



Grow Up In Thee

Steve Dunn Hanson

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INTRODUCTION

*That they may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost, and...be prepared to obtain every needful thing.*¹

This extraordinary passage from the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple is not just a succinct declaration of what the temple is all about. It is a singular statement that defines the purpose for our mortal sojourn and our eternal potential.

Everything is about growing up. And *who* we are growing up to be is the choice we are here on this earth to make. This book is about growing up in the Lord. It is a witness that Jesus Christ is our Savior and that we are literal children of God who can grow up to become as He is.

Steve Dunn Hanson

1

THE QUESTIONS

*If first I'll seek the truth in me,
then I'll find truth where ere it be.*

WHO ARE WE...REALLY?

Are we part of some extraordinary eternal plan, or are we simply the product of "natural selection?"¹ Do we have purpose, with pillars of Light that mark our way to a potential celestial end, or are we just temporary entities that begin life at birth and conclude our existence at death? Is there a supreme being who governs our universe and makes an ultimate sublime eternal condition for us possible, or is that an evolving myth perpetuated in our minds to bring us some emotional comfort?

To know and understand and become is a path unique to each of us, and the answers to the questions that define who *we* are, literally are found within us.

My friend, Jack, 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 and 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! His wife 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. 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."²

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?"

A pull on left.

A pull on right.

Will I split apart?

Of course not.

But because I can choose,

I know I AM.

We have *choices* as to who we will be, because there is opposition in all things.³ Each of us are proof that we can, in fact, *choose* our ultimate state of being for we *have* agency or free will.⁴ This truth is an irrefutable standard we can use to measure the validity of any supposition concerning our existence and purpose. With that as our criterion, let's look at the two most prevalent theories of our origin.

One: We are purely biological and are the result of billions of years of evolution. Male or female identity is nothing more than the random combination of sperm and egg. We do not exist outside of our body and brain, and our mortal experience here defines our beginning and end. Therefore, morality—what we deem right or wrong—is defined by our instinct for survival and desire for physical and mental pleasure and comfort. It is an evolving thing.⁵

But if we exist because of "natural" forces and have a finite beginning and end, all our choices are pre-determined by the circumstances we each find ourselves in and by our inherited genes that have evolved over countless generations. That is not agency. While we are certainly *temporarily* affected by our mental and physical condition,

by those around us, and by our surroundings, agency requires that we are innately able to choose our own ultimate path regardless of these provisional conditions.

Two: Our non-biological spirits were created at the time of our physical birth by a god and placed in our bodies to give them life. While our existence began at birth, our spirits continue to exist when our bodies die. How we act in our bodies relative to a set of standards established by that divine entity determines whether our spirits spend eternity in a heaven (reward) or in a hell (punishment) or some variation thereof.⁶

This scenario also precludes agency. If we were created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by some supernal being, we are the potter formed. Our proclivities or desires, and therefore our choices, are the responsibility of the maker who created us to be who we are. That is not agency.

So, who are we?

Our undeniable ability to make choices irrespective of or even unrelated to our environment, physical condition, or parentage is a witness that our *basic self* or *essence* has no beginning nor end. If it did, by definition, an external entity or condition would determine our choices and ultimate fate. But agency exists, and like my friend, Jack, and President Joseph F. Smith, all of us can, in fact, choose who we want to be at the end of the day. Our agency affirms we are *eternal* in every sense of the word.⁷ We just *are*. Always have been. Always will be. And our eternality poses some interesting and vital questions.

WHO ARE WE SANS A BODY?

Just before Christmas years ago, I asked my five-year-old granddaughter what Santa Claus was going to bring her.

“Two bikes,” she quickly 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.”

I stifled a laugh and, of course, she did not get two bikes. Her perception, as real as it seemed to her, was not based on what actually is, and her subsequent expectation was not realized.

For us to have legitimate eternal expectations, we need to understand what is *real* about us. All human beings—male and female—are created (i.e. “formed”) in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.⁸ “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”⁹

Our basic entities that existed even before becoming a “spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents” are intelligences or essences that have always been.¹⁰ In addition, we are ultimately independent and capable to *act* for ourselves and not to be *acted upon*, “otherwise there is no existence.”¹¹

Before our present mortal state, then, our intelligences or essences became spirit sons and daughters of God,¹² who is a Being of infinite intelligence or Light and Truth.¹³ While our spirit body is not flesh and bones,¹⁴ it does have substance that is more fine and pure than the physical matter our temporal bodies are made of.¹⁵ Our spirit bodies resemble our mortal bodies,¹⁶ and since we are “in the image of God” and are His children, we can become like Him, just as a child becomes like his or her parents. That clearly suggests that God was once like us and subsequently progressed to His divine state.¹⁷

WHAT ARE OUR STAGES OF EXISTENCE?

*What was real
to me before,
became a dream.
Now, I've just swapped*

*dreams again, it seems.
So, what is real?
Does it matter
since I am
changing?*

Becoming like God is a process of change and growth...and choice. Our capacity for Light and Truth can increase as we have experiences with it, and we can move from one level or stage of being to a higher one, as we abide the laws in each stage.¹⁸ If we choose not to live those laws, we stop in our evolving and cannot advance to a greater level. For example, we know that there were those who could not come to earth and receive a body of flesh and bones like us, because they chose to act contrary to the laws of Light and Truth in our previous world.¹⁹

We have been through an unknown number of stages of existence prior to our earth life, and we will continue to do so after. I believe that each stage of our existence is essential for us to both *determine* who we desire to be eternally and to have the experiences necessary for us to *become* who we want to be. What we know with certainty is that we are incapable in and of ourselves to move from one stage of existence to another. That is God provided and God directed.²⁰

There are at least four stages or states of being which I discuss below, and it is likely that the timing and location of where we are placed in each stage reflects our experiences and choices in the previous phase. When and where we are placed is not necessarily a judgment statement about our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in abiding law in a prior world. Rather, it is where we individually *need* to be so we can have the unique set of experiences that will help us choose and become who we *want* to be. Additionally, because of capabilities developed previously, we may be placed in our next stage where we can be of greatest service to our fellow beings.²¹

The levels of our existence, that we know of, include first being essences or intelligences.²² We then became spirit children of God

and resided with God.²³ In our present state we have a physical body and the unique experiences that only a spirit in a physical body can have. Our spirits then move into a stage where we are without a physical body but retain the knowledge of what it is like to have that body. Our involvements there are similar to those here in our mortal state.²⁴

Ultimately, we will receive an immortal body of flesh and bones and be consigned to the eternal level of Light and Truth we choose to receive.²⁵ Without God we would be forever in our essence state, never knowing good from evil and, therefore, never having Light or Truth.²⁶

In our current mortal state, the option to progress beyond it requires a Savior. One who is God-empowered to lift us beyond what we can do by ourselves. One who makes possible, through their example and grace, our final assignment to the level of Light and Truth we desire. That Savior is Jesus Christ.²⁷

A question worth pondering is did our stages before this one need a savior as well to provide us the grace required to successfully complete it? We do know that we had notable leaders at least in our existence just prior to this one. Jesus Christ and Lucifer were among those, as was Adam (Michael) and likely Eve. We also know that it was possible for even outstanding leaders there to fall. Lucifer was "an angel of God in authority," then with the power and knowledge he had obtained, he sought to take away the agency of man and rule as a dictator.²⁸

But why would God provide a savior for us? Why would Jesus Christ sacrifice on our behalf? The answer, I believe, defines God.

God is *love*.²⁹

Charity, which is "the greatest of all," is the "pure love" of Jesus Christ.³⁰ So, does God *need* to *love* in order to be God? Does His work and effort on behalf of us independent essences describe God? I believe it does. To lift and bless all of us, according to our choices, defines God's purposes and glory.³¹ And *service*, a synonym for *love*, is what God is all about.³²

WHY ARE THE VARIOUS STAGES OF OUR EXISTENCE TEMPORARY?

The temporary nature of our stay here in our mortal form is obvious. We were born into it, and we die out of it. In addition, virtually everything around us is temporary, from houses to mountains and from personal illnesses and challenges to macro events of every shape and color. The world itself, in its current state, will one day be no more.³³

Our entry into this phase of our existence we call a birth, but that entailed our leaving our previous phase, which was in the “presence of God,” and that was a death.³⁴ After our death here, through the atonement of Christ, we are brought back into God’s presence, which is as a birth.³⁵

Birth and death signify both an entry and an exit, depending which side of it we are on, and define the temporary nature of our stages of existence. But this exit and entry process will eventually cease for us. Ultimately, if our choice is a *fulness* of Light and Truth, we will never again go out of God’s presence for we will be as He is,³⁶ and for everyone, time itself, which defines the temporary, will end.³⁷

But why the temporary in the first place?

Some years ago, when I was a stake president in southern California, 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 Latter-day Saint friends encouraged her, and she responded.

Subsequently, she met a young man from an adjoining stake, and they began dating. He went on a mission, but several months into his mission he just disappeared. His parents had no idea what happened and were frantic. But Laney did. He had come home and

was surreptitiously living in a shed behind Laney's house. She and her mother were hiding him, and he and Laney began to live together.

His parents ultimately became aware of the situation and urged the couple to get married. They agreed, and I was asked to perform the civil marriage. I invited Laney and the young man 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 had no light about them at all. 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 seeming catastrophe in her family's life as tolerable as possible. The situation was so repugnant 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 and her husband-to-be showed up. She was in jeans and a casual blouse with her 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.

Nothing was organized for the ceremony. I suggested the few bride's attendants 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 without 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 and after an hour or two in the library concluded 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 I was in the Los Angeles temple, and a lovely young woman, radiating Light, 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 focus. Six months later they went to the temple and were sealed. Now she was the mother of a baby born in the covenant.

Learning, and, therefore, choosing, requires trial and error. We determine by our experiences what we want and don't want both temporarily and eternally. Eternal choices cannot be made until we have the range of experiences and observations necessary to determine who we ultimately want to be.

In a sense, it is a sampling of choices, and by definition, the process must be and is temporary. Therefore, these experiences are impermanent and do not "make us." They simply give us the knowledge we need to determine who we desire to be.³⁸

WHY CAN'T WE REMEMBER OUR PREVIOUS STAGES OR EVEN GOD?

Apparently, for us to determine who we want to be, we must make our choices on “neutral” ground, where our personal involvement with *good* or *evil* is as a result of our own choice.³⁹ Our remembrance of our previous existence, including our interface with either God or Satan or Jesus Christ, has been temporarily withheld so we can discover our own proclivities or desires independent of overwhelming outside force or compulsion.

However, we are given the means to recognize good from evil no matter our circumstance, upbringing, or environment.⁴⁰ And we do bring with us into this world a latent awareness of our previous experiences and decisions not specifically recallable until we have prepared ourselves by making choices here that open that door.⁴¹

As we choose *good*, means are provided for us to obtain both confirmation of the good we are choosing and to receive greater knowledge of God and of who we are.⁴² We become eligible for a consummate spiritual gift, the Holy Ghost, that can be with us constantly and bring all things to our remembrance.⁴³

As we respond to our righteous desires, exceptional spiritual experiences may happen that can confirm our prior existence,⁴⁴ but we must “knock first” and ask first, as that is a manifestation of our basic desire.⁴⁵ Our eyes then can open, and we will begin to remember what was, see more clearly what is, and understand more completely what will be.

WHY CHOICES IN THE FIRST PLACE AND WHERE CAN OUR CHOICES TAKE US?

As young missionaries, my companion and I were tracting in a small town outside of Brisbane, Australia. We knocked on yet another door one hot summer day and were greeted by a man, perhaps in his late

30's or early 40's, who had more than his share of tribulations and problems judging from the deeply etched lines on his somber face. I don't remember that we even introduced ourselves. He simply said, "Come in. I've been expecting you."

We had never been greeted like that before!

He led us through a living room, where an elderly man was sitting who he said was his father, then, so we wouldn't disturb him, he brought us to his own small bedroom. It was dimly lit with scores of mostly paperback 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 proceeded to give him what we termed the First Discussion, which covered the apostasy from the ancient original Church of Christ and the ultimate restoration of the gospel. As we concluded, we handed him a copy of the Book of Mormon, and with a brief explanation of its origin, we bore our testimonies to the truth of what we had taught him.

He held the book in his hands and closed his eyes. For several seconds there was silence, then he opened them 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." He randomly selected a page and without looking, placed his finger on it.

This 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."⁴⁶

He looked up and with what might have been a smile, said, "When can you come back and tell me more."

We could hardly contain ourselves! We set up an appointment, shared our testimonies again, and left. We had just had the kind of experience that all missionaries dream of having.

Over the next few weeks we met with him several times, and each meeting was a spiritual experience. The concluding discussion was the Plan of Salvation lesson where we taught him about our pre-mortal life, our purpose for coming to earth, the three degrees of glory, and our divine potential.

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." And we set his baptism date.

We never met with him again.

A few days before he was to be baptized, we received a note from him asking us not to contact him anymore. I don't know what his challenge was or whether he was making an "eternal" decision as to who he wanted to be. What I did learn, as a young missionary, was that to know the gospel is true was not the same as choosing to fully live it.

It is not just seeing and understanding truth, it is determining the *degree* of Light and Truth we desire. Our choices ultimately define us, and we potentially can become as God in every sense. We can have His *fulness*, and His fulness is not finite. It is infinite and comes because He expands in Light and Truth in an endless process as His spirit children, like you and me, choose to embrace Light and Truth as well.

