

“Celestial Training in a Telestial World”

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My dear sisters, I have looked forward to today. I always love being in the Marriott Center. I have been coming to the Marriott Center for fifty years to watch BYU play basketball. And let me tell you, when BYU plays basketball here, this place rocks! But it also rocks at BYU Women’s Conference, because the Spirit cannot be restrained when covenant-keeping women gather. So, thank you for making this place rock today. I pray that the Spirit will teach each of us.

We’re here for a little same-boat therapy, because we are all in the same boat. We are here in mortality—or what C.S. Lewis called “enemy-occupied territory”¹—together. Moroni warned us to “be wise in the days of [our] probation,”² and we *have* been wise. We have identified The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Lord’s restored Church. But that is only the beginning. Because the purpose of the Church is *not* to just help us cope with living in this telestial world or even to prepare us for the terrestrial kingdom. It is to prepare us for the celestial kingdom.

When we were baptized, and then made additional covenants in the temple, we essentially signed up for celestial training. Any kind of training is tough. Training stretches us. But celestial training in a telestial world is the most rigorous training on earth. Because the object of celestial training is to help us become better and better disciples of Jesus Christ. And what could be more demanding than that?

Celestial training in a telestial world is *not* for the faint of heart.

But *take heart*. We are probably doing better than we think. A few years ago, my stake president began a stake council by asking us how close we were to the celestial

kingdom. We hemmed and hawed and explained that we had a long way to go. Some even said they weren't sure if they were celestial material. Our stake president let us wring our hands for a while and finally said: "Would you like to know how close you are to the celestial kingdom? You are shockingly close."

Frankly, I was *shocked* by his statement, but I also felt a confirming wave of the Spirit. He then explained, "*You* are on the covenant path, *you* are exercising faith and repenting, you have made covenants and are keeping them, *you* are trying to progress. You don't realize how close you are. You are shockingly close."

Sisters, you are here at BYU Women's Conference. You've come to be taught by the Spirit. Okay, maybe you've come for mint brownies. But you're also here for spiritual food. You're here either because you're on, or want to get on, the covenant path. We are probably all closer to the celestial kingdom than we realize. Perhaps even shockingly close.

But that doesn't mean that we've got it made. This year I celebrate one of those big birthdays—one with a zero on the end. I don't know if it's my age or just something in the cosmos, but I keep being asked a question that goes something like this: "Has your testimony ever seriously been threatened?" The short answer is no. I have never struggled to believe that God is my Father, or that Jesus is the Christ, or that His gospel was restored through the prophet Joseph Smith, or that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, or that we have a living prophet. I know these things are true. So I have a testimony.

But at times I have struggled to feel that there is a place for me in the Church. And I have been hurt by feeling judged by some Church members.

The follow-up question is always, "How have you stayed faithful?" *That* is what I'd like to talk with you about today.

I have spent much of my life dealing with words. I have had the privilege of being the publisher for many of the most articulate, most faithful minds in our culture. I have learned two things from this: first, that words are powerful; and second, that the Lord cares about words. And He always has—perhaps in part because of these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the *Word was God*."³ One of the names of Jesus Christ is *the Word*.

Further, throughout scripture, prophets have admonished us to believe *their* words, for as Nephi declared, "they are the *words* of Christ."⁴

Enoch is a case study in the power of prophetic words. Remember how he protested when the Lord called him to prophesy unto the people: "All the people hate me, for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?"⁵

But the Lord's response to Enoch is telling. He promised Enoch that if he would just open his mouth, it would be filled. "I will give thee utterance,"⁶ the Lord said. And did he ever! For "so great was the faith of Enoch that...he *spake* the *word* of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, ...and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the *word* of Enoch, and so great was the power of the *language* which God had given him."⁷

From the earliest days of *this* dispensation, the Lord's prophets have gone to heroic lengths to publish *words* that communicate the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon was published before the Church was even organized, and the publication of that book required so many miracles that it almost makes parting the Red Sea look ho-hum.

And that was just the beginning. While the fledgling Church was being chased out of New York, then Ohio, then Missouri, and then Illinois, the Prophet Joseph and other leaders managed to publish truth. There was the *Elders' Journal* and the *Messenger and Advocate* in Kirtland, the *Evening and the Morning Star* in Independence, the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo, and the *Millennial Star* in England.

