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"'WHOSO THEREFORE SHALL BE ASHAMED?'"

L. Alan Westover, MS

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we believe that all truth is subsumed within the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the gospel of Jesus Christ "embraces all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys necessary to save and exalt men in the highest heaven hereafter'" (McConkie, 1966, p. 331). We also believe that the Lord wishes us to "be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that are expedient for [us] to understand" (D&C 88:78).

What could be more "necessary to exalt man," or more "expedient for us to understand" than the roots of volition, human behavior, and behavior change? Since we believe that all mankind has "fallen" (see D&C 20:18-20; Moses 6:48-49) and that it is the work and glory of God "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), is it not reasonable to assume that the Lord's strategy and plan must center upon the ability to change? Furthermore, if we, as avowed disciples of the Lord, have personally chosen to center our life's work upon the task of assisting others to find enduring joy via needed change, should we not model our efforts after the methods of the all-knowing God we worship?

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, LDS scholars have a decided advantage in the study of human behavior in that we may adopt as initial assumptions, instead of educated...
guesses, the truths revealed from the source of all truth, the Lord. We cannot afford to ignore the truths we possess by deferring apologetically to those with different views.

But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them.

And it shall come to pass, if they are not more faithful unto me, it shall be taken away, even that which they have.

(D&C 60:2-3)

Even to passively omit Deity from our theories and practices is folly and places us in poor company indeed.

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

(2 Ne. 9:42)

Surely as members of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists we are committed to avoiding these pitfalls, by "com[ing] down in the depths of humility" and "consider[ing] [ourselves] fools before God." And if we are prepared to take one additional step, to "hearken unto the counsels of God," we avoid the unenviable status of being despised by God, receiving instead divine approval for being "learned."

... O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

(2 Ne. 9:28-29)

What is being suggested here is not meaningless self-deprecation; rather, it is an acknowledgment of the relative poverty of our understanding when contrasted with that of our Father in Heaven. The startling confrontation with this fact led Moses to exclaim "for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). Recognizing the relative puniness of our own understanding, then, we are led to "knock," conscious of the promise that "whoso knocketh, to him will he open."
On each AMCAP Journal and each issue of the AMCAP News is the following claim: "AMCAP supports the principles and standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." In making this assertion, is it our intent merely to note that AMCAP members are also coincidentally members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Or do we wish to emphasize a deeper commitment or striving to conduct our professional lives in strict harmony with revealed truths? If we wish to do the latter, let us take a more convincing stance and clearly state the assumptions upon which our faith is founded. Assumptions such as the following might be considered:

Assumption 1: God, the Eternal Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, as taught in the scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are living realities (see first article of faith).

Assumption 2: "Man is the child of God formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of Celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God" (Statement of First Presidency, 1909, pp. 74–81).

Assumption 3: The earth was prepared as a proving ground upon which literal sons and daughters of God can demonstrate the extent to which they are prepared to do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them (see Abr. 3:24–25).

Assumption 4: All mankind will be held accountable for the moral quality of their chosen behaviors (see second article of faith).

Assumption 5: "... through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (third article of faith; emphasis added).

Assumption 6: "The first principles and ordinances of the gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins [by one having authority]; fourth, Laying on of hands [again by one having authority] for the gift of the Holy Ghost" (fourth and fifth articles of faith).

Assumption 7: All those who keep the commandments of God and endure until the end of their probationary state shall have eternal life (see D&C 14:7; 2 Ne. 31:9, 17–20).

Assumption 8: We can best become acquainted with the commandments of God by looking to the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the words of modern prophets (see eighth and ninth articles of faith).
Assumption 9: All those things which "inviteth to do good," which "persuade to believe in Christ," those things which are "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy," should be actively sought and openly received (Mor. 7:16; thirteenth article of faith).

Assumption 10: All worthwhile endeavors are harmonious with the single unifying purpose of striving "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

Few of us would disagree with these statements as tenets of our private worship. As LDS professionals we would do well to stand upon the foundation of such articles of faith, not only on Sunday but also in the professional work we do. These revealed "assumptions" should rest at the heart of our theories, applied interventions, and research activities. As a formal association of Mormon counselors and psychotherapists which claims to support principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we should be prepared to adopt formally the Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as advanced in the Pearl of Great Price as our common point of departure into our professional activities. If we are not prepared to do so, we should either disband or select a more fitting and less presumptuous organization title disassociated from the Church.

Consequences associated with the adoption of such assumptions are not trivial. These assumptions not only have great intrinsic value in and of themselves but they also unlock a vast treasure of additional revealed truths pertaining to the study of human behavior.

The pages which follow are an attempt to identify and integrate some of these revealed truths regarding the roots of volition, behavior, and behavior change. It is acknowledged that any such effort will inevitably be incomplete and imperfect. It is hoped, however, that it may highlight the great potential which exists for increased understanding if LDS scholars such as AMCAP members will collaborate in the quest for a gospel-based theory of human behavior. While the challenge may be too great for us as independent scholars, it is attainable if we will work together as a group qualified to knock and have the door opened unto us.

Today—A Day of Probation, A Day of Proving

And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there,
and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;
And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.

(Abr. 3:24–25)

Members of the restored church are unique in the knowledge that the earth was created as a proving ground on which literal sons and daughters of a divine Father could qualify and prepare for godhood. A complete understanding of human behavior is not possible outside of the context of the plan of salvation. The following brief review of the plan of salvation underscores this point.

The enormous gulf between our own attributes and those of a divine Father makes it inevitable that some of us would be willing to sacrifice everything in that quest for understanding even though others would find the cost too high (see D&C 29:36–37).

It was necessary for the two-thirds who committed themselves to pass over the gulf, to prove the quality of their commitment in a temporary mortal probation. The question to be answered was Would we do all things whatsoever the Lord commandeth? The rewards of obedience were clearly promised:

... and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.

(Abr. 3:26)

The pure love of a divine Father and a divine Brother would be expressed by their working ceaselessly to help us achieve our potential. They would provide us with a straight and narrow path across the
gulf and we are free to accept or reject the opportunity. The Lord foresaw the rejection of this opportunity by many of his children.

For straight is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. . . .

Broad is the gate, and wide the way that leadeth to the deaths; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law.

(D&C 132:22, 25)

Nonetheless, some would succeed.

For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.

(D&C 45:57)

Because obedience to God’s commandments is the only way to “abide the day,” obedience to the commandments of God is the operationalization of love.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

(Matt. 22:36–40)

Because the three loves (God, neighbor, and self) are all expressed by conforming to the truth, the three loves cannot compete with one another. One’s love of self is only as great as his love of God and neighbor. Likewise, the three loves are only as great as one’s commitment to true law.

Figure 2
Pure love seeks the eternal fulfillment and joy of God, self, and neighbor, which fulfillment and joy can be obtained only by conforming our lives to truth. As we move across the gulf in strict obedience to the "strait and narrow way," we become not only one with the Lord (see D&C 35:2) but also one as eternal family units and as a Zion people (see Moses 7:18–19).

Yea, we see that whosoever will may hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.