To bring that about is His work and literally His glory. It is the ultimate manifestation of Love.⁴⁷ Our progress through each stage, including receiving a tangible body of flesh and bones, can bring us to that end, if that is our choice.⁴⁸

God's overriding designation is *Father* as referenced throughout ancient and latter-day scriptures. Jesus Christ spoke of Him as both His Father and *our* Father scores of times.⁴⁹ Men and women each have their own defined roles, but only together can they fulfill their full divine potential.⁵⁰ Therefore, there must also be a Heavenly Mother.⁵¹ We can become as our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother and receive all that they have, including their *fulness*, by seeking to be one with them and offering them our broken hearts and contrite spirits. In other words, our whole souls.⁵²

Since "Mother" and "Father" describe Them, our *desire* to be mothers and fathers here on earth is key to us becoming as They are. Like Them, we can receive joy and rejoicing in our posterity as we focus on helping our children and grandchildren receive as much Light and Truth as they want.⁵³ And like Them, our becoming one with each other, with our posterity, and with our family who preceded us, will likewise bring us a *fulness*.

This fulness not only constitutes joy, but sorrow as well. In fact, the heights of our joy are related to the depths of our sorrow for they are inversely connected.⁵⁴ Our *awareness*, our *reality*, expands infinitely as a result of us having a never ending posterity and heritage, and we experience all the peaks and the valleys of existence so we have endless comprehension too. And as we become like our Heavenly Father and Mother, Light and Truth will also define us.⁵⁵

Only a man and woman who desire to ultimately make and keep sacred covenants with each other and with God, and who have been legally and lawfully wedded by proper authority and "according to God's law," can be as our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother.⁵⁶ We can also choose to receive Light and Truth but not the fulness held by our Divine Parents, and we have the option to even reject Light and Truth altogether.⁵⁷

This broad range of possibilities has always existed.⁵⁸ We are never compelled nor forced to obtain Light and Truth, for that would violate our agency. Indeed, we only obtain it by *choosing* it. *We* must *want* it. God's purpose and *glory* is to show and teach and provide

the conditions and means for us to receive all the Light and Truth *we* desire. Then, with His infinite love, He invites us to be one with Him.⁵⁹

For many years I served as a volunteer chaplain in the Orange County California jails. There is not much I didn't see. I met with a murderer, pedophiles, drug dealers, robbers, physical abusers, forgers, and men, women, and teenagers of different nationalities and backgrounds. I felt with all my heart, that everyone I worked with was a son or daughter of God and had within them the spark of divinity.

With few exceptions, I sensed they were likely where they needed to be at that moment. They had broken serious laws and, in some instances, might be a danger to the community. But without exception, I knew they had the potential for Light, and there was much goodness in them. Perhaps, far more than what they thought themselves. They were sons and daughters of God who needed help. Who needed love.

Their freedom had been restricted because they had chosen to break society's laws. But did those choices reflect who they ultimately want to be? It is likely, at least to some degree, their temporary mental, emotional, and physical conditions, and/or the environment in which they lived or were raised, had a significant effect on their current choices. That possibility begs some important questions.

Why are we challenged in such diverse ways with the minds and bodies and emotions that we are born with? Why can the circumstances we find ourselves in, through perhaps nothing we have done, impact us so greatly? Since we are all God's children, why aren't we on "equal" footing here in mortality?

The Lord is clear. We "all are alike unto (Him)."⁶⁰ So, why the sometimes very stark differences in our individual situations here? These seemingly "inhibiting" factors result from being born with an imperfect mind and body and being surrounded by imperfect people and conditions. God does not create imperfectness. It just exists, for there is opposition in all things.⁶¹ In this, our mortal, *temporary* state,

we are surrounded by it so we can have the experiences we need to both decide and then become who we want to be.

If we desire to be as Christ, who "descended below them all," we will follow Him through experiences akin to His, for He is The Way.⁶² We will abide in Him by walking with Him.⁶³ While the tone and tenor of them vary from individual to individual, our experiences here, including our discomfoting challenges, are a critical part of our "telestial tour,"⁶⁴ which I discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Key to understanding and dealing with our unique mortal adversities and difficulties is to remember those experiences here are *temporary*. All of them. *We* are the *eternal* ones.⁶⁵ What we choose to do with our *provisional* physical, mental, and emotional states and situations leads us to who we ultimately want to be and the degree of Light and Truth we desire to possess eternally.

Will we strive to follow God's directions as taught by prophets, scriptures, and the Holy Ghost, and humbly seek temporal and divine grace to enable us to do that?⁶⁶ Or will we let the circumstances we are in and our less than perfect body and mind control us? That is our daily, even constant, choice here in our earthly stay.

The promise from the Lord is clear. "He who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come."⁶⁷ Continual Spirit-reassurance during this mortal experience of ours and, hereafter, "eternal life," the greatest of the gifts of God, is offered to *ALL* who choose to be righteous. Who choose to follow in every way, Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ God's work and glory is "to bring to pass the...eternal life of man."⁶⁹

No one, because of their inherited or learned mental, physical, or emotional human traits are excluded from that promise. ***Everyone who wants eternal life and strives to live their life accordingly, will receive it.***⁷⁰ Whether we have addictive propensities, heterosexual challenges, LGBTQ/SSA proclivities, mental and emotional and physical conditions or circumstances that may preclude us from experiencing all that we desire to experience here in our mortal state, the "narrow path that leads to eternal life," is available to all.⁷¹

Some years ago, one of my teenage grandchildren was discouraged with what they considered to be their sub-par mind and body. I shared with them this analogy. Our bodies are like a ship, our minds like the computer that runs the ship, and our spirits 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 vessel with a hard-chugging motor that sounds to be on its last legs, and its computer wreaking havoc with its direction, we may brand the captain an incompetent.

In fact, our judgment of the captain, because of the vessel and computer he has, may be far off the mark. It is entirely possible that the skipper of the vessel none of us would want to have, 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. And in that circumstance, his opportunity for personal growth is exceptional. On the other hand, the captain of the seemingly ideal ship, may be unwilling to handle anything that doesn't automatically run itself and is not receptive to challenging growth experiences.

Moral? Don't judge a captain by his ship. And, don't judge a spirit by the body and mind it possesses. Leave that to our Heavenly Father who knows each one of us intimately. Regardless of the ship and computer we end up with here, we can and will have every experience we need to become like Jesus Christ, *if* that is our desire. No matter what shape our temporary ship and computer may be in, we just need to do the best we can with what we have. The grace of Jesus Christ will take it from there.

There is another important aspect to our experiences. I believe a mark of our desire to be one with the Savior is a willingness to use our struggles with earthly challenges to help others come to Christ. Joseph Smith was told that his trials would work for his good.⁷² But our difficulties will only be for our good *if we choose* to use them to help us become more like Jesus Christ and to lead others to Him.

My friend, Tom Christofferson, a gay Latter-day Saint, has, through his experiences and with his wisdom and love, helped heal and lift and bring faith to countless. His counsel, specifically to those with homosexual propensities, I believe applies to all of us.

"We don't know much about how being gay...in mortality plays out in an eternal sense. ...(But) we can live in the present, allowing space for what the Lord can do with the talents and abilities our heavenly heritage has granted. Day by day we can learn the language of the Spirit, we can gain experience in identifying promptings, we can increase in faith and wisdom. We can seek grace, the enabling power made possible by the Savior's Atonement, to expand our strength and augment our righteous desires. Eventually the day of decision will come, and having learned to trust the reality of daily bread, we will be as well equipped as possible to identify and pursue our best course."⁷³

While we may not know the source or reason for our particular difficulties, I believe Elder Neal A. Maxwell's observation and counsel applies to all of us. "Just as the capacity to defer gratification is a sign of real maturity, likewise the willingness to wait for deferred explanation is a sign of real faith and of trust spread over time."⁷⁴

What we do know is that God is our *Father*, and we are His children with inherent potential to become as He is. That awareness and desire to reach our divine possibility, and our willingness to rely upon His grace to do so, will enable us to look beyond the momentary ramifications of our challenges. We proceed with an "eye of faith" and see they do not affect us eternally.⁷⁵

Yes, our life here is temporary, and so is our immediate post mortal life which is literally an extension of this one where we continue to have experiences to learn and grow and choose.⁷⁶ That we do temple work for those who are deceased confirms that truth.

Does that mean it's okay to knowingly "put off" following Christ fully until the next life, using our "mortal condition" as a justification for less than faithful desires and actions? Amulek's counsel to the

Zoramites gives a succinct and unmistakable answer to that rationalization. “That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”⁷⁷

The degree of our eternal happiness or joy is a choice that we will ultimately make regardless of our conditions and circumstances here in our mortal probation.⁷⁸ God’s grace is sufficient to help us overcome any and all temporary barriers to our becoming as He is. If that is our desire.⁷⁹

WHAT IS LIGHT AND TRUTH?

Life did not begin.

Life will not end.

*To remember who I am is to
remember Light.*

*To become who I can become
is to be filled with Light.*

First, I must remember.

*First, I must **want** to remember.*

Light and Truth have always existed.⁸⁰ They give life to all things, govern all things, and are the *power* of God and the *glory* of God.⁸¹ They are independent of us, and we possess them by choosing to abide those laws that govern them.⁸² With them, we can comprehend everything.⁸³ With them, we thrive and proliferate in knowledge and power and love and ability to serve.⁸⁴ And with them, our understanding is quickened without restriction.⁸⁵

They give us the capability and capacity to create and to expand infinitely because one who possesses them will lift and help and assist others to obtain them so both the receiver *and* the giver increase in Light and Truth without bounds.⁸⁶ In every way they are the

opposite of one who seeks their own aggrandizement and power by being a law unto themselves.⁸⁷

Our Heavenly Father's plan of love, *The Plan*, provides *all* of His children, without exception, the means to receive the amount of Light and Truth they desire, and, if it is their choice, to have a fulness like Him. A fulness of joy. A fulness of reality. A fulness of Light and Truth.⁸⁸

2

THE PLAN

*The Plan is The Way.
The Plan makes us free.
The Plan is His grace.
that grants agency.*

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 because 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*. 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.

President Dallin H. Oaks said, "(God's) plan gives us the teachings and the opportunity to make the choices that will assure us the destiny and the life we choose."¹ Many of us have the propensity to seek complexity in what we accept as authentic or true. But as comprehensive and extraordinary as *The Plan* is, it is, in concept and understanding, simple and easy to comprehend if we will not "look beyond the mark."²

The Plan goes by several defining names including the Plan of Salvation,³ the Plan of Redemption,⁴ and the Plan of Mercy.⁵ But perhaps its most affecting name is the *Great Plan of Happiness*,⁶ for joy is the sublime objective of our existence.⁷

The Plan is co-eternal with God⁸, and like all truth, it is independent in its own sphere.⁹ The agency of man is to follow *The Plan* to the extent they desire joy or to reject *The Plan* altogether to their condemnation.¹⁰ To obtain a fulness of Light and Truth, or, in other words, to become as God, one chooses to follow fully the eternal directions or laws that constitute *The Plan*. Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father are the pattern.¹¹

So, what is *The Plan*? Acknowledging the reality of infinite universes is perhaps a key to understanding it. There is much discussion in scientific and philosophical circles concerning the existence of universes beyond our own, and among scholars there is increasing acceptance of that possibility. Though, at least for the present, it is not "scientifically" provable.¹²

While there are different theories as to how these universes might be constituted, some models correlate significantly with what we know by revelation.¹³ For instance, we know that there is a God that we cannot see with our mortal eyes, and we had a pre-mortal existence¹⁴ and will have a post-mortal existence.¹⁵

All of this points to different reality dimensions or universes other than the one where we currently reside. According to scripture, there are innumerable eternal or permanent states of being based on the degree of Light and Truth that is within them,¹⁶ so there are countless worlds and dimensions or universes that exist.¹⁷

AN OVERVIEW

The Plan includes the sequential stages we pass through that I have previously discussed, each with opportunities to grow in Light and Truth. Perhaps, in one sense, that process is a filtering system where essences or intelligences either advance from one level to another as they seek and live more Light and Truth, or cease to go forward because they choose not to abide by laws required for that progression.

We have no recorded revelation pertaining to the levels preceding our premortal state as spirit children of God, but by implication they exist.¹⁸ We were given *spirit bodies* in the form and likeness of our physical bodies in this first phase that we have scriptural information about.¹⁹ There we made choices about Light and Truth that qualified us to come to earth and receive bodies of flesh and bones. Many, however, made choices that precluded them from progressing to our current corporeal state.²⁰

Here, in this earthly stage, we have experiences with a physical body that are necessary for us to decide the eternal degree of Light and Truth we desire.²¹ Upon our death, or our leaving this mortal state, we re-enter a spirit world where we continue to make choices regarding the eventual degree of Light and Truth we want.²²

We know of at least two important but temporary divisions there. Paradise, where those who chose to substantially live the laws of

Light and Truth during their earthly sojourn reside, and spirit prison, where those who significantly or utterly rejected Light and Truth dwell.²³

When we have had all the experiences needed to ultimately choose who we want to be, we are brought back into the presence of God, and we are resurrected with our physical bodies restored to us in an immortal and incorruptible form.²⁴ We are then eternally placed where we will have the level of Light and Truth we have chosen, and our permanent bodies will be endowed with power and ability commensurate with that choice.²⁵

THE ETERNAL LEVELS OF LIGHT AND TRUTH

*I choose
the Light and Truth
I will abide.
I choose
eternally
where I'll reside.*

There are three eternal levels or kingdoms defined by the degree to which their inhabitants choose to possess Light and Truth, as manifested in their mortal and post mortal stay according to their "testimony of Jesus."²⁶ The highest, the celestial glory, is compared to the light of the sun. Those who are *faithful* in their "testimony of Jesus," inhabit the celestial. They are "made perfect" through Him and dwell eternally in the presence of God the Father. There are three degrees in the celestial universe, and those who are in the highest have chosen to live fully *all* laws of Light and Truth. They become, in every sense, as Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father.²⁷

The second level of glory is the terrestrial, and it is compared to the light of the moon in its brilliance. Those who reside here will be ministered to by Jesus Christ but not God the Father. They have lived

good and honorable lives prior to their resurrection, but chose not to be "valiant" in their testimony of Jesus Christ and, therefore, to not receive a fulness of Light and Truth.²⁸

The lowest degree of glory, the telestial, consists of innumerable levels.²⁹ Those who dwell here were heavily influenced by Satan and rejected Jesus Christ during their earthly stay. They are eventually redeemed from Satan's influence and will ultimately receive a limited share or portion of Light and Truth. They will be ministered to by the Holy Spirit and those assigned from the terrestrial kingdom. The glory of the telestial is likened to that of the light of the stars.³⁰

My wife, Joyce, and I served a leadership/proselyting mission to Romania. Young elders there invited us to go with them to visit a married couple who they were going to teach about the three degrees of glory. The elders made their presentation and then, with great expectation, asked the couple which of these kingdoms they would like to be in. The man thought for a moment, then said, "That middle one looks pretty good to me."

