

ANCIENT AND INFANT:
STRUGGLE STEADILY UPWARD

David Pulsipher—Editor

Last April, holding a newborn daughter in my arms, I thought of the mighty wrestle of blood, water, and spirit that brought her into the world. Her eyes struggled to focus, her hands to grasp, her lungs to breathe. Though she was new to me, the wrinkles around her eyes hinted at her ancient soul, newly thrust into a harsh and alien experience. I knew these were only the beginning of many struggles to come. But I also knew the incredible joy and satisfaction that would come with each conquered task, as she bent the will of her flesh to her spirit. We named her Grace, and I wished for her as much of it as possible during her coming journey.

Likewise, as we begin a new era under President Clark, we might pause and marvel at the struggle and miracle that has brought about this new creature called Brigham Young University–Idaho. Newly born but not entirely new, we—BYU–Idaho—brought with us who we already are—Ricks College. We are both ancient and infant. And like all children we struggle to bend our new university flesh to the spirit of our eternal past—the Spirit of Ricks—while stretching to become what prophetic visions imply for our millennial future. Each struggle can seem monumental, but each victory brings remarkable joy.

Part of our struggle is with external forces—spiritual, intellectual, and educational trends moving higher education, and society in general, away from the divine roots of teaching, learning, and progression. As the Apostle Paul stated: “We struggle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

But so much of our wrestle is like the ancient struggles of Jacob, Enos, and Alma. They struggled with themselves and with God. Jacob wrestled all night with an angel, until the angel begged Jacob to let him go. “I will not let thee go,” Jacob said, “except thou bless me,” at which point Jacob received his new name—Israel—which means “he perseveres with God” (Genesis 32:24-28). And from this sprang blessings for all the tribes of Israel. Likewise, Enos writes, “I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins,” again involving a prolonged struggle—throughout the day and into the night—and blessings for nations (Enos 1:2). Finally, the Book of Mormon relates that Alma “labored much in spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city”

(Alma 8:10). His struggle with the Lord is all the more poignant for the paucity of fruit from his effort in Ammonihah.

Like the ancient prophets, we wrestle within ourselves and with God in search of blessings, not for ourselves alone, but for multitudes and nations—for the students who come to us and for the lives they will ultimately touch when they leave. We struggle to reconcile external accreditation expectations with internal standards and self-imposed limitations. We struggle to prepare our students to live in and be recognized by a world in which we do not want them always to fully participate. We struggle to integrate an activities program designed to both supplant intercollegiate athletics and supplement academic instruction. We struggle to achieve intellectual and pedagogical excellence while accomplishing intense advising and administrative duties. The struggles are real, often painful. Yet we also sense and have already tasted the incredible peace, comfort, and joy reserved for those who, like Jacob, persevere with God.

The pages that follow evince that intellectual and spiritual struggle. In Elder Eyring's challenge to raise the bar of our spiritual lives and live daily by the promptings of the Spirit and in Elder Bednar's touching description of the Spirit of Ricks as "the Holy Ghost with its attendant spiritual gifts," we find demanding new directions for our campus community. President Clark describes our challenge as bringing students and the institution together into ever new modes of learning and teaching, while David Ward, Faculty Association President, advocates a new degree of dialogic unity among faculty and administrators. Kent Bessey, David Pigott, and David Peck outline for us—in turn—paradoxical, historical, and global implications of the effort.

Perspective: Expressing Mind & Spirit initiates a new feature, the semiannual Mind & Spirit lecture. Brian Tonks, of the Physics Department, accepted our invitation to explain how his scholarship prepares his mind to receive eternal truths. His talk appears in this issue. Ron Messer, of the English Department, will speak in February 2006, and so on.

More precious fruit to enjoy awaits you in the articles, images, and poems of our traditional feature Tending Our Garden.

As we have already sensed from President and Sister Clark, the future of this institution is remarkably promising, even potentially extraordinary. We continue to move upward through personal, departmental, and institutional struggles—wrestling to reconcile our ancient and infant selves. In this process I wish for us, as I did for my daughter, as much grace as possible. ∞