Brothers and sisters, I am grateful to speak to you today. I cannot be with you in person, so I am very grateful for the technology that allows me to share some thoughts with you from my office at home. I can’t be in crowds or meetings during this period of time as I recover from the kidney transplant I received August 2. This operation has been a great blessing. I am recovering well and getting stronger every day. I am grateful for your love and support and for your prayers.

It has been ten years since President Eyring delivered a landmark talk at a BYU–Idaho devotional entitled “A Steady, Upward Course.” That talk contains remarkable prophecies about BYU–Idaho.

This afternoon I would like to reflect for a moment on the last ten years and our experience on the steady, upward course. I want to share with you a pattern I see in our work together. I call the pattern Innovation by Revelation. I will describe the pattern and then comment on seven principles that govern the way the pattern works at BYU–Idaho. I will close with a look forward and offer a few thoughts about what the next ten years will require of us.

TEN YEARS ON THE STEADY, UPWARD COURSE

As I have reflected on the last ten years, two words capture what I feel about where we have been and what we have experienced. The two words are Revelation and Innovation. President Eyring anticipated those themes in his remarks. He spoke on September 18, 2001, a week after terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. It was a time of great uncertainty and economic turmoil. He said:

What I will now describe …is the miraculous thing that has happened here — where the Lord has guided this institution and will guide it in such a way that although there will be tremendous change, the personal deep and spiritual characteristics of the place will not only not be lost, they will be enhanced…

…And change will not end. The phrase “rethinking education” is not to be only a slogan… The school is to be a place of educational innovation — permanently…

…The people here have treated all they had as the Lord’s and always counted it as enough. And they have used it as if it was the offering of the poorest widow to her Lord and to His Kingdom. Nor have they felt badly treated when the Lord asked them to take less and yet give more. Because of that faithful obedience and sacrifice, I certify the Lord has poured out His Spirit here.¹
What President Eyring said ten years ago is true of the university today: Innovation is ongoing at BYU–Idaho, and it occurs powerfully and effectively because of you. Because of your faith and obedience, your humility and consecration, the Lord has blessed us with revelation and associated gifts of heavenly power.

There is a pattern in the way that revelation comes and in the way it inspires and enables innovation. I call this pattern Innovation by Revelation. I believe that recognizing and acting in faith to use that pattern will be essential in the years ahead. I first want to talk about the three arenas in which innovation takes place and then discuss seven key principles that govern the pattern.

**REVELATION AND THE ARENAS OF INNOVATION**

Innovation by Revelation takes place in three different arenas which are closely connected and reinforce one another.

**ARENA NO. 1:** Vision and Strategy

**ARENA NO. 2:** Programs and Initiatives

**ARENA NO. 3:** The Daily Work of Small Groups and Individuals

In each arena revelation and the bestowal of heavenly gifts and power has driven innovation. A scriptural example of the arenas and the way revelation works in them is found in Enoch’s call to be a prophet:

*And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good.*
Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.²

If we take the promises of the Lord in these passages and match them with the three arenas, we gain insight into the way revelation comes and how it drives innovation:

**ARENA NO. 1: VISION & STRATEGY** | The Lord calls Enoch and directs him: “Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee.”³ The Lord leads the university through His living prophets. Revelation about vision and strategy comes to the Prophet and, thus, to the Board and to leaders in the university.

**ARENA NO. 2: PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES** | The Lord promises specific revelation and guidance and specific help and support in the work: “Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance.”⁴ This kind of revelation provides insight and power that guides and nurtures the development of very specific programs and initiatives. It comes to the Board, to the leaders of the university, colleges, departments, programs, task forces, councils, committees, and to individuals who have responsibility for initiatives. It comes when we are on the move. Revelation comes as we act in faith.

**ARENA NO. 3: THE DAILY WORK OF SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS** | The Lord promises His Spirit to (and to justify the words and actions of) His faithful servants: “Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify.”⁵ Revelation — and heavenly power — blesses the daily work of individuals and small groups of people. It comes to the Lord’s faithful servants all across the university. Those who “walk with [the Lord]”⁶ and take action to innovate in their own personal sphere of influence in accord with the Spirit, and with revelations in Arena’s 1 and 2, will be justified by the Lord. The Lord will take what they say and what they do and make it powerful and great.