While the young elders were flummoxed, Joyce and I couldn't hold back a smile. This man's answer may have honestly reflected his choice as to who he wanted to be. And that's okay. To choose to live the level of law we are most comfortable with is not a punishment.³¹ The Plan of Happiness is that *all* who desire some degree of Light and Truth will be content at whatever level their choice represents.³²

Here in this world, prophets and teachers sometimes use stark carrot and stick or reward and punishment incentives to motivate, but this primarily pertains to impermanent consequences of not abiding transcendent laws.³³ While all of us, at least temporarily, experience the negative results of living adversely to laws of Light and Truth, all who ultimately repent and choose to live, to some degree, these transcendent laws, will be where they desire to be.³⁴

There is, however, an indescribable punishment for those who are a law unto themselves and reject all Light and Truth. They are eternally without order, peace, power, or joy for they are with others who are just like them. They are isolated in incomprehensible darkness.³⁵

JUSTICE AND MERCY

*I break a law,
and justice
binds me.
I repent,
and mercy
sets me
free.*

There is no existence without law,³⁶ and *The Plan* is about following transcendent laws. If we choose not to obey those laws, the "blessings" associated with them cannot be forthcoming.³⁷ For example, "wickedness never was happiness."³⁸ Justice is the consequence of obeying or disobeying laws.³⁹

If we *temporarily* do not abide an eternal law and then, because of our experiences, choose to live that law permanently (repent), the potential eternal negative results of that disobedience are removed.⁴⁰ That is mercy. There is no conflict between justice and mercy, for it is not *just* that we be condemned eternally for temporarily not abiding a law as we seek to know who we want to be. That is what *The Plan* is all about. *Learning, then choosing.*

Mercy, therefore, is an integral part of justice. We are able to choose to live eternal laws *after* we have had experience with not obeying them. *Mercy* brings *sanctification* and *justification* with our changing. We are cleansed and purified as we repent.⁴¹ We are *justified* in our temporary experience of not following the law and are no longer held accountable for it, as we choose to use that experience to become one with Christ and help others change as a result of that experience.⁴² We are *made* "fit for the kingdom."⁴³ Interestingly, justice is designated masculine, and mercy, feminine, in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁴

GRACE

It doesn't come too early.

It doesn't come too late.

It never is too little.

It never is too great.

Grace is the aiding power that makes *The Plan* possible and is received as we seek it at every stage of our existence. It is the perfect gift of love given by those who constitute the Godhead so we can become as They are.⁴⁵ The only thing we have that has always been ours is our essences or our wills.⁴⁶ To understand our complete need to rely upon God for virtually everything else, is to open the door to ultimately become one with Him.⁴⁷

As we seek to know and obey Jesus Christ, he will “show unto (us our) weakness,” and His grace will be sufficient for us to overcome our “weak things” so we can become like Him.⁴⁸ As we obey the laws that pertain to Light and Truth and *give* grace through service to others, we likewise receive grace *for* our grace until we have a fulness of Light and Truth like Jesus Christ.⁴⁹

Grace is a *facilitating* power that we have been given and includes our bodies and minds, our talents, our time, our circumstances and experiences, our resources, and indeed, *The Plan* itself. But grace is also an *enabling* power and provides every means necessary for us to become who we desire to become eternally. We have the innate *capacity* for Light and Truth, and for total darkness as well, but our agency, our ability and right to choose, is a *facilitating* grace-gift as is our discerning that which is *good*.⁵⁰ We have been *given* the way to become who we choose to be and what we choose to receive eternally.⁵¹

But without *enabling* grace this would not be possible. This grace is manifest in three ways.

The Spirit of Christ—All of us have access to the Spirit of Christ or Light of Christ, if we respond to it, so that we can know good from evil. It is “one of the most fundamental means God uses to sustain and guide us” in all aspects of our lives. It is Light and knowledge and literally gives life and permeates all space.

Some might call it our conscience or our innate compass that not only helps us see right from wrong, but if we will allow it, it brings *negative* feelings when we are doing wrong and *positive* impressions when we are doing what is right. If we seek it and permit it in our lives, our intellect is enhanced and our understanding opened to truths that would otherwise not be available to us. It is the source of great ideas, inventions, and inspiring creativity including music, paintings, poetry and writings. It brings peace and prepares one to receive the powerful witness and constant companionship of the Holy Ghost.⁵²

The Holy Ghost—Joseph Smith said the Holy Ghost, a member of the Godhead, “is a personage of spirit.”⁵³ To those who have made and keep the covenants, through baptism, to be willing to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ, remember Him, and obey Him, the Holy Ghost is given as a potential constant companion.

The Holy Ghost enhances our memory and leads us to the “truth of all things.” It guides us in our decisions and protects us from physical and spiritual harm, and with it we can receive comfort, hope, and love. Through the power of the Holy Ghost we are sanctified through repentance and by remaining faithful to our covenants. The grace offered through the Holy Ghost aids us throughout our mortal tour to know and understand and live Light and Truth. Importantly, it testifies of our divine heritage and is an unimpeachable witness of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

Jesus Christ—Without Jesus Christ, there is no Plan of Happiness.⁵⁵ “He came into the world...to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness.”⁵⁶ His willingness and desire, to condescend to become mortal and to offer Himself as an *infinite* sacrifice so all of us can return back to the presence of God,⁵⁷ literally

defines what God is all about: "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."⁵⁸

The possibility of redemption and sanctification that Christ offers as a result, allows us to have the experiences necessary to determine who we desire to be eternally. We must be able to provisionally observe and experience the full range of alternatives so we can see their consequences and make our choices.

Ultimately, we may desire to be at a higher or lower level of Light and Truth than our initial temporary choices represent. However, we are inherently incapable of elevating ourselves once we have descended to a lower level. A redeeming power that can cleanse and lift us is mandatory if we are to rise to our desired state of being.⁵⁹

That redeeming power, that grace, is Jesus Christ who, through a soul-offering that is incomprehensible to our finite minds, made it possible for us to be cleansed and lifted to the level of joy or happiness we ultimately want—*after* having experiences to know both good and evil.⁶⁰ As we acknowledge our innate weakness and *desire* to overcome it, His grace is sufficient for us to become one with Him.⁶¹

THE TELESTIAL TOUR

*Enshrouded by some
coarser stuff,
I slip from Light.
And find eternity
obscured by
veil of time.*

Some years ago, I was sitting in a priesthood class when the Primary president put her face next to the little window on the door of our classroom and motioned for me to come out of the room. I did, and she was holding my grandson's hand tightly in hers.

“We can’t do anything with him,” she said. “He’s disturbing the whole Primary. You’re going to have to take him.” That’s all the explanation she gave and put his hand in mine and left.

My grandson was five or six years old and was visiting our ward that day. His disrupting Primary was not a surprise. He had a history. I brought him to one of the sofas in the foyer and sat down with him. 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. Finally, I said, “Why do you do those things?”

His answer was quick. “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.

Since then, I have thought numerous times that his words describe many, if not all, of us. The great battle is to subject our telestial bodies and minds to the higher desires of our spirits. In other words, to try to *live* the higher law, or as President Russell M. Nelson invited us to do, “Think Celestial.”⁶²

Why is the world in which we now live such an integral part of *The Plan*? Perhaps because it is where sorrow and joy intermingle and where the greatest trials seem to come in our waiting for understanding. In a word, It is a place of choosing.

This mortal stage is a type of the telestial kingdom, the lowest of the three eternal orders, and Light and Truth is available here to varying and limited degrees depending upon our choices. Billy Graham said, “My home is in heaven. I’m just traveling through this world.”⁶³ Whether he fully realized it, he perfectly described the temporary nature of our telestial tour, and because we are here, we know more about this stage of our existence than any other.

For instance, we are told that here we are conditionally experiencing the length and breadth of *telestial* existence so we can see, firsthand, if the telestial is what we ultimately want. In addition, Satan is allowed to influence us here, and if it is our choice, we can follow him.⁶⁴ Our experience with the telestial and Satan’s power is necessary in order to become *like* Jesus Christ. For Him to “com-

prehend all things” he both “ascended up on high (and) also He descended below all things.”⁶⁵ We have followed Him here to the lowest of all the kingdoms so we can have similar experiences as He had, including doubt and darkness, and, like Him, we can ultimately “comprehend all things.” If that is our choice.

Here in mortality and our subsequent post-mortal spirit stage, we have the full range of choices open to us, including experiencing the consequences of those choices. As we choose to live ever more transcendent laws in this mortal telestial phase, our awareness or remembrance of a higher order increases, and we see our current telestial-ness less isolated and more in an eternal context. That enhanced awareness is elevating and can lead us to behave less telestial and ultimately to have “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” even here in a telestial world.⁶⁶ Simply put, we can *always* “think celestial” if that is what we want.⁶⁷

A critical part of our current experience is dealing with a physical body. But why do we even want a physical body with all its seeming challenges? The simple answer is, God has a body of flesh and bones,⁶⁸ and if we are to become like Him, and therefore have a fulness of joy,⁶⁹ our spirit must ultimately become inseparably connected to a physical body.⁷⁰ There is something about having a physical body that increases our capacity for Light and Truth *and* darkness, for “all beings who have bodies have power over those who have not.”⁷¹

Those spirits who did not abide the laws of our previous existence, were denied this special gift.⁷² And it *is* an extraordinary gift. That we receive a temporary physical body here in this mortal phase means we are guaranteed to ultimately have an incorruptible immortal body that will be refined and perfected according to the level of Light and Truth we choose.⁷³

That choice is made given the provisional experiences we can only have with our body of flesh and bones and subsequently as post mortal spirits. Perhaps, then, the most important purpose for this mortal stage of our existence is for us to learn how to use a physical

body and to determine the degree to which we will live transcendent laws when we occupy it.⁷⁴

What specifically, then, are we to be doing here on our celestial tour? What choices are we here to make? I believe the degree to which we desire to grow up in the Lord and to be free is defined by how we embrace the all-encompassing *Pillars of Light*:

ACT—*Act and not be acted upon*⁷⁵

LOVE—*Love Christ first*⁷⁶

LAW—*Live the law of Christ*⁷⁷

HUMILITY—*Recognize our innate weakness*⁷⁸

ONE—*Be one in Christ*⁷⁹

3

ACT

ACT AND NOT BE ACTED UPON

*No matter what the forces be,
I'll have self-control,
for thus I learn to overcome—
to possess my soul.*

YEARS AGO, WHEN CONTRACTING AIDS was a death sentence, my friend, Lucia, was diagnosed with it. Her unfaithful husband gave it to her but even on his deathbed wouldn't acknowledge what he had done. Lucia was a lovely young woman with a small child. While she could not choose to extend the now very short term of her life, she did have the choice as to whether she would let what her husband did control her.

During her husband's last moments she told him she forgave him. She strived to bear him no hate, for that would suppress her. Over the next two years of her life, she was involved in helping and serving others, particularly her own daughter who she would not see grow up. She was a volunteer worker at the Los Angeles temple, fulfilled church assignments, spoke on behalf of AIDS victims, and carried with her a smile of hope and love that lifted all of us who were close to her.

When the end of her own life was a few days away, and Lucia was a gaunt replica of her former self, one of her friends 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 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 the person I've become!"

Lucia chose "to act" and "not be acted upon."¹

No matter our condition, circumstance, or who or what we are surrounded by, we have the ability, the agency, to *act* independent of everything and anything. While we cannot control the intentions or behavior of others, we can choose whether to allow what they have done or said control our minds and spirits.² And to the extent we let outside influences dominate us, to that extent we lose our freedom.

Kaye met her husband on their mission, and they were married shortly after. She worked as a high school teacher to help put him through medical school. Unable to have children, they adopted two. Then, while he was finishing his residency, he left Kaye, their children, and the Church. Shortly after that fateful day, Kaye was in our home. She was emotionally devastated. "What am I going to do?" she cried. "I can't even get a job at McDonalds!"

With fits and starts, she determined to *act* and to turn what at first blush was a life destroyer into an opportunity. She never remarried but went on to get her PhD and became a professor at BYU. While raising her two children, as a single mother, she taught thousands of students, became the associate director of the BYU MBA program, and associate director of the BYU Jerusalem Center in Israel.

She traveled the world giving seminars on communication to business leaders and organization heads and spoke at BYU's Education Week and at a BYU devotional. She was a Relief Society president, Sunday School teacher, went on a fulltime mission as an older single sister, and served on the Young Women's General Board. And she dealt with all kinds of health challenges including having a double mastectomy.

At her funeral several years ago, Virginia Pearce, prominent author and former member of the General Young Women's presidency,

gave the eulogy. Then, nine of the great women of the Church, all who had served with Kaye at one time or another, stood in a line across the stand, and one-by-one came to the pulpit and spoke of how Kaye had blessed their lives. There were past General Young Women presidents, a General Relief Society president, temple matrons, and counselors in general auxiliary presidencies.