(Hel. 3:29–30)
As we sanctify our hearts and learn how to love perfectly, we too will freely sacrifice all things in order to bring “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (see John 3:16; D&C 19:16–18; Lectures on Faith 6:7–8, 10). From the vantage point of pure love, one sees the needs of others differently. He seeks to identify what is truly needed in order to obtain eternal life. Such needs may include the need for repentance or the need to learn patience, empathy, and humility by facing difficult challenges. Meeting such needs with a confronting call to change or with the provision of a prolonged personal challenge may not inspire great popularity in our stewardships with individuals who are not viewing life from an eternal perspective. If we truly love them we will give them what they need to get back home to Heavenly Father, whether or not they appreciate it at the time. The Savior at times met the needs of the physically handicapped by restoring their health. At other times he met the needs of the spiritually handicapped with articulate crushing confrontations. The scribes and chief priests were not grateful for being told they had turned the temple into a den of thieves (see Mark 11:15–18) and were as whitened sepulchres (see Matt. 23:27–28), but it was the message they needed to hear. The failure of these proud men to repent might lead to a loss of salvation. All the Savior’s behavior was motivated by a desire to meet the real needs of those around him.

* * *

QUESTIONS

As Brothers and Sisters first, and counselors second, what should we have as the overriding purpose motivating our professional activities? How may a counselor best express his or her love in the counseling setting? When is it an act of love to confront a person with painful realities, or allow him to suffer some bitter consequences?

* * *

The Savior never forgot that every soul he encountered was in the midst of his or her own final examination or personal proving grounds. We are familiar with missile or plane proving grounds in which devices are tested to see if they reliably do that which they were created to do. We place our trust only in those planes or missiles which prove reliable in the testing process. Similarly, only those of God’s children
who prove reliable during this brief mortal examination will be entrusted with the enormous powers of godhood. This test, as any other, is of limited duration and will be followed by an evaluation of performance. Alma and others have referred to the proving or testing period of this life as a probationary or preparatory state (see Alma 34:32–34; 42:4–13) in which we prepare for a final accounting or judgment (see Matt. 7:21–23; Rev. 20:2–15).

For a performance evaluation (judgment) to be fair, the person to be evaluated must first be permitted to obtain the resources necessary to pass the test and must be told the criteria against which he or she will be evaluated. Second, the person must be free to perform or fail to perform at that standard. The scriptures call these two principles, respectively, the principle of stewardship and the principle of free agency. Neither principle can be excluded from a fair test.

It is wisdom in me; therefore, a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall organize yourselves and appoint every man his stewardship;
That every man may give an account unto me of the stewardship which is appointed unto him.
For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

(D&C 104:11–12, 17)

Stewardship

The Lord grants stewardships specific to the needs of his children. These tailor-made stewardships include many elements, including physical bodies, time, material wealth, truth, spiritual gifts, authority, special abilities, and the powers of procreation. The size and quality of stewardships vary. A steward manages resources owned by another.

I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

(D&C 104:14–15)

As the passage continues, we are clearly taught that as stewards we will be held accountable for the resources entrusted to our care:

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.

(D&C 104:18)
In the parable of the talents, the Lord reveals that the steward who is faithful over a few things will be made ruler over many things, while the slothful servant who buries his talents will lose even those few talents which he was initially granted (see Matt. 25:14–30). This is true of each of the elements of our individual stewardships (material wealth, truth, authority, time, our physical bodies, and powers of procreation). That the parable of the talents applies to each of these arenas of stewardship is documented in the scriptures. For the sake of brevity, we will illustrate its application to only one of them. Scriptural documentation is equally available in the other stewardship arenas. Applying this principle to the "talent" of truth, Nephi taught:

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say. We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

(2 Ne. 28:30)

Those who see this life from an eternal perspective will focus their attention and efforts upon learning to be "good and faithful servants" and will encourage others to do likewise. For those who pay the price, the blessings will be infinite:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;

And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.

And he that is a faithful and wise steward shall inherit all things. Amen.

(D&C 78:17–18, 22)

* * *

**QUESTIONS**

What does the principle of stewardship suggest about who may most appropriately render counsel?

Should the availability of counsel have any preconditions? If so, what should they be?

How well are we doing individually and collectively as LDS professionals with the talents of revealed truth regarding the resolution of social-emotional problems which the Lord has placed in our stewardships?

* * *
Free Agency

If this life is to be a proving ground followed by a final judgment in which we give an accounting of our stewardships, that we be free to manage our lives is essential. While the secular world debates whether human behavior is caused by physiological or environmental forces, the Lord has revealed that neither explanation is adequate. He explains that a third element, intelligence, is the sole determinant of chosen behavior:

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.
All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.
Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light:
And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation.  
(D&C 93:29-32)

In this short statement, the Lord identifies the existence of a natural element in the universe which has thus far been undetected in scientific study. The independent action of an "intelligence" is not undetermined; it is self-determined. The scientist need not abandon his belief in an orderly universe when accepting the Lord's explanation; he needs only to acknowledge the existence of a primal element (intelligence) of which he was previously unaware.

Not only is the intelligence an uncreated entity, it is also characterized by an internal power source which enables it to act for itself, to act independently.

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.
Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;
For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.  
(D&C 58:26-28)

When the Lord organized the elements of the earth, he clearly distinguished between things capable of independent action and other things which could only be "acted upon" (see 2 Ne. 2:14). That the Lord intended that Adam and his posterity be "actors" was demonstrated in his assignment to Adam to "subdue" the earth and
to have "dominion" over every living thing which moves upon the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28).

This view is in powerful contrast to the assumption that environmental forces act upon man, subdue, dominate, and control him. The scientific community largely treats human behavior as the response to physiological and environmental stimuli and thus as dependent upon the ebb and flow of external forces. The Lord has said mankind can independently bring to pass much righteousness without benefit of commandment or instruction, let alone dependence upon some external power source for energy to choose or to assign direction to such choices.

Moral Agency

Initially, the Garden of Eden was the sphere in which Adam and Eve were placed. While the Garden did contain a number of opposite or alternative conditions, such as wet/dry, hard/soft, fatigued/rested, hot/cold, which provided a limited number of behavioral alternatives from which to choose, only one behavioral alternative was expressly forbidden by the Lord. Adam and Eve were commanded not to partake of the fruit of a specific tree. Because this single forbidden alternative provided the only opportunity for Adam and Eve to disobey God, it comprised the limits of their moral agency. Because a primary purpose for providing his children with a second estate was to allow them to independently choose their eternal destiny, the Lord has gone to great lengths to protect man's moral agency. He set the guidelines:

According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles;
That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

(D&C 101:77-78)

The Lord has allowed Satan to actively promote evil alternatives because it is necessary that opposition exist if man is to be free (see 2 Ne. 2:11-16; D&C 29:39). By the same token, the Lord has provided the light of Christ, the Holy Ghost, prophets, scriptures, missionaries, parents, thereby exposing the posterity of Adam to righteous alternatives (the truth) so that man might be free.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

(John 8:31-32)
I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed; and the law also maketh you free.

(D&C 98:8)

How does knowledge of law or truth make us free? By obtaining knowledge of the truth or law, one becomes free to partake of the blessings of God by conforming to the law, or is free to deny himself the blessings by choosing not to conform to the law.

