

Patricia Terry Holland, “First Things First,” in *Finding God at BYU*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Kaye T. Hanson, and James R. Kearl (Provo, UT: The Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 2–15.

Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever (Deuteronomy 4:39–40).

First Things First

Patricia Terry Holland

Patricia Terry Holland is a native of St. George, Utah. A talented musician, she has had specialized training in voice and piano, including study under the direction of a member of the faculty from the Julliard School of Music in New York City. It was the study of music that first brought her to Brigham Young University, though she has returned over the years in several different capacities. She is active in church and community service and has served in the general presidency of the Young Women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and on the board of directors of the Deseret Book Company. Currently she is serving on the Primary Children’s Medical Center Board. She is the coauthor, with her husband, of On Earth As It Is in Heaven. Mrs. Holland is married to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and former president of Brigham Young University. They have three children and six grandchildren.

I first came to BYU as a sixteen year old, when my parents enrolled me in a music camp for young people. Typically, the summer music camps were two to three weeks long. But because I didn’t have exposure to specialized teachers in the small town where I grew up, my parents arranged for me to stay the entire summer. So I had a full summer of exposure to Brigham Young University. It was in that summer that I first fell in love with the University, its mission, and the spirit it held for me. It had a great impact on me. The first thing that had a great and lasting impact on me was seeing students pray over their meals. That’s just not something you usually saw young people do at that age in such a public way. The impression added greatly to my own spiritual growth, building on a foundation laid by deeply religious parents whose whole motivation in life is the spiritual. Seeing other young people being motivated by the Spirit and understanding that it was important to them to pray, even over a hamburger, awakened something within me and began to create spiritual depth and resolve.

I was alone. I was young. I didn’t have any friends. I lived with an older woman off campus. I would get up early in the morning and practice the organ and the piano. I had a lot of time to myself, and I remember the scriptures became very important to me then. I started reading the scriptures that summer because of the influence of watching the students. I prayed with more sincerity because I saw the sincerity with which I thought I saw them praying. I could hear them praying. And they were just enough older than I was that I looked up to all of them. I thought, “Here are all these wonderful BYU students, and look what they do.” The minute I started to study my scriptures daily, they became all-important to me. I have learned that the more I study, the more I want to study. The more I feel the spirit of the Holy Ghost, the more I want that with me continually.

Because they were all older than I was, the students with whom I associated that summer were great role models for me. One young woman, a pianist, particularly impressed me. I remember deciding that summer that I was going to set goals so that by the time I was a college-age student, I could become as competent as she was and play with the kind of touch, feeling, emotion, and passion that I saw in her performances. Others, indeed the entire community of music students, impressed me greatly because it was easy for me to see their religious devotion intertwined with their devotion to their music. Watching other students reading their scriptures, meeting a lot of returned missionaries, and sensing the spirituality at the “Y” motivated me to want to become more like those students.

During the prior academic year, I met Jeff. He was a year older than I in our high school. We had dated once or twice, and he wrote me during the summer. I remember writing him and telling him what a wonderful place the BYU community was, how it inspired me, and motivated me, and gave me great dreams. I wanted to set higher goals, and I wanted him to be a part of that. I wanted him to experience that sort of thing. But every member of his family had gone to the University of Utah. I think that I probably had an influence on him, at least in the beginning, to “hink about going to BYU someday. I think my enthusiasm for it spilled over into his thinking, though it did take some time before he was fully convinced that he was going to go to BYU. He had intended to be a physician from the time he was a little boy. The “U” had a wonderful medical program, so he had always intended to attend the University of Utah.

Over the next year Jeff and I became better friends. And we started to date more seriously—very seriously, in fact! He went on a mission, and we continued to write. I went to Dixie College. When he returned I wanted to further my music training, so I went east and studied music. While I was in New York, he spent an additional year at Dixie. Then he decided to cast his lot with BYU. And he convinced me to come home. Teachers there were trying to convince me to stay, but he was a lot more persuasive than they were. I returned home, we were married in June, and we both enrolled at BYU in the fall of 1963 as a young married couple.

We were very, very poor and eventually one of us had to work full time. I chose to work because we both knew Jeff's career wasn't just for Jeff, it was for our family. I worked full time in the State Bank of Utah, took evening classes, and went to summer school. Sometimes we made enough money so I could go a full semester. Just as he was about to graduate, Jeff was asked to teach for a year in what was then called the College of Religion. He was getting his degree in English, but university administrators had decided to try an experiment with two students fresh out of their undergraduate work. They wanted to choose two students who had no experience in teaching religion classes but who they thought were natural teachers. I remember Robert K. Thomas, who was then the academic vice president, and Dean Wes Belnap talking about this with my husband and a student friend of his, Quinn Gardner. They asked these two if they would stay an extra year, work on a master's degree, and teach several sections of the Book of Mormon. They both agreed to do so.

