

# LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings

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## Messengers of the Covenant

Before the beginning was the Covenant.

“Everlasting covenant,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “was made between three personages before the organization of this earth and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth. These personages, according to Abraham’s record, are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the creation of the world, and even (it seems) before the council in heaven, the Members of the Godhead enfolded humankind within Their pact of covenant love.

I’ve learned from colleagues at BYU that the Hebrew name for such love is *hesed*, which the King James translators variously render as “goodness,” “mercy,” and “loving-kindness.”<sup>2</sup> President Nelson has described divine *hesed* in a landmark message entitled “The Everlasting Covenant”<sup>3</sup>—a message that Elder Christofferson, who now chairs the executive committee of our Board of Trustees, recently highlighted in a message to young adults in the Marriott Center and explored at length in a meeting of all CES presidents.

The essence of the everlasting covenant, President Nelson taught, is the possibility of a deep, intimate, and abiding relationship with God. “Once you and I have made a covenant with God,” he said, “our relationship with Him becomes much closer than before . . . . Because of our covenant with God, He will never tire in His efforts to help us, and we will never exhaust His merciful patience with us.”<sup>4</sup>

We strive at BYU to create a covenant community and to foster a sense of covenant belonging within every member of that

community.<sup>5</sup> We do this most effectively by inviting our students, and by striving ourselves, to come unto Christ. “We are too diverse,” Elder Christofferson has said, “and at times too discordant to be able to come together as one on any other basis or under any other name. Only in Jesus Christ can we truly become one.”<sup>6</sup>

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Malachi said of the promised Messiah: “the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even *the messenger of the covenant*, whom ye delight in” (Mal. 3:1; emphasis added). As the messenger of the covenant, the Savior is the harbinger of *hesed*—the emissary of His Father’s invincible covenant love.<sup>7</sup>

Latter-day Saints sometimes associate Malachi’s prophecy with the Savior’s appearance to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland temple on April 3, 1836. On that occasion, the Savior also sent three other covenantal messengers: Moses with “the keys of the gathering of Israel,” Elias with “the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham,” and Elijah, who came “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers” (D&C 110:11-12, 15).

On my reading, this conferral of keys comprised (among other things) the authority to reestablish the everlasting covenant and to carry its blessings to “every one of our Heavenly Father’s children, on both sides of the veil.”<sup>8</sup> God’s everlasting covenant is thus as eternally inclusive as it is cosmically comprehensive. All are invited to participate; all are invited to invite others.

At BYU we have a unique opportunity to invite our students—to help them see themselves

as “children of the covenant”<sup>9</sup> (3 Ne. 20:26) and to model for them what that means in the life of a disciple-scholar. We have the chance to be messengers of God’s covenant in the lives of our marvelous students.

To that end, we might draw on the many covenant-related teachings of this past weekend’s general conference. President Emily Belle Freeman, for instance, taught that “A covenant is not only about a contract, although that is important. It’s about a relationship.”<sup>10</sup> And Elder Joaquin E. Costa taught that “Our covenants are not merely transactional; they are transformational.”<sup>11</sup>

Our students’ experience at BYU will be transformational in the sense that prophets have envisioned to the extent that it helps deepen their covenant bond to the Lord and His Church. Then,

after they leave our campus, they themselves will become messengers of the covenant and will help to transform the world.

“And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people . . . and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (D&C 45:9).

In his great message about the everlasting covenant, President Nelson noted that “every benevolent act of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members is an expression of God’s *hesed*” —of our Father’s covenant love.<sup>12</sup> In my view, the BYU faculty collectively represent one such “benevolent act” of the Church and its members. May your individual acts of covenant kindness continue to shine God’s love and light into the lives and hearts of our students.

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<sup>1</sup> Discourse, circa May 1841, as reported by William Clayton, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-circa-may-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1#full-transcript>.

<sup>2</sup> See generally Kerry M. Muhlestein, *God Will Prevail: Ancient Covenants, Modern Blessings, and the Gathering of Israel* (Covenant, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Because of the covenants we have individually made with God, “all relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor.” “The Mission of Brigham Young University,” <https://aims.byu.edu/byu-mission-statement>.

<sup>6</sup> D. Todd Christofferson, “One in Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2023.

<sup>7</sup> See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> See Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 15, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Belle Freeman, “Walking in Covenant Relationship with Christ,” *Liahona*, November 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Joaquin E. Costa, “The Power of Jesus Christ in Our Lives Every Day,” *Liahona*, November 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022.