In the fall of 2014, I had the privilege of sitting down with our new university president, Kevin J Worthen, to get his thoughts on Religious Education and more broadly about coming changes. I hope you enjoy as much as I did the opportunity to hear President Worthen share his thoughts on faith, student challenges, and the Church’s increasingly visible presence in the world today.

In this issue you will also find other important essays and contributions by leading scholars and historians. I’ve had the privilege of reading each of them personally, and I am pleased to report that they each offer insightful counsel and discussions. In the behind-the-scenes preparation for this issue, I was able to work closely with Elder Bruce C. Hafen on the article that is published here. The article “Fear Not, I Am with Thee” has an interesting history and is the first of a two-part discussion. This article was originally presented at the 2014 BYU Women’s Conference, and a second part will be published soon in the Religious Educator. The second part contains Elder Hafen’s talk at the 2014 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium held at BYU in October.

The remaining articles cover a wide range of important topics, reaching from a discussion of the historical setting of Doctrine and Covenants 127 and 128 to a reflection on the interplay of agency and accountability. Two of the articles in this issue go hand in hand: one that discusses the growth of the Church on a global scale and one that treats the sensitive issue of teaching about world religions in LDS classrooms. I hope you enjoy these insightful essays and studies.

Thomas A. Wayment
Editor
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Let me begin by relating an obscure historical event, and then I will draw out some lessons that can be learned from this remote maritime misfortune.

In the early seventeenth century, Sweden was a world power. Sweden’s king, Gustav II Adolf, commissioned a warship that would be christened the Vasa. The ship represented a substantial outlay of resources, particularly the oak from which the vessel would be built. Oak was so valuable that cutting down an oak tree without authorization was a capital offense. Gustav Adolf closely oversaw the construction process, attempting to ensure that the Vasa would fully realize his expectations.

After construction had begun, Gustav Adolf ordered the Vasa to be made longer. Because the width supports had already been built from precious oak, the king directed the builders to increase the ship’s length without increasing its width. Although the shipwrights knew that doing so would compromise the Vasa’s seaworthiness, they were hesitant to tell the king something they knew he did not want to hear. They complied. Gustav Adolf also insisted that this ship have not simply the customary single deck of guns but cannons on
three decks, with the heaviest cannons on the upper deck. Again, against their better judgment, the shipwrights complied.

Over the course of several years, shipwrights, carpenters, rope makers, and others worked diligently to build the Vasa. Over one thousand oak trees were used to complete the ship. It had sixty-four cannons and masts taller than 150 feet. To give the ship the opulence befitting a king’s flagship, several hundred gilded and painted sculptures were added.

On August 10, 1628, the Vasa began its maiden voyage. In view of countless spectators, the ship left its mooring directly below the royal castle in Stockholm. After being pulled along by anchors for the first several hundred feet, the Vasa left the shelter of the harbor. A stronger wind entered its sails, and the ship began to tip. The Vasa righted itself slightly, but only temporarily. Before long, as recorded by an observer, “she heeled right over and water gushed in through the gun ports until she slowly went to the bottom under sail, pennants and all.” The Vasa’s maiden voyage was about 4,200 feet.

The Vasa rested at the bottom of the Baltic Sea until it was recovered three centuries later in 1961. It was successfully raised from the seabed and towed back to Stockholm. Today the Vasa rests in a temperature- and humidity-controlled museum in Djurgården, an island in central Stockholm. I have a model of the ship in my office at Church headquarters as a reminder of several lessons that underlie its short, tragic history.

Despite the Vasa’s magnificent appearance, the ship was not seaworthy. The alterations in its construction resulted in it not having sufficient lateral stability to enable safe seafaring. Gustav Adolf’s desire for an extravagant status symbol ruined the design of what would have been a magnificent sailing vessel, and the mightiest warship of its time. The shipbuilders’ reluctance to speak up—their fear of the king’s displeasure—deprived the king of their knowledge and insight. All involved lost sight of the goals of the enterprise: to protect Sweden and to promote its interests abroad. A ship that attempts to defy the laws of physics is simply a boat that won’t float.

For us to successfully navigate our mortal sojourn, we also need sufficient lateral stability—which is really spiritual stability—to confront crosswinds and crosscurrents, make the necessary turns, and return safely to our heavenly home. There are things we can do to increase our spiritual stability. There are also things we can do to diminish our spiritual stability. As our spiritual stability decreases, we predictably bring consequences on ourselves that could have been avoided. I will touch on four matters that help us build spiritual stability.

Obeying God’s Commandments

The first is obeying God’s commandments. Just as the Vasa was subject to physical laws—even if it was designed by a king—we are all subject to spiritual laws. No one is exempt. We need to obey these spiritual laws, which we refer to as God’s commandments.