The chapel and culture hall were almost filled and near the conclusion of the funeral, the speaker asked for all who had been taught or tutored or mentored by Kaye to stand. More than seven hundred people were on their feet.

Forty years earlier, Kaye wondered what she was going to do with her life now that her hopes and dreams had been irretrievably shattered. She couldn't see 40 years into the future. What she came to see, however, was that she did not have to let the circumstances that were forced upon her, control her and her destiny.

She could *act*. And she did.

For most of us, our act or be acted upon choices might not be as dramatic as the examples I've given, but for all of us they are just as real and defining. We are continually faced with potential *acted upon* situations, and whether we *act* independent of them or allow them to control us is our choice.

*Why I would give away
my soul's control
so readily, is beyond me.*

Is it hate or betrayal or envy or jealousy or anger? Is it food? Is it sex? Is it money? Is it seeking recognition or fame or power? Or is it an uncomfortable or even devastating "Why me?" situation? Whatever our physical or mental or emotional conditions and no matter who has influence in our lives, we can choose to act and can turn, with the Savior's grace, any situation into a learning one. A growing one. A helping others one. We can *grow up in Him* as a result.

Bill Gould 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 and was visiting our stake in Orange County, California, where I served in the stake presidency. I can't tell you why there was almost instant bonding between us, as he was old enough to be my father. Maybe it was because we both loved to write. In any case, virtually from the git-go we traded writings. Mine, fiction and self-help articles, and his, memoirs and personal history.

And what a history!

From a boy of small stature with a 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 he shared with me 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 a remarkable thing happened. 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, then smiled up at him. That act of kindness and 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. How he idolized her and cared for her. She was a cancer victim and graciously and courageously struggled to stay afloat. She was only in her early 70’s when she passed away. 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 my wife, 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 depression when Erlyn died. He was in an “I’m-going-nowhere” 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. Who 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 neighbor, a widow, about her dad. How difficult his life was since his wife's death and what he was now doing. 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.

Bill's daughter notified him about Millie, and Bill reached out to her to thank her for her kindness those many years before. The rest is history.

When we choose to *act*, we choose also to be *free*. Free from anything that could potentially control us. And we choose to open possibility doors that would not otherwise be available to us. We need to be patient with ourselves, though. We are in a telestial world with telestial bodies and minds. We are in the *prove them herewith* part of our eternal journey.³

Over time, we can grow in our ability to *act*, if that is our desire. And for most of us, it does take time. We will see that God's grace is mandatory to help us do it, and *repentance* is key here. Our *wanting* to act and not be acted upon, and our *willingness* to readily recognize when we have let ourselves be controlled is required. Then, through grace, our inadequacies and failings can be made our strengths and ultimately we can have boundless freedom.⁴

We grow up in Jesus Christ.

4

LOVE

LOVE CHRIST FIRST

*To love
with
Christ's pure love,
I first
love Him
purely.*

SOME YEARS AGO, I was discussing The Book of Mormon with a protestant minister friend who was reading it. He turned to his copy and read, "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."¹

He then said that to see our service to our fellowman as literally and directly service to the Savior was a key principle among the early Christians. That it was stated so clearly and unmistakably here in The Book of Mormon had affected him deeply. He next told me a 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. 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 a cry, they would

search 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. She would have them carried back to her home. There, she would have them washed and gave them nourishment. Then for hours, she would sit with a stranger's head upon her lap to give comfort and consolation in his or her last moments on the earth.

My friend wrote and asked her how she could do this day after day under such horrible, revolting, circumstances. The note 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."

Mormon tells us that charity is "the pure love of Christ" and is "the greatest of all."² Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father define love. Their sublime purpose is to lift and bless all of us. Every man, woman, and child who ever lived or whoever will live on this earth. Christ taught us, by His own example, that love is defined by seeking to bring about the wellbeing and happiness of others. The quantity and quality of the love we are *capable* of giving to another is determined by where we place Jesus Christ in our lives.

In answer to the question what the greatest commandment or direction is, the Savior said it is to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind. He then added that the second is "like unto" the first. Love your neighbor, your fellowman, as yourself.³ There is a specific priority or order given here which implies that the second admonition cannot be fulfilled completely without keeping the greatest commandment first. So, in order to love others with Christ-like love (charity) we must first love Him with pure love. We become capable of doing this by pleading to "the Father with all the energy of heart" to receive it and by being "true followers of...Jesus Christ."⁴

We know that *The Plan* is the consummate expression of our Heavenly Father's and Christ's love, but how is *our* love, *our* charity,

manifested? And how do we love Christ and our Heavenly Father with all our heart, soul, and mind? I think the answer is we *choose* to make ourselves an integral part of Their plan of love. Their Great Plan of Happiness.

What does that mean?

“If ye love me, keep my commandments,” Jesus said.⁵ That is to say, follow His directions.⁶ He is “the way, the truth, and the life,”⁷ and to love Him means we seek to *know* Him. Then, with His *grace*, we strive to pattern our lives after His, because we *choose* to love Him purely. We choose to grow up in Him. We *choose* to become as He is. With this focus, we feel and understand sorrow and hurt and pain and joy and goodness and peace, and we lift and bless others as a result.

We recognize the eternal worth and potential of every person who has ever lived or will live, and we honor their agency. Their God-given right to choose who they want to be. We work to facilitate their happiness and to obtain the joy they are willing to receive. We do not force nor compel but encourage with patience and by kindly entreating.⁸ And we forgive.⁹

To love like Jesus Christ, perhaps we give our time or money or give up physical comforts or maybe even miss desired opportunities as we assist another. While these acts certainly can be manifestations of love, *Christ-like* love is on another level. To lift and bless and love as He does, we offer to that end, as He did, our lives. Our “whole souls.”¹⁰ For “greater love” has no man or woman than this.¹¹

Jesus Christ, a God, condescended to come to this earth to reside in a telestial state so that *The Plan* would apply universally to every spirit son and daughter of our Heavenly Father.¹²

That is love.

He went forth suffering pains and afflictions and temptations and sicknesses “so that He might know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”¹³ And relieving His people is what He did while He was here on this earth.¹⁴ And that is what He still does for you and for me. He gives us peace.¹⁵ He gives

us hope. And He gives us respite from our pains and anguish and the strength to deal with them as we make our way through this telestial tour.¹⁶

That is love.

And He allowed Himself to be slain “for the sins of the world,”¹⁷ then raised Himself from the dead, purified and perfected, to provide that ultimate, eternal end for all of us, if that is our choice. For because of Him we can “become (forever and ever) holy, without spot.” Just like Him.¹⁸

That is love.

While our attempts to lift and bless others may not be anywhere near the infinite offering of Jesus Christ, yet our *willingness* to do it, following His pattern and likeness, can and will bring through us His grace and hope and peace and relief to those we seek to help. And in the process, we receive that same grace and hope and peace for we are given grace as we also give grace.¹⁹ Our *desire* to do this says everything about who we are and who we want to be.

For that is love.

Years ago, I was in the delivery room when our sixth child was born, the only birth of our eight children I was permitted to attend. It seemed as if I were witnessing Joyce lay herself upon an altar to offer her life as a sacrifice, if necessary, to help bring about *The Plan*. My heart filled with indescribable love and gratitude for her.

Her life was literally put on the line in two subsequent births, and I was struck with the realization that, at least in this telestial world, whatever I was asked to do in the name of service or love would pale in comparison to what she had done. What my grandmothers and my mother and mother-in-law and my daughters and my granddaughters and virtually all mothers have done.

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.²⁰

And that is love.

But perhaps our one-on-one intimate and personal service 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. She took care of her invalid husband, my father, who was bedridden from Parkinsons Disease, and she wrote countless emails and letters and cards to those who she felt she could lift.

My mother, right up to the day of her death, loved.

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.

She was charity personified.

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. But Kent's heart had no more room for hurt. This is what he 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." Kent saw the personal pain he would bear if he let fester the wound his bishop's words caused, and he forgave him.

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.²¹

To forgive, however, is not to ignore wrongness. Rather, it is to say I understand you are having a challenge. I will not stop loving you as you make your way through it, just as I will not stop loving myself as I make my way through my own set of telestial experiences. In a sense,

repentance and forgiveness are saying the same thing. Repentance about me, and forgiveness about you. Both are acknowledgments of our innate weakness and a statement about our willingness to not pass final judgment based upon a wrongful act.

Repentance and forgiveness is how we lift both ourselves and another. Like repentance, forgiveness is a process that is layered and is the mindset of one who truly wants to love. It requires grace because of our own weakness,²² and it is as freeing and restoring of peace as is repentance.

It is love.

Of course, there are differing degrees of hurt. Big things like infidelity, betrayal, physical harm, and devastating financial loss will likely require more of us than the day to day kinds of things like stinging words or harmful actions. But the process for forgiving in all instances is the same, although admittedly more difficult with some occurrences than others. When we *want* to love, we seek to see everyone with the Savior's eyes. We ask for grace. We choose to be actors and not be acted upon. We maintain control of our peace. We *will* love.

Ultimately, a *fulness* of the pure love of Christ and its incumbent joy...and sorrow...can only be experienced as a family, with a husband, a wife, and children. It can only come by being eternally connected to our family preceding us²³ and our posterity proceeding forth through us.²⁴ Family—a husband, wife, and children—define God. We have a Heavenly *Father* and a Heavenly *Mother*. Jesus Christ is Their *son*, and we likewise are Their *children*.²⁵ If we desire to be as They are, we will do as They do. Only as eternal fathers and mothers can we fully and completely be involved in bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, God's defining role. That is a fullness of love.²⁶

While it is not possible, for many reasons, for everyone in this mortal state to marry here and have children, it is possible for everyone here to *want* to be a mother or a father. To *want* to have children and an extensive posterity. Wanting to is everything. These desires

for those who seek to possess the pure love of Christ in its fulness, will ultimately be met, whether in this, their current earth phase, or later.²⁷

In the meantime, serving and lifting and blessing others is reflective of such a desire. My sister-in-law (Joyce's sister), Shirley, never married. She was a school teacher of challenged children, served a full time mission, and was faithful in many Church callings. In her singleness, she did not isolate herself. Instead, she chose to be a blessing in the lives of her dozens of nieces and nephews, remembering their birthdays and special occasions, and just loving them.

Prior to the birth of our last child, Joyce was hospitalized with a life threatening health challenge tied to her pregnancy. She had been 12 days in the hospital when her rapidly deteriorating condition forced the doctors to induce labor to try to save hers and our baby's lives. Her life was preserved, but our baby only lived a few hours. That was just long enough for me to give him a name and a blessing.

When I finally got home all the children were asleep, but Shirley was there waiting for me. She had been staying with us for a whole month helping us with our children and Joyce with her extreme physical challenges. And we wept together. My children not only had a mom and dad and exceptional grandparents, they had Aunt Shirley who embodied the pure love of Christ.

To discover how much we desire to possess that love is one of the reasons we are here. We will have the experiences needed to determine that for ourselves, and ultimately we will have every blessing and opportunity that our choice brings.

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.

And, in the words of my friend, Tom Christofferson, "Our earnest desires to gain the gift of charity, that we may purely love one another

as the Lord loves each of us, can transform us as a people and prepare us for the greater things He would have us do as we seek to become His worthy disciples.”²⁸

5

LAW

LIVE THE LAW OF CHRIST

*Law does not constrain.
Law gives freedom to attain.*

WE ARE PRESERVED BY law.¹ Synonyms for law are *order* and *purpose*. Without law, there is not only confusion and chaos, there is non-existence, for without law, there is no earth, no universe, no God, and we are not.² Eternal or spiritual laws are fixed. There is no deviation. If they are followed, certain known positive results occur. If they are broken, unavoidable consequences happen.³ “The light of Christ is the law by which all things are governed. ...It is in all things (and gives) life to all things.”⁴ It provides order and existence for everything, including we who have agency and can *act*, as well as entities that are to be *acted upon*.⁵

Every kingdom of God, or level of Light and Truth, has laws that define it. Individuals who will not follow the laws of a celestial level “cannot abide a celestial glory.” Likewise, those who will not follow the laws of a terrestrial level cannot receive a terrestrial glory, and they who will not abide the laws of a telestial level will not receive a telestial glory.⁶

Those who will not abide by any law, but who are a law unto themselves,⁷ literally and paradoxically, lose their freedom because, if left unrestrained, they would take away the agency of others. They will ultimately be bound in an inescapable universe that is without

Light or law or order or power. In a word, they will be surrounded by those who are just like them. And that is hell.⁸

In this world, there are a plethora of temporal laws that are enacted by societies to maintain order and preserve the basic rights of its members. These vary in the degree of freedom they allow and in their conformity to more transcendent laws, and those who violate them are most often required to pay a penalty. That could be a loss of material possessions or being removed from society, either through incarceration, like my friends I worked with in the jails, or even death.⁹

Spiritual laws, for the most part, are individually applicable and, therefore, usually not regulated by temporal governments.¹⁰ They can, if we are receptive, be written in our hearts so we can *feel* what they are.¹¹ Everyone has been given the "Spirit of Christ" so they can "know good from evil."¹² We all are capable, therefore, to determine the level of transcendent law we will live, and for most of us, discovering that level is a line upon line, precept upon precept process.

