

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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Agents of Light

Poison dart frogs (*dendrobatidae*) are famous for two features: their beguiling coloration and their intensely toxic skin. These two attributes, it turns out, are correlated. But the toxicity of poison dart frogs is not inherent in their nature; it is a product of their diet. They consume toxic arthropods, whose toxins they then absorb and secrete. When poison dart frogs' diet varies, their toxicity declines. Fed a non-toxic diet in captivity, they lose their toxicity entirely.

I worry that the much-lamented toxicity of our public culture is, similarly, a product of our collective media diet. I worry about my own consumption of toxic material—even when that consumption comes through my modest efforts to remain minimally informed. I wonder how what I consume is affecting what I emit.

At last week's forum, Professor Kim Clark described the difference between those who inject light into an organization and those who introduce darkness. This idea caused me to reflect on how seemingly small things that I might be tempted to regard as passing personal lapses—a snarky jab, a sardonic quip, a surly complaint—might impair, at least the margins, this institution about which I care so deeply. Professor Clark's message inspired me to consume light more consistently and to inject it more intentionally into my university stewardships. His message also quickened my gratitude for countless colleagues who do both these things so superbly well—who are both consumers and agents of light.

One such colleague told me last week of the transformative experience he and his wife had on a recent vacation as they read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover in a very compressed period. He was astonished by the connections he

saw, amazed at how much he had previously missed.

However quickly or slowly we read it, I am convinced that feasting on the Book of Mormon will amplify everything that we are striving to accomplish as a university. It will fill us with the Savior's light and empower us to reflect that light more effulgently into our classrooms and throughout our campus.

I am a slow reader and always have been. Nevertheless, through joyful persistence and happy plodding, I've managed over the years to read a respectable number of books. Nothing in all my reading—in any language or genre—tempts me to qualify the Prophet Joseph Smith's assessment that “the Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion and a man [will] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than [by] any other book.”¹

I've felt for some time that, because BYU is the educational ambassador of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the flagship of the Church Educational System, the Book of Mormon should serve as the keystone of our campus.

President Ezra Taft Benson underscored the Book of Mormon's power to “give spiritual and intellectual unity to [our] whole life.”² I believe it can guide us and our students toward the celestial unity of a fully integrated life. This will require that we feast upon its pages ourselves and infuse our classrooms with its doctrine and our curriculum with its witness.

We have, of course, been studying the Book of Mormon this year in connection with *Come, Follow Me*. I was humbled and inspired by a passage in last week’s reading that seemed to speak to me directly about my work at the university:

And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred . . . that he may show forth his power unto future generations. . . . [And] if ye keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you, (for you must appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them) behold, no power of earth or hell can take them from you, for

God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words. [And] he will fulfill all his promises (Alma 37:14, 16-17).

At BYU, God has entrusted us not only with “sacred things” but with sacred souls. Fortunately, we too enjoy the promise of heavenly protection and aid. We too can appeal unto the Lord in all things connected with our BYU stewardships. We too can help convey God’s power unto future generations.

God is indeed “powerful to the fulfilling of all his words” and “all his promises”—including, I am convinced, His promises about BYU. May we then “claim in our day the prophecies of the past.”³ May we be agents and vectors of light.

¹ Remarks, November 28, 1841, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/remarks-28-november-1841/1?highlight=most%20correct%20of%20any%20book>.

² Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon is the Word of God,” *Ensign*, May 1975, p. 65.

³ C. Shane Reese, “Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response,” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU, volume 2: Learning and Light* (2024) 306.