

# COGITATIONS



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# Contents

1. A CHRISTMAS STORY	2
2. A DISABILITY? THINK AGAIN	4
3. AN EXTRAORDINARY DÉJÀ VU	7
4. AN UNASSAILABLE WITNESS OF THE BOOK OF MORMONAN	10
5. BECAUSE I DID MY DUTY	13
6. BECOMING ONE THROUGH THE TEMPLE	17
7. BLESSINGS	20
8. THE LAW OF CHASTITY	23
9. CHOOSING TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST	25
10. DOUBLE DUMBS	27
11. ELDER L. TOM PERRY	29
12. ENDURE TO THE END	32
13. EYES TO SEE	34
14. GRANDPA DUNN & DEATH	37
15. HUMILITY	40
16. ACT AND NOT ACTED UPON	44
17. IT ISN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER	47
18. NOT EQUAL BUT ONE	50
19. JOY IN SHARING JOY	53
20. MOTHER TERESA AND KING BENJAMIN	55

21. MY BODY WON'T LET IT	57
22. ONE DANCE TOO MANY	60
23. PATIENCE	63
24. PROFESSING CHRIST IS NOT ENOUGH	65
25. SOMETIMES THINGS DO WORK OUT	67
26. TENDER MERCIES REVISITED	70
27. THE GOSPEL'S TRUE—THE CHURCH IS GETTING THERE	73
28. THE HOMELESS WOMAN	76
29. THE LAW OF CONSECRATION	78
30. THE LAW OF SACRIFICE	80
31. THE MIRACLE OF LUCIA	83
32. THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE	87
33. PIONEERS—A TYPE OF OUR TELESTIAL TOUR	90
34. THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST	93
35. THE REAL QUESTION	96
36. THE SON OF A KING	99
37. TOLERANCE—THE NEW SECULAR MORALITY	102
38. WE CONVERTED A PARAKEET	104
39. WILL WE REMEMBER LIGHT?	107
40. THE LORD IS IN CHARGE	108
41. YOU OUGHT TO BE DOING THAT ANYWAY	111
Endnotes	113

## **COGITATIONS**

***A collection of experiences and observations meaningful to me.***

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# A CHRISTMAS STORY



I like Christmas. A lot! All of my Christmases have been memorable, my choice, and some have been exceptional. Like the Christmas of 1978 in Tustin, California.

I was serving as a counselor in the bishopric at the time. My fifth go-around for that call. I'd heard a thousand times the two most popular clichés that went with that kind of recycling.

*"You'll do it until you get it right."*

*"Always a bridesmaid, never a bride."*

There wasn't much I hadn't experienced in that position, but that was about to change. I was assigned to work with the Young Women and Young Men. All that year we emphasized service, and in that spirit the young people decided to forego their Christmas party and replace it with a meaningful act of service. They would provide the whole Christmas for a needy family. An ad hoc youth committee was organized, and a family outside of our ward was prayerfully selected.

The divorced mother lived with her three children and her own aged mother in a small, one-bedroom house that was scarcely bigger than some peoples' living rooms. No furniture to speak of, and the family's sole source of entertainment came from a small black-and-white television set. Remember, this is 1978. The woman worked nights to provide meager sustenance for

her family, and she didn't have the means to purchase either a Christmas tree or presents for her children and her mother.

Our youth wanted to go all out for this family. The Priests purchased the Christmas tree and presents for the young boy. The Laurels provided the food, including a turkey for Christmas dinner. The Teachers bought presents for the mother. And on it went until an unforgettable Christmas was assured. To make this an even more meaningful experience for our young people, we encouraged them to earn the money they would be contributing. Mom and Dad were off-limits as a resource.

The gifts, beautifully wrapped, the tree, and the food were all taken by the youth committee to this special family several days before Christmas. The tears of the mother, the children, and the grandmother were a poignant thank-you that our youth would never forget.

But the giving experience was not over. Now, it was time for charity—the pure love of Christ.

Christmas morning, as I was ushering my young family into the car to go over to my brother's for Christmas dinner, our Young Men's president pulled up in front of the house. "Did you hear what happened to the family we provided the Christmas for?" he asked.

My puzzled look told him I hadn't. He went on. "While the mother was working Christmas Eve, someone broke into the house and stole all their Christmas presents. They even took their old TV set."

I was crestfallen. Then I noticed that his car was filled with presents. Smiling, he continued.

"This is the second batch going over to the family this morning. When we found out about the robbery, we called a few kids in the ward, and before we knew it, they had contacted others. All these kids and their families donated their own Christmas presents to our Christmas family."

Sitting on top of the pile of packages in his back seat was a beautiful TV set. He saw me looking at it. "One of our young men donated that."

He drove off. I got into the car with my family, and one of my children asked, "What was that all about, Dad?"

I swallowed a couple of times, then answered.

"Let me tell you a Christmas story."

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## A DISABILITY? THINK AGAIN



**W**hat is a disability?

I have more than a significant hearing loss, but I think Joyce has the hearing disability. She hears everything! I admit, however, that my hearing challenge can be a bit taxing for those who are trying to communicate with me. I'm sorry about that, but my so-called disability has huge upsides—like no noise keeps me awake at night, and I don't catch more than a fraction of the dialogue in most movies. With what's out there now, that's a blessing.

My mother passed her hearing loss on to me, as did her mother to her. And my mother taught me how to recognize the challenge and refocus my efforts into something that doesn't require hearing. Her deafness brought her to the typewriter and later the computer where she wrote letters, thank you notes, greeting cards, expressions of sympathy, encouragement, and whatever she thought would make someone feel better. If she knew you, or sometimes just heard about you and your challenges, from time to time you would get something to brighten your day. For missionaries, that cheer came at least monthly. For her children and grandchildren—well, you could make a book of her constant expressions of love and tender counsel. Perhaps most important, my mother

encouraged me to see the literal blessing that someone's so-called disability can be for them and for those around them.

In the late 1990's I was serving as stake president, and one of our bishops asked me to go with him to meet Michelle, a middle-aged woman who was investigating the Church. She was a published author with a hopper full of experiences, including, for a time, being a Roman Catholic nun and an ardent member of NOW (National Organization for Women). Now, she was the caretaker of about a dozen children who were all cerebral palsy victims. Many lived in her home and most were confined to wheelchairs and could only communicate via computers attached to their chairs. She was a single woman and had legally adopted four of them.

I was impressed with her. But how did she feel about the Church? That question got answered without me asking. She raved about the sessions of general conference she just watched and said she had never felt the Spirit like that before. I asked how she was introduced to the Church. With a big smile, she answered, "Kerri Adamic." Kerri, a member of the Church, taught cerebral palsy children. That's how Michelle met her. They became fast friends, and Kerri introduced her to the gospel by sharing her feelings about the church that she had painstakingly written in her journal over the years. Michelle was touched by what she read and accepted Kerri's invitation to have the missionaries teach her.



*Michelle & Kerri*

I say *painstakingly written*, because Kerri was a cerebral palsy victim herself. She was in her early thirties when Michelle met her and had been wheelchair bound since she was a child. Because

of her cerebral palsy, she “verbally” communicated using a computer voice synthesizer (think Stephen Hawking). She wrote by laboriously punching out her messages and talks and journal entries with her left index finger, one letter or word or phrase at a time on her computer.

Michelle was baptized. On the front row were five wheelchairs. Four were occupied by her adopted cerebral palsy children, and the fifth by Kerri. Kerri was also the main speaker. It took untold hours for her to peck out on her computer that exceptional, insightful, and Spirit-laden ten-minute talk. A sister in the ward read it for Kerri, while Kerri sat in her wheelchair in front of the congregation smiling down at us. Not a dry-eye event.

Two months later, two of Michelle’s cerebral palsy children were baptized. This time Kerri gave the invocation using her voice synthesizer, and two other cerebral palsy children bore their testimonies. Three elders were in the font to assist in the baptisms. Ben was at this baptism with Judy, his girlfriend at the time. Judy was not a member of the Church. She had taken missionary lessons, attended church several times, and had tentatively decided she would be baptized, but there was significant hesitancy. As she attended this baptism and the subsequent poignant confirmations the next day at sacrament meeting, she was deeply affected. My cerebral palsy friends brought the Spirit, and that Spirit bore testimony to Judy’s soul. That afternoon in our living room, she and I had a wonderful father-daughter kind of talk. As we concluded, she asked if I would baptize and confirm her.

Michelle later married, was sealed in the temple, and her adopted cerebral palsy children were sealed to her and her husband.

Kerri, like my mother, chose to turn her ostensible disability into an immeasurable blessing. A blessing for Kerri. A blessing for Michelle and her husband and children. And a blessing for my family.

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## AN EXTRAORDINARY DÉJÀ VU



In 1960, I was a young man living in Australia, serving a two-year mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My mission was not at all what I thought it would be. But how could I anticipate extreme highs and lows that I had never before experienced? How could I visualize conditions and circumstances, let alone a culture, I had barely read about? And how could I foresee the lifetime effect that my experiences would have on me and on some of those I worked with, when I was just a wet-behind-the-ears kid?

I fictionalized my Australian experiences, along with their effect on me, in a “semi-novel,” *The Mission*. Written with years of hindsight, it quite accurately portrayed my own struggles and metamorphosis. And the memories of my mission are still an ever-present part of my life.

In 2017, I returned to my Australia mission stomping grounds with Joyce, and Ben and Judy and their family. My first time back. Things had changed! There had been a bumper-crop of skyscrapers in Sydney, and Sydney’s public transportation system was the envy of the world. To paraphrase a verse in the musical, *Oklahoma*, “Everything’s up to date in Sydney City!” What hadn’t changed was the friendliness and openness of the people.

We visited places where I had served and houses I had lived in 57 years earlier. Surprisingly, most were still there. Importantly, not only was I able to reminisce, often emotionally, but Joyce

and Ben could put a physical face on the stories I'd told them a zillion times. And I saw, first-hand, what had taken place in the lives of some of those I had worked so closely with so many years ago.

Albury, New South Wales, the southernmost town in our mission, was my crucible back then. I had been out less than a year, and my companion and I were literally a hundred miles from the nearest missionaries. There were just six active members, including two women and four children, and a brother who did not come to Church and who had not received the priesthood. We met in a little one room rented hall. It was the "mission field" indeed! And for a while, things really looked up. We found and were teaching two responsive families, the Walkerdon's with five children, and Mr. and Mrs. Metz with a baby. And we had reactivated the man who was a member of the Church and had ordained him a priest. But my weeks-long euphoria gave way to reality.

Our recent return to activity brother stopped coming to Church. Both the Walkerdon's and Metz' chucked us. An eye problem I had struggled with since I was a small boy acted up. Then, as if I needed a little something extra to encourage humility, I received a Dear John from my girlfriend! My companion and I stood on a hill looking down on the town, and I remember the thought that flooded my mind, as if it were yesterday: "The Lord sure knew what he was doing sending me all the way to Australia. If I were in the States, I'd be on the next bus home!"

Albury was a stop on our current trip, and it was a Sunday. There was now a large branch of the Church meeting in a beautiful building there. The branch president kindly asked me to speak in sacrament meeting. I did and expressed my gratitude for what I had learned from my challenges serving there so many years ago. I mentioned the names of the Walkerdon's and the Metz', along with the handful who were members back then. When the meeting was over, some of the old timers updated me. Both families that had chucked us those decades ago had been baptized, and Brother and Sister Metz now worked in the temple in Melbourne. At least some of the Walkerdon children were active in the Church, including one who was currently serving a full time mission with his wife.

We next flew to Brisbane and had dinner at the home of Chris and Shane Turvey. Chris was taking care of her mother, Lorraine Carden, who my companion and I taught back in 1962. Lorraine was a young, divorced mother then, with three small children. The oldest, Chris' sister, Kay, was eight and was baptized then with her mother. Years later, Kay introduced her husband-to-be to the Church. That was Elder Terence M. Vinson general authority emeritus and formerly one of the presidency of the Seventy. Although Lorraine was challenged with Alzheimer's, she remembered me, and we had a delightful visit with her and her family. We were shown a picture board with

many of Lorraine's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Four generations now that had been blessed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.



*With Lorraine Carden 2017*

We then visited Ann and Peter Boehme who were also in the Brisbane area. Ann was another young, divorced mother when my companion and I taught her just after I arrived on my mission in 1960. Her four-year-old daughter, Jayne, would sometimes say, "Here come them snoopy old Mormon's," when we visited. I baptized Ann, and as I saw the change in her life, my own life changed. The gospel became *real* to me. It transformed lives! It brought *joy*! Subsequently, Ann married a counselor in the bishopric of her ward and bore three more children. Ann and Peter now were surrounded by a marvelous posterity, all raised in the Church. Her "snoopy-old-Mormon's" Jayne, was a grandmother herself, with all her children endowed.

Fifty-seven years later I saw and felt what I never could have perceived when I was called by President David O. McKay to serve a full time mission. Scores and scores of my Father's children are now in His fold, because I said (and not without significant challenges then), "Yes," to that call. My blessing? I now know the reality of the Lord's joy-promise to those who want to be an instrument in His hands to bring His children back to Him.<sup>1</sup>

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## AN UNASSAILABLE WITNESS OF THE BOOK OF MORMONAN



When I was a boy, back in the mid-1950's, my mother's father, John William Dunn, told me about an experience he had regarding the Book of Mormon. Grandpa lived in Logan, Utah and was born in 1889. Martin Harris, one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, lived in Clarkston, 20 miles northeast of Logan, until his death in 1875.

A man who had spoken with Martin Harris told Grandpa about his experience with him. What I remember my grandfather saying to me was that this man had visited Martin in Clarkston and asked him if the Book of Mormon were true. Martin Harris told him he knew it was true because of what he had seen. That experience my grandfather had when he was a young man made such an impression on him, that he shared it with me.

Over the 70 years or so since I heard the story, I have forgotten most of the details, but I never forgot Grandpa telling me about it and the impact it had on me at the time. Several years ago, I came in possession of my Grandmother Dunn's book of remembrance. It was chockfull of memorabilia, pictures, and documents. I systematically went through these and put them on FamilySearch. That's when I found this little note:

By Godfry

A number of young men with myself went to see ~~Martin-Ha-~~  
 Marin Harris, on the way one of them said,  
 "You are the oldest, you ask him some questions!"  
 When we got there I did ask him,  
 "Brother Harris do you believe the Book of Mormon is true  
 true?"  
 He said, "I do not believe it, Knowledge supercedes  
 belief, I know it is true." The angel showed me the plates,  
 and I heard the voice of God declare they were translated  
 correctly."  
 He was very earnest and sincere in his testimony.

Thomas Godfry                      John E. Godfry  
 John Butters                        Charles Shumway  
 Alma Jensen

I don't know who typed this, but if Mr. Godfrey didn't, it was apparently copied from his handwritten or typed recollection that was in my grandfather's possession. In any case, the note I have is many scores of years old and gives the first-person accounting of the experience of this young man and those who were with him. After over seven decades, I have a simple, powerful, hold-it-in-my hand evidence of what my grandfather told me so many years ago.

I shared this experience with my children and grandchildren. I concluded with this statement: *At this stage of my life, with my experiences, I do not need other witnesses of the truth of the Book of Mormon. I **am** a witness.*

There have been countless articles and books written about the evidences of the Book of Mormon. External evidences include, for example, Mesoamerican archeological discoveries in the last decades and unimpeachable eyewitness accounts of the plates, of the angel safeguarding them, and how Joseph brought the book forth. There are a plethora of internal evidences including Hebraic literary devices within the book and its remarkable consistency, complexity, and detail.

While these are interesting, they are also expected, for the book *is* true. The real proof of the book is what it does to you and for you. How you change when you make it an integral part of your life. How your knowledge, understanding, and love of Jesus Christ grows because of the words you are reading and the Spirit you are feeling. How you are becoming a more Christ-like person through that process.

Back in the early 1970's I was driving with my young family from Utah to our home in southern California. It was late at night and everyone else in the car was asleep. I was listening to

news radio when the newscaster talked with a man by the name of Walter Martin, a Christian radio talk host who for years carried out a vendetta against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He had hired three so-called handwriting experts to exam Solomon Spaulding's handwriting as compared to the Book of Mormon manuscript. I'm not sure which manuscript—either the printer's copy or the original where only a fraction of that manuscript still exists. In any case, those were mostly written by Oliver Cowdery. Walter Martin explained what he had done, and said one of those he hired reported that the manuscript was in Solomon Spaulding's hand. The conclusion: Joseph Smith plagiarized the book from Solomon Spaulding.

For a second, a wave of devastation swept over me, and then the resolve that defined who I was, came. My commitment was unwavering. "I don't care what they say. I will follow that Book for the rest of my life." I knew what it had done to me and for me. And that is what I wanted. Then I almost laughed at the absurdity of what I had just heard. Turns out, that a few days later what the other two experts concluded came out. One said, it was such a frivolous thing he didn't want to participate. The other said he was wondering what Mr. Martin was doing. He had written his opinion that there was no similarity whatsoever between the handwritings, and Mr. Martin didn't even acknowledge it.

The importance of that experience for me was my seeing that the sublime truths and spirit of the Book of Mormon was what *I desired*. How it was changing my life was unimpeachable evidence that it was what Joseph declared it to be.

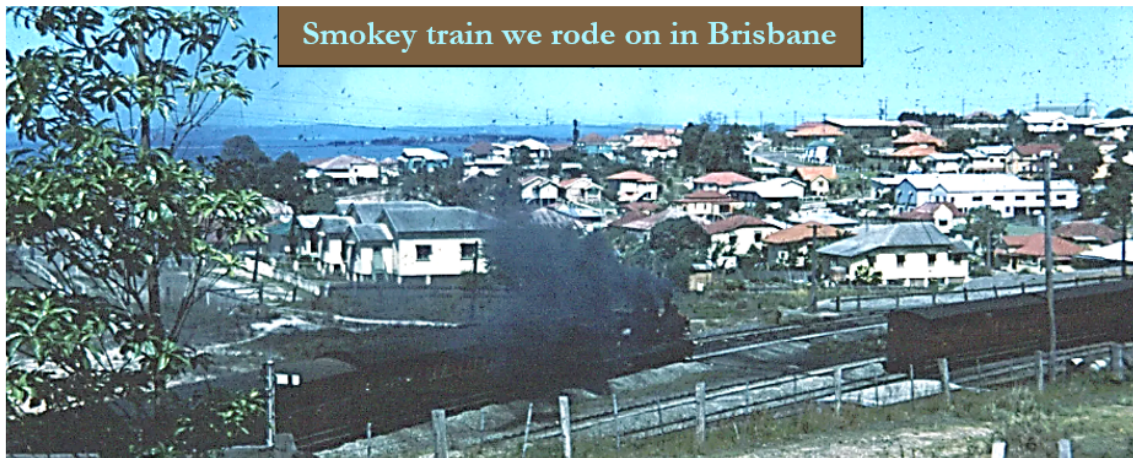
President Ezra Taft Benson said: *We do not have to prove the Book of Mormon is true. The book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

Those who seek to "prove" or "disprove" the Book of Mormon by external evidences are looking beyond the mark. The proof *is* within its pages and the life-changing effect it has on the sincere reader. Joseph Smith said, "A man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."<sup>2</sup> That is the proof!

Every reader can be a certain and sure testator to its truthfulness. *If they want*. The pure humble desire (faith) to follow the Savior is the key. That is why I can declare to my children and grandchildren, that I am a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Like Martin Harris, I don't believe it. I know it!

