

# LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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## Prophetically Directed

President Nelson turns 100 (!) next week. Someone recently asked me, “If those in their eighties are called *octogenarians*, what do we call those in their nineties?” “*Nonagenarians*,” I answered, “but President Nelson will soon be a *centenarian*.” How grateful we are for our centenarian prophet!

In his powerful message at last week’s university conference, Elder Rasband declared that having the Lord’s living prophet chair our Board of Trustees is *the* comparative advantage we enjoy as a university. Elder Rasband and Elder Christofferson, who serve respectively as vice chair and chair of our Board’s executive committee, have both encouraged leaders throughout CES to quote President Nelson often and to testify of his prophetic call.

As important as it is to follow this counsel in administrative pronouncements, it strikes me as even more important that we do so in our classroom teaching. After all, “to succeed in [our] mission the university must provide an environment enlightened by living prophets.”<sup>1</sup>

Last week Elder Rasband directed our attention specifically to two of President Nelson’s messages: his September 2019 BYU devotional address, “The Love and Laws of God,”<sup>2</sup> and his May 2022 worldwide devotional message, “Choices for Eternity.”<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Elder Rasband’s invitation, I reviewed these landmark messages and was edified, fortified, and inspired by them. I commend the exercise to all.

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In his 2019 devotional, President Nelson described his experience as a pioneering heart researcher. Amid his early struggles, he recalled, “two truths articulated in the Doctrine and

Covenants spoke to my inquiring mind[:]. . . first, that all blessings are predicated upon obedience to law and, second, that to *every* kingdom there is a law given.”<sup>4</sup> These truths led President Nelson to conclude “that if every kingdom had a law, there must be laws that govern the beating heart.” Accordingly, he “determined to discover those laws and obey them.”<sup>5</sup>

We know the rest of this story. For me, it contains at least two lessons for our work at BYU.

First, as we immerse ourselves in the scriptures—especially the scriptures of the Restoration—the Lord will bless us with insights and intimations, direction and resolve that will magnify our scholarly and creative work. We will thus vindicate President Kimball’s promise that “the scriptures contain the master concepts for mankind.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, divine laws govern every discipline we pursue here. Through diligence and inspiration—by study and faith—we can discover those laws and obey them, thus rolling back the boundaries of knowledge and blessing our Heavenly Father’s children.

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In his May 2022 devotional for young adults, President Nelson underscored our primary identities as children of God, children of the covenant, and disciples of Jesus Christ. He also explained *why* we should focus on these primary identities.

“Other labels,” he warned, “will disappoint you in time because they do not have the power to lead you toward eternal life in the celestial kingdom of God. Worldly identifiers will *never* give you a vision of who you can ultimately

become. They will never affirm your divine DNA or your unlimited, divine potential.”<sup>7</sup>

Only by focusing on our students’ divine and enduring identities can we impart the kind of “education for eternity”<sup>8</sup> that will “assist [them] in their quest for perfection and eternal life.”<sup>9</sup> In this respect, perhaps the best gift we can offer our students is a sense of their “unlimited, divine potential” as undergirded by their primary, divine identities.

In his BYU devotional, President Nelson linked those divine identities to our students’ premortal promise. “I would not be surprised,” he said, “if, when the veil is lifted in the next life, we learn that you actually pled with our Heavenly Father to be reserved for now. I would not be surprised to learn that premortally you loved the Lord so much that you promised to defend His name and gospel during this world’s tumultuous winding up scenes.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps as faculty we pled premortally for the privilege of helping these valiant spirits prepare for their mortal mission. Perhaps we promised to help them honor their premortal vow to proclaim the Savior’s gospel and defend His matchless name. Certainly we are supremely blessed to take part in the grandest work on earth in this majestic corner of His vineyard.

“There is nothing happening on this earth more important than gathering Israel *for Him*,” President Nelson declared. “Let your Heavenly Father know that you want to help. Ask Him to put you to work in this glorious cause. And then stand back and marvel at what happens when you let God prevail in your life.”<sup>11</sup>

May we all stay close to the Lord’s living prophet as we petition the heavens to put us to work in this grand and glorious cause.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Mission of Brigham Young University” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 1, Foundations and Dreams* (2022) 65.

<sup>2</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” BYU Devotional, September 17, 2019, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/>. I was especially pleased to hear President Nelson speak about law on Constitution Day.

<sup>3</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” Worldwide Young Adult Devotional, May 15, 2022, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson?lang=eng>.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, “Love and Laws” (emphasis in original; citing D&C 130:21 and D&C 88:38).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 1, Foundations and Dreams* (2022) 57.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, “Choices.”

<sup>8</sup> See Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity” in EBYU 1:159-184; Kimball, “Second Century,” EBYU 1:46.

<sup>9</sup> BYU Mission, EBYU 1:65.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, “Love and Laws.”

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, “Choices.”