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A Few Reasons I Choose Christ: A Beginning Expression of Thankfulness for What Jesus Does for Me

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Robert L. Gleave, PhD, recently retired as a clinical professor at Brigham Young University, where he served in Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) for many years and also taught and mentored students in the counseling psychology doctoral program. He is a president elect of APA Division 49 (Society for Group Psychology and Psychotherapy) and a diplomate in group psychotherapy. He served on the AMCAP board for many years, and he has devoted his career to applying the teachings of Jesus Christ to mental health practices and therapy.

I'm thankful for a wonderful companion who has been a perfect match for me, in spite of the fact that I could never deserve such a great gift. I'm thankful to Jesus for establishing a church with priesthood power, for sharing His house—the temple—with us, and for working with us as we've built the beginnings of an eternal relationship.

I'm thankful that through His willingness to be our Savior, Jesus made available agency, which is the very source of proactive power. As long as I can make another choice, I can take another action. I am only limited by my own arrogance and hesitance to seek new ideas and guidance from Him.

It seems to me that expressing agency requires facing (at least) two choices that demand accepting one and rejecting the other. Agency also is enhanced as each choice is presented against each choice until priorities become clear and patterns of preferences emerge.

A full expression of agency also requires that the choices be encountered in a multitude of contexts,

some of which are pleasant and some of which are quite unpleasant. Having the option to prefer a choice, even when the context is painful, brings a nobility to the choice and deepens commitment to the preference.

I'm thankful that our Lord is completely unintimidated by pain or discomfort of any kind, His or anyone else's, and that He will not withhold a needed gift from me in the name of being nice or not wanting to hurt me. I'm thankful that His promise of eventual relief and assurance of complete restoration gives me hope to face pain, difficulty, and trials unafraid. With hope in Him, my trials become opportunities, my difficulties are only difficult, and my pain is temporary. And none of those are reasons to shrink or to change what I choose.

I'm thankful that Christ gives me so many great gifts. Love, kindness, healing, and joy. I'm also grateful He doesn't limit His gift-giving to only those I welcome easily. He also showers me with gifts of sorrow, pain, hardship, weakness, and loss.

I'm thankful that He doesn't rescue me from my trials but rather supports me through them—allowing me to grow and learn even hard lessons.

He lets me stay stuck, even wallow in my self-pity, until I want to take action myself rather than wait for, or manipulate for, someone to do it for me. But as soon as I decide to seek relief myself, He leads me to resources. Clearly, they are resources that require my effort, yet they are effective, and the beginnings of relief are felt quickly. Most importantly, He empowers me to become who I want to *be* regardless of the circumstances around me.

I'm thankful that Christ taught me that the lost sheep are not *the other guy*. The lamb He seeks is me. It's not if I stray but rather when I stray. *Lost* doesn't refer to membership status or activity reports. *Lost* refers to much more than that. It covers my times of confusion, loneliness, frustration, fear, etc. I'm glad His seeking is not an immediate relief from experiences I find distasteful. Nor is it quickly removing the damage I cause to others through my lapses. His is a gentle call to a vision beyond the toils of mortality. Again, His call does not rescue me from the mortal experience but gently invites me to set my sail to catch that comforting breeze of His assurance of a better day to come. His is not a call to merely endure trials—to hold on while they pass—but a blanket of meaning and purpose that imbues the experience with nobility, determination, and strength. If I turn to Him, I, as a lost lamb, can tune in to His guiding frequency and find my way home to the fold. With such a clearly marked trail and such marvelous assistance, my return is assured but not immediate. He does indeed rescue me, but He does so in a way that allows and encourages my choosing and empowers my own efforts.

I'm thankful that Christ gives me rules that provide a beginning structure. Then He makes it impossible for me to follow all the rules, which then makes me face hard choices. He teaches me about "infinite obligation with finite resources." He allows me to choose where the losses will fall to both myself and others. These choices teach me to both stand up for myself (even at another's expense) and to suffer myself for another's benefit. Compassion and charity are gifts that follow but only when I have enough in my own bucket that I can be proactive.

When I'm ready to move beyond the Old Testament preparatory law of *doing* and give up my quest for perfect performance (which is an impossibility in this mortal world anyway), I can more fully embrace His New Testament law with its increased attention to *being*.

When commandments or obligations collide, I know that I can't decide from my own mortal limitations, yet responding to either rules out the other. However, I can be guided by what I have become through choosing Him—together with the influence of the Holy Ghost. Then His gentle breeze becomes an ever-present sense of peace and eternal hope, an ongoing comfort amid any distress, and an ever-ready guide through the most trying labyrinth.

I'm thankful that in this mortal world all good things are interlaced with the mundane and even error. The goof-off times and the mistakes do not define the whole of any experience. It is impossible in the mortal world to do anything with only good in it. The good is in a heart that is touched or a shift in trajectory that makes all the difference, in spite of any lapses or perceived failures.

I'm thankful that our Savior remembers every one of my affronts to Father in Heaven's other children so that mercy toward me doesn't result in permanent dismissal or loss to them. I'm also thankful that Christ's atonement, along with the Holy Ghost, can work with me over time to help me to fully accept my responsibility. I'm thankful for His willingness to carry my debt without interest and then to help me make my repentance sufficient for His mercy to recover the rest of the damage I've inflicted. Thus, I can learn more about compassion and empathy.

I'm thankful that He is "always already" present, interested, reaching, understanding, and prepared to help. I'm grateful that when I turn to Him, He is always already turned toward me. No matter what I've done or how unclean I feel when I turn.

I'm also grateful that He is not in a hurry and never pressures me with a sense of crisis.

I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that He really did all that He said He did.

As one who is just beginning to catch the edges of His grandeur and power, and yet has taken His name upon myself, I express my thanks in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.