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## BECAUSE I DID MY DUTY



Summer in Brisbane, Australia can be brutal. Temperature and humidity ride up the scale together. Three-digit heat banded with nearly three-digit humidity is not uncommon. Add to this, or rather subtract from it, the complete lack of air conditioning anywhere in Manly, a Brisbane suburb, back in 1960 where I served the first part of my mission, and you have a formula for misery.

One day, my senior companion and I received the rarest of all gifts from the mission home—a referral. I could count on maybe two or three fingers the number of referrals I received my entire mission, so they were pure gold. But for us to get to this person required a lengthy train ride, then a bus ride, then a several miles walk. And there was no phone number for us to arrange an appointment. We had two alternatives: Chuck it or, spend a whole day in a hot, smoky train car, a sweltering bus, and a blistering walk in the sun, without a guarantee we'd even catch him at home.

My companion and I had a brief discussion about the choices, but we knew we would go. We set a day aside and embarked on our journey. All the way there, and particularly as we trudged the miserable dirt road out into the countryside where this man lived, I kept thinking about the missionary stories I had heard and read about. Missionaries slogging through abominable conditions to find one who was waiting for the gospel. I was confident we were going to add our story to that collection.

Finally, we arrived at the house. We walked up the steps and knocked on the door. Within a few seconds it opened, and an old man stood glaring at us. We introduced ourselves as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (missionaries didn't have badges back then) and explained that we had been asked to stop by to see him.

His eyes went saucer wide. "You Brigham-ites!" he screamed. "You apostates!" He was shaking. "Get off my porch!"

As the door was about to slam in our face, another voice called out. "Dad, let them come in." A younger man appeared. He apologized for his father, who he said belonged to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, now called The Community of Christ, and had "strong feelings" against Utah Mormons. He brought us into their kitchen where he gave us some ice water and let us rest for a few minutes. After a couple of refills, we were on our way.

Apparently, there were other kinds of stories about what some missionaries find when they go the extra mile that I hadn't read. Ours would be on that list. But we did our duty.

Some months later, I was transferred to the town of Goulburn, 700 miles to the south. It was winter, and I was now in likely the coldest town in our mission. With no central heating, below freezing weather, high humidity, and wind that never stopped blowing, the cold slid through your clothes and wrapped around your bones no matter how many layers you were wearing. My luck--serving in one of the hot places in the mission in the summer, and now a cold one in the winter.

After I was there a month or so, we received a transfer telegram. My companion was to catch the next train for points north, and I was to check at the train station every day until my new companion arrived. He was coming from over 1000 miles away, and I wasn't given a time when he would get here. I would be on my own until then and was instructed to stay at our apartment. Of course, missionaries are never left by themselves now. As I often tell young missionaries today, "You have all your rules, because in my day, we didn't."

I was grateful for the reprieve. My feet hurt so bad I could hardly walk and sitting by the warm fireplace in the house where I lived was more than comfortable. Each day, though, I would layer up, get on my bike, and ride to the train station, then return home without a companion. Sunday came, and it was fast Sunday. There were only two member families in town. An older couple, and a young family with two small children. We met in a hall downtown on the second floor of a run-down building. The hall was always littered with cigarette butts and beer bottles, and there was not much heat. Since we missionaries had the key and oversaw the meetings, we went early, cleaned the place up a bit, and prepared the sacrament.



*Church members met on the second floor of this building*

I sat by the compelling fire thinking of all the reasons why I shouldn't go out in the cold to clean up that messy place and hold the meeting—like my aching feet and no companion. But neither of the members had a telephone, and if they showed up they would find the building locked. My internal debate didn't last long. I put on my long-johns, shirt, sweater, suit, overcoat, scarf, and gloves, then got on my bike and rode to town.

I completed all the preparations at the hall, then waited in the cold. The time for the meeting came and went. No one showed. For 15 or 20 minutes, I sat there indulging in a pity-party. I was probably thinking of our wasted day in Brisbane months before. *Deja vu* all over again. I started to put the sacrament away when I heard someone coming up the stairs. It was the elderly sister. She was out of breath, and her face was apple-red from exertion and the cold. She and her husband lived about five miles out of town. They had a car, but only he could drive, and he was sick. She wasn't going to miss partaking of the sacrament, so she rode her bike all the way in.

Should just the two of us hold a fast and testimony meeting? A glance at her sweet face gave me the answer. She sat down at the old, out-of-tune piano and began playing the opening hymn. Immediately, we both knew this was going to be an experience we would never forget. The music

that came out could have accompanied an angels' choir. We sang, and then I gave the opening prayer. We sang the sacrament hymn, and I blessed the sacrament with a depth of humility and desire I had never before felt. Our eyes were wet as we partook of the emblems representing our Savior and our covenants. Then with tears streaming, each of us stood and bore powerful witness of our love and gratitude for Jesus Christ. Throughout that entire meeting, an extraordinary understanding of what He had done for us flooded our souls. It was as though we were on fire. We finished our service with a hymn and a prayer, then fell into each other's arms and wept.

A young missionary and a daughter of God in the winter of her life had, for a moment, shared a glimpse of eternity. Truly, one of the singular experiences of my life. And one I would have missed if I had not "gone the extra mile" and done my duty.

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# BECOMING ONE THROUGH THE TEMPLE



I was a young boy in Primary in the 1940's, and we were encouraged to memorize the Articles of Faith and the names of all the general authorities. There were only 25 then, including the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, seven Seventies, and the Presiding Bishopric. We also memorized where all the temples were located. There were only seven when I started Primary and eight when I graduated. I was told that our prophets said that one day temples would dot the earth, and I thought, "Not in my lifetime!"

There are at least 350 temples around the world today that are operating, under construction, or announced. They are starting to dot the earth, and I suspect we haven't seen anything yet.<sup>1</sup> Why is this so important? Because the temple is all about becoming one here in a telestial world. In this

time of great disruption, rampant sin, and readily available temptation via the internet and social media, having temples in close proximity to faithful members of the Church is essential for them to gather and to spiritually isolate from the world so they can become one with Jesus Christ, with their families, and with each other.<sup>2</sup> Each temple is like a city of Zion, and being in one is being removed from the telestial world just as Enoch's people were.

The story is told of a brother who was leaving the temple and said to the temple president, "I hate to go out into the real world." The temple president responded by pointing his hand to where they were, and saying, " This is the real world."

And so it is.

The endowment reminds us that we are daughters and sons of god, portrays our eternal journey, including what took place before we came to earth, what being here is all about, and what will happen after we leave if we are "true and faithful" to the covenants we make there. It is a powerful symbolic representation of The Plan and provides the keys and knowledge and covenants necessary to become one with Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. That potential oneness is symbolized by the white clothing we wear in the temple and by the oneness of the ordinances administered there. They are virtually the same for everyone, male and female, including the covenants they contain and the blessings that result by keeping those covenants.<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent sealing ordinance is about being one and binds husbands and wives together and children to their parents and grandparents on both sides of the veil. It empowers them to become one in every eternal sense with each other, their family, and with God.<sup>4</sup> Our participation in the temple, after we have received these ordinances for ourselves, involves us linking family members who have left this mortal phase to both their ancestors and their posterity. The oneness we feel with those who are deceased, and who we are serving, and in a meaningful sense redeeming, strengthens us and supports us as we deal with the challenges we face here. Not just because we are reviewing our own celestial covenants and blessings, but doors are open for those we are serving to likewise serve us in ways we might not even be aware of because they are now one with us.<sup>5</sup>

Our Heavenly Father has a fulness of Light and Truth because His children continue forever, and He is infinitely expanding in Light and Truth. He is the ultimate definition of free. We obtain this never ending expansion when we are eternally united in the temple by one who has the authority to administer that sealing ordinance, and that union is subsequently bound by the Holy Spirit of Promise. A man and woman who are thus sealed receive a "fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever."<sup>6</sup> They become one with their endless posterity and, therefore, have an infinite expansion of Light and Truth. Just like our Heavenly Father. They will "have no end" and

will “be from everlasting to everlasting because they continue.” They will be “above all” and “all things are subject unto them.” They “will be gods” and will “have all power.”<sup>7</sup>

This supernal promise holds for every child of our Heavenly Father who desires to be one and to have this eternal end and who will keep the covenants they make in the sacred ordinances they participate in. And while individual circumstances may preclude that eternal binding here in our very temporary mortal experience, if we “faithfully seek that privilege, (ultimately) in time or eternity it will surely be (ours).”<sup>8</sup>

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# BLESSINGS



**B**lessings. What are they? Well, that's an easy question to answer. All I need to do is check my list.

- Good health. Whoops, I mean, GREAT health.
- Money
- Nice house
- Super job
- Beautiful car
- Outstanding talents
- Good looks
- Kids and grandkids all doing fantastic

- My marriage couldn't be better
- BYU basketball team wins (Ehh, that used to be a blessing )
- You fill in the blank\_\_\_\_\_

Maybe another name for the list could be my *itemized expectations*—if I'm keeping the commandments. At least my version of the commandments. After all, how many times did the prophets in the Book of Mormon say if we obey, we will *prosper* in the land?

Some decades ago and with this promise, and probably my list, in mind, I felt impressed by the Spirit to leave my good-paying job and become involved in a start-up company. Things went fine for about a year, maybe two, and then...Well, I don't know how it could have been worse financially. Or emotionally for that matter. The business tanked, we lost our savings, and I was unemployed with a wife and five children to provide for.

But how could this happen? What about my list?! I was doing all the things that qualified me for a current temple recommend. I was serving on the high council at the time. I was trying to be a good husband and father. And I sought spiritual guidance as I made my decision to leave my employment. I was certain that the Spirit directed me to do what I did.

What went wrong?

Actually, nothing went wrong. I just needed to make some adjustments in my perception of what constituted a blessing.

There are all kinds of reasons I need to read the scriptures every day. An important one is that I just might read something that gives me special insight. A revelation in essence, that will be of specific help to me that day. I'm a believer in that. It has happened to me countless times over the years. And that's what happened this time as I read this passage.

*And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan and was **led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.***<sup>1</sup>

It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact this passage had on me then. While Joseph Smith's translation of this scripture varies a little from this, my personal revelation came from this King James rendering.

The Spirit led the Savior into an extraordinarily difficult situation. He was led into a wilderness of deprivation where he would be directly assailed by Satan. That was what the Spirit did! Why? There are lots of answers, including, apparently, the needed growth and strengthening that took place in the Savior that helped prepare Him for his ultimate sacrifice and atonement.<sup>2</sup>

For me, this was a *Eureka!* moment.

Perhaps for the first time in my life, I began to seriously consider what constituted a blessing. Here's what I determined. If I am seeking to keep my covenants, I *will be blessed* with every experience and wherewithal I need to help me come closer to the Savior and assist me in magnifying Him.

That's what happened here.

As a result of this experience, I saw more clearly than ever before some aspects of my life that needed to change. I was more determined than ever to be a better and wiser father and husband. I was more compassionate for others who had failed. And certainly, at least momentarily, this very humbling experience gave me a leg-up on my ongoing personal struggle with pride.

There was nothing Pollyannaish about these realizations for me. I still needed to provide for my family and didn't know how I was going to do it. But I had *hope* that doors would open so I could. Over time, that happened. But not without me receiving a hopper full of additional *learning blessings*. All of which pointed me to observations and understandings that helped me draw nearer the Savior.

Needless to say, my itemized expectations list was tossed. Over time, my prayers were simplified. Besides my thank-you list, and that one seemed to expand, I began to ask only to have experiences that would help me know the Savior, to become more like Him, and to have sufficient for my needs.

The standing promise of the Lord that I would prosper in the land if I were faithful, took on a whole new meaning for me. It really had little to do with temporal conditions that had been so important to me before but by definition were fleeting. It had everything to do with becoming who I *could* become through the grace of Jesus Christ.

And the blessing, the gift, the prospering in the land, I began to see, was any and every experience, no matter its hue and shape, that would help me in my quest to become one with Him.

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## THE LAW OF CHASTITY



I received my patriarchal blessing when I was almost 16 years old. We had been living in St. Louis, Missouri, and since there was no patriarch there, my parents went through the appropriate authorities to have a patriarch in my mother's parents stake in Logan, Utah give my older brother, Bruce, and me a blessing. To my knowledge, none of my peers in St. Louis had had their blessing, so the only thing I knew about what it would be like was what my parents told me.

My mother took Bruce and me to the patriarch's home, and because Bruce was older, he was the first to receive his blessing. I listened carefully to his to see if my blessing would be the same. Where was my faith, huh? My blessing was completely different, and the patriarch said specific things about me and what I felt and thought that he could never have known without inspiration. That got my attention, and he gave me a blessing that has continually impacted me over the decades since then.

One of my blessing's admonitions was to "guard your virtue as you would your life that your children may have a pure and holy father." Of course, I didn't know what it would be like to

be a father and have children then. I could feel, however, the importance of what he said, and my blessing has been a consistent reminder throughout my life to help me avoid and overcome temptations that would keep me from being "a pure and holy father" to my children. A reminder to help me live the Law of Chastity.

The Law of Chastity is that there is to be no sexual relationship except between a man and woman who have been legally and lawfully married according to the Law of God. "Physical intimacy between husband and wife is beautiful and sacred. It is ordained of God for the creation of children and for the expression of love within marriage. ...Heavenly Father has given us the Law of Chastity for our protection. Obedience to this law is essential to personal peace and strength of character and to happiness in the home."<sup>1</sup>

Living the Law of Chastity is not simply having physical intimacy only with the one we are married to. It is a mindset. It is a desire to be pure. The Savior said a lustful mind is breaking this hallowed law.<sup>2</sup> To be as the Savior, to grow up in Him, is to "let virtue garnish (our) thoughts unceasingly." We are then consistently and naturally imbued with His power and understanding here in mortality as we do so.<sup>3</sup>

Physical, verbal, and mental intimacy between a man and woman, who have been legally and lawfully married, is an expression and manifestation of a covenant oneness. It is for a husband and wife to fulfill their sacred obligation to "multiply and replenish the earth" so they can "have joy and rejoicing in their posterity."<sup>4</sup> It is to help "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."<sup>5</sup> Violation of this sacred trust in lustful and demeaning ways is one of the most serious desecrations of God's laws.<sup>6</sup>

To abide the Law of Chastity in our word, thought, and act, is a manifestation of our desire to become as our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother.<sup>7</sup> As I have become a father and grandfather, I have seen the power and importance of what the Lord admonished me through the patriarch so long ago. Using the procreative gift only within the bounds encompassed by Truth and Light characterizes God. We are to be living examples to our own posterity and those around us of what it means to be an eternal father and mother and the "joy and rejoicing" that comes from being faithful and true to this defining law.

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## CHOOSING TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST



**M**y friend, Jack Rushton, had everything going for him. He had a PhD in education and was a popular teacher of religion of high school and college students. He loved music and was an outstanding pianist and clarinetist. He had a lovely wife, Jo Anne, six children, and was serving as a stake president when he had a swimming accident in the ocean that severed his spinal cord. From that moment, he was a quadriplegic on a ventilator. He could not breathe on his own, and the only things he could move were his eyes, his mouth, and his throat muscles.

For the first three months after his accident he wanted to pack it all in and die. But he couldn't even do that. Someone would have to unplug his ventilator for him! Jo Anne not only wouldn't do that but gave him a Scotch blessing for wanting to quit. That changed his life. With her love and support, he determined he would turn this catastrophic event into a blessing for him and others.

For the next nearly 24 years until his death, Jack did just that. He dictated books, spoke to hundreds of audiences, served as a Sunday School teacher, and for much of that time was a stake patriarch, including the 10 ½ years I served as the stake president. In that calling, someone would lift his arm and hold his hand on the head of the one receiving his blessing as he spoke in coordination with his ventilator.

In my conversations with Jack, he said that without this nearly completely debilitating accident, he would not have come to know the Savior as he did now. This experience was a defining moment in his life where he came to know with certainty that Jesus Christ exists and that he wanted to follow Him completely. His current physical condition was an integral part of the process for him to become like the Savior. To literally grow up in Him. His previous service as a bishop, a stake president, and seminary & institute teacher, as fulfilling as they were, had not brought him to that spiritual level.

Apparently, it was a different story for President Joseph F. Smith, the sixth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After he was baptized when he was just a boy, he said, "I felt that I would not injure the smallest insect beneath my feet. I felt as if I wanted to do good everywhere to everybody and to everything. I felt a newness of life, a newness of desire to do that which was right. There was not one particle of desire for evil left in my soul."<sup>1</sup>

That does not describe my baptism experience as an eight-year-old. I had a "good feeling," but I don't recall any self-inspection and certainly no sublime conversion. I still liked to stomp on ants.

Transcendent discoveries and subsequent potential transformation involves choice and process, and for most of us, that is not a simple quest or a onetime experience. In fact, for many, it does not even begin as a quest, and our self-discovery experiences will likely not be as dramatic as Jack's nor come as early in our lives as President Joseph F. Smith's. Rather, we each have our own unique path to find answers to the questions that for us define everything.

"Who am I?"

"Who do I want to be?"

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## DOUBLE DUMBS



**W**hen's the last time you put two (or more) dumb decisions together back-to-back? Usually the second or tertiary dumb is a reaction or attempted correction or a rationalization or a cover-up or any of a thousand you-name-it dumbs resulting from the first dumb. I don't need to go to the news to give you examples of double-dumbs, but I will because that's less embarrassing than me relating my own.

How about this one. A guy in Virginia robs a bank and while he's doing it posts two videos and a photo of his escapade to his Instagram account. He's picked up 20 minutes later. He claims innocence. "I decided to go to the bank," he says. "She (the teller) gave me money, and I left." He goes on. "A robbery is going in and demanding something and taking the money. I didn't do that." He explained that he only asked for the money and he included the word "please."

Yeah. Dumb-Dumb. He's in jail.

Here's another one. This happened in West Virginia. I wonder if he's related to our polite bank thief? This robber goes into a pharmacy wearing full camouflage and a paintball mask. So no one will notice him I guess. He whips out a pepper spray can and starts spraying to incapacitate the employees. Problem is he walked right into the cloud of pepper spray he just created. He staggered out of the business and was captured.

How hard can it be to find a guy in full camouflage wearing a paintball mask and walking like he's drunk?

Okay, so none of us can really identify with the dumbness of robbing a bank or a store and the double dumbs associated with these acts. Maybe this next example is something that some of us may have at least contemplated doing.

We're moving out of the Virginia/West Virginia neck-of-the-woods now and down to a more laid back Florida. You ever have problems with your computer? Well, this fellow in Orlando did. Whether it was his or the computer's fault is immaterial. In his frustration he whips out a gun he just purchased and shoots eight bullets into the offender. He says he realizes shooting his computer wasn't the right thing to do" Yep. A double-dumb. But losing his computer wasn't his only problem. He was summoned to appear in court.

I wonder what the penalty in Florida is for computercide?

I suspect that just about all of us can relate our own very personal double-dumb experiences. I can't say that I've eliminated the possibility of these happening anymore in my life. I can say that I know how to avoid them. Applying that knowledge consistently, however, is still a bit problematic for me.

My very wise friend, Lloyd Rasmussen, used to tell me: "There are two kinds of decisions a smart man will make. The right ones. And the ones he makes right." Maybe a corollary to this is: There are two reasons why we don't make the right decision. We don't know what the right decision is. Or, we know what the right decision is and choose not to make it.