Innovation by Revelation has been the pattern in the innovations we have experienced at BYU–Idaho. Some of the innovations have been significant and have brought substantial change. I have in mind innovations like the Activities program, the track system, the year-round calendar, Foundations, the Learning Model, online learning, Pathway, and the BYU–Idaho Center. But there are literally thousands of other innovations that have occurred all across the campus that also follow this pattern and are critical to the university’s progress on the steady, upward course. Here is an example of Innovation by Revelation at the level of work groups and individuals.

Over the last ten years, when the university has grown significantly, the total water usage on campus has not increased at all (this is not water use per person, this is total water use). This has saved the university significant resources and has required only a modest investment. It has occurred through many, many small innovations in the way we manage and use water, all of them driven by people in our Facilities Management group. Many, many small incremental innovations have added up to a significant impact on our operating costs as we have pursued the steady upward course.

Revelation has been central to this process. (Of course, so has hard work and hard thinking.) The people involved will tell you of the impressions that have come, the problems solved in what seemed a miraculous way. Heaven must care about how we use water because the folks involved have had the powers of heaven in their work.⁷
INNOVATION BY REVELATION: PRINCIPLES

We have discussed the arenas in which Innovation by Revelation occurs. The arenas are: 1) vision and strategy; 2) programs and initiatives, and 3) the daily work of small groups and individuals. I turn now to a few principles that govern this powerful pattern.

THE INNOVATION FLYWHEEL: THE POWER OF WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE | Our experience illustrates that inspired innovative efforts, closely linked to mission and strategy, create momentum and a store of creative energy. We might call this the innovation flywheel.8

Take Foundations as an example. From 2000 to 2004 when the university received full accreditation, the faculty created hundreds of new courses and many new majors, all shaped and influenced by innovative concepts — integrated majors, clusters, internships, and so forth. In addition, Elder Bednar had laid out a vision of BYU–Idaho as a beacon of light in learning and teaching. This was inspired work. Thus, the development of Foundations took place in an organization with momentum around rethinking education and with experience in receiving revelation and innovating in curriculum and pedagogy. There was inspired creative energy ready to be applied. Today that flywheel continues to be charged with revelation.

KEY IDEA: Seek revelation that will build momentum and charge the flywheel of innovation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INSPIRED COUNSEL | In our innovative efforts we have had a wonderful measure of inspired counsel. When our colleagues and coworkers have an impression or a feeling that comes from the Spirit, they speak up and raise questions and issues and provide new perspective as an innovation develops. Inspired counsel often leads to new directions and saves us from mistakes. It is a source of revelatory guidance.

KEY IDEA: Listen to one another and always seek the guidance of the Spirit.

THE POWER OF SMALL GROUPS OF INSPIRED, COMMITTED PEOPLE | Small groups of people who are committed and empowered — and who are guided by revelation — can do amazing things. We have many examples of that true principle. A key role of leaders in any innovation is to seek revelation in picking the right people for the teams, giving them the right direction and guidance, and staying connected to them for ongoing support and help.

KEY IDEA: Base innovation around small teams of the right, empowered, inspired people.

DISCIPLINE IS ESSENTIAL | Inspired creativity is the engine that makes innovation go. But we also need inspired discipline — objectives, reviews, plans, processes, and some structure, but not too much. Inspired processes of discipline can become a forum for revelation. The key is in the balance between creativity and discipline, and that balance shifts over time as an innovation begins to take shape.
KEY IDEA: Seek revelation to achieve the right balance between creativity and discipline.

INNOVATION REQUIRES A LOT OF LISTENING AND TALKING | Innovation by its very nature involves a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity. Inspired innovation needs a lot of communication — a lot of listening and a lot of talking. This must be in informal settings as well as formal occasions. As noted above, people who feel impressions from the Spirit need to be empowered to speak. Without that we lose a hugely valuable source of insight and inspiration. Discussions, both formal and informal, are often a mechanism the Lord uses to reveal His will. This is revelation by council (cil) and by counsel (sel).

A KEY IDEA: Whatever level of communication you think is sufficient, double it; and then triple that.

THE POWER OF VISION AND STRATEGY | Our experience illustrates the power of vision, especially prophetic vision and a well-conceived strategy. Clarity of vision and strategy cuts through a lot of the ambiguity and sharpens the focus of the innovative work. Vision and strategy, therefore, cannot be vague and ethereal. They must be clear and concrete, but framed broadly enough to allow for creativity and innovation.
A KEY IDEA: Vision and strategy should guide and empower, not handcuff.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY | Innovation by Revelation charges the flywheel, but it can be slowed and ultimately stopped by pride. The innovation-dampening power of pride is manifested not only in the Book of Mormon, but in all types of modern organizations. Our mortal tendency is to respond to success with self-satisfaction and complacency; the heavens close to us, and the inspiration required to innovate is cut off. The antidote to this natural tendency is humility.

