



12-15-2020

### A Sacred Trust

David T. Seamons

*Association of Latter-day Saint Counselors and Psychotherapists*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp>



Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Seamons, David T. (2020) "A Sacred Trust," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*. Vol. 40 : No. 1 , Article 4. Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol40/iss1/4>

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# A Sacred Trust

DAVID T. SEAMONS

ASSOCIATION OF LATTER-DAY SAINT COUNSELORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

OCTOBER 4, 2019

*Being invited into the innermost intimate parts of a person's life is a sacred trust. As such, it is one for which we must be personally prepared. Having an understanding that those in our care are sons and daughters of Heavenly Father must ground our approach to our clinical work, constantly guiding us as we assist them through the healing process.*

---

As a young boy, I had a fascination with why people did what they did. This curiosity led me to be an astute observer of human behavior, whether it was at school, with friends, in a store, or in any other public venue. Because of my interest in people and their behaviors, I have always leaned towards the field of psychology. My first introduction to emotional disorders came as a result of an assignment in my Abnormal Psychology class, for which I had to spend 20 hours volunteering at the Utah State Hospital. Wow! What an experience. That “wow” experience has continued to fuel my passion through graduation and to the present.

During my graduate program, I began to see a gap between my religious beliefs and what I was learning as a would-be psychologist. Unsure of how to close this gap, I asked my instructor, “How do I bridge the gap between my religious beliefs and my professional learnings?” His answer sounded simple: “You have two hats. When you go to work you wear your professional

hat, and when you go to church, you put on your church hat.” This did not feel right; it did not make sense then, and it does not make sense now. I can only wear one hat, and that hat includes both my religious values and beliefs, and my professional orientation and practice. It is with my one hat that I wish to visit with you today.

For me, coming to this conference is more than receiving a few Continuing Education Units (CEU). I come to learn how best to help Heavenly Father's children navigate through this challenging mortal experience and return safely home. As I have visited with many of you, I have become aware of the multiple gifts that you have been given as therapists: the gift of understanding, the gift of compassion, the gift of faith, and the gift of personal revelation, to name a few. Such gifts do not come from textbooks or degrees, but from Heavenly Father, who has charged us to use them to bless the lives of others—to give faith to the faithless, hope to the hopeless, and courage to

the downtrodden. This charge includes taking the opportunity, when appropriate, to remind those with whom we work who they are and whose they are. It has been my privilege over the past 40+ years as a therapist to be invited into the private lives of many of Heavenly Father's children. I have come to reverence and cherish these experiences. They have provided and continue to provide me with many priceless insights. Let me share just a few with you.

Being invited into the inner, most intimate parts of a person's life is a sacred trust, one for which I have a personal responsibility to prepare. When people come into my office, they do so at a time of great vulnerability. They are looking for a safe place—for someone who will listen to their fears and concerns, and give them direction, encouragement, and hope. Lori Gottlieb summarized it best when she said that during the therapeutic process, patients share their "secrets and fantasies, their fears, their shame and their failures, invading the spaces they normally keep private" (Gottlieb, 2016).

It has been helpful for me to know that everyone who comes to my office is a son or daughter of a Heavenly Father who wants us to be successful in our earthly experience and return safely home. As I listen to their stories, I soon realize that they are stuck and/or lost. Their world has become confusing and frightening. They are overwhelmed with emotions that cloud their judgement and their ability to apply what they know.

Longtime Sesame Street writer Emily Perl Kingsley (1987) wrote a story in the hope of providing comfort and inspiration to those with a Down syndrome child. I believe this story can also apply to others:

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability – to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this . . .

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip – to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several

hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland." "Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guidebooks. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you never would have met. It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around . . . and you begin to notice Holland has windmills . . . and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy . . . and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away . . . because the loss of that dream is a very, very significant loss.

But . . . if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to go to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things . . . about Holland.

This is a familiar scenario for many that I see. Their trust is that I can assist them in adapting to "Holland." Because of this sacred trust, I begin each day petitioning the Lord for guidance and inspiration as I work with His children.