Seems to me the key to avoiding double-dumbs and, like my friend Lloyd, ultimately turning all, or hopefully most, of our decisions into the right ones, is our ready willingness to recognize when we are doing wrong. And stop it! Peace is the result.

Another word for that willingness is repentance.

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# ELDER L. TOM PERRY

## Uncommon Common Man



Our Orange California stake conference in February of 2006 came and went, and our visiting authority left my stake presidency intact. I was set apart as stake president exactly ten years before. Elder Caldwell of the Seventy told me then that I was called by revelation and would be released by the computer in nine years.

The computer must have had a glitch.

Our next stake conference in August was designated by Salt Lake as a stake president's conference, and no visiting authority was scheduled until February of 2007. We in the presidency were more than okay with that and settled in for at least an eleven year duration.

Then in May I received a surprise phone call. Some brother from Church offices wanted to know how far the Orange County airport was from our stake center and if it would accommodate private planes. I said, "Twenty minutes from the stake center and yes it handled private planes."

"You have a general authority stake conference coming up in August," the brother said, "and the senior brethren sometimes attend stake conferences using a private jet."

My response began with a stammer. “Uh, our August stake conference is a stake president’s conference, and we don’t have a general authority scheduled.”

Silence. For a very long moment.

Finally, I spoke. “Doesn’t look like either you or I know what to say now.” I was smiling. I don’t think he was. He just let a cat out of the bag—big time. I’m not a rocket scientist, but that was a pretty obvious clue my presidency was coming to an end. Nearly two months later I received a letter from Elder L Tom Perry saying he would be visiting us, and our presidency would be released.

The Friday afternoon before our conference I picked Elder Perry up at the airport. Immediately, it seemed like I had known him forever. No pretense. No condescending. Just a huge smile, a warm handshake, and a booming voice that I would have heard even without my hearing aids.

“President Hanson. Good to be with you!”

I’m sure he gave that heartfelt greeting to all of the stake presidents he visited. And meant it each of the hundreds of times he did it.

As we drove home we talked about a lot of things. Just like friends do. I told him about the unexpected telephone call I’d received in May that signaled I was going to be released. “Who was that?” he thundered. He wasn’t smiling. I was glad I’d forgotten the name of the brother who called me.

He stayed with us for two days and in between meetings and interviews we would just sit at the dinner table and talk. He was genuinely interested in Joyce, me, and our family. We would quickly answer his questions about us and try to get back to listening to him, his counsel, and particularly his anecdotes.

One of his stories was about his first general conference talk as a member of the Twelve. He was called by President Spencer W. Kimball in April of 1974 to be an apostle. Elder Perry said he only knew about the call one day before conference, and he was to be the last speaker in the Sunday afternoon session just before President Kimball concluded the conference. He was nail-biting nervous through all of the meetings as he sat waiting for his turn to speak. “Bruce (Elder Bruce R. McConkie) sat next to me,” he said. “And just as the speaker before me was concluding, Bruce leaned over to me and whispered: “Tom, this has been the most boring general conference I’ve ever sat through, and if it’s going to be saved at all, you’re going to have to do it!” As he walked to the pulpit, Elder Perry’s wrestle to suppress out loud laughter pushed all nervousness aside and his absorbing objective was simply to keep a conference-appropriate look on his face and speak by the Spirit.

When he and I came into the chapel for stake conference on Sunday, the 1300 or so members in attendance stood. He whispered to me, “That’s embarrassing!”

Elder L Tom Perry. A sincerely humble man.

As we sat on the stand, I looked down at the faces of the members I loved. I had served them as stake president for the past ten and a half years and as a member of the stake presidency for over ten years before that. I about lost it, and I was conducting! I stood at the pulpit trying to control my feelings when Elder Perry got out of his seat and walked up to me. He removed the beautiful leis that some of our Polynesian members had put around his neck and hung them over the microphone so they draped in front of the pulpit. He said to the congregation, “I have hay fever, and if I continue to wear these I’ll cry all the way through my talk.” He put his arm around my shoulder. “I’ll let President Hanson do the crying for me.” That broke us all up and saved me from an impossibly emotional meeting.

My mind was a little skittish though. I neglected to announce the choir number that was to follow the sustaining of the new presidency. When my counselors caught my error as I turned to sit down, I returned to the pulpit. I apologized for the omission, announced the choir’s number, and said, “No wonder I’m being released.”

Some of Elder Perry had rubbed off on me.

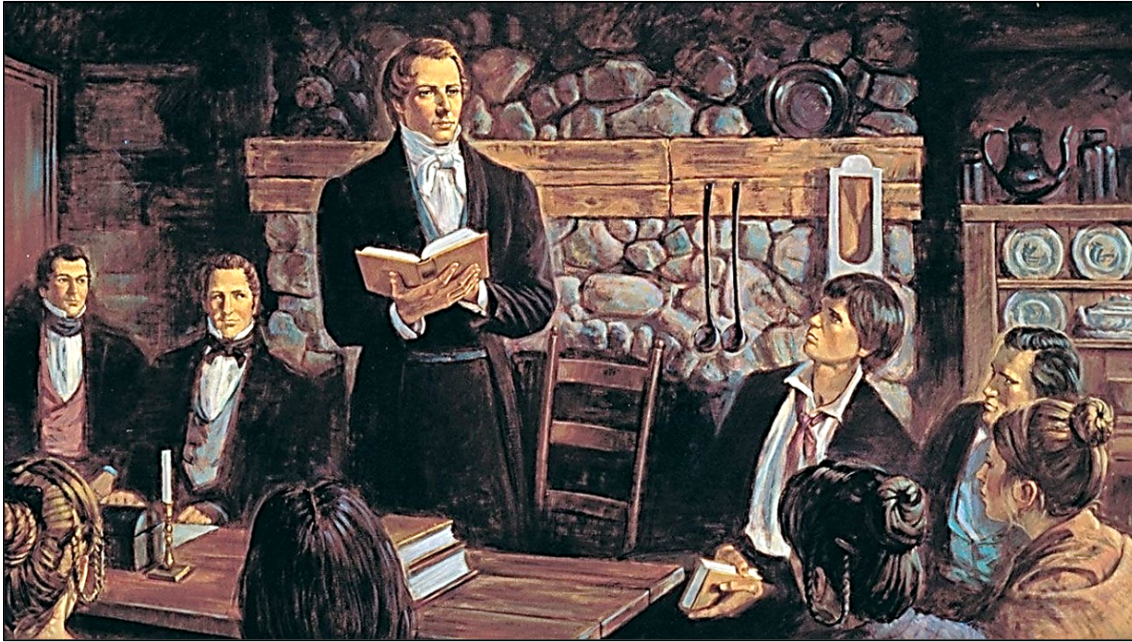
Sometime during our private conversations with him and referring to his being next in line to Elder Boyd K. Packer who was then president of the Twelve, he said with his contagious smile, “Just about all of my efforts these days are devoted to keeping President Packer in good shape. My prayer is that he will outlive me by at least one day.”

His prayer was answered. Elder Packer outlived him by a month.

Elder Perry unremittingly and powerfully testified of the Savior with his unique voice and his selfless actions his entire life. The passing of this most uncommon common man left a very big hole.

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## ENDURE TO THE END



I have unsurpassed awe for Joseph Smith, but not because of the Book of Mormon and other ancient scriptures he helped bring forth, or the revelations he received, or his building of cities and temples with their incumbent sacred ordinances, or the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ and its management. The wherewithal to do these things were gifts from God.

They were full blown miracles, and he was the first to say so. Joseph was "raised up that (God could) show forth (His) wisdom through the weak things of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

What he did that deserves extraordinary praise and admiration and gratitude and love is that he willingly and consistently made himself God's instrument.<sup>2</sup>

He did not quit when he had every conceivable mortal reason to do so.

He obeyed to the last breath of his life. No matter the circumstances. No matter the deaths of his young children. No matter his physical, mental, emotional and financial challenges. No matter his chastisements from the Lord. No matter his imprisonment and his beloved saints being driven

from their homes. No matter the betrayals. No matter the shattering of dreams and hopes and expectations to establish a physical Zion.

For Joseph did more “save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.”<sup>3</sup>

He was told that he would have many afflictions, but he was to endure them.<sup>4</sup>

And he did. He endured to the end.

And the Church is an irrefutable witness that what came *through* him was from God.

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## EYES TO SEE



**H**ow can men and women of intelligence, integrity, scholastic prominence, and with acknowledged expertise, have such divergent views of the Book of Mormon and its origin? For example, take the diametrically opposed conclusions of two prominent anthropology Mesoamerican scholars, who, by the way, are friends. One, Michael Coe, is at least an agnostic, and the other, John Sorenson, a devout member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Michael Coe: I'm a totally irreligious person.... In my opinion, (Joseph Smith) was not just a great religious leader, he was a really great American, and I think he was one of the greatest people who ever lived.... This man had an incredible memory. He made (the Book of Mormon) up and dictated it nonstop. It's ... an incredible feat of the mind. Even if it is all made up, to do something like that is really extraordinary.... I mean, if it's a work of fiction, nobody has ever done anything like this before. And I think it is fiction, but he really carried it through, and my respect for him is unbounded.<sup>1</sup>

John Sorenson: I have (written) a large book (800+ pages and nearly 100 pages in references) ... (that) presents 420 correspondences between the text of the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican cultural patterns and archaeological sequences. On that basis, I maintain there is no alternative to

understanding that the Book of Mormon ... could only have originated from the hands of a native Mesoamerican writer and that scholars will do well to study it seriously.<sup>2</sup>

And I ask the question again: How is this dichotomy possible?

I think the answer is, we see what we want to see. And that ability to choose what we will see, is the crux of agency. The reason we left the presence of God and descended to neutral territory here on this earth.<sup>3</sup> How and what we see, has everything to do with how we want to live our lives. Or, in other words, who we want to become. As we exam the Book of Mormon (or, for that matter, any of the scriptures, the temple, the Church, etc.), we tend to look for that which will confirm the way we think we want to live. Our take, then, maybe isn't so much a statement of our perception of what is true, as it is a declaration of our desires. What we choose *to see* reflects who we choose *to be!*

The perfect proving ground, huh?

But as we have experience, our desires can change. And if that moves us toward the Savior, who is the source of all truth, what we look for and, therefore, what we see, will also change.

Years ago, when I was a stake president, one of our bishops told me that a man living in the boundary of his ward had approached the missionaries to be taught. The bishop was a little concerned that the investigator may have ulterior motives. The reason? The man was on the board of directors of an international evangelical church. He owned or managed many Christian radio stations and had spent years writing and preaching against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Though he seemed sincere, I suggested that the missionaries proceed with caution.

A few months later, the man expressed a desire to meet me, and the missionaries brought him over. He was fascinating! He had several advanced academic degrees, was a Biblical scholar, and was conversant in Hebrew and Greek. He told me how he was brought to investigate the Church. An extraordinary story for maybe another time. He then explained that the Book of Mormon was his converter. He said that before investigating the Church, he had read it through cover-to-cover three times. Then he decided he would really read it. In essence, he would open his eyes to see! "It is a perfect, pure book. Not a flaw in it!" he said. "No one could possibly have written that book. No one!"

His conclusion was that there were only two possible sources: God or Satan. And by the Spirit and the book's contents, he knew it was not Satan. That was why he wanted to meet with the missionaries, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary for him to follow what he now knew to be true.

He asked to speak for a few minutes immediately following his baptism. He was filled with gratitude for all that had led him to this moment and especially for the Book of Mormon. None of us who were there will ever forget his concluding, emotional comment. “In all of my experiences, I have never felt as close to the Savior as I do at this moment.”

The Book of Mormon has affected me in the most sublime ways. It has taught me of Jesus Christ. It is precisely what it claims to be. What we desire is everything. If we want eyes to see, we will see.

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## GRANDPA DUNN & DEATH



When I was 16 years old, my mother received word that my grandpa, her father, was dying of cancer. Our family quickly drove from northern California to Logan, Utah, where he lived. When I saw him in his bed, he just lay there like a skeleton with skin. I lost it and just sobbed. The next day, my father took my siblings up to Idaho, where his parents lived, so they wouldn't be in the way in Grandpa's small house, but I stayed with my mother. I wanted to help take care of my grandpa. Over the next few days, several of us rotated being with him so he wouldn't be alone.

Much of the time he was in a coma, but often he would come out of it and speak to us. One time, when I was the only one in the bedroom with him, he and I were talking, and he stopped. "Who's in the room with you, Steve?" he asked.

I was confused. "I'm the only one here," I said.

"No. You're not. There are people at the foot of my bed."

I couldn't see them, but it seemed as though I could sense there were others there.

A day or two later, a few of us were in his room. Grandpa was awake and alert. He told us that he had been visiting his own parents and brothers who had died, as well as friends and other relatives who had passed on. He described their dress and surroundings in detail, then he looked at my mother. "Don't worry about your daughters, Isabelle," he said. "My mother is taking care of them for you."

The daughters were my twin sisters who died shortly after their birth when I was only two.

I had been taught, since I was little, about The Plan of Salvation. Life did not end when we died, I was told. I believed that. I hoped that. And now with the experience I had with my grandpa, I felt I was a witness to that.

My experience with Grandpa Dunn and the reality of those living on the other side of the veil did not end there. Some 13 years later, I was talking to Will whose name, John William, was Grandpa Dunn's. He was two years old as I recall, and I wanted to try to tell him about my Grandpa who he was named after. I had never done this before given his age, and I showed him a picture of Grandpa Dunn that I had that he, of course, had never seen before. He looked at it and said, "Grandpa Dunn." Then his little finger pointed up, and he said, Grandpa Dunn up there."

What communication this little boy had with his great grandfather I never knew, only that he must have had it.

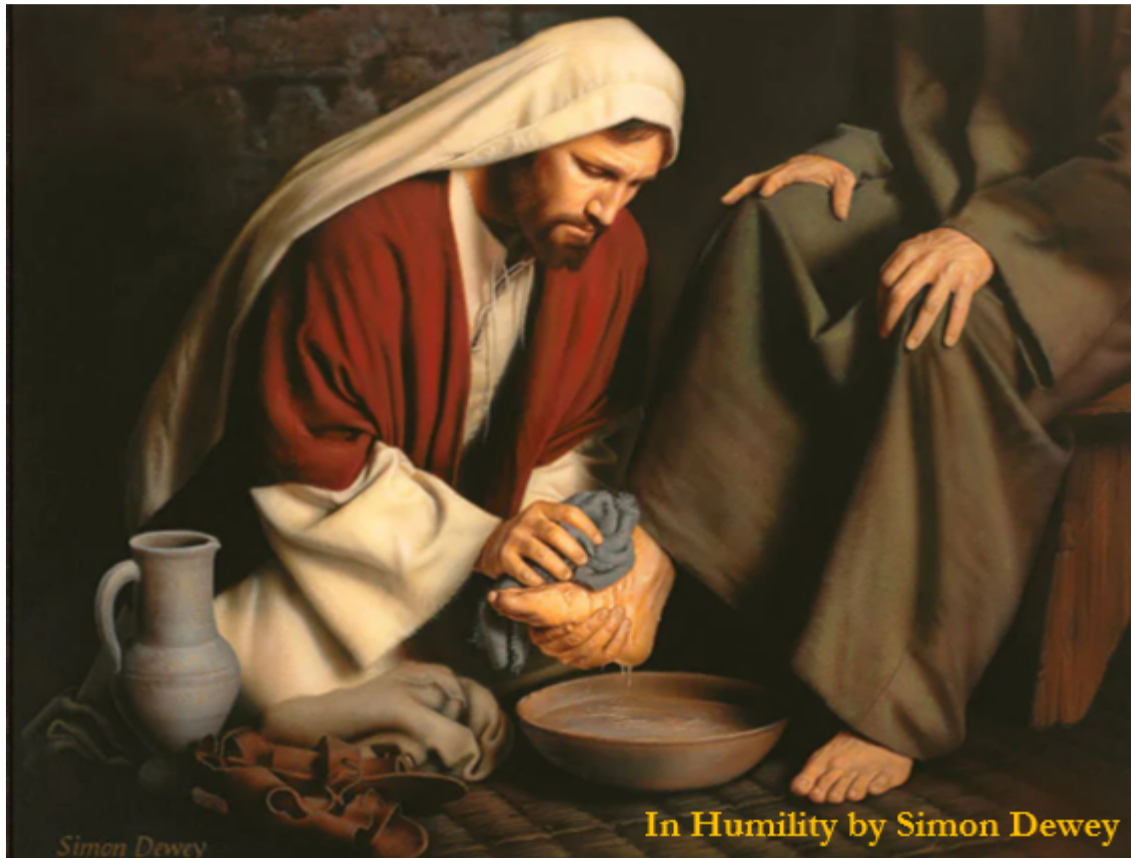
When I was 15 I was given an extraordinary assignment by the Lord in my patriarchal blessing. "There rests upon you a responsibility to gather the history and genealogy of your forefathers and perform work in the house of the Lord for the redemption of your dead kindred. If you are faithful in this labor, the Lord will bless your efforts and you will become a savior on Mount Zion."

For 15 years I was not faithful in doing this. Then in conjunction with a singular blessing from the Lord, I assumed that assignment. Since then I have strived to fulfill it. I have submitted over a thousand family names for temple ordinances. I have gathered thousands of family histories and made them available to living family members. I have served as an ordinance worker in three temples, been a member of a temple presidency and temple recorder, and as a sealer have performed at least 50,000 sealing ordinances. The unmistakable personal experiences I have had with those who have passed on are too numerous to count. They live. They are as real as you and I are. Maybe more so. They have had our mortal experience, but we haven't had their post mortal experience yet. That they are real and can make salvation choices there is why we do temple work for them.

Countless experiences I have had since my Grandfather's death, have confirmed what I learned then. There is a Plan of Salvation. And all of us who have ever lived, including those who are on the earth at this time and those who have passed on, are part of it.

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# HUMILITY



In the late spring of 1988 I was in my business office in Santa Ana, California when our secretary buzzed me. She was excited! “President Benson’s on the phone for you!” President Benson as in Ezra Taft Benson! I had never received a phone call from the president of the Church before, and I haven’t since. I had a good idea, though, why he was calling then, but I was still overwhelmed.

My wife, Joyce, served on the school board with President Benson’s sister-in-law, Barbara, and over the years both Joyce and I became close friends with her. She was not a member of the church. Her husband, Ross, President Benson’s younger brother, had not been active in the Church since he was a young man, and Barbara’s church involvement was mainly through us as we invited her to Church sponsored activities we thought she would enjoy.

She loved “T”, as she fondly referred to President Benson, and often related to us his constant checking up on her since Ross passed away a few years before. That was why President Benson was calling. I was serving as a counselor in the stake presidency at the time, and President Benson was told of my closeness to Barbara and wanted to encourage me to keep my priesthood eye on his sister-in-law.

For the next 30 minutes or so I had a conversation with the prophet of the Lord. I could feel his extraordinary love for Barbara, and he asked me to do everything possible to look after her and keep the Church in front of her. He expressed his genuine love for me too. But his old age, he was nearly 90, was taking its toll. He was unmistakably senile. He repeated himself over and over again, forgetting what we had talked about just a minute or two before, and my distinct impression was he would never be able to speak in another general conference.

I was wrong.