To the extent we follow ever higher laws, to that extent more knowledge and understanding is ours.¹³ We become increasingly free as the door opens to a greater level, and the way is provided for us to live it, if that is our choice.¹⁴

For example, faithful men and women in The Book of Mormon saw in the Law of Moses the path to the greater law represented by Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Perhaps the Law of Moses, with its accompanying rituals and temporal directives, was more akin to the laws of a celestial order.¹⁶

Most Christian religions teach Jesus' elevated modification of and ultimate fulfilling of the Law of Moses as explained in the New Testament. They embrace His truths, including acknowledging His divine status as our Redeemer and the Only Begotten Son of God. They admonish their followers to emulate the Savior's example of love, including service and forgiveness, and to believe in grace and an eternal afterlife with a restoration of an uncorruptible body. This is a sublime advancement of laws and may define a terrestrial universe.¹⁷

However, even more transcendent laws are found at the celestial level. The ordinances of the holy priesthood administered in the temple of the Lord incorporate the highest laws and our following them enable us to know God, become one with Him, and to even obtain the “power of godliness.”¹⁸

These ordinances can only be administered by one who is authorized by God¹⁹ and include the making and keeping of sacred covenants to obey specified celestial laws.²⁰ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the sole possessor of both the necessary authority of Jesus Christ and the ongoing revelation essential to perform these ordinances.²¹ There are five supernal laws that they contain:

The Law of Obedience
 The Law of Sacrifice
 The Law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 The Law of Chastity
 The Law of Consecration



THE LAW OF OBEDIENCE

*I follow Him not knowing where,
 but where He is, I want to be.*

Over 130 years ago, my great-great grandfather Anderson and his family helped settle Idaho's upper Snake River valley. He was a mem-

ber of the Church and was an obstinate Swede. His daughter married and, as was the custom in their community, he provided a wedding dance at his log cabin home to celebrate the event. The bishop had established a rule about dances. He said there could not be more than two slow couple dances, like waltzes, in an evening. The rest were to be lively group dances. He apparently felt that too many slow dances gave couples opportunity for unacceptable 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 slow couple dances occurred that evening as well. A member of the bishopric was in attendance, and he was counting. Three slow dances! He dutifully reported the violation.

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 slow dances."

Grandpa's perception of the bishop's no-more-than-two-slow-dances rule as being plain dumb had nothing to do with what Grandpa should have done. Grandpa had raised his hand to sustain his bishop and to obey his requests. He went back on his promise, especially refusing to apologize for so long. His disobedience, it didn't matter his perception of the rule, 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?

The decision we make that determines our ongoing relationship with God is the degree we will live the Law of Obedience, which is to follow God's commandments or directions and to subject all else to that singular determination.²² Obeying Him must be our primary focus if we are to become as He is,²³ for obedience is the manifestation of our love for God and our desire to become one with Him.²⁴ By following His directions completely, we receive a fulness of Light and Truth.²⁵ To eschew all transcendent laws is to be a law unto ourselves.²⁶

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 big-time discomfort.

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, and then a few 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. That was our responsibility, and we would obey. 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 of 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 hopeful 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 a very 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 slammed 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 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 are some not so positive accounts about what missionaries found when they obeyed and went the extra mile that I hadn't read. Our experience would be on that list. But, we had obeyed.

I have another story.

When winter came on my mission, I was serving in a small town a few hours drive south of Sydney. My companion had been transferred, and I wasn't given a time when my new companion would get there. I was just told to check at the train station every day until he arrived. He was coming from over 1000 miles away, and I would be on my own until then and was to basically stay where I was living and not do any proselyting until he got there. Mission rules about a missionary being by himself have changed a bit since then.

As it turned out, I was grateful for the reprieve. I had recently purchased shoes that didn't fit very well, and my feet hurt so bad I could hardly walk. Sitting by the warm fireplace in the house where I lived was where I wanted to be. Each day, though, I would layer up

with warm clothes, get on my bike, and ride the ten minutes to the train station, then return home without a companion.

Sunday came, and it was fast and testimony day. There were no other missionaries or priesthood leaders within 50 miles of me, and there were only two member families in town...an older couple and a young family with two small children. For Sunday meetings, we met in a poorly heated hall downtown on the second floor of a run-down building that was always littered with cigarette butts and beer bottles. Since we missionaries had the key to the building and the room and conducted the meetings, we had to go early to clean up the place and prepare the sacrament.

This Sunday, I sat by my warm fire thinking of all the reasons 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. None of the members had a telephone though, and if they showed up, the building would be locked and no meeting. They would be very disappointed. And if I were to be truthful, the futility of our going the extra mile on that hot day in Brisbane several months before was likely on my mind too. Gratefully, my internal debate didn't last long. It was my responsibility to do it, and like then, I would obey. So, I put on my cold weather clothes and rode my bike to town.

I completed all the preparations for the sacrament, then waited for the members in the chilly room where we met. The time for the meeting to start came and went, and no one showed. I sat there for about 20 minutes indulging in a pity party. It was a Brisbane *Déjà vu*. I started to put the sacrament away when I heard someone coming up the stairs. It was the older sister. She was out of breath, and her face was apple-red from exertion and the cold. She and her husband lived about three miles out of town. They had a car, but only he could drive, and she said he was sick. She didn't want to miss partaking of the sacrament, so she rode her bike all the way in. That's why she was late.

For a second I wondered if I should hold the fast and testimony meeting with just two of us, but the expectant look on her face

gave me the answer, and we held the meeting. She sat down at the 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 of that old piano could have accompanied an angels' choir. We sang, then I gave the opening prayer. Back then, a Melchizedek priesthood holder gave all the prayers in sacrament meeting. Then we sang the sacrament hymn, and I blessed the sacrament with a depth of humility and desire I had never felt before. Both of us blinked back tears as we partook of the emblems representing our Savior and our covenants.

Then with our eyes watering freely, each of us stood and bore powerful witness of our love and gratitude for Jesus Christ. An extraordinary understanding, even revelation, of what He had done for us flooded our souls. We concluded our service with a hymn and a prayer, then wrapped our arms around each other as we wept. We 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 done my duty that day. If I had not obeyed.

Obedience is not just action, but an attitude and desire that is reflected in our daily lives. In how we respond to directives from Church leaders, from those in authority where we work, and even in the way we deal with the temporal laws and rules we have agreed to abide by. Perhaps *integrity* is a defining term here.

With respect to the laws of the land, the Lord has instructed us to “sustain and uphold” whatever government we are subject to if our “inherent and inalienable rights” are protected by its laws.²⁷ We are plainly told that if we are keeping God’s laws, there is no reason to break the laws of the country we reside in.²⁸

Whether we disagree with a law or rule or directive given by one in authority over us, as long as it does not violate any of the laws of God, we are to obey it to maintain the peace and order of those around us. Doing so, reflects an attitude of submissiveness and a desire to act for the good of the whole that is necessary, not just to maintain a viable

society, but to become one with God. The very act of obedience develops in us self-control and strengthens and increases our ability to follow even the most difficult of God's directions.

Does that mean we *blindly* obey *all* temporal laws and directions without thought? No. When such a directive places us in spiritual, mental, or physical harm or is a direct breach of any of God's laws, we obey God's law and seek the Spirit to know what we should do about the temporal law or rule.²⁹

The Law of Obedience also means that we *seek* direction on the most personal level to know God's will concerning our own lives, and then follow it. Sometimes we receive such direction but do not know how to accomplish it. The sustained unflinching desire to obey will ultimately point the way, but often only after a significant trial of our willingness to obey.³⁰

In other instances, we may be given a divine directive and not know the reason for it. For example, Abraham being commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac,³¹ or Adam and Eve being commanded to offer the best of their flocks in sacrifice.³² In these instances, it is our willingness to obey God that is the test, but we are also always taught important truths. Is our love for Him and our faith that He will never lead us astray great enough to withstand such tests? If it is, we are living the Law of Obedience.

When I was a young man, I was in a responsible position of a rapidly growing public opinion polling firm and on its board of directors. After much thought and prayer, I received an unmistakable impression by the Spirit that I was to leave that firm and go with a startup company that seemed to hold great potential. I obeyed. A few years later, the company I went with failed, and I suffered a devastating monetary loss that put my family and me in a precarious financial position.

How could that happen? I was obeying, and then this! Did I mistake the prompting? I was sure I didn't. I had many such impressions in the past, and the results always confirmed their Spirit-source. But I was almost overwhelmingly confused, and then I read in Luke where

Jesus Christ was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be *tempted* by Satan!³³ He was ushered into horribly difficult conditions by the same Spirit that had led me. He was led there so He could learn and grow.

It was a “Duh!” moment for me.

I had my list of blessings that constituted my expectation for obeying the Spirit. It was what most people would anticipate. Health, monetary success, family temporal wellbeing, safety, etc., etc. And every one of those so-called blessings on my list were temporary in nature. One of my blessings with this experience was to learn what a *real* blessing was. I discovered that anything that helped me understand better and become more like Jesus Christ was a blessing. And that is what that experience did.

I’m not suggesting we be Pollyannish about our challenges. However, if we remember they are temporary and ask ourselves what we can learn from them, we are less likely to be *acted upon* by them. In fact, as I became more and more familiar with the Savior and His earthly life, I saw that experiencing trials and challenges and heart breaks and disappointments were an essential part of gaining a fulness of Light and Truth.

Those experiences may even come as a direct result of our prayers to know Jesus Christ more fully. He showed the way by following the Spirit as He was led into experiences that allowed Him to grow and to understand, for even He did not receive of the fulness at first.³⁴

My choosing to obey, in this instance, led me to an understanding that has been a foundational principle for me in my life and has helped me not only to deal with and learn from even greater challenges than I faced then but has made it possible for me to give Christ-centered counsel and service to others. I have found that as I live the Law of Obedience, I will *always* be *eternally* blessed.³⁵

Importantly, living the Law of Obedience is also the door to complete and unrestricted freedom. “Obedience to God can be the very highest expression of independence,” Elder Boyd K. Packer taught. “(God) will accept (obedience) when freely given. And he will then

return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of—the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to be.... Strangely enough, the key to freedom is obedience.”³⁶



THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

*What makes my mite acceptable,
is it contains my soul.*

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.³⁷

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.³⁸ *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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

What does it mean to offer our whole soul? On the one hand, it is to “serve Him with all (our) heart, might, mind and strength.”⁴¹ But offering our broken heart and contrite spirit is an integral part of our complete sacrifice. A contrite spirit means we willingly subject our wills to that of our Heavenly Father as an obedient, loving child submits to his earthly father and mother. We become “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love and willing to submit” to every experience necessary for us to become like Jesus Christ.⁴²

We learn what one aspect of a broken heart means from Alma the Younger’s experience with remorse as he viewed what he had done in light of who he wanted to be. He was “racked even with the pains of a damned soul.” Then when he offered his broken heart to Jesus Christ, he was “harrowed up (no more) by the memory of his sins,” and he was “filled with joy as exceeding as was (his) pain.”⁴³

Alma’s life was changed. Not *because* he had seen an angel and brought to a recognition of his sins, but because through his experiences he saw who he really wanted to be, and through the Savior’s grace *chose* to submit his sacrifice of a broken heart. With that grace, he made the changes in his life that allowed him to “labor without ceasing (to)...bring (other) souls unto repentance...that they might also be born of God and be filled with the Holy Ghost,” like him.⁴⁴

But there is more.

*To partake from Lehi's tree,
I descend with Christ to Calvary.*

The fruit of the tree of Lehi is the "love of God." It is "the most desirable above all things," and "the most joyous to the soul."⁴⁵ To love God is to want to become one with Him. A broken heart sacrifice means we are willing to follow the Savior in having experiences necessary for us to become like Him. I believe that is what Paul meant when he said, "We glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."⁴⁶

Christ suffered "pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that (he could)... take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. ...And he (took)...upon him their infirmities, that (he)...may be filled with mercy...that he may know...how to succor his people according to their infirmities."⁴⁷

We become like Jesus Christ by following *His way*. For us to lift and bless in His name, we must have the empathy and compassion and understanding and love that He has, and that will likely require personal heart rending, heart breaking experiences. I do not believe that means we hold up an adversity lightning rod and say, "Hit me!" I do believe it means we *consent* to have the experiences needed for us to understand and know and be like Jesus Christ.

Our acceptance of them is our humble offering of a broken heart and contrite spirit.⁴⁸ And the Lord's promise is that our "adversity...shall be but a small moment,"⁴⁹ and we will "suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ."⁵⁰ We will have the strength to understand that and feel that and to use that to bless others.



THE LAW OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

*What good is hope,
if I won't look
with eyes of faith?*

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 wasted no time introducing me to missionary work. He scheduled a meeting with 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 first hand 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.⁵¹ That they might have *joy*.⁵²

The Law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a set of directions for us in our telestial tour that, if followed, will bring us peace here, and eternal life, or a fulness of Light and Truth, in the world to come.⁵³ Those directions cover virtually every aspect of our lives here, from cultivating our minds and spirits,⁵⁴ to keeping our bodies healthy and pure because they are temples of God that are essential to bring us a fulness of joy.⁵⁵ From being anxiously engaged in good causes,⁵⁶ to serving God by serving our fellowmen.⁵⁷

Foundational to this law is the Doctrine of Christ which, simply stated, is that we seek to change (repent) when we behave contrary to any of God's directions. We have faith in Jesus Christ and *desire* to "be perfected in Him" by denying ourselves "of all ungodliness."⁵⁸ We receive the ordinances of the holy priesthood and make and keep sacred covenants that enable us to receive the power of godliness.⁵⁹ Then, we endure to the end.⁶⁰

That we *can* change is a grace-gift.⁶¹ That we *want* to change is a manifestation of who we desire to be. We are in a telestial world with telestial minds and bodies having the various experiences necessary for us to choose our eternal destiny. Our stay here is an integral part of *The Plan*, for we need to be able to discern between good and evil and then have a broad spectrum of choices made available to us. We are not only learning who we *want* to be here, but, if it is our choice, we can also learn, with sufficient grace, how to *control* our physical minds and bodies to conform to celestial laws.⁶²

Our spirits are learning to act and not be acted upon by our minds and bodies. That naturally involves failures that take time to overcome and requires grace for us to do it. If it is our desire, we will be in a constant state of repentance throughout this mortal learning process. Once a friend said to me, “I’m not as good a person as I used to be.” I replied, “That’s not true. You’re better. You are seeing things now you want to change that were not even on your radar before. When you were younger, you didn’t have the experiences yet to recognize the need to change in those areas.”

