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Where Can I Turn for Peace?

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A few months ago, as Rick Hawks has indicated, I wrote a book entitled Valley of Sorrow: a Layman’s Guide to Mental Illness (Morrison, 2003). The book, intended for a general audience, was not written either as a clinical or scientific treatise, although it almost necessarily contains some information on both the scientific and clinical aspects of mental illness. My purpose in writing it was deeply personal. I wanted, above all else, to pay tribute to our beloved daughter, Mary, who has suffered from panic attacks and depression for half of her life, and whose courage, faith, and spiritual maturity astound and inspire all who know her. Secondly, I hoped that by recounting some of what is known about mental illness I could lay to rest a portion of the prejudice, ignorance, misunderstanding and social stigma which continue to dog sufferers and their families afflicted with one or more of the cruel constellation of afflictions involved. With your indulgence, I shall not hesitate to quote from Valley of Sorrow in my discussion with you today.

The tsunami of suffering associated with mental illness sweeps over and submerges its victims and their families, leaving in its wake smashed hopes and deserted dreams. Sorrow, hopelessness and despair can afflict every waking moment. Grey emptiness is punctuated only by bright flashes of terror and pain.

Amidst all of the tears, turmoil and despair, however, there is – as you know – reason for hope. During the last four decades great advances have been made in the therapeutic armamentarium available to physicians treating mental illness. Although the available medications represent a revolution in the treatment of mental illness, it must be admitted that today’s drugs are far from perfect. Unwanted side effects and limited efficacy, especially over time, are not uncommon in many – perhaps the majority – of patients. But I have great faith that over time biological and medical research will lead to new and improved therapeutic interventions in the field of mental illness. New medications, more closely approaching the longed for “silver bullet” (which is specific in both the site and nature of its effects), can
be expected over the next decade. So, too, can we expect additional information, at both cellular and subcellular levels, about how the brain actually works, and how its component parts, both large and small, influence each other. Skilled psychotherapy, which assists sufferers to understand why they think as they do, and helps them to overcome unhealthy or aberrant thoughts, will continue to bring benefits which medication alone cannot provide.

I return again to a brief consideration of the tsunami of suffering so characteristic of mental illness. That suffering inevitably colors every attempt to treat, and hopefully to heal, the victims of mental illness. Every sufferer cries out for respite from agony, longing to be made whole again. Family members and friends, caught up in the maelstrom of pain and despair, echo the pleas of the primary victims. Each longs for a day when tears will be dried and torment will cease. Where, each asks, can I turn for peace? In the beloved words of Emma Lou Thayne, “where is my solace when other sources cease to make me whole? Where, when I languish, where, in my need to know, where can I run?” (Hymns no. 129).

I believe with all my heart that the answer to those penetrating questions lies at the very core of successful treatment of mental illness. It is the answer discovered by Robinson Crusoe, the character invented by Daniel Defoe, more than two-and-a-half centuries ago. You all know at least the elements of the story: as the sole survivor of a ship caught in a ferocious storm and broken apart on a reef near an uninhabited island somewhere off the South American coast, Crusoe, like so many sufferers from mental illness, believed he had been abandoned by God. Washed ashore by the ocean currents, he struggled first to survive and then to salvage some sort of life for himself. At first, alone on his island, Crusoe, bereft of all human companionship, was overcome by loneliness, self-pity, and deep depression. Defoe has Crusoe saying these words:

I had a dismal prospect of my condition, for as I was not cast away upon that island without being driven, as is said, by a violent storm quite out of the course of our intended voyage, and a great way, viz., some hundreds of leagues, out of the ordinary course of the trade of mankind, I had great reason to consider it as a determination of Heaven, that in this desolate place, and in this desolate manner, I should end my life; the tears would run plentifully down my face when I made these reflections; and sometimes I would expostulate with myself why Providence should thus completely ruin its creatures and render them so absolutely miserable; so abandoned without help, so entirely depressed, that it could hardly be rational to be thankful for such a life. (Defoe, 1719, pp. 44-45)