When the Saints were in dire straits at Winter Quarters, Brigham Young dispatched W.W. Phelps to the east coast to do what? Buy a printing press! It took Brother Phelps more than two years to buy and transport the heavy press across the plains so that publishing could continue in the Salt Lake Valley, which it did in 1850 with the first edition of the *Deseret News*. Many other publications followed. The *Woman's Exponent* and the *Relief Society Magazine*. The *Young Woman's Journal*. The *Conference Report*. The *New Era*. The *Instructor*. The *Improvement Era*. The *Juvenile Instructor*. The *Seer*. The *Ensign*. The *Liahona*. The *Friend*. Deseret Book. The *Church News*. Come Follow Me. I could go on and on. The Church has been and is a prolific publisher.

As members of the Lord's restored church, we care about words. That is how we teach and testify. It is how we lift each other and communicate what we believe. It is even how we work miracles. The *Lectures on Faith* states that faith "works by words; and with [words] its mightiest works have been, and will be, performed."⁸ *Words have power!*

So, here is the rub: Because the Lord cares about words, so does the adversary. Satan understands the power of The Word, meaning the Savior, and he also knows the power of our words when we testify of truth. Every time we use words to teach truth, we dilute the efforts of the adversary.

Surely the war in heaven was, at least in part, a war of words. For "there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not....And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent,

called the Devil, . . . which deceiveth the whole world.”⁹ Somehow Lucifer was persuasive enough in his rebellion, that even in the presence of the Father and the Son, he managed to deceive—most likely through words—a host of Heavenly Father’s children.

But scripture also makes it clear that we *who did not fall* for the adversary’s deceptions “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the *word* of their testimony.”¹⁰

The Lord cares about words. So, is it any surprise that in these last days the war of words—the war between truth and deception—has reached a fever pitch?

Ironically, the glut of information available at our fingertips makes finding and discerning *truth* more challenging than ever. Never in the history of the world have people been so saturated with the philosophies of man. It is possible to consume an endless diet of content today—podcasts, blogs, movies, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, SnapChat, Hulu, Netflix, and cable channels galore. This is more than sampling *hors d’oeuvres*. It is gorging on a 10-course meal every day.

What happens to our hearts and minds when we consume hours, days, even years of *words*—with most of them coming from those who know nothing about the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do the words we consume invite the Spirit or drive Him away?

Then, add in the emergence of artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT. The other day a colleague asked the ChatGPT website, Who is Sheri Dew? Within seconds, it generated a bio on me that got my birthday, birthplace, and Church membership right. Then it said I was *Time Magazine*’s 2003 Woman of the Year. I wasn’t. And that I have an MBA from Harvard. I don’t. But it all *looked* true.

Another colleague in the room said, “I didn’t know you were *Time Magazine*’s Woman of the Year.” “I wasn’t,” I said for the second time. Trust me, I am going to get introduced somewhere as *Time*’s Woman of the Year. Artificial intelligence has remarkable capabilities, but it can also produce deepfakes¹¹ instantly. You may have seen a recent photo online of Pope Francis in a stylish white puffy jacket. Except it wasn’t him. The photo was fake. Artificial Intelligence will only make it more difficult to discern what is true and what is not.

In short, we are inundated by words. From family. Friends. Journalists. Leaders. Authors. Scholars. Podcasters. Talk about a “war of words and a tumult of opinions”!¹² Joseph Smith’s description of *his* day describes ours perfectly.

Further complicating this issue is a tactic the Book of Mormon warns us about repeatedly—the tactic of flattery. On the surface, flattery probably sounds harmless. How serious can it be when someone tells you that you did something well when you know you didn’t?

But flattery is far more insidious than false praise. Flattery is defined as the act of “gratifying by falsification” and “cajoling, beguiling, and playing upon one’s vanities.”¹³ Flattery means telling people what they want to hear. And it is one of the most seductive ways to gain followers.

Look at any anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon, or for that matter, *anyone seeking followers for themselves*. In every case, he or she is a master of flattery.

Sherem is a classic example: “[H]e had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.”¹⁴

Some flattery is probably harmless. But *the instant* that flattery is used to persuade you to believe something you would never have believed otherwise, it becomes a diabolical tool. In fact, Jacob taught that flattery is designed to “overthrow the doctrine of Christ” because it draws its power from “the power of the devil.”¹⁵

Politicians use flattery to get your vote. Companies use it to sell you stuff. Influencers use it to get you to support *them* and *their* agenda. No doubt flattery helped create the mists of darkness Lehi saw in his vision of the Tree of Life.¹⁶ Beware of those who tell you what you want to hear.