For many of us, repenting can be daunting, even depressing. It should be the exact opposite. That we are recognizing things about us that we *want* to change is a sure sign we are nearer to Christ.⁶³ Repentance involves justification and sanctification as discussed previously.⁶⁴ It is becoming one with Jesus Christ and is the path to a fulness of joy.⁶⁵

FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

What is this faith? It is to believe in Jesus Christ and to believe what he says, and then to *act* and *think* and *speak* accordingly.⁶⁶ I believe the operative word here is *desire*.⁶⁷ We have to *want* to believe *in* Him. We have to *want* to believe Him. We have to *want* to follow Him. We have to *want* to love Him purely. We have to *want* to be one with Him. With this desire and His grace, we will follow Him throughout our mortal experience. That brings constant *hope*, which

is an unwavering anticipation that we will be with Him and be as He is. That, in turn, is an anchor to our souls.⁶⁸

We look with an “eye of faith.”⁶⁹ We see ourselves in eternal context, and clearly perceive the ongoing and ultimate results of our following Him. That becomes the truth we live by, and we understand that the circumstances that we face here in our telestial tour are temporary and non-binding. Our eternal purposes and focus become what is *real* to us, and through our faith in Jesus Christ we become complete. We become whole.⁷⁰

RECEIVE THE ORDINANCES OF THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

These ordinances are integral to the Doctrine of Christ because they empower us to become as He is.⁷¹ While there are several ordinances administered in the Church of Jesus Christ, three are the *gateways* for both men and women to become as Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. They are *sequential*, they define *the covenant path*,⁷² and they possess the *critical structure* that is necessary for us to be so empowered.

First, the recipient is interviewed by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority(ies) and deemed worthy before receiving the ordinance.

Second, the ordinance is administered by a person who has the authority to do so. Furthermore, those performing the ordinance must be *authorized* to administer that ordinance by one who, under the direction of the president of the Church, has been given the keys of that authority in the ecclesiastical area where that ordinance is to be performed.⁷³

Third, the words used in the ordinance are given word for word as approved by the president of the Church.⁷⁴

Fourth, the empowering ordinance includes the receiver making sacred covenants with the Lord and specific blessings promised to them upon their faithfully keeping those covenants.⁷⁵

Fifth, witnesses attest that the ordinance was performed and covenants were made.⁷⁶

And finally, the completed ordinance is recorded in the annals of the Church and, therefore, in heaven.⁷⁷

The initial empowering ordinance is *baptism* with the subsequent bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost and the ongoing partaking of the sacrament to renew the covenants made and be reminded of the resulting blessings received. The receivers of the ordinance promise to be willing to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ, remember Him always, obey Him, bear one another's burdens, and be a consistent witness of Him. By keeping these covenants, they will have the Holy Ghost with them always, be cleansed from their sins, and ultimately dwell in the presence of God.⁷⁸

The second empowering ordinance is the *endowment* and can only be received by worthy men and women who have been baptized. The man must also hold the Melchizedek priesthood, and both men and women must be recommended by their bishop and stake president to receive it.

It is administered in a dedicated temple and includes a visual and audio representation of *The Plan*. The receiver makes covenants to live the laws of obedience, sacrifice, the gospel of Jesus Christ, chastity, and consecration, as well as to keep confidential, sacred information. Importantly, in receiving this ordinance, these covenants are specifically made "before" God, angels, and mortal witnesses which underscores the sacredness of the commitment being made.

The recipient is promised a litany of blessings contingent on their faithfulness in keeping their covenants, including "power, purpose, and protection in our daily lives," a greater understanding of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and "personal revelation and peace." Most important, they become qualified to enter the Celestial kingdom and dwell in God's presence.⁷⁹

The culminating ordinance is a man and woman being *sealed* together eternally as husband and wife. Only those who have received their endowment and are recommended as being eligible and worthy by their bishop and stake president can obtain it. The ordinance is administered in a temple of the Lord by one who has been given that

authority either directly by or under the direction of the president of the Church who holds the keys to the sealing power on the earth.

They make covenants with each other and with the Lord that is done "in the presence" of God, angels, and mortal witnesses, that pertain to their "divinely appointed roles" as husbands and fathers and wives and mothers. The blessings received through this "new and everlasting covenant of marriage" include being eternally bound to each other, and becoming as Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother in every respect as they seek to be *one* with Them, with each other, with their forebearers, and their posterity. Only a husband and wife who have been sealed according to God's law, which has been confirmed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, can attain that end.⁸⁰

ENDURE TO THE END

What we are in the end is *who* we are. To make the *eternal* choice to follow Light and Truth and do all within our power to adhere to that choice until the completion of our telestial tour, is what enduring to the end is all about. We stand steadfast in Christ with full hope for our eternal future. We love God and, therefore, our fellowmen, and "feast upon the word of Christ." This constant and never-ending "pressing forward" brings eternal life, the greatest of all God's gifts.⁸¹

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.⁸²

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."⁸³ What he did that deserves extraordinary praise and admiration and gratitude and love is that he willingly and consistently made himself God's instrument.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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.”⁸⁶

He was told that he would have many afflictions, but he was to endure them.⁸⁷ And he did. He endured to the end.

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

Years ago, while serving in a stake presidency in southern California, I received a phone call from a prominent protestant minister asking if I would be willing to share with him what the Church did 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, and if there was, his church could not provide him that experience.

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 desires them to do.”

He smiled somewhat indulgently 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, and his kindly nod showed tolerance for my reply rather than acceptance.

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

"Theoretically," I said with a smile, and I explained the home teaching and visiting teaching programs that existed then and that not all but *most* of our members were visited monthly.

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

His look now showed genuine respect and maybe even wonder. He continued. "I understand your teenagers have some type of catechism training on a regular basis. Tell me about that." He was talking about seminary. We did not have release time seminary in our area, and I told him our young people attended classes to study our standard works, including the Bible and the Book of Mormon, 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 with amazement now. "How do you get teenage kids to get up for scripture study at that time of the morning five days a week?" My smile was my answer.

After my friend left, I thought about the miracle of the Church, and 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 "practical" reasons for it. There was only one reason, and that was the one I gave him. This is the Church of Jesus Christ, and as we serve, we "have rejoicing in the joy" of our brothers and sisters.⁸⁸

The Doctrine of Christ is the way to a fulness of Truth and Light. It is completely embodied within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the "only true and living church."⁸⁹ It is not the sole church with significant truths nor does it have a monopoly on

goodness and belief in Jesus Christ. But it is the only Church with the authority to bestow the Gift of the Holy Ghost on its members, administer all the ordinances of the Holy Priesthood, and through its prophets, receive constant revelation from Jesus Christ to guide and direct His followers.

As members, we find in the Church a place for service in the name of Christ and interaction with other imperfect people who support and assist each other to grow up in the Lord. To understand and live the Doctrine of Christ. To become firmly planted on the covenant path by holding fast to the iron rod of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

The Church is not a democracy. It is, rather, a kingdom. “The church and kingdom (for) the elect of God.”⁹¹ Its head is Jesus Christ, and He *actively* directs the affairs of His church through His called and ordained servants.⁹² The destiny of the Church is “to establish Zion in preparation for the return and millennial rule of Jesus Christ. ...It is the repository of His authority in the earth, the administrator of His holy covenants, the custodian of His temples, the protector and proclaimer of His truth, the gathering place for scattered Israel.” And it provides the saints a place of refuge and defense from the calamities and destruction that have and will come upon the earth.⁹³

The Doctrine of Christ is the *way* of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The focus of its members is to be prepared and worthy for exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God.⁹⁴ It embodies the Law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



THE LAW OF CHASTITY

*When I remove
this world's tint,
I see,
to slide
from white to gray
is to leap
away from Thee.*

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 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 my brother and me to the patriarch's home, and because my brother was older, he was the first to receive his blessing. I listened carefully to his to see if my blessing would be the same. It wasn't. My blessing was completely different, and the patriarch said specific things about who I was and what I felt and thought that he could never have known about me. That got my attention, and he gave me a blessing that has continually impacted me over the decades since.

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 that 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."⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷

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."⁹⁸ It is to help "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."⁹⁹ Violation of this sacred trust in lustful and demeaning ways is one of the most serious desecrations of God's laws.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹ As I have become a father and grandfather, I have seen the power and importance of what the patriarch admonished me so long ago. Using our 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.



THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

I give all I have.

He does the same.

My gift is my life.

His is His name.

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.¹⁰²

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?¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

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.”¹⁰⁵ And “we do what the prophets and the Holy Ghost direct us to do to build up God’s kingdom.”¹⁰⁶

Most often, the Law of Consecration is followed simply because *it is* written in our hearts. In the 1970's, I was a counselor in the bishopric and worked with the Young Women and Young Men in our ward. One year, our wonderful young people decided to forego their annual Christmas party and replace it with a project to provide a Christmas for a disadvantaged family. A youth committee was organized, and they prayerfully selected a family outside of our ward.

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. She had little furniture, and the family's sole source of entertainment came from a small black-and-white television set. 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 or her mother.

Our youth wanted to go all out for them. To make this an even more meaningful experience for our young people, we encouraged them to personally earn the money they would be contributing. That's what they did. With their funds, a Christmas tree and presents were purchased, and a complete Christmas dinner, with a turkey and all the trimmings, was provided. The beautifully wrapped gifts and the tree and the food were taken by the youth committee to this special family a few days before Christmas. That was not a dry-eye event. 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.

Late Christmas morning, I was getting in the car with my family to go over to my brother's for dinner, when 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, and he continued. "While the mother was working Christmas Eve, someone broke into the house and stole all the Christmas presents we gave them. They even took their old TV set."

I was stunned! Then I noticed that his car was filled with presents. Smiling, he said, "This is the second batch going over to that 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 are giving 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 got that for Christmas and is donating it."

I got into my car, and one of our children asked, “What was that all about, Dad?”

I swallowed a couple of times and brushed my eyes, then answered. “Let me tell you a Christmas story.”¹⁰⁷

Those young people were living the Law of Consecration and may never even heard that there was such a law. Their desire to use what they had been given to bless another was who they were and is what that law is all about.

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.

For the two years that Joyce and I served a fulltime mission to Romania, we rode buses and street cars and no-heat trains. In the winters we walked in the slush, on the ice, and in heavy snowfall, usually putting 5+ miles a day wear on our shoes. No cars for missionaries in Romania then.

What we did have were warm clothes and a comfortable, sometimes overly warm, apartment on the sixth floor of a cement building patterned after the communist-era so-called blocs. It was a December morning, and just the night before, our daughter in the United States emailed us that I received an unexpected very large commission check from a company I worked for before our mission. That would come in handy!

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 an apparently homeless woman in rags. She was next to a tiny fire made from some paper and cardboard she had retrieved from the garbage bins. 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 go contrary to an unspoken but universally understood mission rule about not giving to beggars because there were so many. I dressed quickly and took

our rickety elevator down to the ground floor. I walked across the parking lot to where this woman sat and handed her three ten lei bills in Romanian money. She took them and stared at them. 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 the night before. It 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 whatsoever to take or use for myself more of the bounties of this earth than what was sufficient for me and my family's needs. 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 who has made a covenant to consecrate, I have a ways to go.

Obedying law is a statement about our willingness to act for the good of all, and our seeking to obey increasingly transcendent laws is the covenant path that "will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere." It is the path to a fulness of Light and Truth.¹⁰⁸

It is growing up in the Lord.

6

HUMILITY

RECOGNIZE OUR INNATE WEAKNESS

*When I think that it is me,
I find my glint is hard to see.
As I lose myself in Him,
His Beam bursts forth
where e'er I Am.¹*

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.² 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."³

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."

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.”⁴

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.”⁵

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.”⁶

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*.⁷ 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 grace⁸ and can ultimately bring us to our infinite potential. A fulness of Light and Truth.

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 terrestrial 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.”⁹ As discussed previously, 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.¹⁰ For us to use them to make us look better or worse than someone else is akin to a kid bragging about the iPad his parents gave him for Christmas or bemoaning the fact that he didn't get one. Like having one or not possessing one somehow makes a statement about his own worth.

There is another damning aspect of pride. Judging others.¹¹ As a young missionary in Australia, I was asked by the mission president to handle the publicity for a general authority who would be visiting our mission. My charge was to obtain as widespread press coverage of his arrival and purpose for coming as I could.

Since he was an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, not an apostle, and the Church wasn't exactly a household name in Australia then, it was doubly hard to convince anyone in the media that this was a worthwhile news event. We succeeded to the extent that a few reporters from a couple of radio stations agreed to meet with him at an upscale hotel in downtown Sydney where he would be staying.

The day came and all seemed to be going according to schedule. That was until our visiting authority arrived at the hotel. At the front desk he was given his room key and asked if he would like to freshen up after his long 19-hour flight. Struck by the opulence of the lobby, he turned to the desk clerk and asked, "What's the cost of my room?" The answer ignited an explosion. "I just want to stay two nights, not buy the place!" he boomed. And with that, he turned to the elders escorting him. "Let's get out of here and find a motel close to the mission home that has a reasonable cost." He insisted on leaving even though he was told he was to meet representatives of the press there later that morning.

The missionaries took him to a motel many steps down in quality, then drove back to the hotel to tell the reporters that came to inter-

view him where he was now. Unsurprisingly, they were not pleased and no one committed to go talk with him. When I heard what happened I was mortified, and that was followed by a few other not-so-positive thoughts about our visitor. I was later told, by the elders escorting him, that he got upset with the motel management because they put him in a room near stairs that he thought would be noisy and demanded to be given another room.