But later, miracle of miracles, the scales fell from Crusoe’s eyes, so to speak, and he began to see things “as they really are.” He began to understand he had not been abandoned by God after all. Sinner though he undoubtedly was, in common with all mankind, nothing could separate Crusoe from the love of God (see Romans 8:38-39). He found first solace and then deep faith and spiritual contentment in his study of the Bible, a copy of which he located in a seaman’s chest salvaged from the wreck. He began to pray, for the first time in his life, and to reflect upon the “many wonderful mercies which [his] solitary condition was attended with.” He began to give thanks to God, “who had thus spread [his/Crusoe’s] table in the wilderness.” Wrote he,

I learned here again to observe, that it is very rare that the providence of God casts us into any condition of life so low, or any misery so great, but we may see something or other to be thankful for, and may see others in worse circumstances than our own. (Defoe, 1719, p. 45)

Challenges became tests of worthiness for the castaway, and contentment came to him. Crusoe found peace when he put his hand in the hand of God and walked with Him.

There is it, in a nutshell: inner peace and the healing of the spirit come only as we turn to God and commit our lives to Him. How sweetly this lesson is taught by the virgin mother-to-be of Jesus. When told by the angel that she would bring forth a son named Jesus, “the Son of the Highest,” she exclaimed: “be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:31, 32, 38). It is a wondrous story: a young girl, sweet and pure in her innocence, not (we can be sure) fully understanding her glorious destiny, who is nonetheless totally obedient, humbly submissive to the God and Father of us all.

The example of the Mother of Jesus tells us all what
is needed: if we are to overcome the trials of life, however galling they may be – including those of mental illness – if our faith is to remain intact, inviolable, we must be submissive to the will of God. “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39) must be our watchword. Only then can we find peace in the midst of the storms and turmoil of our mortal journey. Even though we may have to endure repeated fiery trials of our faith, we can both survive and be made whole as we “take [His] yoke upon [us] and learn of [Him]” (Matt. 11:29).

It should not surprise us that Jesus is the Great Physician, the miracle worker who heals the scarified souls of the suffering. The Bible records more than two dozen healings during Christ’s mortal ministry, from the healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-53) to the healing of Malchus, a servant of the high priest, whose ear was severed by Peter’s sword the night Jesus was betrayed (Luke 22:50-51). And who can ever forget the account in the Nephite record of the actions of the resurrected Christ here in the Americas, who continued His role as the Great Healer:

All the multitudes, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one ... (3 Nephi 17:9)

We can be sure that among that throng of sufferers, longing to be healed, were some afflicted with mental illness.

One of Jesus’ attributes as the Great Healer is His total compassion, His ability to understand and empathize with the sufferer. All that He did was done out of love: “For he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him” (2 Nephi 26:24). As he went about healing and blessing all, Jesus demonstrated the power of God, to be sure, but His miracles stand also as symbols of His compassion for the weak, the unfortunate, those in spiritual, emotional or physical pain. His heart was ever tender and full of empathy for those in distress. The tears of the bereaved, the widow, and the orphan affected Him deeply. The depth of His love for children can never be plumbed. He, whose burdens were beyond our mortal abilities to comprehend, reached out in loving compassion to ease the cares of others, taking no thought of Himself. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” He said, “and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). How can we ever thank Him enough for the ineffable gift of His life and example, for His unparalleled ability to bind up the wounds and heal the bodies and spirits of the suffering? His empathy is perfect, His understanding is full and complete. He is the model we must strive to follow.

How does Jesus carry out His work of healing? We do not know: His ways are not our ways, as Isaiah reminds us (Isa. 55:8). But of one thing we can be sure, He, the creator of worlds without end, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, knows all there is to know about psychotherapy and medicine (Kimball, 1982, p. 11). We can teach Him nothing, “for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] thoughts [higher] than [our] thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

In some way, which I do not even pretend to understand, Jesus’ role as the Great Healer relates to His Atonement. The Atonement is, at the same time, the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and perhaps the least understood of all the revealed truths (McConkie, 1985, p. 10). In a very real way it is beyond human comprehension. Try as we will, we cannot fully grasp it in all its majesty. We can at best comprehend only its broad outlines. The Atonement of Christ pays for our sins and suffering upon condition of our acceptance of Him and our obedience to His laws and ordinances. If we are not willing to accept these conditions, and try to live up to them, the full weight of divine justice must inevitably fall upon us. It cannot be otherwise. Christ came to earth, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1985, 1989) has summarized, to bring mercy to the repentant and justice to the unrepentant. He came not to end all suffering, but to end the needless suffering brought on by sin and to teach us that suffering need not be in vain. In some way incomprehensible to the human mind, Jesus took upon Himself the sorrows, sins and suffering of all of God’s children. This was accomplished through great sacrifice, through unspeakable agony. There is no pain He did not suffer, nor anguish He did not know. Yet His incomprehensible suffering permits Him to empathize with ours.

