

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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Conference Time

Four days after we arrived in Connecticut to start law school, our four-month-old daughter, Elisabeth, was diagnosed with hydrocephalus. Her cerebral-spinal fluid wasn't properly passing from one brain ventricle to the next.

There followed a season of trials—of sleepless nights, tear-filled days, and gnawing anxiety as our baby girl underwent one brain surgery after another. But it was also a season of miracles—of divine reassurances, priesthood blessings, and heroic ministering from the members of our ward.

Another miracle took the form of October general conference. After six weeks of running a remorseless, relentless gauntlet, we desperately needed the spiritual boost that general conference always brings.

I don't remember many sermons from that weekend, but I do remember the last of them. The final speaker before the prophet's valediction was Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who spoke about general conference itself. "It is no trivial matter," he said, "for this Church to declare to the world prophecy, seership, and revelation, but we do declare it. It is true light shining in a dark world, and it shines from these proceedings."¹

It certainly shone for us through the darkness of that harrowing first semester. And it has kept on shining—each April and October—ever since. We have been blessed beyond measure from one conference to the next as that indomitable baby girl has grown into a young woman of impressive talent and unwavering faith—a polyglot, a polymath, and a harpist of consummate grace.

Like many of you, I harbor sweet and stirring memories of general conferences gone by. At some point in my adolescence, conference ceased

to be a biannual hardship that tested my endurance and became instead a spiritual feast that fortified my soul—an unfailing anchor in the storms and sea rhythms of my life.

Somewhere deep within me the voices of beloved past leaders continue to ring—from the soaring cadences of President Hinckley to the epigrammatic eloquence of Elder Maxwell to the fearless faith and fortitude of Julie Beck and Sheri Dew. More recently, my soul has thrilled to hear President Nelson speak with a surgeon's precision and a prophet's power. I have resonated, again and again, with his seeric summons to seek revelation, exercise faith, gather Israel, and let God prevail. I love this mighty prophet, now ninety-eight years old, and I love the women and men who labor beside him.

Elder Holland once said of this group: "I bear personal witness of how thoroughly good they are, of how hard they work, and how humbly they live." My own limited experience confirms Elder Holland's testimony. Earlier this year, I sat near one of the Twelve in a small meeting as he offered the opening prayer. "We want *nothing*," this good man pleaded, "but to do Thy will."

We at BYU are blessed to have such men and women compose our Board of Trustees. Our mission statement calls for "an environment enlightened by living prophets." Ours is the grand opportunity, unique in all the world, of blending our academic training with their prophetic keys—including "by encouraging programs that are central to the Church's purposes and by making [our] resources available to the Church when called upon to do so."²

In that exhilarating effort, I have been impressed and inspired by President Worthen,

whose public declarations and private conversation reflect a serious, sedulous study of the words of living prophets. In particular, I have heard him quote President Nelson, insightfully and abundantly, in ways that evince long hours of prayerful, probing study.³

President Worthen’s example makes me want to do better. In a modest way, I’ve tried to follow it by highlighting prophetic declarations in my BYU teaching—formally and informally, in planned and unplanned ways, in the classroom and outside it.

Some of the choicest experiences of my life have come as I have seen the peace and power of the Almighty descend like fire on His anointed servants. In such sacred moments, I have been blessed to see those humble servants in their true character—as chosen messengers of my Father in

Heaven, duly commissioned apostles of the living Christ.

It is, as Elder Holland affirmed, no trivial matter for this Church to declare to the world prophecy, seership, and revelation. And it is no trivial matter for this faculty to declare to the world a university “enlightened by living prophets.”⁴ But we do, emphatically, declare it. It is true light shining in a dark world, and it shines from this luminous campus.

¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Prophets in the Land Again,” *Ensign*, November 2006.

² BYU Mission Statement.

³ President Worthen’s most recent devotional message is a wonderful example of this. See Kevin J Worthen, “Choices for Eternity: Prophetic Counsel,” *BYU Devotional*, September 6, 2022.

⁴ BYU Mission Statement.