“What a crusty old man!” I said. “Nobody should behave like that!” And I let my anger simmer for a long time. Then my lesson about judging others.

Over the next two days he held meetings with the missionaries and the members of the Church in Sydney. The Spirit was there. Powerfully. He spoke and acted like a man of God, and I was affected deeply. Following the concluding 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 were now gone, and I was ashamed for having had them. I gratefully told him I would like a blessing. He laid his hands on my head, and a remarkable sensation, like flowing warm water, coursed through my body. I had never had an experience with the Spirit like that before, and the tears came. At the conclusion of the blessing, he asked for the phone number of my parents who lived in California. He said he would call them when he got back to the United States.

My judging, my pride, had kept me from seeing who this man really was. When he first arrived in Sydney, he was a tired older general authority who was beat from a 19 hour plane flight and likely had age related physical challenges that were bothering him. He might even have been given a budget for his trip that the cost of that hotel room would have busted. But that same tired older man was a man of God who spoke by the Spirit and was kind and exceptionally considerate of me and my own physical challenges.

Judging is simply the negative comparison of someone else to ourself and is virtually always done without knowing all the facts. It

is a blatant pride act. And the irrationality of pride is that *all* of this comparison and competition is meaningless and *temporary*. It will be gone with time, and it sucks away our agency since we depend on someone or something else to bring us happiness or satisfaction. We do not act but are acted upon, for our peace and fulfillment depends on *our perception* of how well we are doing *compared* to others.

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.¹² Jacob's admonition was straightforward. "Let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls."¹³

If we are truly humble, or as Christ described Himself, "meek and lowly in heart," we have the door open for faith and hope and charity. We are in control of our own destiny. We love because we understand who we are and who everyone else is. We abide by law because we refuse to be a law unto ourselves. We can receive all power because we offer our whole souls to Jesus Christ and God. And we become *acceptable* to Them.¹⁴

So, here comes choice again. What do we want? What do we *really* want? Satan forfeited all to satisfy his craving for notoriety, self-aggrandizement, and power above and beyond everyone else. His stated desire was to take away our agency so all the glory and honor and power would be his. But he has been left to himself. He is eternally nothing.¹⁵

The paradox of humility is all that is truly desirable is made possible by recognizing our innate weakness or "nothingness" when we focus on ourselves, and our infinite potential when we lose ourselves in Jesus Christ.¹⁶

7 ONE

BE ONE IN CHRIST

*To be one with Thee,
I seek unity.*

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WHILE I was serving in the presidency of the Spokane Temple, a man came in to be sealed to his parents who had died. 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 all his siblings, but him, were sealed as a family decades back. This man would have been in his late teens early twenties at that time and obviously not prepared then to be in the temple. Now, after all these years, he was. He was ready to be one with his family. I could literally feel how his parents and his siblings were feeling now, and I wept.

I have repeatedly witnessed situations akin to this. We think we know who our loved ones will want to be, but sometimes it takes them a while to find that out for themselves. And that may not be until their post mortal life.¹ It really isn't over until it's over. Sometimes we forget that each of us needs our own set of experiences before making our eternal choices. *When* the choice is made to be one with family and Christ is not what "counts." To ultimately *choose* to be eternally one with them does. Perhaps that is what Christ's parable of the laborers in the vineyard meant. All workers, regardless of when they came to work, received the same wage. That they came,

was the criteria to receive the wage—the last shall be first and the first shall be last, He said.²

The word *equal* has no meaning in a celestial universe. It is a pride driven word when used to define the relationship between one person and another. A word that *compares* one to another and implies *competition*. The operative word to define relationships that bring a fulness of Light and Truth is *ONE*.

Jesus consistently stated this truth. “I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons (and daughters) of God, even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one.”³ “I pray...for all those who shall believe...in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father art in me, that we may be one. ...That they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.”⁴ “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that *they may be made perfect in one*.”⁵ And, finally, so there is no doubt about our need to become one, “If ye are not one ye are not mine.”⁶

What does it mean to be one? Enoch was told that a Zion people, a celestial people, “were of one heart and one mind and dwelt in righteousness,”⁷ but that does not mean we are clones. Elder D. Todd Christofferson said, “Unity does not require sameness, but it does require harmony.”⁸

While we each have different talents and roles, for example, “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose,”⁹ oneness is a choice. A choice to act rather than be acted upon. A choice to love God first and then our fellowmen as Jesus loves them. A choice to abide by transcendent laws. And a choice to remove all pride and self-serving from us. It is a choice to offer our whole souls to Jesus Christ.¹⁰

There is no controlling or dictating or compelling to become one. No force. No commanding. We choose to join our essence, our soul,

with Jesus Christ and, therefore, with our Heavenly Father, because that is what we want. Our purposes, our desires, our whole reason for being is the same as Theirs and *unitedly* our work and our glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of every spirit child of God who desires to be one.¹¹

So, how can we even approach the fulfillment of that exalted desire here on our telestial tour with our imperfect spirits encased in a telestial body and mind? We know it is possible because we have some powerful examples.

Those who followed Alma the elder and were baptized in the waters of Mormon made covenants to be one, and through harrowing times and by the grace of God, they kept their covenants.¹² The thousands who gathered to hear and see the Savior when He visited the Bountiful temple after His crucifixion became a people where there was no contention or envying or immorality or separation by culture or physical characteristics or circumstances. "They were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs...of God."¹³ And because those in Enoch's city of Zion, or City of Holiness chose to be of "one heart and one mind," they were taken out of the telestial world, for they were no longer telestial.¹⁴

But what about us?

Back in the 1940's, when I was a young boy in Primary, 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, "How could there ever be enough temples to do that 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.¹⁵ 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 isolate from the world so they can become one with Jesus Christ and with each other and their families.¹⁶ Each temple is like a city of Zion, and being in one is being removed from the telestial world 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 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." 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

Our participation in the temple, after we have received these ordinances for ourselves, involves us linking those who have left this mortal phase to both their ancestors and their posterity, including those who are still here. 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 of our telestial world. 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.¹⁹

Our Heavenly Father has a fulness of Light and Truth. That means He is forever expanding in Light and Truth. He is the ultimate definition of *free*. We obtain this infinite expansion, this fulness, by wholly accepting and following the *Pillars of Light* and, therefore, becoming one with Him and with *every* essence who chooses to do the same. Our consuming desire is for the welfare and happiness of everyone.²⁰ We are linked by Light with God, and, therefore, with all who are one with God.²¹ We receive intelligence, or “in other words Light and Truth,”²² from all who we are one with, and they likewise receive it from us.

Light is sharing. It is the conveyor of truth. We are no longer limited by our own finite abilities and capacities for we are the sum of all we are one with. As our oneness with others expands infinitely, so does our intelligence. Our Light and Truth and power and love. We have a fulness. We are free. We are as our Heavenly Father.

But how does our oneness with others bring us a fulness of Light and Truth? Gender is eternal. Male and female define the essences. Each gender has unique innate abilities and roles. Only when a man and woman choose to become one with each other eternally, according to the law of God, are those abilities complemented and magnified.²³

They become a whole. A whole that is infinitely greater than the sum of its individual essences. And together, and only together can they become as God. When this eternal union takes place in the temple by one who has the authority to administer that sealing ordinance, and it is subsequently bound by the Holy Spirit of Promise, that man and woman together receive a “fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”²⁴

They become one with their never ending posterity and, therefore, have a never ending expansion of Light and Truth. 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.”²⁵

This supernal promise holds for every child of our Heavenly Father who *desires* to be one and to have this eternal end. 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).”²⁶

8

GROW UP IN THEE

*Two questions now
define this life for me.
How near am I to Light?
Am I where I want to be?*

TOWARD THE END OF my mission in Australia, my companion and I lived in a small home in a Sydney suburb. Our landlady was gone most of the time, and the only other boarder was Mr. Kraft, a small, wiry man in his early 80's, who had been a station hand (ranch hand) in Australia's outback most of his life until he retired. He had lived in this house for several years, was cantankerous, barely said a word, and pretty much kept to himself. He had an artificial leg, which I'm sure affected his disposition.

We shared the kitchen with our landlady, Mr. Kraft, 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. My companion and I saw Jock as a worthy challenge. We ate at a different time 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 one day, a voice shrieked out: "Jock's a Mormon! Jock's a Mormon!" We had

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.

Mr. Kraft became even more sullen and depressed. Finally, we decided we needed to teach Jock some new words. Every time we were by the bird's cage, we repeated another phrase. Several days passed, and we were studying in our bedroom when Mr. Kraft hammered on our door which we always kept closed. "Elders!" he shouted. "Are you in their, Elders?"

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

We shook our heads.

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

Two very wet-behind-the-ears missionaries were learning it was better to be kind than to be clever. We were growing up in the Lord. We were learning about *The Pillars of Light*.

ACT—*Act and not be acted upon*¹

LOVE—*Love God first*²

LAW—*Live the law of Christ*³

HUMILITY—*Recognize our innate weakness*⁴

ONE—*Be one in Christ*⁵

Growing up is what *The Plan* and *The Pillars of Light* are all about. We can "grow up in (the Lord), and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost...and be prepared to receive every needful thing."⁶ We can grow up to become as much like Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father as we desire, and with the help of the Holy Ghost, we can "be

prepared" to deal with and learn from every growing experience and challenge we will have here on this earth.

For most of us, our choices are not so much between good and evil as they are between good, better, and best.⁷ That there are myriad kingdoms of glory testifies to the broad range of options available to us, and being eternally assigned to a telestial or terrestrial kingdom is not a punishment. It is a choice, and the glory of even the least of these kingdoms is beyond our comprehension.⁸

However, because all of us have, to one extent or another, acted contrary to Light and Truth, we must go through a chastening, cleansing, and purifying course before we can receive our chosen eternal glory,⁹ for no unclean thing can enter the presence of God.¹⁰ This is an integral part of the "growing up" process.

As we repent, we experience necessary sorrow and remorse here in our mortal state and in our subsequent spirit state that is commensurate with the degree to which we have violated eternal laws. And that pain and suffering can be exquisite.¹¹ However, like Alma the younger, that "suffering" condition that is essential to the cleansing process, will ultimately end as we become sanctified through Jesus Christ and prepared to come back into God's presence.¹²

Those who refuse to grow up in Light and Truth and who disdain the Savior and all that defines God cannot be redeemed, for they will not change. They have no desire to be one with Jesus Christ.¹³ Their end is like Satan's. Eternal isolation and darkness. For they would also seek to destroy the agency of others if left unrestrained.¹⁴

The question, then, is to what degree do *we* want to grow up in the Lord? For those of us who choose to become one with God, recognizing that *The Plan* has been, is, and will continue to be a process to that end, helps us be patient with ourselves and to understand how to navigate through it. How to *wholly* grow up in the Lord, and to realize that as we grow up in Him we will be "prepared" to use every aspect of our telestial tour to become as He is.

A key here is to seek transcendent truths actively and consistently so we will know what it means to be one with Jesus Christ. But we obtain such truth only as we are *ready* and *willing* to *live* it.¹⁵

Truth is found in various ways. It comes as we *ponder* inspired thoughts we have or have read or heard. It comes from our experiences and reading about, hearing of, or observing the experiences of others. It comes as we *foster* the expansion of truth we have received into other thoughts we have not yet had. And it comes by asking God for help in our understanding and knowledge. Importantly, humbly acknowledging that our telestial capacity to recognize and understand truth is limited, opens the door to receiving truth beyond what we are mortally capable of receiving.¹⁶

Our eyes, ears, taste, touch, and mental abilities are defined by the quality of the cells that make up our body. Even in the most ideal circumstances, by ourselves we can only rise to the understanding limits of the telestial world we are in. The Holy Ghost is necessary to confirm truth in what we think and read and hear and experience, but it also can put our spirit in touch with concepts and universes beyond our mortal ability to perceive. It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that we can ultimately "know the truth of *all* things."¹⁷

Our offering for an ultimate infinite expansion of our knowledge and understanding, and, therefore, power and freedom, is our willingness and desire to live *all* truth.¹⁸ It is the offering of our whole souls to Jesus Christ.¹⁹ It is growing up in Him.

Here, in our mortal state, we deal with *time* as we seek truth. With time, the future becomes the past as it flows through our now's, and our memory of what was, *naturally* fades with that flow. We are here, in time, because the temporary is integral to our choosing and becoming. And, depending on our choices, time will either hide from us our possibilities or let us see both who we are and who we can be.

We choose.

If we *want* to remember, to remember Light and Truth, we will find it. If we seek truth because we *desire* to live it, we will find it.

Two things, then, are necessary for us to obtain as much truth as we are capable of receiving in our earthly stay:

- 1-Do what is essential to *remember* truth as we find it.
2. Continuously seek it and live it.

REMEMBER TRUTH

The sublime truth, the truth that makes sense of everything, is we are eternal in our existence and are of divine lineage. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “We all are spirit sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. An encouraging genealogy!”²⁰ Our stay here upon this earth, complete with its myriad challenges, is part of our tutoring and choosing. It is part of the process necessary for us to realize, understand, and reach our divine potential. That we are sons and daughters of God is a fact. Whether or not we seek to remember who we are, and to act accordingly, is a choice.

Striving to remember that singular truth and remembering it constantly is crucial to us finding Light and Truth. Satan is as real as Jesus Christ. As real as we are. His greatest deception is that we are not children of the Divine. It is when he can convince us that we are not who we really are that we become vulnerable to his power.²¹ But to remember our infinite potential, we must *want* to remember. The wanting or not wanting to remember makes a serious statement about our eternal choices.

