

# LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings  
January 2025

## Remember the Alamo Bowl

I had never been to a bowl game before. Neither had Lia, and neither, of course, had Baby Miriam. It was a very quick trip, but we relished the San Antonio sun and the festive, friendly atmosphere uniting the fans for both teams. At a tailgate party, I ran into a star former student, now prospering as a Houston attorney by way of Stanford Law School. I felt buoyant and light and alive.

About the game itself, I had modest expectations. “If we play our game,” I reasoned, “I think we’ll be competitive. If we try to play *their* game, we’re toast.”

Well. I won’t deny that watching our beloved cougars thoroughly and meticulously dismantle one of the flashier teams in recent memory was satisfying and delicious. I was proud of our team for their painstaking preparation and scrupulous execution against a worthy and talented foe. But I was even more proud of their bearing and disposition before, during, and after the game.

In his on-field postgame remarks—when the confetti had fallen and the trophy had been raised—Coach Kalani Sitake was, as always, a model of generosity and grace. He thanked and praised the players, the fans, the organizers, and our Colorado opponent. He expressed faith in and gratitude for “our Savior.” When asked what made this 2024 team so special, he answered that it was the players’ love for one another and their spirit of gratitude. Another thing that made the team special was its remarkable head coach.

\*\*\*

The word *generous* entered the English language around the 1570s. It derived from Latin (*generosus* = “of noble birth”) by way of French (*geneveux*). It was applied to persons of aristocratic

lineage—“knights of generous extraction” or persons “of generous birth”—as well as to horses and dogs of “a generous breed.” Later the term described magnanimous and kindly gestures, as well as liberal and openhanded giving.

*Generous* shares roots with *genus* and *genes*, about which I’ve been reading lately and, in the process, encountering examples of generosity.

One of my Christmas presents was a copy of *The Double Helix*, James Watson’s memoir of his discovery, along with Francis Crick, of the chemical structure of DNA, as well as its replicating mechanism. I confess that as I opened the book I braced myself to be a bit bored. Somewhere in my weary brain swirled dim memories AP Biology encounters with base pairs and phosphates, and the effect was slightly soporific. But there is nothing even remotely dull about *The Double Helix*. It is, I found, a galloping and a galvanic read. Watson brilliantly captures the full range of human emotions that attend the fits and starts of scientific discovery. Some of those emotions are unflattering, such as vanity, envy, rivalry, and pride. Others are nobler, such as fairmindedness, love of truth, and generosity of spirit.

This last, generosity, is on finest display, not in Watson himself, but in his ostensible rivals. Watson and Crick were latecomers to the structure of DNA. Two colleagues at King’s College London, Maurice Wilkins and Rosalind Franklin, had worked on the problem for years. Throughout *The Double Helix*, Watson both yearns to beat Wilkins and Franklin (and Cal Tech’s Linus Pauling) to the answer and worries that, by so doing, he and Crick might be treating their colleagues unfairly. When the Cambridge twosome finally crack the code, it is with some

trepidation that they tell those colleagues about the good news.

The colleagues' response, however, is immensely generous. Wilkins is "genuinely thrilled." Franklin responds warmly and excitedly. Pauling sends hearty congratulations. All seem thoroughly delighted by a major scientific advance.

Academics aren't always renowned for generosity toward our colleagues, and James Watson is often less-than-generous in the early pages of *The Double Helix*. I can't be sure, but it strikes me that something about the double helix's discovery reminded Watson, Crick, Franklin, Wilkins, and Pauling that they were all comrades in a common cause and calling—that the discovery of truth finally transcends the comparative fame and plaudits of its discoverers.

I noted earlier that *generosity* shares roots with *genes* and *genus*. It also shares roots with *genealogy*. Ultimately, I suggest, *generosity* is about recognizing and honoring a common familial bond with our fellow children of God. It is by virtue of that recognition that "all relationships within the BYU community [can] reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor."<sup>1</sup>

Generosity, I believe, is a harbinger of charity—a steppingstone toward Zion. May we all be a little more generous in 2025—toward our BYU colleagues, toward our students, toward our academic peers, toward all the children of God. In that effort, we can take a cue from a humble, able, and great-hearted head coach.

Remember the Alamo Bowl.

---

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