Our challenge, as disciples of Christ, is to do again here in mortality what we did premortally. Remember, we overcame Lucifer by “the blood of the Lamb, and by the *word* of their testimony.”¹⁷ So, in *today’s* war of words, will we *again* discern what is true and *again* choose to follow Jesus Christ?

This is why celestial training is so important: It immerses us in words that are true.

So, where do we go for celestial training? There are a number of places. But today, let’s examine two places we can go where the *words* have unusual power: the temple and prophets of God.

First, the temple. I did not receive my endowment until I was 29, and candidly I didn’t love the experience. So, I didn’t go back very often for a couple of years. Then one day my stake president asked me how my temple attendance was. “Not what it should be,” I admitted. He paused and then said, “Sheri, just go.” There was no lecture, no guilt-induction, just a gentle nudge.

I promised I would and set a modest goal to attend more often. At first, I went out of sheer obedience. But after a while, I realized that I felt different after being in the temple. I *felt stronger*—spiritually and emotionally. That’s when I wanted to understand what was happening to me there. What had I been endowed with in the House of the Lord?

I pored over section 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where it says that in the temple we receive “a *fulness* of the Holy Ghost.” What did that mean? It says that we emerge from the temple “armed” with the power of God. The power of God is priesthood power, but what did that mean for me as a woman? It says that angels will have charge over me. How does that work? Could I ask for angels to help me? Section 109 opened my mind and led me to many other scriptures. Little by little, I began to learn about the profound spiritual privileges we receive by making covenants in the House of the Lord.

In the temple we covenant to live five laws: the laws of obedience, sacrifice, the gospel of Jesus Christ, chastity, and consecration. In return, the Lord promises to endow us with knowledge, power, and spiritual capacity. The temple teaches us how to progress even while we’re still living here. It is celestial training at its best!

Regular time in the temple has saved me. It has buffered disappointment and loneliness, helped me endure pressures that would have otherwise crushed me, and helped me solve problems I could never have solved alone. It has reduced my anxieties, because I am endowed with godly power. And it has helped me learn to receive revelation. The Lord likes to do His own teaching in His own house. As I was preparing this very message, I sat down in an endowment session and immediately heard three specific sentences I needed to add. That kind of thing doesn’t happen very often. But sometimes it does.

President Russell M. Nelson explained why there is such power in the temple: “[T]he temple lies at the center of strengthening our faith...because the Savior and His doctrine are at the very heart of the temple. ...[A]s we keep our covenants, He endows us with His healing, strengthening power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead.”¹⁸

So, I offer you the counsel from my stake president many years ago, “Just go.” And keep going. It will literally change your life. Because the *words* in the temple comprise the most celestial training on earth.

Now, a few words about prophets. I declare without reservation that *the most important words* being spoken on earth today are those from prophets, seers and revelators. Some of their words are to worldwide congregations and others to an audience of one or two. But their words always have power.

During a recent meeting with President Nelson, I had a chance to scan an extensive document that lists the dignitaries with whom he has met since becoming President of the Church. It was an impressive list of ambassadors, religious leaders, and more. I asked the President how many on the list he had invited to come, and he said, “None of them. Each of these individuals requested an audience with the First Presidency

at Church Headquarters.” Surely Isaiah’s prophecy—that the Lord’s Church would be “established in the top of the mountains” and that “all nations [would] flow unto it”¹⁹—is coming to pass before our very eyes.

As one recent example, the Ambassador to the United States from a country in eastern Europe met with the First Presidency earlier this year. Afterwards, the ambassador told those hosting him at Church headquarters that he had met with rulers all over the world but had never had an experience quite like the one with the First Presidency. He subsequently encouraged a Muslim leader in his region to visit Utah to have his own experience with the First Presidency, which that leader did. In an interview with the *Deseret News*, the Muslim leader described his experience with the First Presidency as “unforgettable” and said he only wished he had come sooner.²⁰

I have witnessed similar reactions to prophets. When President Nelson arrived at the Government Palace in Lima in 2018 to meet with Peru’s President, a tour guide was standing nearby as President Nelson stepped out of the car. “Who is that man?” the guide asked those of us standing there. Before we could respond, she called out to President Nelson, “Will you please bless Peru?” President Nelson could have been any government official dressed in a suit. How did she know that he actually *could* bless Peru?