We cannot mention Christ’s Atonement without at
least giving passing reference to the Father's Great Plan of Happiness (Alma 42:8), of which the Atonement is perhaps the centerpiece.

When the formation of the earth was being discussed in the great council in heaven, Jesus Christ, who stood among those in attendance as one who “was like unto God” (Abraham 3:24), proclaimed:

We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [i.e., the spirit children of God] may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. (Abraham 3:24-25)

Our mortal experience, our “second estate,” thus is a time when we will be tested and tried. Mortality is a time for learning, even though that effort may be nearly more than we can bear – confusing, well-nigh inexplicable, soul-wrenching. C.S. Lewis (1943) spoke of how God remolds us, if we will but let Him, sometimes in ways that hurt and don’t seem, on the surface, to make sense:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. (Lewis, 1943, p. 172)

At times, in God’s remolding of our lives, it is required that we go to the outer limits of our faith, when all we can do is hang on, trusting that He knows what is best for us, even when we feel bruised and battered by life. We may be surprised, even confused at what is happening, but He is not. God, the Omniscient One, who comprehends all things past, present, and future, knows full well how we will cope with adversity and tribulation. Though He knows us perfectly, and loves us completely, His foreknowledge does not impinge on our agency because, as we approach our trials, we are free to choose one course of action or another. Our decisions are made in the light of our knowledge, not His. We do not know what He knows. God takes our decisions into account so that His tutoring proceeds as it should, and His purposes – to help us grow spiritually and become more like Him – are not frustrated. Thus “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28).

We must be careful, however, not to equate Christ’s healing of body and spirit with absence of adversity or of suffering, either. Both adversity and suffering are the inevitable consequences of living. Both are the constant companions of those who are afflicted with mental illness. William Styron, himself a victim of the malignant sadness of depression, hit the mark when he noted that the pain associated with depression “is quite unimaginable to those who have not suffered it, and it kills in many instances because its anguish can no longer be borne” (Styron, 1990). Although many mentally ill persons blame themselves for their condition, the causation of much of suffering remains an enigma. Many victims, and those around them, falsely attribute their illness to divine punishment from God who is affronted by their sin. Latter-day Saints are by no means immune to those false ideas. In the Book of Mormon we are informed that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). It is seductively easy to twist that doctrinal truth into the erroneous belief that unhappiness is always due to wickedness. All too often victims and others conclude that the suffering of the mentally ill is due to something brought about by the sufferer himself – just punishment meted out by an angry God.

In their agony of spirit, persons with mental illness commonly ask why it is they suffer so much. They may pray over and over again, day in and day out, for relief that doesn’t come. Their prayers – unlike those of others, or so they believe – go unanswered. In their false guilt and confusion they may feel deserted by God and deprived of His love. They may become bitter and angry. The Old Testament character Job, at a time when he undoubtably was depressed, announced that bitter despair:
Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, there is a man child conceived ... why died I not from the womb? ... Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? (Job 3:3, 11, 20-22)

From time immemorial, mankind has tried to make sense of suffering. Why, we ask, do the righteous so often suffer while the ungodly apparently get off scot-free? Why is there such an unequal distribution of suffering in the world? Why, if God's justice reigns, do we read every day of senseless violence, brutal attacks on the innocent, the murder of children and women? How do we explain the tragedy of the innocent family killed on their way home from church, by a drunken driver fleeing from the police? And closer to home, why, oh why, is this pain and suffering happening to me? Why does God not hear or heed my prayers? Doesn't He care? Perhaps I really do deserve to suffer, though harrow up my soul as I will, I cannot comprehend why!

How then, do we explain suffering? At best, our knowledge about it is incomplete and inadequate. Of one thing we can be sure, I think: the causation of suffering does not lie in the nature and character of God. He who is all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, knows "all things which are to come" (Words of Mormon 1:7), including the suffering which all of us must endure. He knows, in infinite detail, the trials and tribulation that await each of His children, as He knows too our ability to withstand them and grow spiritually from them.