I forgot about the Lord’s promise to renew the bodies of those faithful in magnifying their callings, and there was more God wanted to say to the saints through this prophet.<sup>1</sup>

Just a few months later, in the 1988 October conference, President Benson gave his extraordinary talk on “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon.”<sup>2</sup>

Then six months later, he had President Hinckley read his landmark talk, “Beware of Pride,” that has affected literally millions of members over the years since. Especially me. To underscore the importance of his talk, he said, “This message has been weighing heavily on my soul for some time. I know the Lord wants this message delivered now.”<sup>3</sup>

He told us “there is no such thing as righteous pride.” While “conceit, boastfulness, (and) arrogance...are elements of (pride)...the heart or core is still missing.” The center of pride and the driving force behind it “is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen.” He said this was manifest in our competitive natures where we won’t fully accept God’s authority in giving direction to our lives and our seeking to “elevate ourselves above others and diminish them.”

He quoted C.S. Lewis on how so-called competition lessens us. “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. ...It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone.”

Why we do what we do is everything, and President Benson said when pride rules in our lives, we are in “bondage of men’s judgment.” We are anything but free and are deprived of peace because contention is the result of pride. It is counter to the oneness required to become as our Heavenly Father, and its “antidote...is humility.”<sup>4</sup>

When Moses met with God on “an exceedingly high mountain,” God’s glory was upon him so Moses “could endure his presence.” In that extraordinary meeting, God told Moses, “thou art my son” and “thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten...who is full of grace and truth.” Moses, as God’s son, was His heir, and was in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Moses was everything!

However, when the Lord’s presence withdrew from him, and “he was left unto himself, he fell unto the earth.” It took him a long time to regain his strength, and then the truth of who he was when “left to himself” was a reality stab. “Now, for this cause,” he said, “I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.”<sup>5</sup>

I believe Moses’ experience defines humility. Humility is both a realization and a choice. The realization is that with God and Jesus Christ we can become everything, but without them we are nothing.

The choice is that we willingly and consistently recognize our innate weakness and repent and humble ourselves before Jesus Christ. That brings His grace, and our weakness becomes our strength through that grace and can ultimately bring us to our infinite potential. A fulness of Light and Truth.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1980’s, I received a phone call from a man who talked like he knew me, but I didn’t recognize his voice. It was Jack, a boyhood friend from St. Louis who I hadn’t heard from since I left there, as a young man, over 25 years before. He said that after my family left St. Louis, he stopped going to Church and had nothing to do with religion for the next 15 years or so. Then he came back to the Church and was currently the elders quorum president in his ward in Arizona.

He said for the last number of years he had been trying to locate both my brother and me and explained the unexpected way he finally found us. Then he told me why he was so anxious to do that. “Do you remember when we were just 13 or 14, and we went on this outing, and I showed you two these pornographic pictures?”

I searched my memory for a few seconds, then I told him I did. I hadn’t thought about that probably since I left St. Louis, and I remembered being embarrassed by it at the time and looking away.

There was a long pause, and then he said, “I’ve been trying to find you all these years to ask you to forgive me. I know you never would have seen that kind of stuff if I hadn’t shown you.”

I have thought about that phone call from Jack many times since then. What I wrote in my journal that day, I believe, describes an aspect of humility. “What a tender heart this man has developed, to have those feelings and desires to clean up every dark little corner and crevice of his past.”

Humility is the desire to overcome our pride that is defined by the I want to be better than you competition devil that constantly plagues us in this telestial world. Here, we "naturally," and almost reactively, have a compulsion to compare. To compete. Sometimes subtle. Sometimes in your face.

And it can be either a positive or a negative comparison. Like I'm better than you, or I'll never be as good. It covers the whole range of our experiences from how well we play a sport to our job positions and even Church callings. From how smart or dumb we think we are to how good or bad looking we view ourselves. From how well our house stacks up to others in the neighborhood to how our clothes compare with those around us. And from how much money we make or don't make to what extent we consider ourselves well known or esteemed.

Seeking to be humble allows us to see the foolishness of pride. To see, as Alma did, the irrationality of men when "they are puffed up...to greatness with the vain things of the world."<sup>7</sup>

All we have, we have been given by God. Our time, our talents, our brains, our bodies, our so-called possessions aren't ours at all. That goes for exceptional knowledge or wisdom or communication skills as well. None of these gifts make us greater or better than anyone else. They are tools. Responsibilities. Assignments. Resources. And they are all gifts.<sup>8</sup>

Pride is the loss of freedom. Pride is the loss of our ability to control our own destiny. Pride is the loss of reality. Pride literally damns us because the degree to which one possesses it, to that degree they have excluded Light and Truth from their lives.

Jacob said, "Let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls."<sup>9</sup> And humility brings the opposite results. Humbling ourselves as Christ, who described himself as "meek and lowly in heart,"<sup>10</sup> opens the door to freedom, to Peace, and to His Light.

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## ACT AND NOT ACTED UPON



**F**or 50 years, our sister-in-law, Kaye Terry Hanson, was at the top of Joyce's and my best-friend-list, and for the last nearly year of her life, the three of us had daily morning scripture reading via telephone. Admittedly, our morning get-together was often mostly conversation mingled with scripture.

Joyce's oldest sister, Shirley, had been terminally ill a long time, and she passed away in American Fork, Utah. The next morning, when Kaye called for our daily session, Joyce was on her cellphone with her surviving sisters planning Shirley's funeral. Kaye and I just talked. My feelings were tender as I talked about Shirley and the extraordinary blessing Joyce's never-married sister had been in our family. Then I told Kaye, a divorced single mother, how much I loved her and how grateful I was for the uncounted gifts of time and counsel and just plain love she had so consistently and graciously given me. A tearful conversation.

That evening, Kaye sat in her chair reading a book, *The Chosen*, by Shlomo Kalo, when her mortal stay abruptly and unexpectedly ended. She closed her eyes and peacefully slipped away.

We attended two funerals in Utah that next week. Shirley's was on Monday and was befitting a woman whose life had been filled with service and whose focus was on her family. Her cousin, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, spoke, and another cousin, Linda Margetts, organist for the Tabernacle Choir, provided the music. A mini-general conference.

Kaye's funeral was on Friday. The stake center was filled almost to the stage when Virginia (Ginny) Pearce, daughter of President Hinkley, gave the eulogy. She spoke about Kaye's chronic bout with rheumatic fever as a child, her mother dying from a freak accident when Kaye was on her mission, and Kaye's divorce and raising her two children as a single mother. She reminded the congregation of Kaye's struggle with breast cancer and double mastectomy, and of her latest health challenges with neuropathy, blood clots, and heart irregularities. Then she told us just a few things that Kaye had done—all since her divorce. She was a professor at BYU, her PhD in Theater History. She taught religion classes and communications in the MBA department and was associate director of that world-renowned program. She served as associate director of the BYU Jerusalem Center and was on the Young Women's General Board for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She traveled all over the world giving seminars on communications to leaders of businesses and organizations and spoke at BYU's Education Week and at a BYU Devotional. She led tours to Israel and served as a full time senior missionary in Europe where she worked with young adults throughout the continent and the British Isles. She was an author, a Relief Society president, a Sunday School teacher. And most important, she was an exceptional mother and grandmother and friend.

As Ginny reviewed the accomplishments and challenges of this singular woman, my thoughts went back to a day Ginny didn't know about. One morning, some 40 years before, Kaye came to our house in southern California. The day before, we had been to her home for Thanksgiving dinner. What she told us was life-shattering. After everyone had gone home Thanksgiving evening, her husband gathered together some of his clothes, told her he no longer loved her, and left.

Joyce and I were stunned. "What am I going to do?" Kaye cried, thinking about her two little children and her own just thrown-under-a-bus catastrophe. "I can't even get a job at McDonald's!"

There was nothing in my limited understanding then that I could draw on to even begin to console her, but the Spirit put words into my mouth: "I don't know how, but I promise you if you keep your covenants and focus on the Savior, this will redound to your blessing."

The seemingly impossible promise happened.

At the funeral, after Ginny spoke, Kaye's grandchildren paid tributes to their grandmother and her two children spoke eloquently and powerfully. Then we all had one of the experiences of a lifetime. Nine of the great women of the Church, all who had served with Kaye when she was on the Young Women's general board, stood in a line across the stand, and one-by-one came to the microphone and told how Kaye had blessed her life. That group included former General Young Women Presidents, a former General Relief Society President, and former temple matrons, and counselors in general auxiliary presidencies. Their presence and what they said was electrifying.

I spoke, and I asked all in the congregation who had been taught or tutored or mentored by Kaye to stand. Nearly all 700+ who were there rose to their feet. An overwhelming witness of the influence this woman had on the lives of countless.

A few nights before the funeral, Joyce and I went to dinner with Julie Beck, one of the Church leaders who spoke at her funeral. The conversation centered around Kaye. With great emotion, and in detail, Julie told us how Kaye had taught and trained her. Then she said, "If it hadn't been for Kaye Hanson, I would never have been qualified to serve as General President of the Relief Society."

Kaye, whose unthinkable devastation 40 years earlier led her to think she couldn't even get a job at McDonald's, had chosen to not let her unwanted circumstance control her. Instead, she used this experience to become a power for good in the lives of her children and countless others. She chose to let the priesthood promise given to her 40 years before become a reality.

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## IT ISN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER



A few years after I was called as a stake president, I was home teaching a single, less-active woman and her daughter, Laney (not her real name). While the mother didn't attend church, Laney, a senior in high school, did, and she was active in seminary as well. Her LDS peers encouraged her, and she responded.

Her group went to Disneyland one day and met several other LDS kids from an adjoining stake, including a young man who Laney hit it off with. Subsequently, he went on a mission. That's when the intrigue began.

Several months into his mission, he went AWOL. Just disappeared, and no one seemed to know where he went. His parents were frantic. But I noticed Laney wasn't. Some weeks later, we discovered that the missing missionary was living in a shed behind Laney's house. She and her mother were hiding him.

More time passed, and Laney and the young man began living together. However, with the urging of the young man's parents, the couple agreed to get married, and I was asked to perform it. I invited Laney and her fiancé to visit with me in the stake president's office. They came reluctantly. The Spirit was not there. Right out of the chute, they said they had spent a couple of hours in the library and found out the Church wasn't true. They didn't want anything to do with it, and the

wedding was an accommodation to his parents. They carried no light. I went over a few of the particulars for the wedding, bore my testimony, and expressed my love. I was talking to two blank walls.

The day of the wedding came. I went early to the Church building where it was to be held in a neighboring stake, to see what I could do to be of help. The mother of the groom was there trying to set some things up, but her son, the bride, and the bride's mother hadn't shown. The mother was doing her best to make this difficult challenge in her family's life as tolerable as possible. The situation was so upsetting to the father that he refused to come. I helped the devastated mother prepare a table for food, then we waited. Finally, just moments before the wedding was scheduled to begin, Laney showed up in her Levis and casual blouse with a wedding dress thrown over her shoulder. She went into the restroom and walked out two minutes later in her dress.

But her mother wasn't there. She was bringing the cake, the flowers, and some other essentials. And you really can't start a wedding without the mother of the bride. A half-hour later she came. She apparently had misplaced her car keys. Nothing was organized. I suggested the few bridesmaids and the best man form a line in front of the podium in the chapel. There was no one to play the organ or piano. Laney had brought a CD player but forgot to ask anyone to play it for them. So, we proceeded sans any music.

Laney's mother accompanied her up the aisle, and I muddled my way through some counsel. What do you say to a couple who did what they did, including going to a library for an hour or two and concluding the Church wasn't true? I finished the ceremony, turned the couple around to face the small gathering there, and said, "I present to you, Mister and Missus ...." I forgot the groom's last name!

A perfect ending to a perfect day.

Five and a half years later, my counselors and I were in the Los Angeles temple to receive instructions from the temple presidency. As we were standing in a hallway near the temple foyer, a beautiful young woman took hold of my arm and said, "President Hanson, do you remember me?"

I didn't.

"I'm Laney," she said. "You married us."

After my shock and an embrace, she gave me the brief history of their marriage. Two years into it, she said, they hit rock-bottom. They filed for divorce, and Laney went back to her mother who had moved to the northwest. Then something Alma-the-younger-like happened to both her and her husband. They reconciled, and the Church and the Savior became their rock. Six months later

they went to the temple and were sealed. Now, she said, she was the mother of a baby born in the covenant. My thoughts turned to their parents, particularly, her husband's. I could only imagine the joy they must now be feeling.

Several years ago, while I was serving in the presidency of the Spokane Temple, a man came in to be sealed to his deceased parents. He was in his 60's and was by himself. I was curious about his situation, and while he was preparing for the sealing, I looked up his family's temple records. His mother and father and apparently all his siblings were sealed as a family decades back. This man would have been in his late teens or early 20's at that time and obviously not prepared to be in the temple. Now, after all these years, he was.

And I wept. I was certain his mother and father would be with him in that sealing room.

Time and again I have witnessed scenes akin to these. We know who our children are. But sometimes it takes them a while, and some experiences, to find that out for themselves.

It really isn't over until it's over. We each have our own set of experiences we need before we make our eternal choices. *When* we make those choices is not important. We will make them when we know who we want to be.

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## NOT EQUAL BUT ONE



Just before Christmas a number of years ago I asked my five-year-old granddaughter, Chelsey, what Santa Claus was going to bring her. “Two bikes,” she answered.

“Two bikes?” I was puzzled.

“Yes, Grandpa.” Her face took on a five-year-old’s serious look, and her hand went to her hip. “It was a mistake. I told two different Santa Claus’s to bring me the same thing.”

Chelsey’s view of reality modified along with her experiences like it does with all of us. What is real doesn’t change, of course, but what we perceive to be reality often does. I won’t get into a philosophical dance here, but I suggest there is a very simple litmus test for determining what is really real. If something is eternal in its entity and/or ramifications it is real. On the other hand, if something isn’t going to last past the existence of this world we currently inhabit, then it’s not “real.”

And the concept of equality, and specifically gender equality, pertains only to this world.

The temple is where we experience reality. Not the only place obviously, but the place dedicated exclusively for that purpose. Everything there points us to the reality of Jesus Christ and who

He is, and to our own eternal self. And the ordinances of the holy priesthood administered there, and only there, eternally empower us. In that context we are able to see more clearly the “unreality,” as we look with eternal perspective, of the temporal.

Let’s take the example of gender equality. In the temple, that concept has no meaning. So-called equality requires us to evaluate ourselves in relation to others and has absolutely nothing to do with our relationship with our Heavenly Father or our own eternal potential. In the temple, the reality is becoming one, not equal. One with God. One with our spouse. One with all who choose to be one with Jesus Christ.

In the temple, both men and women are involved in administering the ordinances of the holy priesthood and are not differentiated in the slightest regarding eternal blessings nor in eternal opportunities for priesthood service. In fact, the greatest blessings pertaining to our eternal potential are only given to a man and woman together who have covenanted with each other and with God to be one. Those blessings cannot be received individually. Does that mean then that men and women are “equal,” i.e. the same? Quite the opposite. It means that a man with his unique eternal attributes must become one with a woman, and a woman with her unique eternal characteristics must become one with a man in order for an eternal whole to be created.

I believe that what we can say about physical and emotional similarities and differences between man and woman, we can say about them spiritually as well. Their complementary differences, when brought together through the ordinances of the holy priesthood, neither conflict nor are eliminated, but rather mesh synergistically. Man and woman, husband and wife, working as one, bring about justice tempered with mercy, nurturing enhanced by discipline, order that is also flexible, endurance with perspective, and singleness of purpose couched in patience and kindness. And in the end, that oneness literally brings about God’s purpose. The Eternal life of man.

Do men and women have unique roles in this work and glory process? Yes.

Eve and her daughters, through bearing children and their unique nurturing, open the door for us to come into this crucial telestial, temporary phase of our eternal journey. Here, the sons and daughters of God gain a physical body and choose and learn who they desire to be eternally.

Adam and his sons preside and administer the ordinances of the holy priesthood in this temporal world, that allow the power of godliness to be manifest to us here in the flesh. Presiding brings critical order, and these ordinances are literal gateways that are necessary for us to come back into the presence of God.<sup>1</sup>

With some obvious exceptions, these roles are not mutually exclusive. In fact, neither the introduction into our temporary telestial probation, nor restoration into Celestial glory can be

accomplished by man or woman alone. As man's involvement is mandatory for the woman to exercise her key to create temporary physical life here, so the woman's continual involvement as mother, counselor, nurturer, teacher, and helpmeet in the process of bringing God's children back to Him, is required for man to exercise his priesthood keys that open the door to Eternal life. They both play, simultaneously, a supportive and primary role in Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness.

I was able to be in the delivery room when our fifth daughter, Mary, was born. The only birth of our eight children I was permitted to attend. It seemed as if I were in the temple and was witnessing my wife lay herself upon the alter and offer her life as a sacrifice, if necessary, to bring about God's Eternal purposes. My heart filled with indescribable love and gratitude for her, and what she had wrought. As her life was literally put on the line in two subsequent births, I was struck with the thought that at least in this temporary world, whatever I was required to do by virtue of my service in the priesthood, would pale in comparison to her offering.

“Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

As my view shifts from my myopic mortal view, I see that Joyce and I are an eternal team. Our uniqueness and our similarities are melding together. We are not becoming equal, we are becoming *one*. That is the reality. And that oneness is leading us to better understand and become more like our Heavenly Father...and Heavenly Mother. Even here in our Telestial world.

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## JOY IN SHARING JOY



It was not a slam dunk for me to go on a mission when I was a young man, but I went. My few days experience in the mission home (there was no MTC back then) and receiving my endowment in the temple confirmed for me that I made the right choice. But I had no clue what was about to happen to my life.

My first companion, Kai Sedar, wasted no time introducing me to missionary work. He scheduled a meeting with Ann Cante, a young mother who had recently been divorced and been left with a four year old daughter. My companion had met with her once or twice before and said she was responding favorably to the gospel message.

When I met her, the sadness, depression, and bitterness that she felt was evident. Her idealistic view of marriage and family life had been horribly marred by an unfaithful husband. Her depression had been so great that more than once she had contemplated suicide. Her's was a day-to-day existence with no hope to sustain her. Only her devotion to her daughter kept her going.

As we met with her during the next few weeks, I could see a visible change take place in her countenance. I could hear a ring to her voice that wasn't there when I first met her. And the smiles became much more frequent. Each new gospel concept was absorbed and added a new light to her eyes. She accepted our baptism invitation, and my thoughtful senior companion gave me the opportunity to perform that sacred ordinance. As I lifted her out of the water, she literally glowed! She cried and smiled and hugged me. And the intense joy I felt, I had never felt before.

My serving her helped change her life for the better. But it was more than that. It was as though her joy became my joy. As though the brightening of her light made mine glow even more intensely. The transformation that took place in this woman's life transformed me as well. I was no longer a runner bearing some pre-recorded message of hope. I was involved. I was affected. I saw firsthand the miracle of the gospel. The great miracle of conversion, I discovered, could bring the bearer of The Message closer to their Heavenly Father as well.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that He came into this world to sanctify those who choose to follow Him and to cleanse them from unrighteousness so that they may receive as much Light and Truth as they desire.<sup>1</sup>

That they might have joy.<sup>2</sup>

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## MOTHER TERESA AND KING BENJAMIN



Years ago, I became acquainted with a man who was a Biblical scholar and who, at the time, was a prominent protestant minister. He subsequently left the ministry and over many months, we had a number of gospel conversations. He finally decided to take the missionary discussions. I contacted the missionaries in my ward, gave them some background, and set up a time for them to teach him.