I love being a clinician! I believe in people and their ability to be happy and successful. I am of little value as a therapist if I come to a session struggling physically, emotionally, or spiritually. People expect me to give my undivided attention and skills in their behalf. For me, getting a good night's rest and having most of my home life "under control" are advantageous. Joseph Smith found this to be true when, one morning, he became upset with Emma over something she had done. Later, when he tried to translate, he found

that he could not. Joseph went out into the orchard to pray and ask the Lord why he could not translate. He soon realized that he needed the presence of the Holy Ghost. He came back into the house and asked Emma for forgiveness. He was then able to continue with the translation. In addition to being a therapist, I have several other roles: individual, husband, father, grandfather, neighbor, and friend. Over the course of these past many years, I have learned not to overlook my role as a spouse and father. It is impossible for me to be totally available for spiritual guidance if I am pre-occupied with unresolved personal or familial issues.

Additionally, the perspective that I am serving Heavenly Father's children is a humbling thought that motivates me to avail myself of His spirit in the work I do. I have found that spiritual guidance comes in many different ways. Perhaps the most common is the occasional prompting to ask a specific question that needs to be asked. I believe you can find out the truth of an issue simply by asking the right question(s). Another form of spiritual guidance is the power of discernment, or the ability to hear and understand what your patient is trying to communicate. Lastly, on occasion, I have had the privilege to see my patients through the eyes of the Savior. These revelatory experiences have helped me understand who they really are and who they can become. I know that spiritual promptings are not part of our training or covered in textbooks, but they have become real and essential for me in my work. I therefore constantly strive to be worthy of these spiritual interventions. Yes, I have a Ph.D. and faithfully do my CEU's every year for my profession, but I have come to understand that it is work of a lifetime to obtain my "spiritual" CEU's.

I have noticed that, oftentimes, when I am in social gatherings and it comes out that I am a therapist, a brief awkward silence ensues, followed by someone either changing the subject, or asking a litany of questions they have always wanted to ask a therapist. Therapists deal with the daily challenges of living just like everyone else. Our training has taught us theories, tools, and techniques, but whirring beneath our hard-earned expertise is the fact that we know just how hard it is to be a person. We still come to work each day as ourselves—with our own set of vulnerabilities, our own longings and insecurities, and our own

histories. Of all my credentials as a therapist, my most significant is that I am a "card-carrying member of the human race" (Gottlieb, 2016).

Everyone has demons and therapy helps us confront them. This is a very demanding profession! If you find it difficult to separate your own struggles from those who come to see you, I would suggest that you seek help and/or consider a different profession. A therapist holds up a mirror to their patients, but patients can also hold up a mirror to their therapist.

It is my hope that my message today has reminded each of us of the sacred trust we have as we work with those who enter the doors of therapy. May we be prepared and honor this trust in everything we say and do. When all is said and done, I am just a husband, father, and grandfather with a particular education. I witness this day that God lives and that Jesus Christ is His Son. Through the grace of Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we can make mistakes, stumble at times, and repent to realign ourselves with the covenant path back to our Heavenly Father. This knowledge gives me faith and hope in all I do. May this be our perspective and motivation as we labor to assist others along this same sacred path.

## REFERENCES

- Gottlieb, L. (2016). *Maybe you should talk to someone: A therapist, her therapist, and our lives revealed*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Kingsley, E. P. (1987). *Welcome to Holland*.

## AUTHOR'S BIO

DAVID SEAMONS, Ph.D. was born and raised in Southern California. He holds a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Brigham Young University, and has been in private practice for over 35 years specializing in marriage and family counseling. He has been a part-time faculty member in the Department of Psychology at BYU, and a consultant to the United States Office of Education Drug and Alcohol Prevention Program. David has also received a 20-year special recognition award from the University of Utah Drug and Alcohol School as a guest lecturer. He has written several magazine articles and book chapters. His church service has included Bishop, Stake President, Regional Representative, and Mission president (Leeds England). David has served for 5 years at the MTC, and also serves on committees for the Missionary Department. He is married and has 5 children and 12 grandchildren.