At a press conference to announce joint initiatives between the Church and the NAACP in June 2021, the Reverend Amos C. Brown, pastor of San Francisco’s storied 3rd Baptist Church, stepped to the podium, turned to President Nelson, and said for all to hear, “You are the quintessential embodiment of the best leadership in the faith community of the United States of America anywhere to be found south of heaven, north of hell.”²¹

Then, just three weeks ago, Dr. Lawrence Edward Carter, the dean of the Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College, presented President Nelson with the inaugural Gandhi-King-Mandela Peace Prize. In doing so, Dr. Carter cited President Nelson for his “noble efforts to heal and reunite the broken body of Christ.”²² Imagine! Of all the individuals this prestigious black college could have honored, they chose the President of the Church!

Why do dignitaries from around the world feel drawn to prophets, seers and revelators? Why do *we* feel something unique when President Russell M. Nelson, President Dallin H. Oaks, President Henry B. Eyring and any member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles speaks or walks into the room?

It is because they are not like any other leaders on earth. They have been ordained as “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world”²³; and according to the Prophet Joseph Smith, they possess “all the keys that ever were, or that can be conferred

upon mortal man.”²⁴ It is the presence of these *restored priesthood keys* they hold that we feel when prophets enter the room.

I submit to you today that because of their unique ordination and the spiritual privileges that accompany these priesthood keys, prophets, seers, and revelators are the *most dependable source of truth on earth*.

Ammon explained why: “[A] seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have...[A] seer can know of things...which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, ...and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them...”²⁵

Prophets, seers, and revelators can see things you and I cannot see. Celebrities, politicians, journalists, scholars, billionaires, presidents of the finest universities, and even your favorite podcaster cannot see what seers can see. None of these influencers hold *all* priesthood keys. *Prophets are just not the same as other people*. They are in a category of their own.

I still find an article written by an Associated Press reporter when President Nelson became President of the Church comical. He predicted that “Nelson’s record during his three decades in church leadership suggests he will make few changes.”²⁶ Five years later, that statement is obviously absurd.

No journalist, author, broadcaster, or YouTube influencer can see the future. None of them are ordained as special witnesses of Jesus Christ.

That is why prophets don’t say the same things your favorite social media influencer says. That is why prophets don’t mince words and sometimes rub people the wrong way.²⁷ When prophets teach the doctrine of Christ and the great plan of God the Father Himself, there are those who don’t like how it sounds because it is foreign to the 21st century-saturated ear.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland referred to this when he said that too often today “if people want any gods at all, they want them to be gods who do not demand much, comfortable gods, smooth gods who not only don’t rock the boat but don’t even row it, gods who pat us on the head, make us giggle, then tell us to run along and pick marigolds.”²⁸ Celestial training, as taught by prophets, often feels incongruent with this telestial world, *because it is*.

Complicating matters are self-appointed watchdogs, some of them our own members, who feel compelled to censure the Church and its leaders when they don’t like what our leaders say or do. But isn’t criticizing the Lord’s prophets actually criticizing the Lord? Prophets are *His* messengers.

Be wary of those who think they are smarter than prophets. Be wary of those who pressure prophets to conform to the philosophies and practices of men. Beware of those who try to silence prophets when they don't conform.

Some skeptics claim that following the prophet is blind obedience. But there is nothing blind about it for a covenant-making woman or man. Following the prophet is not blind obedience. *It is active discipleship.* Not to mention just being plain old smart. Because seers see things we cannot see.

There are, of course, those who will challenge this statement and cite “mistakes” prophets have made in the past.

I am not suggesting that prophets are perfect, because they aren't. Jesus Christ is the only perfect Being to live on this earth.²⁹ But just days before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith made a distinction between his personal weaknesses and his prophetic role: “I never told you I was perfect,” he said, “but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”³⁰

Prophets, seers, and revelators continue to learn, just as we do.³¹ For that reason, some may wonder about Church policies that change. Were the earlier policies wrong? Honestly, I don't know. But it seems just as likely that changes in policy reflect the maturing of the Church itself, not to mention its members. President Nelson has repeatedly stressed that the Restoration is ongoing. “If you think the Church has been fully restored, you're just seeing the beginning,” he said. “There is much more to come....Wait till next year....Eat your vitamin pills. Get your rest. It's going to be exciting.”³² Policies change. Doctrine does not.