A few days before we were to meet, the senior companion called me. He was nervous and wanted to know how I thought they should handle the meeting. I suggested that they give their discussion like they would to anyone else and listen to the Spirit. My response didn't seem to give him much comfort! The day arrived and the elders did their best to look relaxed but were not too terribly successful. Finally, my friend said, "Elders, before you begin, I just want you to know that everything you are going to tell me, I already believe!" There was almost an audible sigh of relief, and the elders proceeded with renewed confidence.

Although my friend did not join the Church, my experiences with him were profound. In one of the sessions with the missionaries, he picked up his Book of Mormon and read King Benjamin's admonition: "And behold I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings you are only in the service of your God."<sup>1</sup>

He then told us that to see our service to our fellowman as literally and directly service to the Savior was a key principle among the early Christians. But over time, he explained, that understanding had been lost. And today, it was rarely taught or felt among professing Christians. That it was here in The Book of Mormon, stated so clearly and unmistakably, had affected him deeply.

He then told us this story. Years ago before Mother Teresa of India was famous, he, my friend, corresponded with her from time to time. He said she and her co-workers would go to a field at night that was mucky and reeked with a putrid smell. They would stand in a line holding hands in the dark and then stretch their line so they could barely touch one another's fingers. Then they would drop their hands and slowly walk forward—listening carefully for the sound of a baby. A baby that had been abandoned by its mother. When they heard the cry, they would dig through the muck and pick up the baby. They would take it back to their facility, clean it up, and either put it up for adoption or raise it themselves.

Mother Teresa would walk through the sea of humanity that flooded the streets of Calcutta, looking for the dying. And they were plentiful. She would have some of them carried back to her home. There, she would wash them and give them nourishment. Then for hours, she would sit with a stranger's head upon her lap to give comfort and consolation in their last moments on the earth.

My friend wrote her a letter. He asked how she could do this day after day. How she could be so continuously self-sacrificing under such horrible, revolting, circumstances.

The letter he received back simply stated: "Dear Pastor, don't you understand? When I am holding a baby covered with slime, or a ragged beggar's head in my lap, I am holding Jesus Christ."

Perhaps this is what King Benjamin meant when he also said, "I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ. ...I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts."<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, Mother Teresa understood that and did it.

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## MY BODY WON'T LET IT



Some years ago, while sitting in a high priest group meeting in our southern California ward, I noticed the ward Primary president's face peering through the small window of the door leading into the room. She looked around until her eyes focused in my direction, and her finger motioned to come. I glanced at those sitting around me to see who she wanted, then looked back at her. She was staring at me and mouthed, "You!"

I did a "why me" shrug and went to the door. She was tightly holding the hand of my six-year-old grandson, Justin, who was visiting our ward that day. "We can't do a thing with this boy!" she lamented. "You're going to have to take him!" There was no discussion. Justin's hand was placed in mine, and the Primary president marched off. The last time I remember being involved when a Church teacher escorted a child who was misbehaving to his mother was when I was five or six, and I was taken out of my junior Sunday School class to my mother. Maybe it runs in the family.

I walked Justin to the lobby, and we sat on one of the sofas. For a moment, I just looked at him. I loved his face. Not what you'd call angelic for sure, but boy all the way. And there was no

surprise that he had misbehaved in Primary. He had a “history.” Finally, I spoke. “Just-ee, why do you do those things?”

His answer was ground-dirt-honest. “Grandpa, my spirit wants to do the right thing, but my body won’t let it!” I turned my head so he couldn’t see my smile.

A few minutes later he was up and ambling about then drawn to the open door of the chapel like a moth to a candle. I watched him sidle up to it and shook my head at him. That’s all it took. He darted into the empty chapel and ran up the aisle to the stand. I knew what he was going to do. I knew Justin! I was to the door in a second, but Justin was already to the stand. As he ran to the podium and the microphone, I said in a chapel-modified shout, “Justin. No!”

On his tiptoes, he reached up and pulled the mike down to his mouth. It was live! Then after taking a deep breath, he bellowed into the microphone, “I LOVE YOU GRANDPA!” His words reverberated off the chapel walls and down through the halls of the building.

What’re you going to do?

Many times since then I have thought about what he said, “My spirit wants to do the right thing, but my body won’t let it!” I think he spoke for all of us. Certainly, for me. And the great battle in this telestial tour of ours, I believe, is to learn to subject our bodies to the will of our more transcendent inclined spirits.

“Because of the fall our natures have become evil *continually*.”<sup>1</sup> We have been enshrouded by telestial stuff here in our mortal tour and must figure out how to control it and not let it control us.<sup>2</sup> What makes the task even more formidable is that for each of us, our individual mortal paths are affected, even defined, by the body and mind and circumstances our spirits dwell in. No two paths are the same.

In a subsequent talk with Justin, when he was older and discouraged with his uncooperative body and mind, I shared with him this analogy. Our bodies are like a ship and our minds like the computer that runs the ship. Our spirits are like the captain of the ship. When we see a sleek, beautiful vessel seemingly without a dent in its hull or blister in its paint, and with motors humming and its computer allowing for no deviation in its course, we are likely to assume the captain is just as perfect. Conversely, when we see a banged-up ship with a hard-chugging motor that sounds to be on its last legs, and its computer wreaking havoc with its direction, we may brand that captain an incompetent failure.

In fact, our judgment of the captain by the vessel and computer he is saddled with may be far off the mark. It is entirely possible that the skipper of the ship none of us would want to be in, may be extraordinary. And with what he must work with, he may be one of the few able to even get it

to run, let alone make it reasonably productive. On the other hand, the captain of the ideal ship may be incapable of handling anything that doesn't automatically run itself.

Moral? Don't judge a captain by his ship. And, don't judge a spirit by the body and mind it inhabits. Leave that to our Heavenly Father who knows each one of us intimately.

For years, I served as a chaplain in the Orange County jails. There isn't much I haven't seen. One thing I learned. Every man and woman I worked with were sons and daughters of God who loves them. Each had divine potential, but each was challenged physically or mentally or emotionally in some problematic way. Their ship and/or their computer were banged up. And I sensed that, for many, their spirits were doing the very best they could with what they had to work with. They were learning what they needed to learn with what they had and would be able to make eternal choices according to who they wanted to be as a result.

By definition our mortal state is temporary. No matter what shape our ship and computer may be in here, we just need to do the best we can with what we have. The grace of Jesus Christ will take it from there. Our eternal ship will be just what we choose it to be.

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## ONE DANCE TOO MANY



Over 130 years ago, my great-great grandfather Anderson and his family helped settle Idaho's upper Snake River valley. He was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint and was an obstinate Swede. His daughter married and, as was the custom, to celebrate the event he provided a wedding dance at his log cabin home. The bishop had established a rule about dances. He said there could not be more than two round dances (slow dances) in an evening. The rest were to be lively dances. He apparently felt slow dances gave couples too much opportunity for intimacy. Whatever the reason, that was the rule.

And the rule was about to be broken!

The bride chose a waltz for her special bride's dance with her father. Two other round dances occurred that evening as well. A member of the bishopric was in attendance, and he was counting. Three round dances! He dutifully reported the transgression.

The next Sunday the bishop pulled Grandpa aside. "You broke the rule, Brother Anderson. I want you to apologize to the ward members in sacrament meeting and ask them to forgive you."

That raised Grandpa's Swedish dander. "I didn't do anything wrong! I have nothing to apologize for!" And with that he left and went home.

As each Sunday rolled around, he stayed home and watched sullenly as his family got ready for church. Finally, after six months of stubbornness, he broke down and cried. His wife said, "Come on, Pa. Do what the bishop asks and apologize to the ward. You are so miserable and unhappy."

He put on his Sunday clothes and went to church with his family. After some hem-hawing, he said to the bishop, "I'll apologize." Then added, "But I still can't see any harm in having three round dances."

When, as a young man, I first heard this story, I was upset at the bishop and proud that Grandpa had stuck to his guns. I was as wrong as my grandpa. Grandpa's perception of the bishop's no-more-than-two-round-dances rule as being plain dumb had nothing to do with what Grandpa should have done. And with a few years of experience under my belt, I finally began to see this episode in a whole different light.

My grandfather had raised his hand to sustain his bishop and to obey his requests. He went back on his promise twice: Exceeding the two-round-dance limit and refusing to apologize to the ward. And to make matters worse, for six months he refused to go with his family to church and partake of the sacrament. His disobedience, didn't matter much what the rule was, brought both him and his family six months of misery. And how did it make the bishop feel? What effect did Grandpa's acts have on the members of the ward in this close-knit pioneer community? What did his example teach his children?

Grandpa was wrong!

Some years ago, a friend of mine was a bishop in Salt Lake. He told me that his stake president had requested that all bishopric members and priesthood leaders wear white shirts and ties on Sunday. A member of his ward council, who was affected by the request, said, "He can't tell us how to dress! That's going too far. Wearing a white shirt has nothing to do with my priesthood responsibility, and I'm not going to do it!"

My friend replied, "Brother, I kind of look at it this way. There are so many of the commandments that are hard to keep consistently that when an easy one like wearing white shirts comes along, I willingly do it all the way. I hope I can make up some points that I've lost as I struggle with some of the hard ones!"

In an admittedly tongue-in-cheek way, my bishop friend summarized the importance of obedience: The very act of obedience develops self-control and strengthens and increases our ability to keep even the most difficult commandments.

I've discovered another reason to obey my church leaders. They are almost always right! They may be no smarter than the average member. They may have even less experience than many of

those who they have responsibilities over. But they have something that sets them apart. They have been given the authority by those who hold priesthood keys to serve where they are serving and given a commensurate priesthood blessing of wisdom and inspiration. Thus, they are entitled both to receive revelation and possess good judgment regarding their duties and seeking the well-being of those in their care.

So, I obey because I've made a promise to do it. I obey because my leaders are almost always right. And I obey, because that is the way I learn the kind of self-mastery that puts me on the path to becoming one with Jesus Christ.

My commitment to obey is my foundational covenant. My ultimate standing before God, and my proximity to Him, depend on my willingness to keep it.

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## PATIENCE



**M**any years ago, as a young father with several small children, I concluded that the family was a crucible in which gods are made. Where else, I reasoned, would I have the patience-trying experiences that Joyce and I were bombarded with as we struggled to maintain some sort of order and self-control while surrounded by babies and adolescents? Each one with different levels of maturity, wants, and I'm-not-there-yet behaviors.

“By the time I get through this,” I determined, “I will have mastered patience.” Unfortunately, trying to move from looking philosophically and with regret at my behavior after a frustrating experience was over, to applying patience while I was still smack-dab in the middle of it, was often an inconsistent struggle for me. However, those realizations and my striving to be patient during turmoil, even though coming in fits and starts, was important. As irregular and inadequate my efforts were at times, still they had a positive effect on every member of my family. For one thing, I became quick to apologize when my lack of patience flared, and over time, I saw progress. But

regrettably, it was much slower than I wanted. In my journal, at the beginning of each year, I wrote my personal goals. And year after year at the top was patience.

There eventually came two serendipitous insights that were literally life changing for me. First, I realized that my primary responsibility to my family was for me to try to act and think like a heavenly father, and not to try to mold my children into heavenly children. In the eternal scheme of things, I discovered that I'm the only one I either have the right or the capability to control or change. At the very least, my seeking to forcefully perfect others, distracted me from focusing on my own weaknesses. Mote or beam in the eye comes to mind. More significant, it replicated Satan's compulsion-plan that would rob others of agency and included, perhaps, an unstated desire on my part, like Lucifer's, to be elevated to savior status. An uncomfortable "give-me-the-glory," self-promoting thought for sure. The real Savior's way was invitation, patience, example, and grace.

My second course-changing awareness was the reality of the miracle of striving to love God and Jesus Christ first and with all my heart, might, mind, and strength.<sup>1</sup> That I *wanted* to do this was a personal discovery of literally infinite potential. To love Them was to want to become one with Them and to place that desire above all other desires. It was to offer the only thing that was truly mine: My soul.<sup>2</sup> This was the gateway to becoming as They are. This was the means of obtaining constant Spirit-guidance to best counsel and serve and love my children, Joyce, and my fellowmen. It was how I could receive assistance and direction in all that I was about here on my telestial tour. This was the *only* way that patience and every other godly attribute could ultimately and unfailingly be manifest in my life. This was the way to my lasting peace.

The love of God is His supernal gift, I learned, and it was mine if I truly wanted it.<sup>3</sup> The wanting it was everything, because with that came the desire to actively and consistently seek to know my weaknesses so they could be overcome. As my substantial pride gradually ebbed, my pursuit of repentance daily, hourly, and at the very moment of my slipping, became ever more regular. I came to see that my ability to recognize my weaknesses was in direct correlation to the degree to which I drew nearer Jesus Christ. The degree to which I loved Him. And this love, in turn, gave me access to receiving His grace in overcoming all that kept me from Him. Including the ultimate turning of my impatient weaknesses into a placid strength.<sup>4</sup>

My challenge with patience is not over yet. I suspect that while I'm enshrouded with this courser telestial stuff, remnants of my impatience will remain. Ultimately, though, because I desire it, and because the grace of Jesus Christ is real, I believe it will become a thing of the past. And I will yet see the fulfillment of the Savior's promise: "In your patience, possess ye your souls."<sup>5</sup>

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## PROFESSING CHRIST IS NOT ENOUGH



A friend of mine left the ministry of a mainstream Protestant church where he had served for over 20 years. It was extremely difficult for him, as you can imagine. He was nationally prominent both in his religion as well as in Protestant circles in general and had lectured and been a consultant to other ministers over a long period of time. To a much reduced extent, he continued his involvement in these circles even after leaving the ministry.

On one occasion, he and his wife were meeting with a group of ministers. He told them they should look to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for ideas about how to implement the teachings of Christ.

You can imagine the response he got with that suggestion!

"Pastor, how can you make that kind of statement? The Mormons aren't even Christians!"

Here's how my friend responded.

"My experience has been that the Protestant churches are good at teaching about Jesus Christ, but the Latter-day Saints live Christ. My family and I have had difficult economic circumstances over the past months. We have had to move twice. We couldn't afford to have movers move us so we hired a truck and did it ourselves. For those moves, there was one man from my former congregation who came to help me. On the other hand, there were twenty-seven Latter-day Saints, including a beautiful man who was 90 years old, who were there to assist us!"

Then his wife took the baton. Referring to the full time missionaries that had worked all day to help them, she said, "There were two handsome young men who did much of the work. I know they had better things to do than lug furniture around for someone they didn't even know, but there they were. I think you pastors would be hard pressed to find in your congregations anyone like those two who would have volunteered their time under those circumstances."

She wasn't through.

"When the moving was over, they were all hot and sweaty. I thanked them for helping us. Do you know what they said to me? They said, 'Oh, don't thank us. Thank you for letting us be of service!'"

The ministers were silent. There was nothing more to be said.

It is one thing to profess Christ. It is quite another to follow Him.

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## SOMETIMES THINGS DO WORK OUT



**B**ill Gould was a most extraordinary man whose example and kindness affected me deeply. He was literally known throughout the world as the pre-eminent voice for renewable energy. He was also chairman of the board and CEO of Southern California Edison, one of the largest privately-owned utility companies in the world. Bill, in his career, had met and counseled with the world's industrial giants and leaders of nations both large and small.

I first met Bill in 1987. He was a regional representative for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was visiting our stake in Orange County where I served as a counselor in the stake presidency. I don't know why there was almost instant bonding between us, as he was 21 years my senior. Maybe it was because we both loved to write. Or maybe because we both loved raisins. In any case, virtually from the git-go we traded writings. Mine, fiction and self-help articles.

His, memoirs and personal history. And what a history! From a boy of small stature with a horrific stuttering problem and son of a coal-dust-eating railroad engineer, to a man known throughout the world for his accomplishments and contributions.

I got the best of the bargain in our exchanges. Bill was not only the consummate “Martha” with his practicality and I’ll-figure-out-how-to-do-it genius, but he was a spiritual, poetic “Mary” as well. An extraordinary hybrid whose writing skill dwarfed my own.

One of his stories was particularly poignant. As a boy, Bill lived in Provo, Utah, and his diminutive size and severe stuttering problem contributed to his painfully shy disposition. He was always the last one chosen for a team, if chosen at all, and was the subject of constant derision from many of his peers. He was maybe eight or nine-years-of-age when his grade school teacher gave the children an assignment to write an essay and then read the essay in front of the class.

Bill’s turn came, and he fearfully stood. He knew what would happen. His stuttering was so overwhelming that he didn’t get more than a few words out before he stopped. Embarrassed to tears he started to take his seat when the teacher told him to stay where he was. “You will finish, Bill,” she said. She was probably well-meaning, thinking that forcing Bill to go through this would help him overcome his stuttering. For Bill, though, his teacher’s act was bordering on demonic and would forever brand him an unacceptable.

For the longest time Bill just stood there. Then one of his classmates, a young girl by the name of Millie who was sitting on the front row, reached out her hand, took his, and smiled up at him. That act of love calmed and strengthened him, and he finished his reading.

Such were the Bill Gould stories he shared with me, and for the next few years, we kept in close touch. Bill’s wife, Erlyn, was a beautiful woman. He idolized her and cared for her. She was a cancer victim and graciously and courageously struggled to stay afloat. She passed away in 1992, and it was as though a chunk of Bill died with her. For the next nearly two years it seemed as though Bill just disappeared, and I had little contact with him. Then one day when Joyce and I were in the Los Angeles Temple, I saw him. And he was not alone!

When he saw me, his face turned total smile, and he pulled the woman he was with close to him. “Steve, do you remember one of my stories about a girl named Millie who held my hand to help me get through an agonizing ordeal when I was a boy?”

“Yes!” I answered. “Who could forget that story!”

Bill’s smile got wider. “This is Millie. Millie Gould now. We were married last week.”

My turn to smile!

Bill then talked about his funk when his wife, Erlyn, died. He was in an I'm-going-no-where morass, and he finally determined to get out of it. His plan was straight Bill Gould. He reviewed his life to determine those who had given him grace and had made all the difference for him at critical times. Then one-by-one he sought them out to tell them thank you and to now impart his own grace to them to the extent he could.

While this was happening, Bill's daughter, who lived in Provo, was talking to her widow neighbor about her dad and how difficult his life had been since his wife's death. When the neighbor found out that her maiden name was Gould, she asked what her father's name was.

"William Gould," the daughter replied.

"Billy Gould? As a boy, did he go to school in Provo?"

The daughter nodded, and her neighbor, Millie, smiled.

The rest is history.

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## TENDER MERCIES REVISITED



*Heaven's tender mercies are everywhere, and certainly the little good we do in one generation comes back to bless us and multiple generations more.<sup>1</sup>*

In 2016 I received an email from our grandson, Nathan Harman, who was serving as a missionary in Liberia West Africa. He reported that the area president, Elder Terence Vinson, a general authority Seventy, had visited his mission and spoke to the missionaries. Nathan was moved in the most profound way. His testimony was strengthened, and his resolve to be an even better missionary was increased. He did not know my connection to Elder Vinson's wife, Kay, and, therefore, to Elder Vinson.