Though I recognize God is omnipotent, I do not believe He actually afflicts people with mental illness - or other ailments either. For example, I do not believe He stipulates that this person be depressed or that person schizophrenic. But in His omniscience, He knows a trial is coming to us and declines to remove it, using it as a tutoring tool, to help us to grow spiritually. He knows every detail of our DNA and hence of our genetic propensities to resist or acquire disease, including mental disorders. So, too, He knows fully all the myriad of biological, social, and environmental factors to which we will be exposed during our lifetimes, and He understands completely the effect they will have on us. He knows when genetic predisposition will converge with a stressful lifestyle or emotional trauma to produce disorder, perhaps even serious disease. Not all His children pass with flying colors the various tests to which they are subjected, but those who do so become stronger spiritually. Furthermore, while granting that God can do whatever He wishes, I do not believe for a moment He uses the suffering of mental illness to punish His children. No mistake about it: sin certainly can cause mental illness, but God is not the source either of the sin or the resultant affliction. I believe His very nature forbids it. The Prophet Joseph Smith wisely noted:

A man is his own tormentor and his own condemnor. Hence the saying, they shall go down into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man. (History of the Church, 6:314)

That said, however, and fully recognizing that all mortals sin, in the sense that all fall short of perfection, the vast majority of the mentally ill are not sick because they are gross sinners. Furthermore, they are not sick because God is punishing them but because they have a disorder of bodily function, resulting from natural causes and treatable using the knowledge God has given to skilled health care providers. If we do not believe that people get osteoarthritis or tuberculosis because they are sinners, why would we accept that they get obsessive-compulsive disorder or schizophrenia because they are sinners? Such thinking just doesn't make sense, to me at least.

When the pain goes on and on, and prayers are not answered as we had hoped - even expected - they would be, sufferers come to a great crisis of faith. Testimonies hang on the way in which they respond to that challenge.

There are some who believe that people with mental illness need only get a priesthood blessing to be healed. As I noted in Valley of Sorrow, I am a great advocate and supporter of priesthood blessings. I know, from many personal experiences, that they do inestimable good. Our daughter, Mary, literally lives from blessing to blessing. I don't know what we would do without them. I know that final and complete healing in
mental illness or any other disease comes from faith in Jesus Christ. In any and all circumstances, in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, our lives will improve and become richer and more peaceful as we turn to Him. He and only He has ownership of the healing “balm of Gilead” (see Packer, 1987; Jeremiah 8:22) needed by all of God’s children.

However, without in any way denigrating the unique role of priesthood blessings, may I suggest that ecclesiastical leaders are spiritual leaders and should not be expected to take on the roles of mental health professionals. Almost all of them lack the professional skills and training to deal effectively with deep-seated mental illnesses – and are well advised to seek competent professional assistance for those in their charge who are in need. Remember that God has given us wondrous knowledge and technology that can help us overcome grievous problems such as mental illness. Just as we would not hesitate to consult a physician about medical problems such as cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, so too we should not hesitate to obtain appropriate professional assistance in dealing with mental illness. When such assistance is sought, we must be careful to ensure, insofar as possible, that the health professional concerned follows practices and procedures that are compatible with gospel principles. We should run away as fast and as far as we can, from those who do otherwise.

Persons suffering from mental illness who have received a priesthood blessing and have prayed fervently for relief may feel caught between their faith and the need to reach out for professional help. It is not unknown for a severely depressed person who has received a priesthood blessing to stop taking medication in order to show God his/her faith in the blessing. Weeks later, deep in depression again, they fear to go back on their medication, thinking, wrongly, that to do so reveals a lack of faith. I believe it is important for people to understand that getting appropriate professional help is not contrary to the exercise of faith. In fact, exercising faith may require following the advice of health professionals. Acquiring spiritual maturity is the hardest of all labors, and can be immensely painful, particularly if the quest occurs in the face of the intense emotional distress associated with mental illness. It is only when the fear, confusion, disappointment, and even anger of the sufferer give way to acceptance and submission that peace finally can come. Then and only then do we truly understand the Savior’s words: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Time, many tears, and much prayer are required.