If prophets, seers, and revelators aren't perfect, then why should we trust them? Because they are *the most* infallible leaders on earth. In addition to the priesthood keys they hold, the unique organizational structure of the Church protects us. No one leader, even the senior Apostle, acts alone. As decreed by revelation, every decision made by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles “must be...unanimous.”³³

President James E. Faust said that the “requirement of unanimity provides a check on bias and personal idiosyncrasies. It ensures that God rules through the Spirit, not man through majority or compromise.”³⁴

President Nelson has explained that in their meetings, “the majority never rules! We listen prayerfully to one another...until we are united. Then when we have reached complete accord, the unifying influence of the Holy Ghost is spine-tingling!....No member of the First Presidency or Quorum of the Twelve would ever leave decisions for the Lord's Church to his own best judgment.”³⁵

There is another reason to trust prophets. It is their motives. They are not in this for themselves. They aren't seeking votes, money, fame, or popularity. Their *only objective* is “the everlasting welfare of [our] souls.”³⁶

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said it this way: “This is not a fairy tale. This is not something that I get up every morning and ask myself, ‘How can I go fool another group of people today.’... My plea every morning of my life is, ‘How can I convey what I know to be more true than anything on the face of this earth?’...I have a commission to stand by the Savior of the world, to defend Him and defend the Rock that He is.” When a missionary asked Elder Holland if he would give his life for the Church, he responded, “Elder, I *am* giving my life for the Church.”³⁷

The motives of prophets, seers, and revelators today are the same as Nephi's. “For the fulness of my intent,” Nephi write,” is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.”³⁸ In today's war of words, the words of prophets cut through the din and lead us to Christ. *That* is their motive. Prophets always *lead us to Christ*.³⁹

Most importantly, even the senior Apostle, *the* prophet, is not the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Jesus Christ is, and He *is* perfect. *When we follow the prophet, we are actually placing our trust in God the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ.* They are our ultimate protectors.

Of the 8 billion people on the earth, the Lord has entrusted just 15 men with His restored priesthood keys. Wouldn't we want to listen to them first? And wouldn't we want to listen to them most?

Now, dear sisters, let's end where we began. We are preparing for the celestial kingdom, and none of us will be happy with anything less than that. Our celestial training here is rigorous, but we are closer to our goal than we think—perhaps even shockingly close.

We are, however, exposed daily to a war of words. But this challenge presents a tremendous opportunity, because the *words* of covenant-keeping women have unusual power.

Remember the 2000 stripling warriors, whose mothers taught them that “if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.” Remember how they explained the source of their faith? “[T]hey rehearsed...the *words* of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.”⁴⁰

President Russell M. Nelson has said that “women are our hope for the future. They cannot wonder or wander when it comes to being teachers of irrefutable truth.”⁴¹ The *words* of covenant mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, leaders,

teachers, and friends have unusual power to mold lives, touch hearts, and build faith. *We* have the ability to lift, strengthen, fortify, encourage, and testify in a way that changes lives.

We are so blessed to be here now! We have a ringside seat for the gathering of Israel. We have been trusted to carry the banner of truth in the latter part of the latter days. Let us link arms as a worldwide sisterhood committed to using *our words* to bear witness of truth. Because *our words* have power!

I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior. As President Nelson said to close general conference last month,⁴² whatever our dilemmas, Jesus Christ is the answer. That is why the temple and prophets are so crucial. The words of prophets *lead* us to Christ. The words of the temple *bind* us to Him. And in His strength, we can do all things.⁴³

I know this is true. I testify it is true. In the sacred name of *The Word*, even Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (get publication data)

² See Mormon 9: 28.

³ John 1:1.

⁴ See 2 Nephi 33:10. Isaiah praised those who “[publish] salvation,” (Isaiah 52:7) and when Nephi saw our day, he said that “blessed are they who...publish peace.” (1 Nephi 13:37.)

⁵ See Moses 6: 31.

⁶ See Moses 6:32.

⁷ See Moses 7: 13.

⁸ *Lectures on Faith*, 1985, 72-73.

⁹ Revelation 12: 7-9.

¹⁰ See Revelation 12: 11.

¹¹ A “deepfake is a photo, audio, or video that has been manipulated by Machine learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to make it appear to be something that it is not.”

¹² See Joseph Smith-History, 1:10.

¹³ See “Flatter,” dictionary.com.

¹⁴ Jacob 7:4. Korihor used “flattering *words*” to deceive the people. (Alma 30:47.) The sons of Mosiah and Alma the Younger spoke “much flattery to the people” as they tried to destroy the Church of God. (Mosiah 27: 8, 9.) Alma the Younger’s flattery went so far as to “lead many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.” (Mosiah 27:8.)