Several years before when Elder Vinson, an Australian, was called to serve as a general authority, he related the story of his conversion. He said he was introduced to the Church in the early 1970's by the young woman he was dating, Kay Carden. They discussed religion and agreed that each Sunday they would both attend each other's church. Elder Vinson's was a spacious, beautiful edifice, and Kay's a small, rented building where her little Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints branch met. After a while, referring to the Spirit he felt at Kay's Church, Elder

Vinson said, “The comparison was embarrassing!” He began taking missionary discussions and was subsequently baptized.



*Sydney Harbour Bridge*

In January of 1962, eleven or twelve years before Kay introduced her future husband to the Church, my companion, Elder Wagstaff, and I knocked on the door of Lorraine Carden who was living in a suburb of Sydney, Australia. A divorced mother with three young children, Lorraine absorbed the gospel like a sponge. Two weeks later, she and her oldest daughter, Kay, were baptized. And the other children followed as they reached baptism age.

Now, many decades after I first met Lorraine and Kay, Kay’s husband, Elder Vinson, affected my grandson in a powerful and direct way. The results of my missionary efforts over a half-century ago had come full circle to bless my family and, therefore, me.

Shortly after receiving Nathan’s email, Joyce and I attended the Coeur d’Alene, Idaho stake conference. We are not members of that stake, but Joyce’s cousin, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, was presiding, and we wanted to hear him speak. He was accompanied by Elder Meurs, a recently called general authority Seventy. Elder Meurs is from a small town in western Australia, and he told the fascinating and moving story of how missionaries found his family when he was a boy in the late 1950’s.

I immediately identified with those missionaries, and Elder Meurs’ talk moved me to want to make a concerted effort to contact Lorraine Carden to let her know the affect her son-in-law, Elder

Vinson, had on my grandson. Lorraine and I had communicated with each other regularly since my mission, but she had not responded to my emails for a couple of years. She and I were Facebook friends, though, and I determined to try that route. I went through my missionary journal and posted on her Facebook page a summary of the events that brought her and her family into the Church. Then I related my grandson's experience with Elder Vinson.

I received a beautiful, loving response from her youngest daughter who was taking care of her "Mum" in Brisbane. Lorraine was an Alzheimer's victim, she explained. That's why I hadn't heard from her. Then her sister, Kay Vinson, messaged me on Facebook. It was my first contact with her since she was baptized. Here is what she wrote:

*A missionary from the US serves in Sydney in 1962, (and) a family's life is forever changed. Over 50 years later a connection occurs in Liberia, West Africa that ties these people together again. Such a marvelous reminder that we are (God's) children. On mission tours I often tell the missionaries that their converts will never forget them just like I haven't forgotten Elder Hanson and Elder Wagstaff, even though I was just a child at the time. Two weeks was all it took to change the destiny of generations. I can't thank you enough for your missionary service all those years ago. I love how the Lord positions people where they can be useful to achieve his purposes.*

*(This is) too special a story to keep to ourselves. Such a beautiful reassurance that we are personally known to God. ... I feel like Alma and the sons of Mosiah when they were reunited (after all those years) and were thrilled to know that they were still united in the gospel.*

I read this and wept. An extraordinary tender mercy for Kaye and for me.

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## THE GOSPEL'S TRUE—THE CHURCH IS GETTING THERE



**T**he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints isn't perfect yet. Why? Because it's made up of all us imperfect folks. From the beginning, detractors have pointed to the fleshly weaknesses, actual or contrived, of leaders and members of the Church as evidence that the Church as established through Joseph is not true.

I suggest that the very humanness of its members is, in fact, proof of both the Church's divine origin and its consistent overseeing by the Lord. That the Church is what it is in spite of being operated on a day-to-day basis by us very flawed folks is, in every sense of the word, a miracle.

I had a watershed experience with a general authority that underscored this truth for me.

As a young missionary in Australia I had made important media contacts through our proselyting. I was asked by the mission president to handle the press and publicity for a general authority who would be visiting our mission. My charge was to obtain as widespread coverage of his arrival and purpose for coming as I could. Since this man was an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, not an apostle, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints wasn't exactly a household name in Australia then, it was doubly hard to convince news outlets that this was a

worthwhile news event. But we succeeded to the extent that a few reporters from a couple of radio stations and newspapers agreed to meet with him at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Sydney where he would be staying. The time for the press conference was set, and all seemed to be going according to schedule.

That is until our visiting authority arrived at his hotel.

At the front desk he was given his room key and asked if he wouldn't like to freshen up after his long 19-hour flight. Struck by the opulence of the ostentatious lobby, he turned to the desk clerk and asked, "What's the cost of my room?" The answer ignited an explosion! "I just wanted to stay two nights, not buy the place!" he boomed. And with that, turned to the elders escorting him and said, "Let's get out of here and find a motel close to the mission home that has a reasonable charge." And off he went, ignoring his press conference that was to be held at the Sheraton in just one hour.

I was taking care of last minute details for his interview with the press when I heard what happened. Mortified is an apt word to describe how I felt, and that was joined by a few other not-so-positive thoughts about our visitor. I notified the participating reporters, not an easy task, apologized, and asked them to meet our guest at his motel many steps down in quality from the Sheraton and a 45-minute drive away. Only one or two even said they would try. With resentment and anger, I drove with my companion to the motel to inform the general authority that he still may be contacted by a reporter or two. There were no cell phones back then.

I was told by one of the elders escorting him that our visitor got upset with the motel management because they put him in a room right by a staircase. "I'm not going to be kept up all night by people running up and down the stairs!" he curtly told the manager. "Put me in a quiet room!"

"Crotchety old man!" I muttered. "Nobody should behave like this!" That he was a general authority made it even worse, and my anger simmered.

Then my lesson about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

At the meetings he held with the members in Sydney and with us missionaries, the Spirit was there. Powerfully. He spoke and acted like a man of God. I was affected deeply. Following the last meeting, the mission president told him I was going into the hospital the next day for an appendectomy.

"Would you like a blessing?" the general authority asked me. My negative feelings toward him had now dissipated, and I eagerly told him I would. He laid his hands on my head, and a great

sensation, like warm, soothing water, flooded my body from my head to my feet. I had never had an experience with the Spirit like that before, and I wept. I knew I would be healed.

He then asked for the phone number of my parents who lived in California. "I'll call them when I get back to the States," he said.

Guess who felt like a flawed human now?

Awareness of my own faults, including being judgmental, was an overwhelming realization. Yet with that came an understanding that the Lord works through his imperfect sons and daughters. Being and acting human does not disqualify one from serving God nor from being a vehicle through whom God works His purposes. We are all He has here! And we are all learning.

As I looked at the Church in this light, I saw the extraordinary miracle the Church was. There was no other organization in the world comparable to it with its success, organization, temples, family history work, missionary program, latter-day scriptures, focus on member service in the name of Jesus Christ, ordinances of the priesthood, a lay ministry, the Holy Ghost given as a constant companion to every worthy member, and apostles and prophets called by God and constantly instructed by Jesus Christ. All of this, in spite of the collective and individual weaknesses of its members and leaders.

How is this possible? Because Jesus Christ is at its head. He is perfect, and as we members choose to follow Him, His Church is getting there too.

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## THE HOMELESS WOMAN



I knew snow was white and was cold. After all I spent my early youth in blizzard-prone southeastern Idaho and attended BYU in the winter. But the closest Joyce and I got to the stuff from 1966 until we landed in Romania on a two-year mission in 2007 was seeing it on TV news reports and in movies.

That's the sacrifice you make when you live in Orange County, California.

A different story in Romania. For two whole winters we rode buses and street cars and no-heat trains. And we walked in the slush, on the ice, and in heavy snowfall, putting five+ miles a day wear on our shoes.

No cars for missionaries in Romania.

What we did have were warm clothes and a comfortable, sometimes overly warm, apartment on the sixth floor of a cement apartment building patterned after the communist-era so-called blocs. Blocs is an apt name for both the bland façades and the let's-make-everybody-the-same mentality that spawned these uglies.

It was a December morning, and just the evening before, Liza emailed us that I received an unexpected commission check from an insurance company I worked for before our mission. It was large and would easily pay for two to three months of our mission. We were grateful.

Then Joyce called me over to our apartment window.

She pointed down at the two garbage dumpsters that served our complex. By them in the snow sat a little woman in rags. She was next to a tiny fire made from some paper and cardboard she had salvaged. The temperature was in the teens, and she was eating her pittance while trying to keep from freezing to death. It took me all of a second to decide I was going to break the unstated mission rule about not giving to beggars.

I dressed quickly and rode our rickety elevator down six floors. I walked across the parking lot to where this woman sat and handed her three ten Romania lei bills that was worth about \$10 to \$12 in US money. She stared at them, and as I walked back to the building she crossed herself.

All the way up in the elevator I thought about the surprise commission I received that was many times larger than what I gave this woman. I came into our apartment with its warmth and furnishings and food and kitchen range and oven and refrigerator and bathroom and hot and cold running water and bedroom and comfortable bed and me dressed in a warm overcoat and waterproof shoes and I sat down and sobbed.

I wept because I knew that this woman and all of the countless ones like her in Romania and throughout the world are children of God. Just like me. I wept because I knew I had absolutely no right to take or use for myself more of the bounties of this earth than what was sufficient for my and my family's needs and reasonable wants. And for the longest time the tears fell as I realized how poorly I was doing here.

The picture of this woman in her penury and suffering has been indelibly imprinted on my heart and conscience. I don't want to ever again forget that my time, my talents, and everything I have been given don't belong to me. And as a steward that has covenanted to consecrate them to the Lord, I have a ways to go.

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## THE LAW OF CONSECRATION



Several years ago when I was serving as a stake president in Orange County California, our area presidency requested the stake presidents to ask their members to contribute to the cost of building the Newport Beach temple in Orange County. Each stake was given a suggested amount to raise. We gave our members a general idea of what had been asked of us and told them that this

was a unique opportunity to live the Law of Consecration. We invited them to contribute what they felt inspired to do. Their free will offerings, without any monitoring or pressure, exceeded by a substantial amount what our stake was invited to donate.

Most of us who participated felt exceptionally blessed. The resulting peace and increased testimony and awareness of who we are was life-changing for many. "When we do what the prophets and the Holy Ghost direct us to do to build up God's kingdom...we are living the Law of Consecration," and our blessing is that we are becoming one with Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Like all transcendent laws, this law is to be written in our hearts with a desire and commitment to understand it and to follow it. Do we see ourselves "as a steward over...blessings" that God has given us to manage on His behalf?<sup>2</sup>

Or do we see our money and property and time and talents as belonging to us because we have earned them and, therefore, have the right to use them how we want? The distinction between these two perspectives is what the spirit of the Law of Consecration is all about and defines the difference between an Abel offering and a Cain offering.<sup>3</sup>

In living the spirit of the Law of Consecration, how we use the resources entrusted to us becomes a deeply personal affair between us and the Lord. We consistently acknowledge our stewardship role over our time, talents, and temporal possessions, and our responsibility to be just and faithful stewards by using these gifts as the Savior would if He were here.

We seek to be anxiously engaged in good causes, including faithful service in the Church. We pay a full and faithful tithe and give liberal offerings. We conscientiously seek to help the poor and the needy and respond generously according to our own stewardship resources as requests are made by our ecclesiastical leaders to help build Zion. We have "the interest of (our) neighbor and (do) all things with an eye single to the glory of God."<sup>4</sup> And "we do what the prophets and the Holy Ghost direct us to do to build up God's kingdom."<sup>5</sup>

Living the spirit of that law, given our myriad day-to-day involvements with family, our work, church, and seemingly countless other "things," is often difficult. At least for me, it takes constant self-reminding to be attuned to when and where and how to use the resources for which I uniquely have stewardship responsibility for.

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## THE LAW OF SACRIFICE



Lynn and Ruth (not their real names) began a fateful year when their four-year-old daughter ran into the street in front of their house and was hit by a car. She was thrown over 40 feet in the air and spent several days in intensive care in the hospital with her family and ward members fasting and praying for her survival. Thankfully, she lived, but that was only the beginning of Lynn and Ruth's heart breaking year.

Next, completely unexpectedly, Ruth's wonderful, relatively young father passed away. Several months later, Ruth had severe pregnancy complications, and their baby died just a few hours after he was born. Their year was not over. One of their teenagers became seriously rebellious, disrupting the entire family, and Lynn's business suffered extensive financial challenges.

Lynn and Ruth sought to see their experiences in an eternal, spiritual light, and they felt constant peace from the Spirit throughout. But at the time, neither one thought of this as an

offering of a broken heart to God. As a sacrifice that could help them become like Him. Over time, however, that perspective came.

Several years later, Lynn was talking with three of their children who had been away to college. They were telling their father how their friends admired and were even envious of their family because of how close they were. Lynn asked them why they thought their family was so tight knit and loving. Their answer was not a surprise. With tears, his children talked about the experiences of that difficult year, especially the death of their baby brother and the substantial disruption caused by their older sibling.

The sacrifice of broken hearts helped cement their family's relationships. As the children married and raised their own families, those broken heart experiences helped them through their own challenges, and their love and respect for their siblings and parents grew. Importantly, both Lynn and Ruth served in ecclesiastical and community positions where they were able to use their challenging experiences to lift and bless others as the Savior would, because they understood and felt the sorrow and hurt and pain of those they were helping. They were growing up in Jesus Christ.

When we hear the word sacrifice, we likely think of giving up something we value for a greater cause or purpose. Anciently, the firstlings of the field and flocks were given as an offering to God, symbolizing ones devotion and gratitude to Him as well as for forgiveness of sins.

When we give our time or talents or means to assist others or to worthwhile causes, we may think of that as sacrifice because we could use those resources in ways that might benefit us more directly. While these acts can be considered a type of sacrifice to the extent they reflect kindness and generosity, the Law of Sacrifice requires more.

Jesus Christ has shown us the path to become as He and God are. He lived the Law of Sacrifice, and His condescension to come to earth, a telestial world, was abiding that law to its fullest.

The Plan could not have been brought about without Him and His offering. His willingness and desire to give all that He had and is, so we can be one with our Heavenly Father, is the supreme sacrifice.

For us, then, to live the Law of Sacrifice means that we offer up all that we have and are to Jesus Christ. Since our so called possessions, including our time and talents, are gifts that we have been given by God and are not really ours, sharing them or giving them up altogether only entails marginal, temporary sacrifice.

Our essence or our will is the only thing that is actually ours. The only thing we have complete control over, and the only thing that we can give that constitutes real sacrifice. Christ offered His

whole soul, His entire being, as a sacrifice for us. To be as He is, we will choose to do the same. We will offer our whole souls to Him.

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## THE MIRACLE OF LUCIA



**M**y dear friend Lucia Tortis Cooper was twenty-five when she married Richard Cooper in the spring of 1982. They both joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1983 and two years later their daughter, Lisa, was born. In January of 1987, by speaking directly to Richard's doctor, Lucia discovered her husband had AIDS. Back then that was an immutable death sentence.

Richard had been unfaithful in their marriage and had known about his AIDS for many months but had said nothing to her. She immediately had the AIDS tests done on both her and her daughter. Her daughter tested negative, but Richard had given Lucia AIDS. He passed away just a few weeks after Lucia found out he had the disease. Lucia followed him in death two years later, leaving her four-year-old daughter an orphan.

The following is an edited version of the talk I gave at Lucia's funeral, November 1989.

Lucia was convinced, right up to the time she lapsed into unconsciousness, that in some miraculous way her life would be spared. That was not to be. But there was a miracle. It was the miracle of Lucia herself.

"I felt too pure in heart to have this affliction hold me down," she once said. Because of her absolute purity, the gift of faith was hers in abundance.

She shunned the standard treatment for AIDS. Her doctors were frustrated. They could not understand. When her T-cell count dropped to 55, with a normal reading being in the 200's, they were insistent on her taking AZT. AZT was the only HIV treatment then, and the most optimistic prognostication for using it was to extend life a few months. Lucia's response, with her smile and infectious laugh, was: "Doctor, I don't want the medicine. I know it sounds crazy, but I don't want your medicine."

As her doctor looked at her healthy glow with no outward signs of an immune system gone haywire, he replied, "You're obviously putting your faith somewhere else. I guess it's not in medicine."

Lu's answer was direct and unwavering: "You're right. I'm using my total faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to get me through this."

She worked as a volunteer in the Los Angeles temple each week. The temple was a sanctuary. As she explained, "Through my work in the temple I serve God and demonstrate my gratitude for the love He has shown me. It is my spiritual medicine. I have spent hours in this holy place in fervent prayer, talking to my Heavenly Father about this overwhelming challenge. I continually commit to Him that I will do His will."

Her faith preserved her body for an impossibly long time. Her faith gave her the physical and emotional strength to walk out of the hospital when, according to the doctors, she should be dead. Her faith brought her to her last conscious moments fully relying upon the will of Him whom she loved. "My Father is watching me and knows of my trial," she said. "I know I am a chosen daughter of my Heavenly Father."

The miracle of Lucia was manifest in the way she faced her adversity. "There is purpose in this life," she said, "no matter what affliction we may meet. If we turn our obstacles around, they can work to our advantage. We can grow from them. Our spirit can even elevate to the highest degree if we will allow it."

Hers was an ordeal of almost incomprehensible proportion. Hers was a trial of betrayal and of dashed dreams of what might have been. Of motherly anxieties for a daughter who would be raised by someone else. Of day-to-day, hour-to-hour coping with a decaying body and inevitable death. Of bearing the hurt, ostracism, and futility of a 20th century leper. Yet Lucia declared, "I'm not ready for this challenge to end yet. I'm in love with the change that is taking place in me. I'm beginning to realize my potential. Thank you Father for this fabulous experience. I love you."

The miracle of Lucia has affected all of us who were close to her. We have been brought to serious introspection. Our own trials have lost their appeal for self-pity. And we have been raised

from inward fall as we have sought to lessen her burden. On the wall of the hospice where she spent her last moments is written: "With every death we may not see any rewards. But there is one. People grow closer through love, warmth, and caring. This cannot be bought. Only given." Lucia has given us that priceless gift.

There is another miracle of Lucia. One that transcends all others. One that literally defines God and those who would be one with Him. Lu loved everyone. She did not have a negative thing to say about anybody. A Godly gift of compassion that she claimed to have received from her own loving mother. The limitless breadth and depth of her love was demonstrated in her feelings about the man who was solely responsible for this great trial and tragedy in her life. Her husband Richard.

"What is it really like to give of charity, the pure love of Christ?" That was the question she asked as she reflected back on the last time she saw her husband before he died. He was comatose and had shrunk to the skin and bones that is the inevitable result of AIDS. Unlike Lucia, his last days had been sheer agony. No peace, only pain. No solace, only distress and anxiety.

Speaking of charity, she continued. "I felt it stronger than ever that night. We took our positions on each side of his bed and had prepared ourselves to give it all we had, for we were sure it was his last night. We sang peaceful hymns to comfort his soul. We read him scriptures. But more than anything that night, I needed to talk to him. As I held his hand I said, 'Dick, if you love me, squeeze my hand.' For the first time in nine days I felt a manifestation of life. He feebly squeezed my hand. 'Oh, God in heaven, he can hear me. He squeezed my hand,' I shouted. Now it was my responsibility to tell him some important last words."

What would have been the last words that you or I would have said if we were talking to one who had been unfaithful to us? One who had ruined our life by giving us AIDS? One who would make our daughter an orphan? Here is what Lu said: "Dick, now that I know you can hear me, I want you to know that I'm not mad for what happened. I'll never be mad.