Inasmuch as all mankind has sinned against light which has been received, all are under condemnation and subject to spiritual death, which death consists of being cut off from the presence of God (see Alma 42:9, 14). And without a Savior, we could not choose to lay hold of salvation, for the alternative would not exist (see 2 Ne. 2:26–27). It is not possible to understand correctly the principle of free agency independent of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The principles of love, stewardship, and agency fit tightly together with other great gospel truths like puzzle pieces, and, when fitted together, reveal the magnificent vision of the plan of salvation. Of all students of human behavior,
we in the Church should understand that any theories which do not include an understanding of the plan of salvation are incomplete and inadequate. The Prophet Joseph Smith states it plainly:

We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin; and like the ancients, arrives at that point of faith where he is wrapped in the power and glory of his Maker and is caught up to dwell with Him. (Teachings, 1938, p. 51)

Environment

What then of the biological forces and the environmental forces we are constantly experiencing? Do they not play some significant role? Yes, they comprise many of the "bounds and conditions" of the sphere in which each intelligence or spirit is placed (see D&C 88:35–38).
Together with the person, the environmental elements and forces determine what behavioral alternatives exist. No matter how noble the spirit, he cannot choose a nonexistent alternative, nor can he choose an alternative of which he has no knowledge. That the social environment influences the sphere of known behavioral alternatives has been consistently taught by the Lord, with his great emphasis upon the family and the home:

And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

(D&C 68:25)

If children are taught righteous alternatives, they are accountable before God for their choices. But, if knowledgeable parents fail to teach righteous alternatives to their children, they deny them the opportunity to accept or reject those alternatives, for the children have not been exposed to them. In those things the children have been denied their agency.

Similarly, we are commanded to expand our neighbors' spheres of behavioral alternatives:

Behold, I send you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who has been warned to warn his neighbor.

Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads.

(D&C 88:81–82)

Biological and physical realities also limit our sphere of behavioral alternatives. It is clear that the severely brain-damaged child will not have the alternative of learning calculus, nor will the amputee have the alternative of running the four-minute mile. If the ski slopes are devoid of winter snows, the ski buff cannot choose to ski.

Spiritual realities, of course, also influence our sphere of alternatives (see D&C 46:7–10). One cannot exercise priesthood he does not possess. The promptings of the Holy Ghost frequently make us aware of moral expedients, thereby enriching our sphere of behavioral alternatives.

Indeed, biological forces, social forces, physical forces, and spiritual forces are important, for together with the previous choices of the individual himself they determine which behavioral alternatives
will be available. But they cannot determine which alternative the independent actor will choose within the set of available alternatives. Environmental elements and forces can determine what an individual will not choose to do (by eliminating that alternative from that sphere), but, given a sphere of alternatives, environmental elements and forces cannot determine which choice the individual will make. Only because we are free to independently choose our course do we have the ability to determine the limits of our eternal destiny.

And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

(2 Ne. 2:28–29)

**Behaviors Not Chosen**

A living soul is comprised of a body and spirit joined together (see D&C 88:15). During mortality, body and spirit are connected—that is, one's spirit resides within the boundaries of the physical body. Because the spirit of man inhabits a material body which is subject to the laws of nature, a soul not only acts but is also acted upon by environmental elements. Consequently, some behavior occurs not by choice but as an involuntary response to environment. A soldier receiving a flesh wound in the leg, for example, will not be able to walk without limping, if at all. Should a sufficient amount of blood be lost he may lose consciousness. Should bacteria enter the wound an infection may result, which will in turn cause a fever. The soldier suffering high fever may involuntarily shiver, or even become incoherent and delirious. In all of these observed behaviors the element of volition or choice is absent. Human beings therefore not only "act" but are also "acted upon," and when they are acted upon, an involuntary behavioral response may be evoked. Apparently, one is not morally responsible for such involuntary behaviors unless, of course, they occur naturally as the lawful consequences of previous acts of volition. Moral responsibility would apply in the example of the wounded soldier, for example, if the wound was intentionally self-inflicted. In that case the soldier acted upon the gun (material element of his environment) in a manner resulting in the gun acting upon himself.
As has been previously noted, a fair test requires that certain essential criteria be satisfied. One such criterion is that the person being tested first be taught the information upon which he/she will be tested. A more subtle yet essential requirement is the ability of the learner to perceive the instruction and accurately interpret the communication, thereby assigning meaning to the perceptions. Only then can a person accept or reject the instruction and be held accountable for a decision.

... because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.
And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation.

(D&C 93:31-32)

That a person can normally restrict the range of his perceptions is self-evident. Church leaders have frequently counseled the avoidance of pornographic material. One who does not pick up the magazine nor frequent the theater in which pornographic matter is displayed will not perceive the matter.

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

(Matt. 5:28-29)

Both Ham and Lot's wife chose to look upon that which was forbidden and suffered severe consequences for their choice to perceive. Of course one can also choose not to perceive the words of the prophets by choosing not to read the scriptures, attend church services, or participate in temple worship. One can choose not to perceive the needs and attitudes of family members by continually being occupied away from home. We at times go to great lengths to avoid exposure to the truth.

But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

(Zech. 7:11)

While it is true that many sensory experiences are thrust upon us unsolicited, it is also true that we can greatly limit the extent of destructive perceptual experiences via a more responsible exercise of agency.

Similarly, the scriptures are replete with examples of individuals who refused to "interpret" accurately their perceptions and thereby failed to understand the intent of perceived messages. The continual plea of the prophets that "we harden not our hearts" reinforces the need to interpret accurately that which we perceive. It appears that of all of the court of King Noah only Alma accurately interpreted Abinadi's intentions. For the majority, Abinadi was only a presumptuous old man who was insulting and slandering the establishment. Only Alma recognized that Abinadi was risking his life in an effort to persuade Noah and his priests that they were on a course of self-destruction. Is it possible that much of the descriptive jargon we use
in the professional community, terms such as denial, subjectivity, paranoia, projection, self-deception, repression, is a manifestation of the unwillingness of free agents to acknowledge the truth but instead choosing to attach inaccurate interpretations to their perceptual experience? Is there anyone who does not on some level choose to adopt false beliefs simply because these beliefs are more appealing and less threatening to personal pride?

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

(2 Tim. 4:3-4)

The point is that multiple interpretations of the same perceived events are always possible. In adopting an interpretation we actively choose a belief which will influence subsequent behavioral choices. As we have already discussed, one cannot choose to believe or have faith in an idea he has not yet been taught by someone—parents, teachers, friends, counselors, the Holy Ghost—and therefore cannot fairly be held accountable for inadequate beliefs (interpretations). Those who possess the truth have the responsibility to teach it, whether they be parents (see D&C 68:25), neighbors (see D&C 88:81–82), or counselors (see D&C 1:19; 2 Ne. 28:31). After being taught, those previously ignorant are free to receive or not receive the light, although there may be circumstances which prevent them from acting on the teachings which they do receive.

And also it is an imperative duty that we owe to all the rising generation, and to all the pure in heart—

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it—

Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven—

These should then be attended to with great earnestness.

(D&C 123:11-14)

* * *

QUESTIONS

What is the difference between "free" agency and "moral" agency?

How should an understanding of these two concepts influence our
counseling efforts? Do our theoretical treatments and research activities reflect this view of mankind?

According to the Savior, how can one recognize a true disciple? What promise does he give his disciples?

We are part of the social environments of those with whom we counsel. In what ways can we influence their sphere of known behavioral alternatives? What responsibilities do we accept when we consent to render counsel?