Jeff fell in love with teaching the Book of Mormon. He had already had a wonderful awakening to the Book of Mormon from his mission president, Elder Marion D. Hanks. As mission president, he wanted his missionaries to know and love the Book of Mormon. So Jeff's training as a missionary and his natural ability to teach were a wonderful combination. To be in the classroom with the Book of Mormon—he loved it! Every night he would come home so excited, saying, "Oh I love this more and more. The more I teach it, the more I see it affecting the students, and the more I love doing it."

At the time, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do for a career. He had decided not to go into medicine. He loved English, he loved writing, and he loved teaching. He had some encouragement to consider going into the practice of law. But after teaching the Book of Mormon for a year, he fell in love with teaching it. He came home one night and said, "Should we give this a try?" I knew spiritually that was what we were to do. It was just one of those moments when I knew the answer was yes. So we left BYU, and Jeff took a position with the Church Educational System, teaching in the institute program. Our first assignment was in the Bay Area in California. Jeff taught there for a year, and then CES had an opening for a director at the University of Washington in Seattle. It was a big institute with two student wards. There were some challenges. The program was faltering. Given Jeff's age and inexperience it was a real gamble on the part of the CES leaders, but they asked him if he would like to take that position. We said, "Yes!" and moved to Seattle. He was called into the bishopric the first Sunday we were in town, and six months later he was made the bishop. The institute students responded to his interest and efforts. In a matter of months the classes were bulging at the seams.

The longer Jeff taught the more he knew he loved to teach. But we knew that if he were to teach to the height of his ability, he needed graduate training. Due to a very spiritual experience Jeff had one evening in the BYU library, he had known for several years that he should go to Yale University. While in Seattle, Jeff had been taking classes at the University of Washington, only to discover that one of the faculty members in English literature was a distinguished graduate from Yale. He offered to write a letter of recommendation if Jeff applied to Yale. He applied, was accepted, and we moved to New Haven, where Jeff enrolled in the American Studies program. We lived across the street from the Divinity School, and he often sat in on some of the lectures there. He was looking for everything that would help prepare him to be a better teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While at Yale, he was called to serve in the presidency of the Hartford Connecticut Stake. He taught two institute classes while we were there—one at Yale and one at Amherst University, which was about a 180-mile round-trip drive each week for our whole time there. Jeff finished a four-year program in three years. They were intense years, but we were truly blessed.

While he was busy, I was a Relief Society president and the mother of two small children. Because of the time, energy, and emotion that church service took, it disciplined and humbled us. We had some very discouraging moments. There was one period when we didn't have any money. I had to borrow money once from friends to buy enough milk to get through the week. I was also sick. I had pneumonia, and my little girl had pneumonia for nearly eight weeks. It was just a very depressing time, a very discouraging time.

I remember at one point actually being so discouraged that I believed Jeff should quit and we should just find a job. We didn't have enough money to do anything but survive; we were stretched so thin. In the most difficult moments of this period, I remember Jeff saying to me, "If you will read your scriptures every day, you will be able to survive this a lot better." I remember thinking, "Oh sure, how is just reading the scriptures going to give us enough money to get

through the week and more energy to get through the month?” It sounded like trivial advice, and I let it pass. A few days later he said, “I promise that if you will read your scriptures it will really make a difference.” He said it so earnestly, I didn’t dismiss it this time. I could see he was grasping for any and every help we could get. I remember thinking, “I have read my scriptures all my life.” Well, I thought I was reading them, but I was reading them once a week, or on Sundays, or whatever.

One day I was just so down, so blue, that I decided to fast and pray. Toward the end of the day, just before I was closing my fast, Jeff’s counsel about reading the scriptures daily kept coming back into my mind. In fact, he had given me a beautiful new set—a triple combination—for Christmas with money he really didn’t have. This must have been February by now. Those scriptures had sat on my nightstand just looking beautiful. I walked over, picked them up, and randomly opened the triple combination. The book opened to section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants, and my eyes fell on the words, “Your minds in times past have been darkened . . . because you have treated lightly the things you have received . . . even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given” (D&C 84:54, 57). I thought, “That is just too specific.” I thought I had read the scriptures, but I could not remember reading “your minds [being] darkened” because of treating lightly the Book of Mormon. Well, my mind had certainly been “darkened.” I knew that was revelation. In a nearby passage, It reads, “For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (D&C 84:45). And I knew if I had that light, truth, spirit, even Jesus Christ with me, it would make a great difference every day.