"You know I still love you and wished you didn't have to go through this. Seek the Church, Dick. Please remember to seek the missionaries to teach you because you don't understand. Please let go now. You'll be better on the other side."

Her lack of bitterness, and her complete forgiving of and undeviating compassion for this man who merited her wrath and scorn, was as great a miracle as I have witnessed.

A few months ago, Lucia's close friend Kitty Billings asked her, "If you had it to do over again, would you be willing to go through the trials you have had, to learn the things you have learned?"

Without a pause, Lucia replied, "I don't like being ill. I'm a young woman. I love dancing and dating and all the things that every woman enjoys. More than anything, I want to have a happy

marriage and raise my daughter. I didn't ask for this disease, and I don't want it. But yes, I would go through it all again. I like me as I now am!"

Thank God for the miracle of Lucia.

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## THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE



Occasionally, with my tongue firmly lodged in my cheek, I'll say: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is such a class outfit, I'd belong to it even if it weren't true." Then quickly add, "Of course, it's a class outfit because it is true."

Years ago while serving in the stake presidency of the Orange California stake, I received a phone call from a prominent protestant minister asking if I would be willing to share with him what the Church does to help its members prepare for emergencies. We met, and for all of five minutes we discussed the Church's emergency preparedness program. Then my friend, and he did become my good friend, asked the questions he really wanted to ask.

"How do you get nineteen-year-old boys to give up schooling and their fun to leave their homes for two years at their own expense to teach people about Jesus Christ?" He went on to say that in his very large congregation there wasn't one young man who would do this.

My answer was simple and direct. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Savior's Church, and to one extent or another these young men know that and want to do what the Savior wants them to do."

He smiled and asked another question. "I know you don't have a paid ministry. How do you get men and women to volunteer to spend the kind of time necessary to run your wards and stakes?" My answer pretty much parroted what I said before. Again he smiled.

He went on. "Is it true that every member of your church is visited each month by a representative of the bishop?"

This time I smiled. "Theoretically." I explained the home teaching and visiting teaching programs and that most of our members are visited each month.

"How do you get them to do that?" he asked. "Is them being able to go to your temples the incentive?" With maybe a slight variation, I gave my same answer.

Then finally he said, "I understand your teenagers have some kind of catechism training on a regular basis. Tell me about that." He was talking about seminary. I told him our young people attended classes to study our standard works, including the Bible, at 6:00 a.m. during the week.

His mouth literally dropped open. "Six o'clock? How often do they do that?"

"Five days a week," I responded.

His head was shaking now. "How do you get teenage kids to get up for scripture study at that time of the morning five days a week?" He knew my answer.

After my friend left, I thought about the miracle of the Church.

How easy it was for me, being smack dab in the middle of it, to take for granted the extraordinary thing I was part of. My minister friend saw it and was trying to find non-theological reasons for it. There was only one reason. And that was the one I gave him.

For a long time, I thought about the Church and why it is a miracle. This is the Church of Jesus Christ. He literally oversees and directs it. The unfailing testimony of Jesus Christ is in every policy, written word, and practice.

It is an inspired and inspiring organization that allows each of us to give meaningful Christ-centered service. To receive practical and spiritual support and encouragement from one another. To learn and live the Doctrine of Christ. To receive and give assistance as appropriate to help meet temporal and spiritual needs.

The latter-day scriptures including The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and the on-going word of the Lord given through his prophets to provide us up-to-the-minute direction and knowledge and encouragement.

The gift of the Holy Ghost. Through this reality alone I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet. When I was eight years of age, my father laid his hands on my head and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Literally from that moment on and for the past many decades, the Holy Ghost

has been my companion. My father had the power to bless me with that gift because the keys of that power were restored through the Prophet Joseph and passed on to my dad through the authorized priesthood leaders of the Church.

The ordinances of the holy priesthood as administered in our Churches and temples are gateways that put us under covenant, bless us, and allow us to enter the presence of God to become one with Him. Through them we know who we are, why we are here, and what lies ahead. We have eternal purpose and are enabled to achieve it.

The binding of families eternally and the work of salvation for our kindred dead that brings us into a Oneness with them and a Oneness with God.

As I watch general conferences, time and again the reality of the miracle of the Church is manifest. Prophets, apostles, general authorities, and general officers are sustained. Men and women speak by the Spirit. Our prophet witnesses of Jesus Christ and admonishes us to stay on the covenant path and to gather to the Light.

Several years ago in general conference, Elder Christofferson masterfully laid out why the Lord has established His Church. He said that for him personally, "The Church...has been a place to come to know the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

For me also, it has been a place where I have come to know the Lord.

And to come to know the Lord is an extraordinary miracle available to all of us.

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## PIONEERS—A TYPE OF OUR TELESTIAL TOUR



The word *sallow* wasn't in my lexicon when I was a five year old staying with my Great Grandpa John Alfred and Grandma Hannah Hanson in Shelley, Idaho in the mid-1940s. To me my grandma was just old, puffy, and yellow. My grandpa was a bent skinny stick with a mustache. We were only with them a few months before my family moved into a rental house in Idaho Falls, but that was long enough to have memories indelibly scribbled on my mind-slate. After all, how many folks do you know who lived with one of the Latter-day Saint pioneers?

Grandpa was born somewhere in Nebraska in 1866 as his family drove a wagon across the plains. Since that trip was pre-transcontinental railroad, he was an "official" pioneer. His family's ocean voyage, their railcar stint across the eastern United States, and their 1000 mile trek from Omaha to Utah were pretty typical pioneer. However, a drama played out during their journey that was a stark type of our telestial tour.

My great-great grandparents, Hakan and Karna Hanson, joined the Church in Sweden in the mid 1800's and decided to leave all and become pioneers. The ocean crossing was uneventful, and the problems didn't really start until they boarded the train that took them to Omaha. They weren't expecting first class accommodations, but riding in stock cars that had been used to haul hogs to market and were filthy and filled with lice was unimaginable. That was their transportation.

Grandma Karna brushed this off as a temporary inconvenience. After all, they were pioneers, and they knew things would be tough. Grandpa Hakan stewed. "To think we are no better than hogs!" I don't think scenery was on his mind as the train bumped along the tracks to Omaha.

Karna was expecting another child, and Hakan was concerned about her health and the safety of the baby given the difficulty of a journey across the plains. The wagon master assured him that births among the pioneers on the plains was common, and competent midwives were available. So they began the trek.

The baby, my great grandpa, John Alfred, was born healthy somewhere along the trail in Nebraska, and Karna was okay. But that blessing was mitigated a few days later when they discovered their three-year-old son Neils had contracted cholera. The disease hit hard and fast. In the middle of the night, Hakan went to a neighboring wagon to borrow a candle so he could see to better care for the boy. The neighbors wouldn't spare one, and Hakan fumed as he sat in the dark holding the limp, feverish body. He didn't even get to see his son's face before the boy died.

In the morning the wagon master said they would hold a short funeral service and bury the body in a shallow grave. He apologized, explaining they were in dangerous Indian country and didn't have time to do anything more. Hakan didn't accept this. He insisted on staying behind and digging a grave deep enough so the animals wouldn't get to the body. The wagon train left, and throughout the day and into the night Hakan dug a grave five feet deep in the hard soil. Exhausted and sobbing he buried his son then walked all night to catch up with the wagon train. He was heartbroken and mad. Mad at the wagon master for not waiting to give his son a proper burial. Mad at God for letting his son die.

Karna tried to console him. "Father, we have to make the best of it. The baby and I are all right and, thank the Lord, the rest of us are well. If we get to our journey's end without any more trouble, we must be very thankful to our Heavenly Father. We have joined the Church because we believed it was the only true one, and I have faith that it is. We are not the only ones that are having sorrow and trouble on this trip."<sup>1</sup>

They made it to the Salt Lake valley, but hardship and adversity dogged them through the rest of their lives. They each faced these challenges differently. Hakan withdrew himself and became

cantankerous, bitter, and caught up in his own miseries. He stopped going to Church, and the light of Christ grew dimmer and dimmer in his life. On the other hand, Karna's faith increased. Each new problem seemed to make her stronger. She sought to be empathetic, compassionate, and charitable, and was an angel of mercy to many. Her family gravitated toward her and looked to her as their leader.

Grandpa Hakan and Grandma Karna, for the most part, had similar temporal experiences. Hakan chose to turn sour and disbelieving, at least for most of the rest of his life. Karna chose to find happiness and faith. The same experiences, different responses. From that perspective, the experiences themselves were basically neutral!

We are eternal beings, and what we are personally confronted with here in our mortal probation is only temporary. Each of us literally choose the ultimate direction our experience takes us. In essence, whether the experience becomes something "good" or something "bad," something that leads us to the Savior, or away from Him. That's not an advocacy for Pollyannaish naivety. Rather, that's really the way it is. Our extremities are, in fact, our choosing ground. We discover there who we are, and who we want to be. And through those experiences, that is who we become.

"We will prove them herewith," someone once said.<sup>2</sup> This telestial tour we're all on seems the perfect place for doing just that.

Who we become is our choice.

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## THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST



I was in the delivery room when Joyce gave birth to Mary. It seemed as though Joyce was literally offering her own life to bring Mary into this world so Mary could experience this critical phase of The Plan of Salvation. Joyce's life was literally put on the line in two subsequent births as she sought to be the means for two more of God's choice children to come to earth.

And that is the pure love of Christ.

Service to others in our Church callings and responsibilities can certainly be a manifestation of our love for Christ and, therefore, for those we serve. Our work on behalf of our kindred dead typifies that love. We are literally acting as a savior for them as we do their temple work vicariously.

In the process, I believe our understanding of the love Jesus Christ has for us expands, because we are doing what He does.

But perhaps our one-on-one intimate and personal service, like Joyce's and all mothers' child birth offerings, most closely approaches Christ's pure love. My mother, in her later years, was almost completely deaf. She attended sacrament meeting to partake of the sacrament but could not hear and understand what was said over the pulpit. She could not hold a Church position because of her deafness. But she chose to serve in the ways that she could. For years, she took care of her invalid husband, my father who suffered from Parkinsons Disease, and she wrote countless emails and letters and cards to those who she felt she could lift. She was always seeking bring others to Christ. My mother, right up to the day of her death, possessed the pure love of Christ.

My friend, Jack, who became a quadriplegic on a ventilator, was only able to do all that he did because of the love of Jo Anne, his wife. She put him to bed and lifted him out of bed each night and day with a mini crane. For an hour and a half every morning, with the help of an aide, she got him ready for the day. Bathed him, shaved him, clothed him, brushed his teeth, and combed his hair. Then at night for another 45 minutes she would undress him, put him in pajamas, and brush his teeth.

She fed him, changed his diapers, drove him wherever he needed to be, turned the pages of his notes when he gave talks or lessons, and even laughed at his corny jokes. She encouraged him, lifted his spirits when he was down, critiqued his writings and speeches, and spent hour after hour discussing the gospel, the family, sports, or whatever Jack needed to talk about. And this she did for over 23 years.

I had many talks with Jo Anne, and I never heard her complain. Not once. Jack talked about coming to know the Savior through his experience. I am convinced that a significant reason for his enhanced understanding of Jesus Christ was because he witnessed firsthand, for all those years, Christ's pure love manifested through his soulmate, Jo Anne.

I know of many such examples of love given by spouses for their incapacitated mates, and of children giving constant care for parents in need and vice versa. Service is a manifestation of love, for love is the reason for true service. The desire to lift and bless and bring happiness and joy to another is love. It is a choice to follow Jesus Christ.

One of the most consistently difficult manifestations of love is forgiveness. Toward the end of his wife's difficult pregnancy, Kent, (not his real name) was reproved by their bishop. Referring to the large number of children Kent and his wife had, he implied that Kent was not being considerate of her health by having another child. Kent was offended. Who wouldn't be, huh? He and his wife

had prayed fervently to know if they should have another child, and the answer was unmistakable. Even though her last pregnancy had also been a real struggle, they both knew they were to have another baby. A month later the baby was born but died shortly after.

Literally, the day following the baby's death, the bishop confronted Kent again, emphasizing what a mistake it was for them to have had another child. What he said was not only horribly unthoughtful, it was inexcusable. This is what Kent wrote about his bishop in his journal that evening. "He means well but simply does not understand the principle of revelation in one's life." And with that, Kent's love for Jesus Christ led him to forgive his bishop.

Kent understood that forgiveness is the recognition that all of us are dealing with a telestial mind and body and are doing things all the time that are out of sync with the celestial as we make our way through this telestial tour. Wanting to love as Jesus loves is to empathize with others, because everyone, including parents, spouses, children, friends, and even Church leaders, have the same imperfection challenges.

I believe that to discover how much we desire to possess the pure love of Christ is one of the reasons we are here in this telestial world. We will have the experiences needed to determine that for ourselves. We can discover that love is about forgiving. It is about serving and sustaining and building up and mentoring and caring for and enjoying spouses and children and grandchildren, parents and grandparents, extended family, and those who are not members of our family. It is about becoming one with Jesus Christ and choosing to use every experience we have to that end.

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## THE REAL QUESTION



In a small town outside of Brisbane, Australia, my missionary companion and I knocked on yet another door one hot summer day. The door opened, and we were greeted by a man in his 30's. He had more than his share of tribulations and problems judging from the deeply etched lines on his somber face. I don't think we even introduced ourselves. He simply said, "Come in. I've been expecting you."

That was very different than how we were normally greeted!

He led us through several rooms to his own small bedroom. It was dimly lit with scores of books lining the walls. He brought in two chairs from the kitchen and invited us to sit down as he sat on a small bed shoved up against the wall. "You have a message for me," he said. It was a statement, not a question.

We introduced ourselves and proceeded to give him what we termed the First Discussion, which covered an introduction to the apostasy and the restoration of the gospel. His responses seemed to indicate he recognized the truth of what we were saying. As we concluded, we handed

him a copy of the Book of Mormon, with a brief explanation of its origin, and bore our testimonies to the truth of what we had taught him.

He held the book in his hands. His eyes closed, and there was silence. Some seconds later, he opened his eyes and said, "Whenever I pick up a holy book, I say a prayer that I will turn to a passage which will be a message from the Lord to me." Then he randomly selected a page and without looking, placed his finger on it. Here is what he read.

"And now my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good. And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye, for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness."<sup>1</sup>

He finished and smiled. "When can you come back and tell me more," he said. We could hardly contain ourselves as we set up an appointment, shared our testimonies again, and left. We just had the kind of experience that all missionaries dream of having. We floated back to our flat!

Over the next few weeks we had several meetings with him, and each meeting was a spiritual experience. The concluding discussion was the Plan of Salvation lesson discussing our pre-mortal life, our purpose for coming to earth, and explaining the three degrees of glory. He didn't say a word throughout the entire presentation. When it was concluded, tears welled up in his eyes, and he whispered, "Oh, to God that all mankind could hear this." We set his baptismal date and bore fervent testimony to the truthfulness of the message we had given and that the Church of Jesus Christ was once again upon the earth.

We never met with him again.

He sent a letter just a few days before he was to be baptized, which I still have. It read in part: "Dear Elders, I cannot go through with the baptism. ...Please don't call as I desire more than anything else to withdraw into the silence, avoiding any controversy or talking."

As a young missionary, I had not realized, until this moment, that a testimony of the gospel was more than recognizing rationally and spiritually that it was true. The desire to live it and endure to the end was what comprised a living testimony.

Perhaps to find out what we desire is the fundamental purpose for our agreeing to come to a telestial world in the first place. It is the proving us herewith.<sup>2</sup> It is our determining just what manner of man or woman we want to be.<sup>3</sup>

The most important question then, has never been, “Is the gospel true?” It is true! The real question, the one that each of us must answer for ourselves, has always been, “To what extent do I want to live it?”

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## THE SON OF A KING



*The Forgotten Man, Maynard Dixon, 1934*

Years ago, when our children were young, I wrote this story for them.

### *The Son of a King*

There was once a man of little means who despised himself. His hair, shaggy and matted, drooped about a smudged, haggard face etched with frown lines. His eyes, dull and lifeless, were set deep beneath heavy brows, where they continually sought refuge from the gaze of passers-by. His shoulders slumped, not from physical deformity, but from neglect. From self-pity. From the weight of self-worthlessness, he had piled upon them. His clothing conformed to the rest of him. Dirty, ill-fitting, tattered, and to be truthful, somewhat odorous. This man, old beyond his years, had shaped himself in the image of his self-perception. He was a burden to society. He was a burden to himself.

No one knows how he came across the book. Some say he found it while rummaging through garbage cans. Others say it was lying on the table of the library when he hurried into that building to escape the rain. Wherever or however, the book was the beginning of a miracle.

In fact, it was a rather simple book. One that had been read by most school children. It was about an ancient king. A good king. It told about his bravery and courage in the face of adversity, and his kindness and compassion to those who were less fortunate. It described his perseverance and steadfastness. It emphasized his deportment, his lofty carriage, his kingly grooming. And there were stories about his wisdom, about his righteous, merciful judgments, about his fairness and his honesty.

Some would say there was nothing extraordinary about the book. That it was probably only legend anyway. But it changed the life of our friend.

As he was reading through it, his mind seemed to reach back to an event long since forgotten. Shortly before his mother's death, he sat upon her lap as she rocked back and forth, her fingers running through his hair. She was telling him a story about kings and queens, about castles and princes and princesses. Then she stopped.

"Son, did you know that we came from kings? Way back, a long, long time ago. You are descended from a king! Don't ever forget that, son! Don't ever forget that!"

Now, as he read the book, that thought took over his mind. "You are descended from a king! You are descended from a king!" And to him it was as though the story he was reading was about his own ancestor. Then, the disparity he saw between his ancestor king and himself, made him weep.

"What am I doing!" he cried. "I am the son of a king! What am I doing with my life?"

The change was almost instantaneous. The hair was washed and cut. The clothes, ragged as they were, were cleaned, and the body washed. A strange fire began to dance in his eyes and his back and shoulders straightened. He greeted people as he walked down the street. And he smiled. He smiled a lot.

Years passed, and each year saw him become more like the king from whose loins he had remembered he had sprung. Now, as an old man with his body held erect, he would walk daily from his lovely home on the edge of town to Main Street, up through the city park, and then back home. He would stop now and again to chat, to encourage, to counsel.

A stranger in town watched him as he proceeded one morning. He was absorbed in the mannerism, the carriage, and the light that radiated from this old gentleman.

"Who is he?" he asked with wonder of a local townsman.