* * *

Values—Motivation

We have seen that in a world which is governed by law we are limited in behavior not only to the set of behavioral alternatives which exist, but also to the set of behavioral alternatives of which we are aware. The consequences of behavior are determined by law, and they will occur whether or not they were anticipated or intended. If one accurately identifies the consequences of various behaviors available to him, he can intentionally bring about consequences by implementing the appropriate law. As we explore the question of why a person intentionally strives to bring about one set of consequences rather than another, we move into the arena of values and motivation.

Joseph Smith taught that chosen behavior is correctly understood as a process wherein one gathers and interprets information concerning his environment, evaluates the profitability of alternative behaviors, and finally preferentially selects a single alternative from the set he believes to exist.

From this we learn that faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings. If men were to duly consider themselves, and turn their thoughts and reflections to the operations of their own minds, they would readily discover that it is faith, and faith only, which is the moving cause of all action in them; that without it both mind and body would be in a state of inactivity, and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental. . . . Would you exert yourselves to obtain wisdom and intelligence, unless you did believe that you could obtain them? Would you have ever sown, if you had not believed that you would reap? Would you have ever planted, if you had not believed that you would gather? (Lectures on Faith, 1833, 1:9–11)

While the individual chooses behavior on the basis of beliefs, he or she reaps consequences from the world as it really is. To the extent
the real consequences approximate the expected consequences, a person gains confidence in his or her beliefs. As the consequences of behavior match or fail to match the expected outcomes, faith in the beliefs will become stronger or weaker, as the case may be. Faith grows only with the nourishment of evidence.

When the mind believes or has confidence in any subject, or statement, or proposition, whether correct or incorrect, it is then in possession of faith. To have faith is simply to believe. Faith and belief, therefore, are synonymous terms, expressive of the same idea. Faith or belief is the result of evidence presented to the mind. Without evidence, the mind cannot have faith in anything. We believe that a stone will fall, when unsupported, on the evidence of past observation in relation to the falling of heavy bodies. (Pratt, True Faith, p. 70)

In our quest for happiness, then, we choose behaviors believed to produce desirable outcomes. We compare the relative worth of resources to be expended (costs) as well as the worth of the anticipated consequences (returns) and estimate the net gain (profit).

\[(\text{Expected Return}) - (\text{Expected Costs}) = (\text{Anticipated Profit})\]

In all chosen behavior we must spend resources in order to obtain valued consequences. If the returns are more valuable to us than the costs, then we have engaged in a profitable exchange. If the costs prove to be greater than the value of the return, then the behavior has been unprofitable and the experience may be considered in future choices. All of our lives we are estimating costs, returns, and profits, and investing our stewardship of resources accordingly.

To accept the truth that we are motivated by anticipated positive outcomes is only to believe that our behavior is purposeful. If we did not hope and intend to achieve consequences of value or worth through our behavior, then why would we engage in the behavior? How could we be credited with dignity or nobility when consequences of value occurred if we did not intend them to occur? Is there any means by which we can assess the appropriateness of a behavioral alternative other than by estimating and evaluating the desirability of expected outcomes?

It is neither intelligent nor noble to choose a behavior without regard to the desirability of resulting outcomes. Our goal, therefore, should not be to eliminate personal reward, but rather to sanctify ourselves and thus incorporate more godly values into our lives. In a sanctified state, we will find rewarding that which God finds rewarding. Because in the Lord's value system the worth of souls is paramount (see D&C 18:10), he warns us not to risk our souls in the pursuit of any other valued consequence.
For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

(Matt. 16:26)

(Expected Return) − (Expected Cost) = (Anticipated Profit)

The whole world − his own soul = What is a man profited?

From the context of the Lord’s value system President David O. McKay warned that “no success can compensate for failure in the home.”

Again illustrating the incalculable worth of a single soul, the Savior taught:

And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

(D&C 18:15)

Bring one soul − Labor all your days = How great shall be your joy unto the Lord

Once we learn to place sufficient value upon the eternal welfare of our brothers and sisters, then we will find the consecration of resources to be profitable, even though our personal comfort may have been temporarily sacrificed. Of course, the greatest example of such a choice was the atoning sacrifice of the Savior. His infinite personal sacrifice was only possible because of the infinite value he placed upon the welfare of his brothers and sisters and upon loyal obedience to his Father.

The Lord has not told us to disdain treasure; on the contrary, he has recommended that we lay up treasure in heaven where our efforts will yield eternal returns (see Matt. 6:19–21; D&C 6:3; and Hel. 13:19–20).

We value—we treasure—we love those things we believe are necessary to experience joy or happiness. The adversary would have us believe that the ultimate blessing of happiness is predicated upon: (1) the immediate gratification of the appetites of the flesh, (2) the enjoyment of social position, status, the honors of men, and (3) the possession of vast material wealth and power. Just as Satan sought to entice the Savior to abandon his earthly mission in order to obtain immediate gratification (see Luke 4:1–13), so Satan seeks to entrap all mankind.

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men . . .

(D&C 121:34–35)
Our Father in heaven knows which "treasures" will provide true joy for his children; they are the values which he has chosen for himself. As we become increasingly like our Heavenly Father, our work, glory, and joy will also be "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

The view of mankind proposed in previous pages contains numerous assumptions and assertions. Many of these are restated below for the convenience of the reader:

1. Man is a dualistic being comprised of a body of mortal parentage and an immortal spirit begotten of divine parents.
2. Man resides in an absolute environment (sphere), the elements of which are governed by absolute laws which establish real bounds and conditions.
3. Man is subject to the laws of his absolute environment, as is all matter, and is further vulnerable to being "acted upon" by other "free agents" within his social environment.
4. Man also resides in a personally defined environment (subjective reality)—an internal model or map of the absolute environment as he perceives it and interprets his perceptions.
5. This "internal map" is limited by the range of one's experience, including interaction with environment. One is free to govern his openness of perception to interaction or exchange with his environment; perception is an agentive function of the spirit.
6. Man is independent to value what he will.
7. Man is independent, autonomous, or free to choose within his subjective reality the behavioral alternatives upon which he will act.
8. One must interpret (attach meaning to) his perceptions in order to create an internal map of his absolute environment, which interpretation is also an agentive function of his spirit.
9. People are not equal spiritually, physically, or in the quantity and quality of behavioral alternatives which exist in their subjective realities and absolute environments.
10. All behavior involves an expenditure of personal resources, at the very least including time and energy.
11. The consequences of one's choices are determined by (1) absolute natural laws of the sphere and (2) artificial or man-made laws enforced by powerful members of one's social environment.

This view of human behavior is further illustrated in Figure 6. A brief discussion of the model will be provided toward the end of this paper, following the treatment of emotion in the next section.
QUESTIONS

How important is it that both the giver and the receiver of counsel be able to identify accurately the values motivating their behaviors? Should we help the person receiving counsel to become fully aware of all the costs inherent in his current activities? Are we prepared to help this person discover alternative behaviors which would be more profitable?

Is a counselor most justified in operating from the vantage point of his own values, from the values of the person being counseled, or from the values of the Lord? Is it appropriate to counsel a person to abandon his current value system? Is it moral to seek to help a person operate with defective values? Is it justifiable for a counselor to try to help a person find happiness although that person is committed to wickedness?