I must emphasize the need for patience, on the part of both the health care professional and the patient. Healing almost always takes time. Though “tribulation worketh patience” in Paul’s felicitous phrase (Romans 5:3), pain and patience are uneasy partners. Sufferers naturally want relief now. When intense suffering is involved there is little comfort from considering the advantages of some undetermined future state, no matter how rosy it may appear to be. But do not forget: patience leads to experience, and experience to hope, as Paul also noted. That is true even when the burden borne is galling. Indeed, God “trieth [our] patience and [our] faith. Nevertheless – whoever putteth his trust in Him the same shall be lifted up at the last day” (Mosiah 23:21-22). In a time of great distress Alma learned that God will “ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your back” (Mosiah 24:14).

Sufferers of mental illness know from experience how hard it is to appreciate and cultivate the sunny side of life while being battered by a hurricane of darkness and despair. It is hard to keep in mind a glorious tomorrow beyond the veil where there will be no tears or sorrow, no broken dreams, no times when a person is trying with all her strength to just hang on, to make it through another dreary, painful day. Yet Jesus, the Great Exemplar, who always points the way for us, declared: “Be of good cheer” (John 16:33). “I will lead you along,” He assures us. “The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours” (D&C 78:18). No matter if our path be strewn with thorns, no matter how hard and onerous the struggle through mists of disappointment, no matter though we be bowed with care and pain, He will guide us. He will be our leader, if we in humility will follow Him: “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers” (D&C 112:10). To take Him by the hand requires us to acknowledge that without Him we are as lost children, weak and incapable of rescuing ourselves and unable to find our way home again. We need not be ashamed or even embarrassed to show Him our weakness. After all, He knows us perfectly!
Furthermore, "the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescension unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things" (Jacob 4:7). Additionally, "I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27).

As we walk hand in hand with the Almighty along the disciple's path through life, ever seeking to become more like Him, our understanding of His purpose for us continually increases: "For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept" (D&C 98:12). That understanding increases as we read and ponder the sacred scriptures and the words of the living prophets. It increases as we partake of saving and exalting ordinances and covenants. And it increases perhaps most of all as we contemplate the infinite Atonement of Him who is our Advocate with the Father. God did not spare His Only Begotten Son from suffering and anguish so stark and severe as to cause Jesus to "tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore and to suffer both body and spirit" (D&C 19:18). Why then should we despair or rail against the unfairness of life? Jesus, our Advocate, knows perfectly our suffering and helps us through whatever ordeals face us. The prophet Alma spoke adoringly of Christ's compassion for us in our infirmities:

And he shall go forth, suffering paints and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11-12)

The faith in Christ and the Father that is necessary for us to gain spiritual submissiveness helps us to understand that we cannot expect immunity from the vicissitudes of mortality, including the numerous afflictions which are "common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We come to recognize that as Jesus "learned ... obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8), so too must we. The trials of mental illness, for example — trials which "tribeth [our] patience and [our] faith" (Mosiah 23:21) — will in the long run be understood as having been for our good. They represent the "customized challenges and tutoring that require an added and special submissiveness," as Elder Neal A. Maxwell has wisely noted (2002, p. 13).

Both professional caregivers and the sufferers from mental illness to whom they minister must come to understand the need for faith that sometime, whether in this world or in the next, all will be made right. Jesus and the Father [care] for us, with a love which cannot be broken. President Brigham Young put this great truth wisely:

When the Latter-day Saints make up their minds to endure, for the Kingdom of God's sake, whatsoever shall come, whether poverty or riches, whether sickness or to be driven by mobs, they will say it is all right, and will honor the hand of the Lord in it, and in all things, and serve Him to the end of their lives, according to the best of their ability, God being their helper. If you have not made up your minds for this, the quicker you do so the better. (Journal of Discourses 1:338)

Understanding that there is a spiritual perspective to mental illness simply confirms what believing Latter-day Saints have known all along: We are much more than the sum of our anatomy and physiology. The workings of our minds (notice I did not say "brains") cannot fully be explained by knowledge of neurotransmitters, synapses, DNA, and all the other marvelous intricacies of neurobiology. Man is both body and spirit (see D&C 88:15). Those with mental illness experience inner-conflicts, psychic pain, emotions and feelings which are, I believe, evidence of spiritual wounds not explicable by biochemistry alone.