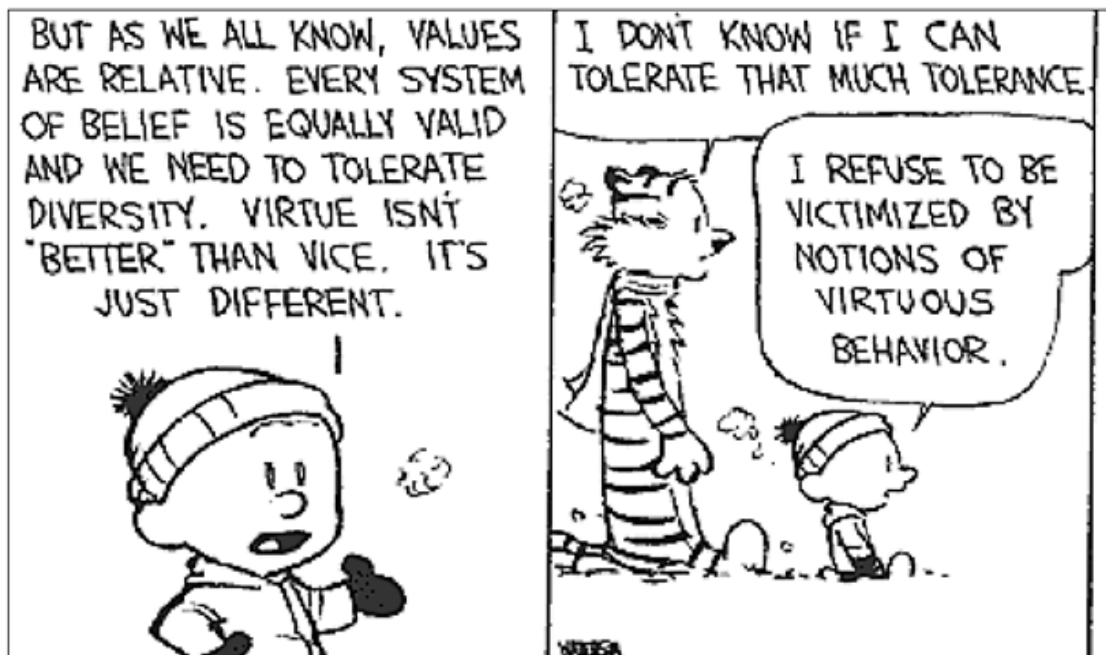
"Him? Don't you know?" was the reply. "He is the son of a king!"

After telling the story to my children, I would say something like this. "You are sons and daughters of God. The King. Don't ever forget that. I love you."

Remembering who we are is everything, isn't it?

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## TOLERANCE—THE NEW SECULAR MORALITY



There are those in our increasingly secular world who are attempting to redefine morality. For them, virtue no longer embraces the shunning of adultery, fornication, pornography, vile language, and deviant homosexual and asexual practices. Rather, their new righteousness, their rubric, is tolerance. The apparent wholesale acceptance of culture-bending aberrations.

For these secularists, their so-called tolerance supersedes traditional social parameters that have kept behaviors that are destructive to individuals and families and societies in check for millennia. And for many judges and politicians, their “neo-broadmindedness” now trumps constitutional guarantees pertaining to religion and states-rights.

The secularist brand of tolerance is literally the de-religionizing of our society. Scrubbing out the Divine and mocking individual eternal potential with its concurrent prerequisite to circum-

scribe appetites and passions. This humanist doctrine would impose on all, the degrading lie that man is merely a product of chance. That man, therefore, is free to unbridle his “natural” desires, restrained only marginally, and maybe temporarily, by a societal caveat that a participating partner needs be a “consenting adult.”

But incongruously, the secularist’s tolerance is one-sided and does not extend to those who object to this humanist perception of man’s existence! To profess a belief in Divinity and in man’s eternal nature and divine potential, and to adhere to a code of ethical behavior that transcends and controls the animal within us is unacceptable. Why? Perhaps, because being reminded of eternal constraints is likely to guilt-laden those who refuse to be bound by such codes, and that is insufferable. Therefore, those espousing religious mores are deemed the ones culpable and need to be cowed into silence or at least relegated to the inconsequential.

Such secular tolerance (intolerance?) is nothing more than self-justification. Literally calling good, evil and evil, good.<sup>1</sup> But try as one might, an eternal law can never be abrogated and “wickedness never was (nor ever will be) happiness.”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, that law will have its due claim.

In the meantime, this new “morality” is taking a frightful toll in spiritual and, therefore, social cost. The intolerance-brand is slapped onto believers who eschew behavior that is antithetical to who God is and who the race of Adam can become. An extraordinary hypocritical distortion.

Believers must stand for righteousness. How? For some, it may mean trumpeting our message from a public soapbox. For all, we must neither embrace nor tacitly accept behavior that undermines individuals, families, and our way of life. And, we defend our right and duty to condemn such behavior for what it is. Deleterious to man’s well-being, both in this life and the next. However, whatever we may do, I believe we must avoid personally attacking individual non-believers. That would be taking a page out of the secularist book.

Nevertheless, we must not allow this secular movement to go unchallenged, for it is also the death knell to our God-inspired political system. Over 200 years ago, John Adams said this about a government sans religion. “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. ...Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”<sup>3</sup>

In a word, we are on a secularist slide whose angle of descent is sharpening precipitously. Unless real morality again takes hold, our society will soon be impaled on the jagged rocks of unchecked self-gratification that we are plummeting toward.

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## WE CONVERTED A PARAKEET



Sometimes I tell full time missionaries today that the reason they have so many mission rules is that when I was a missionary, six+ decades ago, we didn't!

There's more than a hint of truth to that. For example, on my mission we were on our own to find a place to live. No written guidelines. No directions. No rules. No nothing. And that made for some very interesting experiences. In early 1962 my companion, Elder West, and I were sent into a new area in Parramatta just west of Sydney, Australia. After looking around for a place to live, we met Mrs. McLaren, a 50+ year-old widow, who had a room in her house for rent. We took it. And we had an experience we could not have imagined.

Mrs. McLaren was a nurse and worked in a hospital at night. During the day she was usually either asleep or sometimes even drunk. In her home, we had our own bedroom, used her kitchen to prepare our meals and store our food, and washed our clothes in her little "automatic" washing

machine. Mrs. McLaren's daytime imbibing didn't affect us that much, as we were always gone during the daytime.

Sometimes, though, she offered to "help" us. We were like her sons, she said. One day she asked if we would like her to wash our clothes. Or rather, if we would let her wash our clothes. Not wanting to hurt her feelings, we said we had some socks that needed washing. That's all we were willing to entrust her with. We gave her all of our socks except the pair we were wearing. They would be clean and dry when we got home, she assured us. They weren't. When we arrived later that evening, Mrs. McLaren had gone to work, and our socks were sitting in a tub full of water! We would be wearing the same socks we wore today, tomorrow also. And in spite of her promise that the socks would be ready the next day, we were stuck with the same pair of now "scented" socks for the next three days.

Finally, at the risk of making her feel bad, we scooped our socks out of the now murky water, rinsed and washed them, and hung them up to dry. We didn't let her wash our socks, or anything else of ours, again.

Then there was Mr. Kraft, the only other boarder in the house, and his parakeet, Jock. Mr. Kraft was a small, wiry man in his early 80's. He had been a station hand (ranch hand) all of his life until he retired, and he had lived with Mrs. McLaren for a number of years. He was crotchety, barely said a word, and pretty much kept to himself. He was not much for taking baths either. He had an artificial leg and did his best to keep that fact from us. We knew though, because it squeaked when he walked. Taking a bath was an ordeal as he had to remove that leg, then put it back on. That was a pretty good reason to avoid bathing.

We shared the kitchen with Mr. Kraft, Mrs. McLaren...and Jock, Mr. Kraft's parakeet. Sometimes Jock would squawk or screech but would never talk. Mr. Kraft would stand by his cage saying words to get him to repeat them, but it was futile. Elder West and I saw Jock as a worthy challenge. We ate at different times than the others, and every day we would spend a few minutes by Jock's cage trying to teach him just three words: Jock's a Mormon! Teaching him to say, Jock's a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would have been a little problematic.

Then it happened. As we sat in the kitchen eating, a voice shrieked out: "Jock's a Mormon! Jock's a Mormon!" Elder Paul West and Elder Steve Hanson had just converted a parakeet!

From then on, a steady stream flowed from Jock's beak and always the same words. "Jock's a Mormon! Jock's a Mormon!" Mr. Kraft was not a happy camper. By the hour, he stood by Jock's cage repeating, "Jock's a Baptist! Jock's a Baptist!" The bird's reply never varied: "Jock's a Mormon! Jock's a Mormon!" That parakeet was firmly in the fold.

Over the next days, Mr. Kraft became even more sullen and depressed. Finally, Elder West and I decided it was time to teach Jock some new words. Every time we were by the bird's cage, we repeated another phrase. We were studying in our room one day when Mr. Kraft hammered on our door and literally shouted: "Elders? Are you in their elders? Elders?"

We looked at each other wondering what we'd done now to offend him. We got up and opened the door. Little Mr. Kraft stood there with a smile we had never seen before, while tears streamed down his cheeks. "Did you hear him?" Mr. Kraft cried out. "Did you hear Jock?"

We shook our heads.

Mr. Kraft was almost dancing now. "Jock said, 'I love you, Mr. Kraft! I love you, Mr. Kraft!'"

Two very wet-behind-the-ears missionaries learned the lesson of a lifetime. It is far better to be kind than clever.

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## WILL WE REMEMBER LIGHT?



**T**he future becomes the past as it flows through our now's. And our memory of what was, fades with the flow.

But our very awareness speaks of a permanency that is anachronistic to fleeting time. And testifies that our reality is both inside and outside of time. Is beyond it. Surrounds it. Encompasses it. Is independent of it.

We are here, in time, because we need to be. It is part of our becoming. And time is either our veil or our seer stone. It hides from us our possibilities...or lets us see both who we are and who we can be.

The choice is ours, and ours alone. If we want to remember, to remember Light, we will see.

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## THE LORD IS IN CHARGE



Throughout my life, I have witnessed that the Lord is in charge with His prophets. Since the beginning of the Church there have been 17 prophets as of this writing. I have been alive when 11 of those have been the Lord's prophet. I have had personal, impacting experiences with several of them and a singular experience with President Ezra Taft Benson.<sup>1</sup>

In May of 1988, our office received an unexpected phone call. It was for my business partner, Grant Inkley, who was also bishop of my ward. I was unaware of the call until Grant buzzed me. "Gary Gillespie, the secretary to President Benson, is on the phone and wants to speak to you," he said. Those of you who knew Grant recognize that my suspicion of a prank here was justified. When I didn't immediately respond, Grant laughed. "No joke." He then explained that President Benson thought Grant was the bishop of the ward where President Benson's sister-in-law, Barbara Benson, resided. He wasn't, but he told Gary that I was in the office, was in the stake presidency, and was a close friend of Barbara's. Gary spoke briefly with the Prophet then told Grant that President Benson would like to speak with me.

President Benson's younger brother, Ross, fell away from the Church, married Barbara who was not a member, and raised his family outside of the gospel. Ross passed away a few years before the phone call, and President Benson had kept constant contact with his sister-in-law. Barbara

served on our local school board with Joyce, and over time we became very close friends with her. We loved her, and that love was reciprocated. We went together to many functions including several televised general conferences at the stake center where President Benson spoke. She loved “T”, as she called her brother-in-law. “But,” she emphasized, “I’ll never join his church.”

President Benson came on the line. He spoke like he had known me forever and for the next 30 minutes or so I had the experience of a life time. Mostly we chatted about Barbara and his love for her. He asked me to keep my eye on her and literally pled with me to help bring the gospel into her life. I told him how much I loved Barbara, and that Joyce and my daily prayers were for guidance to know what to say or do to bless her.

In the course of our conversation, something else was evident besides the Prophet’s great love for his sister-in-law. He was nearly 90, and the years had taken their toll. His mind was failing. In fact, he showed obvious signs of senility. He repeated himself over and over and over, completely unaware that he had already mentioned those events or thoughts a number of times. As the conversation ended, he expressed his love for me. I told him I loved him and would do everything within my power to bless my dear friend Barbara.

My journal entry summed up the experience. “I feel to exclaim that he is a living prophet of God, and the miracle is the Lord’s renewing of his body and mind as needed for him to carry forth his responsibilities. He possesses that gift.”

October general conference was nearly five months away though, and I was virtually certain President Benson would not speak at it or any other conference again.

I was wrong. The prophet is under the care of the Lord.

For the first few minutes of his talk at the October 1988 conference, he sounded so very weak. Then gradually his voice gained power. The Lord’s prophet was speaking. Every word driven by the Spirit. His talk? The never-to-be-forgotten call to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon!

The Savior had one more watershed message for President Benson to give. Six months later in the 1989 April conference, President Benson was too feeble to give the inspired talk he had prepared, and President Hinckley read it for him. It was the Lord’s admonition to the saints to Beware of Pride!

Shortly after, President Benson became physically and mentally incapacitated and for the remaining few years of his life President Hinckley and President Monson carried on the responsibilities of the First Presidency. But President Benson’s faculties had been momentarily enhanced so he could fulfill his final assignments from the Lord. These extraordinary landmark talks given

after President Benson should not have been able to put two or three cogent sentences together, have helped steer the Church for decades.

With the Lord's prophets, He is in charge.

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# YOU OUGHT TO BE DOING THAT ANYWAY



Several years ago five huge international banks agreed to plead guilty to manipulating the foreign exchange currency market for their own profit. Pleading guilty didn't hurt them at all. They were fined \$5 billion. Nothing more than a bloody nose. The market cap of these banks was over \$500 billion. This punishment for a "brazen display of collusion," as the US Attorney General termed it, didn't even dent their bottom line. In fact, the stock prices for these companies remained basically the same after the announcement. Not one person faced a criminal indictment or potential jail time.

Then there was the AP/Fox News story about those who, according to the FTC, kept for themselves over \$187 million of the money they ostensibly collected for various cancer charities. Way less than 10% of what they brought in did they actually give to the charities. The rest, after paying private fundraisers, they put in their own bank accounts.

Unfortunately, these news items aren't that unusual and underscore a prevalent mentality that is sans any underlying consciousness of or concern for rightness or wrongness. Decisions for such self-absorbed folks seem to be based on answering two questions: How and how much will

it benefit me? Will any price I might have to pay be worth my gain? I suppose that includes fines or jail time or losing a job or public ostracizing as well.

Not everyone does it like this.

For those who are old enough, ABSCAM will mean something. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the FBI conducted a sting operation. Men posing as representatives of an Arab company offered money to several members of congress in exchange for favors. The result was that seven were convicted for accepting bribes. Others, while not convicted, were far less than stellar in their responses to the bribe offers. According to The Washington Post, only one member of congress who was subjected to the scam "flatly refused to consider financial favors in exchange for legislative favors." That man was then U.S. Senator Larry Pressler from South Dakota. In response to those who touted him as some sort of hero, Senator Pressler said, "I turned down an illegal contribution. Whatever have we come to if that's considered 'heroic'?"

Good question. You ought to be doing that anyway is basically what he was saying.

By the way, he subsequently joined the Church.

A number of years ago, the infant daughter of some young friends of mine had a serious problem. Her skull was hardening too fast and not allowing room for the brain to grow. The medical correction was to cut the skull to allow the brain to expand and then put a plate in. The parents were worried to death and the father, a priesthood holder, was fervently praying that that procedure wouldn't be necessary. He promised God all kinds of things if only God would answer his prayer. He received an unexpected impression.

"You ought to be doing that anyway!"

Their daughter was just fine, and it had nothing to do with his, "I'll be good if you..." promises.

Virtue is not circumstance driven. It just is. Larry Pressler did what was right for no other reason than it was right. And my young friend learned that you don't use your agreement to be righteous as some kind of a bargaining chip with the Lord. Moral men and women just do what is right because it is right and that is who they are. No strings attached.

# Endnotes

## AN EXTRAORDINARY DÉJÀ VU

1. Doctrine & Covenants 18:16

## AN UNASSAILABLE WITNESS OF THE BOOK OF MORMONAN

1. See October Conference 1984
2. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1984/06/the-most-correct-book?lang=eng>

## BECOMING ONE THROUGH THE TEMPLE

1. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/a-mid-2023-look-at-temple-milestones-dedications-rededications-groundbreakings-and-announcements#:~:text=At%20the%20midway%20point%20of,President%20Russell%20M>
2. Doctrine and Covenants 38:42
3. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/what-is-temple-endowment?lang=eng>
4. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/what-happens-in-a-temple-sealing?lang=eng>
5. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/04/how-to-obtain-revelation-and-inspiration-for-your-personal-life?lang=en>; Doctrine and Covenants 128:15
6. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19
7. Doctrine and Covenants 132:20
8. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2023/10/15christofferson?lang=eng&cid=p23#p23>

## BLESSINGS

1. Luke 4:1-2 Emphasis mine
2. See Doctrine & Covenants 93:11-14 for example

## THE LAW OF CHASTITY

1. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/chastity?lang=eng>
2. Matthew 5:27-28
3. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45
4. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1973/04/success-a-journey-or-a-destination?lang=eng&id=p31#p31>
5. Moses 1:39
6. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-study-guide-for-home-study-seminary-students-2013/alma/unit-20-day-1-alma-39?lang=eng>
7. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-eternal-family-class-prep-material-2022/lesson-10-class-preparation-material?lang=eng>;  
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-38-eternal-marriage?lang=eng>

## CHOOSING TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

1. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-f-smith/chapter-7?lang=eng>

## ENDURE TO THE END

1. Doctrine and Covenants 124:1
2. Mosiah 23:10; Alma 26:3
3. Doctrine and Covenants 135:3
4. Doctrine and Covenants 24:8

## EYES TO SEE

1. <https://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/coe.html>
2. <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-open-letter-to-dr-michael-coe/>
3. See Abraham 3:25-26

## HUMILITY

1. Doctrine and Covenants 84:33
2. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1988/10/flooding-the-earth-with-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>
3. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1989/04/beware-of-pride?lang=eng>
4. Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” General Conference April 1989
5. Moses 1:1-11
6. Ether 12:27
7. Alma 31:27-28
8. Helaman 5:8; Moroni 10:8-18
9. Jacob 2:16
10. Matthew 11:29-30

## NOT EQUAL BUT ONE

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19-22
2. I Corinthians 11:11

## JOY IN SHARING JOY

1. Doctrine and Covenants 76:40-42
2. 2 Nephi 2:23-25

#### MOTHER TERESA AND KING BENJAMIN

1. Mosiah 2:17
2. Mosiah 5:8,12

#### MY BODY WON'T LET IT

1. Ether 3:2, emphasis added
2. See 2 Nephi 2:26

#### PATIENCE

1. See I Nephi 11:21-23 and Moroni 7:47
2. See Omni 1:26
3. See Moroni 7:48
4. See Ether 12:27
5. Luke 21:19

#### TENDER MERCIES REVISITED

1. Elder D. Todd Christofferson

#### THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

1. [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ftsoy/2021/04/questions-and-answers/15\\_what-is-the-law-of-consecration?lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ftsoy/2021/04/questions-and-answers/15_what-is-the-law-of-consecration?lang=eng)
2. Doctrine and Covenants 104:13-18
3. Moses 5:17-23

4. Doctrine and Covenants 82:19
5. [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ftsoy/2021/04/questions-and-answers/15\\_what-is-the-law-of-consecration?lang=eng](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ftsoy/2021/04/questions-and-answers/15_what-is-the-law-of-consecration?lang=eng)

#### THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE

1. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “Why the Church,” General Conference October 2015

#### PIONEERS—A TYPE OF OUR TELESTIAL TOUR

1. Taken from the History of Hakan Hanson by Hannah Anderson Hanson
2. See Abraham 3:25

#### THE REAL QUESTION

1. 2 Nephi 33:10-11
2. See Abraham 3:25
3. See 3 Nephi 27:27

#### TOLERANCE—THE NEW SECULAR MORALITY

1. See Isaiah 5:20
2. See Alma 41:10 and Helaman 13:38
3. <https://candst.tripod.com/morrelpeo.htm> (Emphasis added)

#### THE LORD IS IN CHARGE

1. See HUMILITY in this work for a more detailed description of my experience with President Benson