Emotion

The capacities of all spiritual substance are eternal as the substance to which they belong. There is no substance in the universe which feels and thinks now, but what has eternally possessed that capacity. (Pratt, 1843, p. 102)

As Orson Pratt suggests, emotions are fundamentally rooted in the spirits of men and women. That spiritual beings not possessing bodies of flesh and bones experience emotions is illustrated in the Lord’s conversation with Job wherein he asked where Job was when the foundations of the earth were laid, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). It would seem, therefore, that spiritual beings without bodies of flesh and bones are capable of experiencing the emotion of joy. Surely the Holy Ghost could not be correctly called the Comforter were he unable to feel and empathize. Similarly, the scriptures reveal that Lucifer “was angry, and kept not his first estate” (Abr. 3:28) when the Savior was chosen by the Father. Simple physiological explanations, therefore, cannot adequately account for emotions.

Nonetheless, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith concerning the depth of joy to be experienced:

For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy;
And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.

(D&C 93:33-34)
Apparently, the depth of the emotional experience of joy is greater when the spirit is housed in a mortal body, and greater yet after the resurrection when body and spirit become inseparably connected. We are further informed that resurrected beings that are granted eternal life due to their righteousness receive a fulness of joy not available in this world (see D&C 101:36–28).

Because the interplay between body and spirit is not yet well understood, it is prudent to explore both medical and spiritual conditions when pronounced emotional disturbance occurs. Competent medical assessment and treatment are always in order. When emotional disturbance has spiritual roots, however, ultimately there must be a spiritual resolution. In such cases, medication will not resolve the true problem.

For the purpose of this paper, we will attempt to understand how emotions can be generated in spiritual beings independent of physiological factors. A correct understanding of emotions requires an accurate understanding of spiritual activities and processes just as a correct understanding of sensation requires an accurate understanding of biological activities and sensory mechanisms. The primary functions and operations of the spirit previously explored include—

1. The interpretation or assignment of meaning of an experience whereby such information is organized into beliefs.
2. The evaluation of behavioral alternatives perceived to be available against the standard of the spirit’s chosen value system.
3. The selection of one behavioral alternative to the exclusion or postponement of all others.

In other words, our spirits are free and independent to choose what they will believe, what they will value, and how they will behave. The source and resolution of emotional arousal and/or emotional disturbance is intimately related to all these activities or operations of independent spirits.

The specific nature or type of emotion experienced is determined by the position a person believes himself or herself to have in relation to the things he or she values.

EXAMPLE: John places great positive value upon the enjoyment of his father’s approval.
Condition #1: John believes his father totally approves of him.
Emotions: Elation, joy, peace.
Condition #2: John believes he is about to receive commendation from his father.
Emotions: Anticipation, excitement.
Condition #3: John believes his father is about to learn of a misdeed and withdraw his approval.
Emotions: Fear, anxiety.

Condition #4: John believes his father will never forgive him regardless of his future efforts and behavior.
Emotions: Depression, discouragement, despair.

Condition #5: John believes his father is unjustly withholding approval which has been earned.
Emotions: Anger, frustration, resentment.

Condition #6: John believes that due to his own misbehavior his father will justly communicate stern disapproval.
Emotions: Guilt, shame, remorse.

Condition #7: John believes that by taking corrective steps he can regain his father’s approval.
Emotions: Hope.

Clearly, John’s chosen beliefs, values, and behaviors largely determine the emotional response he will feel within any given set of circumstances.

The intensity of these emotions is directly related to the strength or intensity of the value. We experience intense emotions when something of great personal value appears to be affected in some way. The more John values his father’s approval, the more intense will be his emotions as he focuses his attention upon the father, upon the father-son relationship, or as the status of that relationship is affected in some way.

Emotion also appears to further affect the behavior selection process indirectly by coloring one’s perception of new experiences. Deep emotions, both of a positive and negative focus, seem to have this effect. Mate-selection theorists have long commented on the tendency of the infatuated lover to look at his prospective mate through rose-colored glasses, thereby magnifying strengths and screening out weaknesses (Waller & Hill, 1951). Similarly, deep feelings of depression, anger, guilt, fear, or hurt seem to color one’s perceptions of ongoing events. The angry and frustrated wife who smashes her prized vase against the wall in a fit of temper or the enraged father who abuses his child makes these choices in the same way he or she makes other choices. While these people select what they believe to be the most profitable available alternative, unfortunately the choice is made in the temporary context of an abnormally skewed set of circumstances.
values. Because their attention is temporarily focused almost exclusively upon a single valued condition, they temporarily block out the extreme prices they pay in terms of other valued conditions and then select a behavioral alternative which would not normally be considered. At such times a type of tunnel vision seems to predominate. At the moment the vase is smashed the sentimental and historic value of the family heirloom are ignored. Similarly, the abusive father blocks from his awareness the possibility that his blows might seriously injure his child physically and emotionally. The observation, however, that intense emotion often impairs one's perspective of the "big picture" should not be interpreted to imply that an emotionally aroused person is irrational. Choices continue to be entirely rational, but based upon an abnormally skewed set of beliefs and values.

Mind and emotion are so completely intertwined that it is folly to attempt to understand the one apart from the other. Because we are free to choose our beliefs, our values, and our behaviors, we can often prevent prolonged emotional disturbance through the responsible exercise of our agency (a topic for another paper).

Having completed our exploration of the relationship of emotion to other volitional activities performed by one's independent spirit, we are in a position to review the complete model of human behavior introduced throughout this paper (see Figure 6).

Volitional Model

The model of human behavior is comprised of three substantive elements—Environment, Body, and Spirit. Environment is defined to include all portions of the real universe which exist outside the physical boundaries of the body. In a very real sense, one's body is also an important part of the sphere or environment in which God has placed the independent spirit to act for itself. Because of the unique relationship of body to spirit, the body will be treated separate from other aspects of the spirit's environment. Environment encompasses three categories or realms: (1) Material Environment (material realities), (2) Social Environment (relationships between independent "souls"), and (3) Spiritual Environment. All three of these categories help define and delineate the sphere of real behavioral alternatives available to the individual.

The second element, Body, also places real limitations upon one's sphere of real behavioral alternatives. That individuals vary in sex, size, age, and in degree of physiological completeness (that is, sensory apparatus, central nervous system, body parts, etc.) is apparent.
The third element, Spirit, is defined to be independent or free to act for itself within the sphere of behavioral alternatives which exist and of which it is aware.

The addition of arrows in the model illustrates the theorized relationship between the three elements as well as between the fundamental agentive activities of the spirit of the actor.

The elements of the larger process, including the spiritual operations, will generally operate simultaneously just as do the multiple biological functions of the body. Chosen behavior is seen as springing from the totality of one's identity rather than a mechanistic response to environmental and physiological stimuli. Therefore, the arrows cannot be appropriately interpreted as a mechanistic cycle of inputs and outputs.

All interaction between an individual and the environment, whether initiated by the individual or the environment, involves the transfer of energy, information and/or matter. In such an exchange,
deterministic laws are set in motion resulting in direct consequences for both the individual and the environment.