In the light of this understanding, a few words of advice for Latter-day Saint counselors and psychotherapists seem appropriate. First, advice to Latter-day Saint Counselors and Psychotherapists:

- Recognize — as many of you already do — that Jesus is the Great Healer. Ultimately He is who heals the suffering souls of your patients. You are at best only His helper, His apprentice. As you draw closer to Him, by obedience to His laws and command-
ments, your ability to become a more effective servant will increase. But never forget: though you are a servant, you are on His errand! Much is expected of you!

- You must learn all you can about the art and science of your calling, keeping yourself up to date always on advances in the vast field of knowledge which you have stewardship over.
- Yours is not a trade or even a profession: it is a sacred calling to wear out your life in serving others. As part of that sacred calling you must never depart from the highest standards of personal and professional ethics. The souls of mankind, and their eternal destinies, are in your hands!
- Strive each and every day to be worthy to be an instrument in God's hands.
- Struggle to learn how to apply gospel principles in your practice, without imposing your own religious beliefs on others.
- Pray for wisdom beyond your own, as you encounter problems outside of your experience, or too complex and tangled for you to tease apart.
- Read and ponder daily the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. They will be a strength and a bulwark to you, a source of wisdom and encouragement.
- Attend the temple often. Ponder there the atoning sacrifice of the Savior which lies at the root of all healing.
- Acknowledge with gratitude those sudden flashes of pure intelligence which are the manifestations of the Spirit to you and which will enlighten your mind and tell you what to do when your mortal wisdom is insufficient and you know not how to proceed.

How grateful my wife and I are that our beloved daughter, Mary, is under the care of two good and godly men – Doctors Greg Ellis and Randy Hardman – who exemplify in their lives not only the highest standards of professional excellence, but also an understanding of who God is, and of our relationship to Him. Both see themselves as being blessed to assist the Great Healer in a noble work. They have our undying gratitude.

Now, a few words of advice regarding your dealings with patients: Please note the need to address the issues mentioned sensitively and wisely, depending on the spiritual maturity and orientation of the individual. You will be able to help patients gain a spiritual perspective of their problems more readily if they are active, believing Latter-day Saints than if they are members of other faith communities, or profess no spiritual beliefs at all.

- Although patients must take the lead in their own spiritual journey and recovery, pray for their success. Call upon the powers of Heaven to encourage and support them.
- Encourage patients to pray, and in their prayers to tell God the truth about their feelings, whether distorted, accurate, sad, angry or happy.
- Encourage patients to open up the channels of communication with other people, with themselves, and with God.
- Help them to ask for Divine assistance to sort out and resolve their struggles and conflicts, to submit their wills to that of God, and to understand that nothing can ever separate them from the fact that the Lord loves and accepts them.
- Help them to recognize they are persons of eternal worth, as God's sons and daughters.
- But be careful not to tell people how to pray nor to pray with them in counseling sessions. Each must come to God, and communicate with Him as he or she understands the Almighty.
- Do not talk about matters which are appropriate to discuss only in sacred settings, such as the temple, and avoid any actions which mimic or emulate sacred ordinances or practices.
- Help your patients to understand God's grace, and that through Christ's atoning power they can find peace and acceptance as they draw closer to Him.
- Encourage patients to seek direction, a blessing, or both from their spiritual leaders, and to participate actively in their religious community.

I reiterate: in your counseling of patients regarding spiritual issues related to their healing, always be sensitive and wise, respecting their views, being careful not to force your own spiritual beliefs on others; and never trifle with sacred things.

I end where I began: Jesus, the Great Healer, is the source of your success as a counselor and psychotherapist. He who knows all, who understands fully the suffering of the mentally ill, whose empathy and
compassion are complete, will make whole all who come to understand that Christ took upon Himself their pain and suffering if they will but come unto Him. In any and all circumstances, lives are improved and become richer and more peaceful as those involved learn that He is the source of the healing “balm of Gilead” needed by all of God’s children. That is my simple message to you. If you, or your patients, long for peace, long for healing, long to be made whole, turn to the Source of all goodness, the Great Healer – He who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Of that I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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