The would-be innovator can apply the power of humility by asking a question posed in prayer by Elder Richard G. Scott after he received inspiration about how to be a more effective servant of the Lord. He asked, “Is there more I should know?”

Oliver Cowdery’s experience in attempting to translate suggests that this question should be directed not only heavenward but also to expert colleagues who can help us “study out” our innovative ideas. The counsel and correction they offer is often invaluable as we return to ask in prayer, “Is there more I should know?” When there is more, God blesses us with revelation and we give thanks to God for His mercy and grace.

As this cycle of humility is repeated, revelation come and the innovation flywheel gains additional momentum.

KEY IDEA: Beware of pride; seek the Lord’s guidance and power in humility and faith.

Innovation by Revelation is a pattern of great power. It will be critical to our work as we pursue the steady, upward course in the decade ahead.
LOOKING FORWARD

We are on a remarkable journey at BYU-Idaho. We have come a long way since 2001. Because of your faith and your diligence and your obedience, the Lord has lifted us upward to a higher level of performance in all our work. But I am convinced the Lord is reaching out to us to lift us to even higher ground. He has prepared the way for us to become much more effective in everything we do. I have no doubt that we will. Listen to the words of President Gordon B. Hinckley at the dedication of the Hinckley Building in October 2002:

I see a great future for this institution. It will go forward under inspired leadership. It will grow in strength under a dedicated and able faculty. It will be increasingly recognized as its graduates move out across the world and fill positions of responsibility.

How do I know this?

I know this because this is an institution of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints....

This Church will never fail. Jesus Christ stands at its head. And just as it will never fail, neither will its institutions and programs.

This university will succeed in a wonderful manner. It will take its place among the great learning facilities of our nation as we who have some attachment to it walk and work in faith. That I believe with all my heart and pray that that day will come, as it surely will.

We are in for a tremendous decade ahead. It will be a season of Innovation by Revelation as the Lord and Savior reaches out to lift us higher, preparing His kingdom and us and the rising generation for His return and His millennial reign. We must become more powerful in our influence on our students while we serve more of them at lower relative cost.

In this season ahead — when the university will grow in students, in reach, and in new modes of education — raising substantially the quality of what we do must be paramount. It must be quality of our kind. It must be rooted in eternal truths and grounded in deep learning as we help our students become disciples of Christ and leaders in their families, in the kingdom, and in their work. We must help our students Know, and Do, and Become what God wants them to Know, and Do, and Become. Quality of our kind must be infused with the Spirit of Ricks so that even as we serve more of them, each student will feel the power of the Holy Ghost in their daily lives. Each will feel loved and nurtured by God and by you, His servants; and each student will be imbued with a spirit of responsibility, obedience, humility, sacrifice, service, and deep and abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Quality of this kind will only come through revelation applied and implemented. It will come through Innovation by Revelation. I have no doubt that the revelation will come. The Holy Ghost will minister here in our work; and the Lord will watch over us, guide us, and lift us beyond our own talents and capacities.
You have been prepared for this time and this place. You have been prepared to receive these great blessings.

Ten years ago President Eyring saw it; Elder Bednar saw it; and President Hinckley saw it. Today I reaffirm it: this university will be a beacon on a hill, a light in a dark world — a bright light of quality in learning and teaching and in everything we do.

This will come because you are what Peter called “stewards of the manifold grace of God.” It will come because you treat everything you have as a sacred trust from God. It will come with hard work and diligent seeking. It will come because of your faith in Jesus Christ, your submission to His will, your humility, your consecration, your willingness to sacrifice, and your devotion to the Lord. It will come because we will be focused on blessing the lives of our students — and students everywhere — with our eyes single to the glory of God. It will come because of the grace of the Father and the Son.

My beloved brothers and sisters, I leave you with my testimony. There burns in my heart a sure witness that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I am grateful for the Atonement of the Savior. In recent weeks I have felt His love and His Almighty power. I pray that we will rise to the great privileges He has prepared for us. I know that as we move forward in faith in Him, He will bless us with revelation and heavenly power. This is His Church and His university. I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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4. Ibid.
5. Moses 6:36.
6. Ibid.
8. I am indebted to Henry J. Eyring for this concept.
10. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. 1 Peter 4:10.