Any energy, information, or material from the environment which impinges upon the physical boundaries of the body is accounted for by the arrow labelled "Acted upon by Environment." The arrow labelled "Act upon Environment" may be defined as any energy, information, or material from within the physical boundaries of the body which impinges upon the environment. This includes both chosen and unchosen behavior. When a person is "acted upon by environment," the environmentally initiated interaction between one’s body and its environment may or may not be perceived or recognized via one of the body’s sensory apparatuses. Interaction initiated by the environment may be perceived by the mind/spirit independent of the body’s sensory apparatus (see Moses 1:11; D&C 6:15, 23; 8:1–3; 46:28; 67:10–11; 131:7–8; Lectures on Faith 5:2; Smith, Teachings, 1938, p. 247). On some occasions interaction initiated by the material environment will elicit a reflexive or involuntary response by the body, in which case the body will "act upon its environment" without agentive decision-making processes occurring. On such occasions behavior is an involuntary response to environmental or physiological stimuli. Otherwise the spirit will choose what behavioral response, if any, will be made to the perceived experience.

We know that although the human body has a sophisticated sensory apparatus it is constantly bombarded by its environment in ways not recognizable through the five unmagnified senses. This environmental bombardment, while not perceived, is still real in its consequences. Environmentally initiated interaction which is perceived is passed on to the spirit in the form of information to be interpreted and retained. The ability of the spirit to register and store information is limited by the body it inhabits. Just as a Helen Keller may have been limited to the three senses of touch, taste, and smell, likewise, an individual is biologically limited in ability to store information by the capacity of his or her brain and central nervous system. Only brains which are activated by spirit may constitute mind. The idea that mind is inseparably related to spirit was taught by Joseph Smith:

. . . the Son being filled with the fullness of the mind, glory, and power; or, in other words, the spirit, glory, and power, of the Father, possessing all knowledge and glory, and the same kingdom, sitting at the right hand of power, in the express image and likeness of the Father, mediator for man, being filled with the fullness of the mind of the Father; or in other words, the Spirit of the Father. (Lectures on Faith 5:2; emphasis added)
The spirit of the individual performs six primary roles:

1. It perceives some environmentally initiated interaction with environment as well as changes in physiological status.
2. It stores or retains information.
3. It interprets information, organizing it into behavioral alternatives. In this process, meaning is assigned to raw information which has been perceived and stored.
4. It evaluates the relative attractiveness of stored behavioral alternatives.
5. It emotes or feels sentiments regarding its relative spiritual state or condition.
6. It chooses the alternative believed to be most profitable.

Because a behavioral alternative whereby a person will "act upon" his/her environment is chosen and instructions are sent by the spirit (mind) to the body does not imply that the body's attempt to implement those instructions will always match those instructions as it acts upon its environment. Actual behavior will, in most cases, approximate the instructions to the degree the beliefs about self and environment are complete and accurate. If, for example, a person is under the influence of hallucinatory drugs, he might tell his body to swoop like a bird from a tenth-story window to the ground. In such an instance, objectively observed behavior and its consequences will vary considerably from the instructions sent and the consequences intended.

As previously noted, some behavior is completely involuntary, occurring in consequence to interaction initiated by the environment. For example, an automobile might slam into a pedestrian with great force. The resulting movements of the body would occur not because of choice, but as a lawful consequence of physical forces acting upon a material object. Certain involuntary biological functions and conditions, such as reflexes and epilepsy, also fall within this category of involuntary or unchosen behavior.

When a person acts upon the environment behaviorally, deterministic laws are set in motion resulting in consequences for self and environment. Only a portion of behavioral consequences subsequently impact upon the individual, allowing him or her to perceive and recognize them. Such consequences are still real and may dramatically act upon others within the actor's environment. Many behavioral consequences are never recognized or appreciated because they are not perceived by the actor. Nonetheless, they are real. If perceived consequences correspond directly with anticipated consequences, confidence
or faith in the beliefs leading the person to choose the particular alternative will increase. If perceived consequences fail to correspond with expectations, those subjective beliefs about reality become suspect.

The internal behaviors of the spirit (perceiving, interpreting, evaluating, emoting, and choosing) are dynamic, particularly if body and spirit are sufficiently open to perceive accurately and interpret the true nature of the environmental sphere they inhabit and the relationship between the soul and its environment. The healthy personality does not stifle personal growth by refusing evidence in this regard. While it must defend itself from destructive elements and inaccurate information, it will be relatively free of self-defeating defense-mechanisms which filter out or block accurate information. Such withdrawal from reality constitutes willful abandonment of the quest for eternal progression. The crippling effects of such an irresponsible exercise of agency can be healed only after a conscious decision and commitment have been made to eliminate mythical fears and to exercise positively the power which resides within.

A Mighty Change

The newborn infant enters mortality through the stressful process of childbirth. In Western culture the infant is assigned the surname of the father and becomes a family member. If the child is a male, he will usually carry his father’s name for the rest of his life, and when asked who he is, he will state the name selected by his parents at the time of his birth.

In the child’s eye, parents assume an almost deified position. They provide him with food, clothing, and shelter. They seem to know everything and are able to accomplish tasks which are awesome. It is no wonder that the child comes to value the approval and attention of the magnificent beings who are his parents, and it is no wonder that the child accepts as true whatever assessment of personal worth his parents assign to him. If he is told by his parents that he is not capable of performing a simple task, he will believe them. If he is repeatedly told he is a bad boy, he will trustingly accept the position. If his parents teach him that certain ideas are accurate and certain conditions valuable, he will accept the beliefs without question. Again, for the child, parents are as gods.

Unfortunately, parents often fail to teach accurate beliefs and joy-producing values, thereby providing their children with distorted self-images. The crystallization of adopted beliefs, values, and roles which constitute “identity” is of course also influenced by experience and
social interaction outside of the parent/child relationship. Children who adopt identities which are inaccurate will select behaviors inconsistent with their true identities as sons and daughters of God. Such behaviors, if repeated, will reinforce the inaccurate self-definitions, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle. Once identity has crystallized, to root out its deepest vestiges is exceptionally difficult. Our Father in Heaven, possessing a perfect understanding of the great difficulty of changing identity, has nonetheless defined his singular purpose as being "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). To transform mortal man into a god obviously constitutes identity change of the greatest proportions. Surely the perfect plan devised by our Heavenly Father must include the means by which inaccurate personal identities might be abandoned and replaced. This being so, it is pertinent to ask, What is the Lord’s plan for bringing about this massive identity change? Do we as LDS counselors understand and teach this strategy to those we seek to assist? Do we at times naively attempt to improve upon a strategy prepared by the Lord?

The identity transformation process described in the scriptures seems to be the same regardless of the time, place, or persons involved. It can be divided into five sequential states or steps to true identity change.

**Step One: Confrontation with the Truth**

An individual operating under misconceptions and misplaced values must first be confronted with the truth. The truth is scripturally defined as "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). The process of introducing to people a view of things as they really are necessarily precedes the motivation to change. The following is just one example of many recorded in the scriptures:

I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?

Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?

... Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?

(Alma 5:16–18, 24)
Step Two: The Witness of the Spirit

The testimony of the truth provides the Holy Ghost the opportunity to bear witness to the heart of the listener. It is always an uncomfortable experience to be confronted with one’s own inadequacy or personal irresponsibility. This spiritual dissonance generally motivates one in some way to resolve or eliminate the discomfort he feels. Some individuals will exercise their agency in a spirit of rebellion while others will express a deep desire to bring their lives into harmony with the truth. Peter and the other Apostles fearlessly testified of the divinity and martyrdom of Jesus Christ following the crucifixion of the Savior. Consider two very different responses to this same message:

Audience #1: The Pharisees

"When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them" (Acts 5:33).