We have, in this mortal state, a time related factor I call the *rolling veil*. We not only draw a blank about what it was like for us before we entered this world, but we are challenged to remember in any detail even what happened an hour ago, let alone a day or a week or a year ago. As time passes, this veil lessens the impact of significant spiritual experiences that remind us of who we really are. To keep them fresh and real and affecting, we must *continually* endeavor to remember.

We have powerful means available to both help us keep alive in our lives and to expand within our souls life-defining truths, including the Light of Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the Church with its opportunities to serve in the name of Jesus Christ and be served in His name as well.

There are living prophets and extensive scriptural resources that clearly and powerfully testify of our worth to us if we avail ourselves of them. Keeping a regular journal that includes descriptions of our spiritual experiences as they happen can be an invaluable tool in this remembering process. And maintaining a consistent, meaningful relationship with our Heavenly Father through our thoughts and prayers will foster remembrance of our divine heritage.²²

Important to our always remembering is our weekly partaking of the sacrament where covenants are renewed, where cleansing takes place, and where peace is bestowed. Making that both a regular and meaningful experience is an indication that we want to remember.²³ The setting aside of our Sabbath days for experiences that are focused on becoming one with family and friends and Jesus Christ is also imperative for us to “always remember” who we are.²⁴

But there is another extraordinary gift we have been provided in this dispensation of time. The promises pertaining to our divine potential that were given to our ancient fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were to be “planted” in our hearts so we would remember who we are. And in doing so, the hearts of children and fathers and mothers would be turned to each other in the oneness that defines God. Over and over again we would remember afresh who we are.²⁵

These promises pertain to the endowment and the sealing ordinances in the temple. Our involvement in these ordinances, first on our own behalf and then on behalf of those who have passed on, constantly reaffirms to our souls our divine possibilities. A literal result of the planting in our hearts the promises made to our fathers.²⁶

That memory, in turn, becomes self-sustaining to the degree that our hearts then turn to our fathers *and* mothers, for in that turning we see them as they really are as well. And our remembering them,

including gathering their histories and performing sacred ordinances on their behalf, reinforces in us the eternal truth that we are all daughters and sons of God.

My wife Joyce's aunt, Nell Swenson Gourley, wrote of an experience she witnessed that her father, H.V. Swenson, who is Joyce's grandfather, had on his small farm in Pleasant Grove, Utah. Every evening he would walk to the edge of the pasture where his sheep were grazing and call to them. They would bolt up their heads when they heard his voice and run to him. On one occasion, all came running except one. This was a new sheep that had been given to him by another farmer because it was unmanageable and was affecting his other sheep.

For a time, H.V. tethered it to a stake in the ground so it wouldn't run away. Then he left the small rope around its neck but removed the rope's end from the stake. When the sheep did not come, H.V. called, "Come on. You're not tied down anymore. Come on." Still the sheep didn't move. So, H.V. walked to the other end of the pasture where the sheep was, with all the other sheep following behind him, and gently encouraged the sheep to follow him. That sheep responded to that love and interest and along with all the other sheep followed H.V. back to the safety of the stall.

The analogy to the Savior is obvious.

Some years ago, Joyce's cousin, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, told this story of his and Joyce's grandfather at a BYU devotional, and it was subsequently published in *The Ensign*.²⁷ I received a phone call from one of our daughters who from time to time has had some challenges. It was an emotional call. She had read the story in *The Ensign* and was somewhat familiar with it because we had related it to our children a few times. She told me how grateful she was for her great grandfather, and then said, "To know that I am the granddaughter of such a Christ-like man makes me want to live more like the Savior."

A significant part of planting in our hearts the knowledge of who we are comes because we are seeking to know those who have

preceded us. Their lives and their sacrifices can bear witness to who we are and *bring to our remembrance* our divine nature.²⁸ Our involvement in the temple and our hearts turning to our fathers and to our children are essential for us to always remember this.

Being open to and fostering recollection of our own spiritual experiences and feelings is also necessary to remembering who we are. When our children were young, I was driving with our 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 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 said he had hired three so-called handwriting "experts" to exam the handwriting of Solomon Spaulding and compare it to the handwritten Book of Mormon manuscript used by the printer to print the book. Some early Church antagonists claimed the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from Spaulding's writings, although at the time, Spaulding's "book" was not available to either discount or verify that claim.

In any case, the handwriting on that manuscript was Oliver Cowdery's who was Joseph's scribe. Mr. Martin explained what he had done, and one of those he hired was with him and reported that the Book of Mormon manuscript appeared to be in Solomon Spaulding's hand. The conclusion: The Book of Mormon came from Solomon Spaulding.

For a second, a devastating wave 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 thought, "I will follow that Book for the rest of my life." I *remembered* what it had done and was doing for me. Then I almost laughed at the absurdity of what I had just heard as I contemplated how the Book of Mormon came forth and all who were involved and eye witnesses to the process.

Some time later, what the other two "experts" concluded came out and not through Mr. Martin. They stated decisively that the

handwriting on the manuscript was not Solomon Spaulding's. Mr. Martin chose to ignore their findings. Mr. Spaulding's "book" eventually turned up, and there is, of course, no significant similarity to the Book of Mormon.²⁹

The importance of that experience for me was I *remembered* how the sublime truths and spirit of the Book of Mormon testified of my divine heritage. It was changing my life, and that is what I wanted. And because the Book of Mormon was affecting me so powerfully and was such a constant inspiration to me, I knew with certainty it was what Joseph purported it to be.

SEEK TRUTH

To *see*, we must first *look*. We must *want* to know truth, *believe* that we can receive it, *ask* for it, then do our part by *seeking*, *studying*, and *pondering* God's word. Nephi said, "The things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught."³⁰

I have witnessed this dichotomy many times and have marveled how men and women of apparent intelligence, integrity, scholastic prominence, and with acknowledged expertise, can have such divergent views of spiritual matters. For example, the denying or accepting the Book of Mormon for what it claims to be: A recorded history of an ancient people, and a miraculous confirmation of the reality of God and Jesus Christ and the restoration of His Gospel through Joseph Smith in our day.

Here are diametrically opposed conclusions of two prominent Mesoamerican anthropology scholars, who, by the way, were friends. Michael Coe, who was agnostic, and 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."³¹

John Sorenson: "I have (written) a large book (800+ pages, 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."³²

How is this dichotomy possible? I believe here in this telestial time-governed world, we see what we *want* to see. And that freedom to choose what we will see is the crux of agency.³³ How and what we see has everything to do with how we want to live our lives at the moment, and perhaps who we ultimately want to become.

As we examine purported truths that could effect our lives, we tend to look for that which will justify how we are choosing 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* may well reflect who we choose to *be*.

We can temporarily create our *own* "truths" by being selective in our details and generalize from them so-called facts that well may be at odds with what we would logically conclude if they were put in context. Is that being dishonest with ourselves? Probably. Is it a statement about who we want to be? Maybe. At least it is likely an indication of who we are choosing to be at that moment.

"Truth is the knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come."³⁴ To know and understand that which is true, we must seek it and see it in its eternal context. Eternal truth will lead us to Jesus Christ who is the "Spirit of truth."³⁵ It will invite us and entice us "to do good, and to love God, and to serve him."³⁶ That is

a consistent, never failing, measure of truth. Anything that will lead us to do good, to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is of God and is truth.³⁷ If we seek truth using that criteria, because we want to grow up in Jesus Christ, we will find it.

The Plan is truth.

Tantamount to finding truth, the question that everyone must ask themselves is, “Am I true?” What do I want eternally? Really. Maybe we don’t know yet, and that’s okay. That’s what the telestial tour is all about. Being dishonest with ourselves, though, is not okay. Ever. When we lie to ourselves, we blind our eyes and harden our hearts to the truth that can free us.

To justify or excuse our actions and thoughts and words that are contrary to the *Pillars of Light* because we find fault or perceived error in the messenger of those truths or the way they are delivered is self-deception. To rationalize that since we are “human” it is okay to behave far less than celestial, but when “things really count” we will live the *Pillars of Light*, may reflect a substantially limited degree of Light and Truth we *really* want eternally.³⁸

In seeking to see the truth within us we need to honestly ask ourselves the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter.

“How near am I to Light?”

“Am I where I want to be?”

The distance we will likely see here in our mortal state between the two, opens the door for us to become who we *want* to become through the grace and power of Christ. We are here to *grow up* in Jesus Christ.³⁹ We are here to grow up *like* He grew up. As with Jacob in the Book of Mormon, our stay in this telestial world passes “as it were unto us a dream,” and at times we feel as though we are “strangers and foreigners” here.⁴⁰

Because we are!

We followed Jesus Christ to this earth, and like Him, we "received not of the fulness at first," but receive "grace for grace" and "(continue) from grace to grace until (we receive) a fulness." That He traversed this path is why he was called the *son* of God.⁴¹ He is our pattern. He is *our Way*,⁴² for we are also sons and daughters of God.⁴³

He came to the telestial world with nothing glorious or remarkable in His appearance, and He endured every emotional, physical, and mental hurt that man can inflict upon another or can experience here. Every grief, sorrow, or pain we will ever suffer, He suffered. Every challenge we will have as we look to change to become celestial, He has born for our sake. He is our Savior. Not just to be adored, but to behold with utter astonishment and wonder and gratitude.⁴⁴

We grow up in Him by taking upon us His name. That is the ultimate sign of true humility. We *lose* ourselves in Him. We do all that we do in His name, not ours, and for His glory, not ours. We strive to see as He sees and to serve as He serves.⁴⁵ We become as He is.⁴⁶ We become his sons and daughters because He has "spiritually begotten (us)," for our "hearts (change) through faith on His name," and "we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually." And we "are made free."⁴⁷

Growing up was anything but pain free for Jesus Christ and is not pain free for us. Growing up is defined by often discomfoting and sometimes even excruciating change as we modify our desires and words and thoughts and actions through our learning experiences. Patience with ourselves in this process is imperative and is indicative of who we want to be.⁴⁸

It is a manifestation of our willingness to experience successes *and* failures, joys *and* tears, and to be tutored and refined. It is our offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.⁴⁹ For to become like Christ, we also must experience the depths as well as the heights so we can comprehend all things.⁵⁰ And as we recognize, like Moses, our innate weakness,⁵¹ the door to His grace that is necessary to overcome that weakness opens for us.⁵²

And that takes us back to choices.

The word *sallow* was not in my lexicon when I was a five year old staying with my great grandparents 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 of them indelibly scrawled on my mind-slate.

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 celestial tour.

My great grandpa’s parents 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. I’m certain 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.

Grandmother brushed this off as a temporary inconvenience. After all, they were pioneers, and they knew things would be tough. Grandpa stewed. “To think we are no better than hogs!” he purportedly said. I don’t think scenery was on his mind as the train bumped along the tracks to Omaha.

Grandmother was expecting another child, and Grandpa 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 were common, and competent midwives were available. So, they began the trek.

The baby (my great grandpa) was born healthy somewhere along the trail in Nebraska, and Grandma was okay. But that blessing was

offset a few days later when they discovered their three-year-old son had contracted cholera. The disease hit hard and fast.

In the middle of the night, Grandpa 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 he 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. Grandpa 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 he dug a grave five feet deep in the hard soil. Exhausted and sobbing he buried his son then walked into the 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.

Grandmother 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 Mormon 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."⁵³

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. Grandpa withdrew himself and became 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. But Grandma's faith increased. Each new problem seemed to make her stronger. She sought to be empathetic, compassionate, and charitable, and became an angel of mercy to many. Her family gravitated toward her and looked to her as their leader.⁵⁴

Perhaps the story of my grandmother and grandfather is a metaphor of our earthly journey. We are eternal beings, and what we are personally challenged with here in our mortal probation is temporary. *We* choose our ultimate direction as a result of our experiences. If we will, no matter their hue, we can use them to grow up in Christ.

That is not advocating nor excusing Pollyannaish naivety. Rather, it is seeing things as they really are. Our extremities are, in fact, our *choosing ground*. We discover there who we are, and who we want to be. That, I believe, is what the Lord meant when He said, "We will prove them herewith."⁵⁵

To be able to love Christ purely and completely is God's supernal gift to all who truly want it, for with it we can become as Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ The wanting it is everything, because with that comes the desire to seek actively and consistently to know our weaknesses so they can be overcome. As our pride ebbs, our pursuit of repentance becomes ever more regular. Not just daily, but hourly, and even at the very moment of our slipping.

We want to know our weaknesses so we can change, and we come to see that our ability to recognize our frailties is in direct correlation to the degree to which we are drawing near to Jesus Christ. The degree to which we love Him. Our desire to be one with Him, in turn, gives us access to His grace in overcoming all that keeps us from Him. Our weaknesses are turned to strengths.⁵⁷

To grow up in the Lord is what *The Plan*, "the Great Plan of Happiness," is all about. And that brings us to the temple. "That (we) may grow up in Thee," is the purpose of the Lord's temples.⁵⁸

President Russell M. Nelson has said, "The temple is the gateway to the greatest blessings God has in store for each of us, for the temple is the only place on earth where we may receive all of the blessings promised to Abraham. ...Time in the temple will help you think celestial and to catch a vision of who you really are, who you can become, and the kind of life you can have forever. ...Nothing will bolster your testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement

or help you understand God's magnificent plan more. ...Nothing will open the heavens more."⁵⁹

Through active involvement in the temple and by choosing to live the *Pillars of Light*, we grow up in Jesus Christ. He is the *only* way we can receive a fulness of Light and Truth.⁶⁰ His grace gives us the strength to succeed. His example and teachings and directives show us the way. His atonement transforms us into pure, celestial beings, so we can become "perfect in (Him)" and "holy without spot."⁶¹

We grow up in Him. We become as He is.

ENDNOTES

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THE QUESTIONS

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