So I put that to a test. I would not begin a day without reading until I felt the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It’s not that the problems went away; they didn’t. We were still poor. We still had those demanding church callings. But they seemed easier. I had more energy. Somebody gave us an old, second car. Blessings sort of poured from heaven. I attribute it to reading the scriptures. Now I can’t live a day without it. It would be like going without food. It’s like starving for me if I have a day that doesn’t start with the scriptures.

We had to have the help of the Lord to make it through those years. It was a real walk by faith for us poor, struggling married students to get through that experience successfully. It had to be a walk of faith. I think all of this was a preparatory time for Jeff to become the president of BYU, and it prepared me to support and work with him on a spiritual basis.

While we were at Yale, BYU courted us, but Jeff had a contract with CES to return to teaching in the institute program. We returned to Salt Lake City, and Jeff taught at the institute at the University of Utah. We had only been in Salt Lake City for about three months when he was asked to become the director of the Melchizedek Priesthood MIA, a new program that had been instituted by President Harold B. Lee to help the single adults in the church, including college-age students. Jeff continued to teach institute at night and worked with the Melchizedek Priesthood MIA. After two years of this, he was asked by BYU President Dallin H. Oaks to become the dean of Religious Instruction. BYU once again came into our lives.

President Thomas S. Monson interviewed Jeff for that job. In the course of the interview, he happened to say to him, “It’s like we’re throwing young Daniel into the lion’s den, Jeff, so you had better go prayerfully.” He did go just that way. After we were at BYU for only a little while, I remember Jeff coming home and saying, “You know, these faculty members are great people, but they don’t seem to have much fun. We need to do some hosting and have the faculty members over. We need to have people enjoy this work.” So we hosted a lot, and had a lot of brown bag lunches with faculty members. Those faculty members were wonderful people, and they would have supported anybody, but we felt a distance when we first arrived. Jeff was young. He was from the outside. He hadn’t earned his spurs with the old-timers. So it was a challenge. But I remember Jeff saying, “This is a great assignment at a great university. Let’s work on this.” We invited faculty members to our home, and he spent a lot of time listening. He was blessed. A spirit of conviviality seemed to come. His personality was contagious. He loved them, and they knew it. However, two years after being named dean, the Church commissioner of education position became open when Elder Maxwell, then the commissioner, was asked to give his full time to General Authority assignments. Jeff was called by President Spencer W. Kimball to fill that position. We moved back to Salt Lake City.

Four years into this position, Jeff became the executive secretary of the General Authority search committee, chaired by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley. The committee was charged to find a new president for BYU when President Oaks retired. Jeff threw himself into the task, never thinking that his name was going to be submitted. After only three days of effort, he was called in by the First Presidency to make a report. He dutifully appeared and showed them the long list of names he had begun to compile. President Kimball, President Tanner, and President Romney looked at him, smiled, and then President Kimball said, “Very nice. This has been wonderful work, but we are calling you to be the president of BYU.” Unbelieving, Jeff responded: “You’re kidding!” President Kimball looked around the room and with everyone smiling said, “We don’t do a lot of kidding in this room, President Holland.”

I had mixed feelings about this call and what it would mean for our family. It was probably the happiest time in my life to that point. We had our first home in Bountiful, and my children were at wonderful ages. I was just learning how to be a homemaker. In fact, the day the call was extended I was making my first strawberry jam. Then I received this telephone call from Jeff. Interestingly enough, while he was working for the search committee looking for a new president, I had received my own spiritual promptings that he was going to be called to be the president of BYU. So I was not as surprised as he was, and that helped me a great deal. But when the call was extended, I thought, “Oh no. My children—we have moved them around so many times, and we finally have roots.” We were out of school, we were living a normal life, and they were happy. They had friends—each of their equivalent ages—who lived up and down the same street. I thought, “I can’t put them in that environment. I can’t have them live in a fishbowl and have them live such an abnormal life.”