¹⁵ See Jacob 7: 2, 4.

¹⁶ See 1 Nephi 8: 23-24.

¹⁷ Revelation 12:11.

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- ¹⁸ Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” October 2021.
- ¹⁹ See Isaiah 2:2; also 3 Nephi 20:22, Doctrine and Covenants 84: 2-4.
- ²⁰ Jan Evensen, “Spiritual leader in Azerbaijan gets a new view of America with Utah visit,” deseret.com, 3 March 2023. The Grand Mufti also met with Elders David A. Bednar and Ronald A. Rasband and thanked the Church for “its fraternal attitude towards us as Muslims.” (See Ryan Jensen, “Azerbaijani Sheikh ul-Islam meets with First Presidency,” thechurchnews.com, 4 March 2023.)
- ²¹ See Tad Walch, “The story behind an NAACP icon calling President Nelson one of the great faith leaders ‘south of heaven,’” deseret.com, 17 June 2021.
- ²² See Tad Walch, “Historically Black college honors President Nelson with first Gandhi-King-Mandela peace prize,” deseret.com, 13 April 2023; Sydney Walker, “Morehouse College honors President Nelson with peace prize, announces collaboration with Tabernacle Choir,” thechurchnews.com, 13 April 2023.
- ²³ Doctrine and Covenants 107:23.
- ²⁴ As cited by Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:137; also referred to by Elder Neal A. Maxwell in “Behold, the Enemy Is Combined,” *Ensign*, May 1993.
- ²⁵ See Mosiah 8: 15, 16, 17. A seer has the capacity to see the future and reveal truth, because the Lord does “nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).
- ²⁶ See Brady McCombs, “Mormon church appoints 93-year-old ex-surgeon as president,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 2018.
- ²⁷ Sheri Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, Deseret Book, 1987. President Ezra Taft Benson often began messages with, “I am not here to tickle your ears.” President Benson’s words echoed King Benjamin, who told his people, “I have not commanded you to come up hither to trifle with the words which I shall speak.” (Mosiah 2:9.) And Isaiah described how many people would respond to the very idea of prophets: “Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.” (Isaiah 30:10.)
- ²⁸ Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, May 2014.
- ²⁹ Abinadi explained that when the Savior was born, He was already divine: “God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God.” See Mosiah 15: 1-2; also Mosiah 3:5; 7:27; Alma 7:9.
- ³⁰ *History of the Church*, 6: 366. Joseph Smith was not alone in making mistakes. Lehi murmured. Jonah ran. Captain Moroni lambasted Pahoran. Peter and the two sons of Zebedee couldn’t even stay awake while the Savior suffered and atoned in the Garden. Even larger-than-life Nephi lamented, “O wretched man that I am! Yea,...my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.” (2 Nephi 4:17.) Perhaps President David O. McKay said it best, that “when God makes the prophet He does not unmake the man.” (*Conference Report*, April 1907.)
- ³¹ For example, in 1993, Deseret Book published *Our Search for Happiness* by Elder M. Russell Ballard. That book became a bestseller and has introduced the Church to thousands of individuals. And yet, not long ago, President Ballard said to me, “You know, I ought to rewrite *Our Search for Happiness*. I know a lot more now.” His statement was about what he has learned rather than what he didn’t know.
- ³² See *Church News* video, October 2018.
- ³³ Doctrine and Covenants 107:27.
- ³⁴ James E. Faust, “Continuous Revelation,” *Ensign*, November 1989.
- ³⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
- ³⁶ 2 Nephi 2:30. Alma the Younger explained how his father was converted: “Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?” (Alma 5:11.)
- ³⁷ “My Testimony,” Church News video, 30 November 2020; <http://thechurchnews.com/2020/11/30/23265192/elder-holland-testimony-video-covid-19-pandemic>.
- ³⁸ See 1 Nephi 6:4.
- ³⁹ The motives of prophets, seers, and revelators today are the same as Nephi’s. “For the fulness of my intent,” Nephi wrote, “is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.” (1 Nephi 6:4.)
- ⁴⁰ See Alma 56: 47, 48.
- ⁴¹ Email from Russell M. Nelson to Sheri Dew, 10 April 2023.
- ⁴² Russell M. Nelson, “The Answer Is Always Jesus Christ,” April 2023 general conference.
- ⁴³ See Alma 26:12.