by our thoughts, and by our hearts. He loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who made it possible for us to live together again as one eternal family. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.