I also had no idea what that would mean for me. I remember lying awake nights worrying about that. In fact, in one of our exchanges with the First Presidency, I had asked if we could live off campus, if there was a possibility that we could live in a normal neighborhood and live a normal life. They were very willing, but Jeff felt strongly that we should live in the president’s home on campus. He knew it would be a challenge, but he thoroughly intended to be a “parent” to those students. He wanted them to know where we lived and that BYU was their home. While he thought our children would do well in this environment, it was a big anxiety for me. And then finally one day I just thought, “Well, your children are going to be your children no matter how you live or where you live. It’s what you do inside the walls of your own home that’s going to make the difference.” We had a little chat with our family and said, “This is going to be a family experience. We will see it as a family calling. We are all to serve the Lord and represent the gospel and do our missionary work and do the best we can.” They were willing and that was the approach we all took to this new assignment.

When Jeff was set apart, sweet President Kimball said to me, “I’m not going to set you apart for this calling, but I feel that you need a special blessing.” He had a vision for women which came out in that blessing. It was really quite remarkable. While I don’t remember the exact words, the sense was, “I bless you that you will have the energy and the desire to serve alongside your husband. You will give everything you can give to serving the University and to serving the Lord in this capacity.” I took his blessing seriously. I felt that a prophet had asked me to do a certain work, and I believed that we do what prophets ask us to do.

It was a very humbling time for me. It was very frightening. I was extremely shy—I still am. One would think, after all those years at the University and in the Young Women General Presidency and everything else that I’ve done, I would have overcome my shyness. But it was a very humbling time for me. I also remember thinking, “If I go to the temple once a week and live the covenants I have made, there are promises that go with those covenants.” Isaiah promises us that though “the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, . . . [his] kindness shall not depart from [us]” (Isa. 54:10). My greatest concern was my children: “Will I lose my children with all of this enormous responsibility? Will they resent it?” I remember reading Isaiah’s promise that if you keep your covenants, your children will all be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children (Isa. 54:13). I also remember getting up early and going to the wonderful Provo Temple and thinking, “If I am just true to these covenants, I will be worthy of those blessings.” It was a humbling time for both of us.

I can now say with deep gratitude that for our children, it turned out to be one of the greatest things that ever happened to them. Whatever life you are asked to live, ultimately you are responsible for what you make of it. Early on we said, “We will concentrate on the good in this and make it a positive experience.” My children tried to focus on the good. They had wonderful opportunities and privileges, and they learned so much. It truly was a blessing for us in every conceivable way. One of the things we do now as a family is talk about the many people whom we hosted in our home and the wonderful influence that they brought. I think of people like Madeleine L ‘Engle, who wrote wonderful children’s literature, Alex Haley, and Chaim Potok, to name a few. And every year we hosted General Authorities. They brought a great spirit into our home and took a genuine interest in our children. It was a wonderful kind of exposure for our children to have dinner conversations with people like this. They have all said that since leaving—and now they are all experienced university students at other universities—they really miss the special spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, that was always a part of our life on the BYU campus.

Students also had a great influence in our children’s lives. When they woke up Sunday mornings and saw thousands of young people dressed in their very best, carrying their scriptures, and looking happy, acting happy, bouncing across the campus toward a church meeting, they couldn’t help but be influenced. And they couldn’t miss seeing them.

I recall one person in particular who was influenced by the spirit of the University in a special way. He was a bus driver. It happened the night that we won an important NCAA tournament game when Danny Ainge made his last-

second basket against Notre Dame. Our children were old enough that we had left them at home when we accompanied the team. We told BYU security that they were there. Security personnel were always good to drive around and keep an eye on the house. But that night a great horde of people came out of their apartments, out of the Marriott Center, out of the Wilkinson Center, out of everywhere. Townspeople came out of their nearby homes and congregated on the campus. They were celebrating, running everywhere on campus. Finally, they said, “Let’s all go congratulate Jeff and Pat.” So they all came over to the president’s home. Our children were looking out the window, and they were absolutely terrified because there were four or five thousand people descending upon our home, climbing over the surrounding walls, and sending up Cougar cheers. But of course no harm came to our children, and no harm was done to our home.

The bus driver had brought some people to the University, and he had listened to the game. He was a member of another faith. He heard us win and then saw what happened on the campus, parked as he was in one of the parking lots. He was impressed that this huge body of students could have so much fun, and celebrate so joyously and buoyantly, but not cause any problems and not destroy anything. He was so impressed that when he returned to his home in Colorado, he called the Mormon missionaries and said, “I want to know more about the Church because of what I saw on the BYU campus.” He joined the Church, and we later heard this story from him personally.

