

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings

August 2023

Called to Serve

I was doing just fine until I saw my wife's face. There we were, just a few days ago, standing in the MTC's underground parking lot, sending our oldest daughter into the mission field. I looked up from handing Julia's luggage to a missionary attendant only to see Lia's tear-streaked face as she fiercely hugged our firstborn farewell. Suddenly I was *not* doing just fine. All too soon, it was my turn. I held Julia close, told her that I loved her and that I was proud of her, and then she was gone. I returned to my office; Lia and the younger kids went home, carrying with them a couple consolatory cartons of Creamery ice cream.

I had known for years that this day was coming. Julia decided when she was a very little girl that she would serve a mission the moment she became eligible. Once, when she was ten or eleven, I tendered a conditional observation hinging on "if you serve a mission."

"Oh," she said firmly, "I'm going."

It is a resolution from which she never faltered or flinched, swayed or swerved. In recent weeks she did mention once or twice—wistfully and in passing—that she might miss some aspects of her BYU student experience. Even then, she knew as well as I do that missionary service is not so much an interruption of a BYU education as a glorious enhancement of it.

The missionary experience of our BYU students represents one of our greatest institutional treasures. Missionary service gives our students a breadth of vision and a depth of character unmatched among any other student body anywhere on earth. Some of our students serve missions before coming to BYU; others serve

during their BYU experience. But all have missions to fulfill after they leave.

Teach ye diligently . . . that ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you (D&C 88:78-80).

Like their forebears in the School of the Prophets, many of our students are both returned missionaries and future missionaries—the once and future servants of the Lord. Our charge is to provide an education that prepares our students for missions yet to come—an education that leads "to lifelong learning and service."¹

The night before we took Julia to the MTC, I gave her a father's blessing. Lia told me later that during the blessing she felt an intimation that a similar scene had unfolded in heaven before Julia was born—a kind of heavenly father's blessing; indeed a Heavenly Father's blessing. We obviously don't know the details, but I'm convinced that our various missions on earth correspond to foreordinations in the premortal realm. Each of our students—indeed, every person we ever encounter—has been entrusted with a high and lofty mission. Ours is the privilege and obligation to help them find and fulfill it.

Two days after Julia entered the MTC, I witnessed a very different and even more tender farewell when I attended the funeral of Sister Patricia Terry Holland, who among many other things is a former First Lady of this university and one of our most distinguished graduates.

I found that funeral almost overwhelming. The tributes and testimonies were as beautiful as they were powerful, as moving as they were majestic. Most moving of all, for me, were a written tribute from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, read by the Hollands' oldest son, and a spoken tribute from President Russell M. Nelson. Our prophet praised Sister Holland as the very picture of "what a celestial woman looks like." He said she belongs to the same "esteemed circle" as Emma Smith and Eliza R. Snow.

I did not know Sister Holland personally; I met her only once or twice. But she has been a model for me from a distance of the power of indomitable discipleship. The fervor of her witness was exceeded only by the eloquence of her example. She exuded pure goodness, and she embodied invincible faith. We who represent her alma mater are very, very proud of her.

The revelations declare that "the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the

¹ "The Aims of a BYU Education," in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Foundations and Dreams* (Brigham Young University, 2022) 71.

gospel . . . in the great world of the spirits of the dead" (D&C 138:57). That promise surely applies to the faithful women of this dispensation as well. It surely now applies to Pat Holland.

Sister Holland's graduation from mortality to a different sphere of missionary service recalls this university's "special role—education for eternity—which [we] must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university."² Our charge is to prepare our students not only for their life's work, but for future labors in the Kingdom; not only for lifelong service on earth, but for unending contributions in eternity.

On earth and in heaven, for time and all eternity, we and they are called to serve.

² Spencer W. Kimball, "Education for Eternity," in *ibid* 161.