Audience #2: The Multitude

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Those who continue in active or passive rebellion cannot achieve identity change nor do they wish to do so. Only those with a sensitivity for and love of the truth respond with a broken heart and a contrite spirit sincerely desiring to change and make amends for previous error when appropriate.

Step Three: A Call to Repentance

Any teacher of the truth, like Peter, should be prepared for both responses, for both will occur. The set of individuals who respond, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” should always hear the same prescription for change from an authorized representative of the Lord.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

(Acts 2:38)

Sometimes, in an effort to communicate a supportive nonjudgmental attitude, we gloss over the need for sincere, heartfelt repentance, but in doing so we do not help the person make the necessary change. Only those who are poor in spirit and mourn for their sins yet come
unto the Savior and exercise faith in him are promised comfort and
the kingdom of heaven (see 3 Ne. 12:3–4). To be truly meek and to
hunger and thirst after righteousness denotes intense desire which is
kindled by these first three steps. Only those who are thus prepared
will ultimately be filled with the Holy Ghost.

*Step Four: The Exercise of Faith in Jesus Christ*

Individuals vary in the intensity of their desire to reduce the
spiritual dissonance caused by the gap between behavioral performance
and the newly discovered truth. The Savior taught: "My sheep hear
my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

When the king of all the Lamanites received a call to repentance,

... the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea,
even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily,
saying:

O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God,
and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will
give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the
dead, and be saved at the last day.

(Alma 22:17–18)

Such a willingness to discard one’s former life-style, position, and
gods (identity) in favor of the newly discovered truth requires the
exercise of faith or confidence in Jesus Christ. One who is caught up
in the bonds of sin recognizes his own inadequacy and his consequent
dependence upon the healing powers of the Savior ‘after all [he
himself] can do’ (2 Ne. 25:23).

One of the accounts we have of the internal struggle which leads
one to turn to Christ is that of Alma the Younger. He suffered from
false pride to the extent that he actively sought to persuade the people
to ignore the counsel of his own father, a prophet of the Lord. It was
while in this attitude of rebellion that an angel of the Lord appeared
to him and confronted him with the truth (Step 1) and called him
to repentance (Step 3). This was done with such force and in the power
of the Spirit (Step 2) that Alma lost his strength and fell into a
comatose state. Alma describes in the following verses the vast spiritual
dissonance he felt and its ultimate resolution via the exercise of faith
in Jesus Christ (Step 4):

But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to
the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented
with the pains of hell: yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God,
and that I had not kept his holy commandments.
Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

(Alma 36:12–21; see also Mosiah 4:2–3)

**Step Five: Baptism**

Such an individual as Alma the Younger has a broken heart and a contrite spirit and is anxious to enter into a covenant with the Lord.

And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God.

(Mosiah 5:5; emphasis added)

Baptism is the ordinance through which one enters into this covenant with the Lord. The Savior taught Nicodemus the absolute necessity of baptism, saying:

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

(John 3:5)
The full power of the parallel between physical birth and baptism may be obtained by a careful reading of the scriptural account of the baptism of Adam. The Lord has provided, in Adam, a perfect model of the step-by-step process through which a son of God, though fallen, may successfully implement the principles of the gospel, ultimately being readmitted to the presence of the Lord (see Moses 6:49–68). For our purposes here we will only superficially explore the massive identity change that occurs when an individual qualified to be baptized (see D&C 20:37) enters the waters of baptism.

A New Identity

Just as the process of mortal birth includes a period of intense discomfort for the newborn, so the “born again” process includes a period of intense discomfort for the person who would transform his or her own identity. Following the travail of repentance, the newly baptized individual tastes and appreciates the gift of life. Like the infant child, the “born again” individual takes a name, the name of Jesus Christ, and literally joins the family of Christ.

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and daughters.

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives. And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

(Mosiah 5:7–10; emphasis added)

The enormous import of such a change in personal identity cannot be overestimated. Consider additional benefits associated with the identity change that occurs when one is “born again.”

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent,
which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

(Mosiah 5:2; emphasis added)

The mighty change of the heart where there is "no more disposition to do evil" is the peace which many clients are seeking when they request counseling from LDS therapists. How enduring is this change when it occurs?

And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, yea, thousands were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites; and they were taught the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time.

... Yea, I, say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

(Alma 23:5-6, emphasis added; see also Alma 27:27)

This is not to suggest that a reversion is not possible if one ceases to exercise faith. But it would appear from this sample of "thousands" that once such a transformation of heart has occurred few are disposed to return to their old identity.

Implications for LDS Therapists Today

I would raise the following questions:

1. How many of the troubled members of the Church seen in counseling have already experienced this mighty change in their hearts?
2. How many would have reason to seek counsel if they had already passed through the "born again" experience?
3. Could it be that the "born again" process is the only process whereby real healing can occur? (See Mosiah 3:12; Acts 4:12.)
4. Do we understand this process ourselves sufficiently well to effectively teach it to others?
5. Is it inappropriate for the paid professional to steer clients in this direction? Is it appropriate to steer them in any other direction?
6. Can one who has not personally passed through this process effectively teach others to do so?
7. Are we sometimes guilty of seeking to bypass or shortcut the process to Step 5 (Baptism) before satisfactory completion of the first four essential stages?
Is it not true that the great purpose of the professional endeavor in which we are engaged is to help relieve the social/emotional burdens so many people carry? What activity could be more rewarding than one that effectively assists people in resolving their personal difficulties and achieving their potential? While this was also the great desire of a converted Alma the Younger, he did not feel to proclaim "O that I were a psychiatrist!" or "O that I were a social worker!"

Understanding that the psycho/emotional pain experienced by his people was a spiritual phenomenon requiring the healing "born again" experience, he instead proclaimed:

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they would repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

(Alma 29:1–2)

Gospel-Generated Intervention Strategies

Discomfort and sadness of course occur in life whether or not we are skillful and responsible in the selection of behaviors. In order for this world to serve as an effective proving ground it was intended that our biological, physical, and social environments be less than ideal. Nonetheless, it is also true that through our chosen behaviors we at times set in motion deterministic laws which bring about painful consequences which might have been avoided via other choices. Why do people choose behaviors with unpleasant outcomes and fail to choose behaviors with desirable outcomes? This question rests at the heart of any intervention strategy.

There appear to exist four primary reasons for selecting behaviors which produce unhappy outcomes:

1. Ignorance. One may not be aware of the laws upon which the blessings sought are predicated. These are they "who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" (D&C 123:12). If exposed to the truth, they might gladly receive it and act upon it.

2. Environmental Constraint. One may be denied, by physical constraint, the freedom to implement true principles. Prisons, dictatorial governments, social orders, geographical barriers, economic bondage, poor physical health—all may have this
effect. In such instances, the knowledge and exercise of true principles may be frustrated by an environment which disallows the implementation of those principles. How many Solzhenitsyns are shackled in sheer frustration by Communist regimes? How many Einsteins, hungry for knowledge, never obtain a formal education for lack of opportunity? How many spirits are imprisoned within deformed or incomplete bodies?