Jeff decided early on that the best thing that he could do for the University was to put the gospel at the “hub of the wheel” and make it a great university because of our gospel foundation, not in spite of it. What some over the years had seen as our disadvantage, he saw as our truest and greatest advantage. Our LDS values and doctrines, our unique, wonderful view of truth would make us a truly distinguished university. It was the University of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Savior was central to Jeff’s life, and he wanted the Savior, the Great Teacher, to be central to the University. So he worked very hard, we both did, at trying to keep that image before the University. I participated with Jeff as much as I could, which was something I wouldn’t have done had it not been for the blessing and clarion call from President Kimball. President Kimball felt that way about his own wife. He felt very strongly that she should participate with him.

One thing Jeff felt strongly about was speaking directly to the students at the start of each semester. And he asked me to join him in that—again something of the parent image. Those devotional addresses wouldn’t be possible, I think, at any other university, but at BYU they were always wonderfully well attended. I look back on those addresses as some of the most important my husband has ever given. Also, although it terrified me, I appreciated my chance to tell the students I loved them.

Most people don’t know that Jeff taught a class every semester he was at BYU, usually a Book of Mormon class. He said it kept him close to the life of both faculty members and students. He loved it. It energized him. Most of the long-term, close student associations he had as president came from regular contact with those students in those classes.

He loved the time with his associates in the administration. Some of the most wonderful memories I have are the nights we I the all went to the temple together to start each semester. Then we would come back to the president’s home for a bowl of soup and fresh cornbread, or some such snack. Those were wonderful nights, wonderful days. I am so sorry that not every university has a temple and gospel principles to unite it, to bind its president to the administrators and faculty and students. Jeff always said Provo is as Nauvoo was originally planned to be—an LDS community with a temple and a university at its center. A temple and a university! That was the ideal city of Zion for Joseph Smith, and it was the ideal city of Zion for Jeffrey Holland.

Of course two of my husband’s most enduring, long-term contributions were made off campus—the building of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies and the publication of the five-volume Encyclopedia of Mormonism by the Macmillan Publishing Company. No book could do justice to what Jeff went through getting the Jerusalem Center built, but someday perhaps that story will be told. From such threatening and difficult beginnings, it has become one of the must-see attractions in the Holy Land. And it has blessed thousands of students’ lives. He loves that building and what it represents. To him it is an integral part of what BYU is saying to the world about Christ and the prophets. For all of its challenge, the success of the Center is one of the true joys of his BYU years.

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism, on the other hand, serves both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints around the world. With a talented, devoted team of editors and literally hundreds of writers, this encyclopedia gave us a great chance—maybe our first real chance—to tell our own doctrine and history, rather than have someone else tell it. Its influence for the Church will go on for many years, and such a project could have been undertaken only at a university like BYU. In that sense it is like other unique BYU services, such as the Missionary Training Center. Without the University, its resources, and its personnel, many of these essential church services could not be provided—at least not on such a large scale. It really is the Lord’s University in the sense that it is sustained by his tithing and directed by his prophets. His Spirit is there for those who are searching for it and looking for it. God’s hand is over that university. He uses it. We see that now in the most profound ways.

While Jeff was president, the late King Hussein of Jordan invited us to visit him when he and others saw us doing so much in Israel. While we were there on one particular visit, we were able to secure a building in the name of the University for university work and for church services. While we couldn't meet as a church officially, we could hold our services if we didn't proselyte. There were perhaps four or five church members in Amman when this building was secured. In 1998 when we visited Amman again at the invitation of the government, my husband was now a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. We visited this little branch. There were over 130 people in attendance at a midweek fireside! They are sending out their own missionaries! We were also able to meet the then Crown Prince, His Majesty Prince Hassan, King Hussein's brother. Because of his interest in education, he was very cordial to us and listened to our view of the Church. He was very warm and wonderful. And he said on this last visit, "You can have anything you want, really. We won't let you come in and proselyte our Muslim people, but you can proselyte the Christian community. We'll recognize your church." Jeff said, "We are probably going to have to have some legal work done to formalize that." The Prince said, "Fine." He picked up the phone and called his legal officers. He then said, "We shall work with yours when you get back to the United States."

This could never have happened without Brigham Young University. In many ways, we would not have much influence in China if it were not for BYU entertaining groups and a host of faculty members going into China, building those relationships and showing the Chinese what the Church of Jesus Christ can do for their young people. The University is a major tool in the hands of the Lord in building the Kingdom of God.

When students and faculty members see the University the way it should be seen, as a tool in the hands of the Lord to teach the gospel and to build up the Kingdom of God, God sort of sets them apart, and they become ambassadors for the University. There is a special countenance given them, and a special ability, which make a big difference. That is real learning. I have been able to witness the work of such people literally by the hundreds; by the thousands, I guess. BYU will always be the Lord's University to me.