3. Bonds of Sin or Habit. Individuals who have become addicted to various physical appetites and personal habits (Alma called them the "bands of death" and the "chains of hell" [Alma 5:7]) may have voluntarily relinquished the power to obey the law upon which the blessings are predicated by virtue of many previous choices. Such individuals may know how they need to behave and desperately want to conform to requisite laws but do not know how to escape the bondage of habit and how to obtain the power of self-discipline. While this category might be conceived as a subcategory of "ignorance," it will be treated here separately.

4. Attitude of Rebellion. Some individuals, while aware of the laws upon which blessings they seek are predicated, willfully choose not to obey the laws. While all of us to some extent fall into this category, explaining, even to ourselves, why we sabotage our own efforts to achieve happiness is difficult. A few of the most common reasons we engage in such self-betrayal follow:

a. Laziness: We just don't want to put forth the effort to obey the law, or perhaps we are prone to procrastinate until we are forced to act.

b. Rejection of the Law: We vainly suppose we can obtain the blessing while willfully violating the law upon which it is predicated.

c. Misplaced Values: We choose to lay up treasures on earth, seeking after the material things of this world, the honors of men, and the hedonistic pleasures of the flesh in faith that "wickedness is happiness," thereby placing our faith in false gods. We love our sins.

Of course, few of us neatly fit into any single one of these four categories. We all suffer at times from our ignorance of truth, inasmuch as each of us possesses but a small portion of the cumulative knowledge of the world. Likewise, we all experience unnecessary negative consequences from failure to discipline our lives with the truth we do possess. And we all know the deep frustration of seeing the
problem clearly, knowing the solution, and being denied the power to resolve the problem due to circumstances beyond our control.

An understanding of these four contributors to unhappiness and discomfort provides direction for efforts to eliminate them. All four problems must be acknowledged and appropriately addressed if the greater problem is to be resolved. Our task might be summarized as follows:

1. To obtain the truth by study and by the exercise of faith.
2. To teach or disseminate the truth effectively to those ignorant of it.
3. To create an environment in which individuals are free to govern themselves independently (make choices).
4. To allow people to experience personally the consequences of their behavior, whereby they can learn to distinguish good from evil, and learn to accept responsibility for their independent choices.
5. To support actively each person’s efforts to bring about responsible behavior change once that person has made a firm decision to forsake the unproductive behavior.
6. To endure with dignity and faith the immutable limitations we chance to inherit in mortality.

While we make unproductive choices for all four reasons in various aspects of lives, often when we examine specific problem areas one of the four explanations is clearly dominant for that given problem. If the problem is to be resolved effectively it first is necessary to assess accurately why the problem exists. Once this has been accomplished the gospel suggests an intervention appropriate to the primary reason for the problem’s existence.

If the problem exists because of ignorance, the appropriate intervention is to supply the needed information or refer the party to someone who can supply the needed information. If, on the other hand, a person is in an attitude of rebellion, or subject to environmental constraints over which the person has no control, continued dissemination of information will be useless, if not counterproductive. Should a person, however, be ignorant, merely to withdraw and permit the person needless suffering of painful and destructive consequences would be inappropriate. Similarly, teaching the first principles and ordinances of the gospel to a person who does not wish to change is fruitless. A person who has been persuaded by bitter consequences already suffered that current behaviors must be abandoned may need assistance in learning how the bonds of habit can be broken. The first principles and ordinances of the gospel hold the answers for this person.
COUNSELING MODEL

Gather Information
What is the most pressing need?

Prayerfully study it in your mind.
What does the need exist?

IGNORANCE OF TRUTH
The person is ignorant of the laws upon which the blessings he seeks are predicated.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS
Circumstances and conditions beyond the person's control prevent the person from living the law in spite of knowledge and desire (for example, poor physical health, inadequate education, entailment of bad company).

BONDAGE TO SIN
The person understands the consequences and accepts them, but has established bad habits and does not know how to change.

ATTITUDE OF REBELLION
The person is aware of truth, but does not want to pay the price of obedience—yet is seeking to obtain blessings without obeying appropriate laws.

TEACH THE TRUTH
Teach the person the laws upon which the blessings he seeks are predicated and how mastery may be achieved.

MODIFY ENVIRONMENT AND/OR CHANGE FOCUS OF ATTENTION
Help the person to modify his environment, if possible, by removing the consequences. If the constraints cannot be removed, teach the person to endure the limitations with faith and dignity, and to seek personal growth in other areas.

TEACH 1ST PRINCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL
Teach the individual how to obtain the healing influence of the Atonement whereby his heart might be changed and the bonds of sin loosened.

RESPECT PERSON'S AGENCY
Allow person to learn by experience the suffering consequences of sin and the glory from evil.

Is individual now motivated by bitter consequences to live gospel?

No
Yes

Continue to allow him to suffer natural consequences, watching and waiting for the person to become teachable.

Figure 7
Conclusion

From this LDS perspective, the political leader, the counselor, the parent, and the teacher all become serious students and disseminators of the truth. Responsibility for resolving problems through the implementation of correct principles necessarily remains with the individual, for as an independent actor, only that person can choose to discipline his or her life. In such a society, the person who knowingly and willfully continues to behave irresponsibly will not receive unconditional supplemental assistance of any sort. Following the Lord's example, we should dispense blessings only to those who exercise responsible behaviors. To indiscriminately provide blessings to those who have willfully violated the law upon which the blessings are predicated only encourages continued irresponsibility and dependency. Ideally, society would cease its unproductive efforts to indiscriminately guarantee security and happiness regardless of personal works. Instead, society would vigorously seek to guarantee an environment abundant with truth and freedom in which each individual, as a self-reliant actor, might subdue his or her own carnal tendencies and gain self-dominion while proceeding with the work of "subduing the earth."

The roles of government would be limited to those described in the Doctrine and Covenants.

We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life.

(D&C 134:2)

Science would not waste its energy trying to identify the determinants of chosen behavior, for those have already been revealed. Rather, science would seek to define clearly the lawful consequences of real alternative behaviors so that the true nature of man's sphere might be accurately understood and taught. Scientific endeavors, therefore, would consistently treat "chosen" behavior as an independent variable rather than as a dependent variable. Knowing that we are independent to choose and to act in our respective spheres, we are challenged to become as knowledgeable as possible concerning the real alternatives offered by that sphere. Science and technology would continue to enlarge understanding of our sphere of behavioral alternatives by discovering and applying the laws which govern our environment.

The successful resolution of man's problems requires that we seek to enlarge the freedom of man rather than seek to restrict it or control it by external manipulation. The appropriate goals of all social
institutions (familial, educational, governmental, or scientific) thus are in harmony with the central purpose of the plan of salvation—to provide man the opportunity to fill the measure of his creation.

In the preceding pages a gospel-based theory of human behavior has been forwarded together with a logically consistent problem-solving or counseling model. While the theory and intervention strategy may be imperfect and need refinement, the paper does demonstrate that a gospel-based theory of human behavior is achievable and that the gospel does provide explicit intervention strategies. In other words, the gospel is pragmatic; it provides real answers to the real problems we face in our personal, family, ecclesiastical, and professional lives. Furthermore, the “answers” are generally quite different from those generated by secular theories of our time.

Let us not be ambivalent nor bashful in expressing our identity as the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists. As Paul addressed the worldly sophistication of Rome, let us openly proclaim:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

(Romans 1:16)

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References