Imagine if Gustav Adolf had been frankly informed that building a long, skinny, top-heavy ship ignored a physical law related to lateral stability. Imagine him then saying, in a sullen, adolescent, whiny manner: “That’s not fair. I’m the king. I should be able to do whatever I want. You don’t understand.”

Working with the physical laws related to lateral stability in the ship’s construction might have felt restrictive to Gustav Adolf, but the Vasa would not have sunk before its mission started had it complied with these laws. Instead, it would have had the freedom and flexibility to accomplish what it was intended to do.

So, too, obedience to God’s laws preserves our freedom, flexibility, and ability to achieve our potential. The commandments are not intended to restrict us. Rather, obedience leads to increased spiritual stability and long-term happiness.

Imagine fighting life’s crosscurrents and crosswinds without spiritual stability. There is a reason obedience is the first law of heaven. Obedience is our choice. The Savior made this clear. As stated in the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 14:28, Jesus directed, “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.”

It is that simple. Settle it. Decide now to be exactly obedient. As we do so, our spiritual stability will be greatly enhanced. We will avoid squandering God-given resources and making unproductive and destructive detours in our lives.

In 1980 my wife, daughter, and I moved to Baltimore, Maryland. Soon after our arrival we were invited to a ward party at the home of a member. We were told it was to be a crab feast. We were excited, but we really didn’t know what to expect. Our experience with seafood consisted of trout, canned salmon, and pickled herring. As we came to the member’s backyard, we saw that newspapers had been spread on picnic tables and steaming bushels filled with red creatures the size of my fist had been dumped out on them.

My wife, Ruth, asked, “What are these?” referring to the red creatures.

We were informed that these were Maryland blue crabs, which turn bright red when they are steamed.
Ruth asked, “How do you catch them?”

We were told that early that morning, two of the brethren had gone to a butcher shop and purchased a bucket of chicken necks. As you know, chicken necks look like chicken and smell like chicken when cooked, but if that is what you are given for dinner, you will go hungry. The chicken neck consists of bone, tendon, and skin.

The assigned men had gone out in a skiff on the shallow Chesapeake Bay. In water about eight feet deep, they began the process of catching a crab. They tied a chicken neck to a string, dropped it into the water, and allowed it to settle on the sandy ocean floor. Sensing a potential feast, a crab scurried along the bottom and grabbed the chicken neck with its big claw. The men then slowly and steadily began pulling on the string. The crab held on to the chicken neck, and just as it was about to breach the surface of the bay, the crab became agitated and let go. But by that time the men had placed a small net under the crab. They took it out of the water and flung it into the boat. And, voilà: ward dinner!

Ruth said, “So, that’s it? There’s no hook? There’s no rod? There’s no reel?”

“That’s right,” they replied.

She said, “The crab could let go at any time?”

“Right.”

“But they don’t?”

“No,” was the reply.

Ruth summed up this newfound knowledge by saying, “Boy, are those crabs stupid!”

If you were writing a pamphlet called *For the Strength of Young Crabs*, it would be pretty short, wouldn’t it? It would say, “Lay off the chicken necks! They are a trap. Don’t be fooled.”

There are many chicken necks in the world: things that look enticing, things that look like a veritable feast, and things that seem worth a minor detour. But if we take that detour, we will, like the prodigal in the parable, experience a fleeting paroxysm of enjoyment followed by degradation ranging from slight to abysmal and misery ranging from small to unutterable before coming to ourselves and recognizing the mistake. The mistake is that these detours are traps.

We can look at each commandment separately and decide whether to obey or not, rationalize disobedience or not, or we can simply settle it in our hearts that we will do the things that the Lord teaches and commands. Nothing will increase spiritual stability more. Nothing will give us greater freedom to accomplish our life’s mission. “Faithfulness and obedience” are not only “the marks of true discipleship”; they are “the requisites of true freedom.”

**Heeding Counsel and Becoming Lifelong Learners**

Second, we need to pay attention and give heed to counsel we receive from trusted sources and commit ourselves to becoming lifelong determined learners. Sometimes we can become like Gustav Adolf, unwilling to listen to counsel from even trusted sources if that counsel does not conform to our biases and desires. We can create an environment that makes others become like the shipbuilders, fearful of giving their best counsel and advice. When we fail to invite and heed counsel from trusted sources, we decrease our spiritual stability and fall into the trap of building a tall, skinny, top-heavy spiritual ship—a boat that won’t float.

President Henry B. Eyring has pointed out that one of the pitfalls of gaining knowledge is the development of hubris, which is the arrogance that can come when we think we know so much that there is nothing left to learn. We have all seen this in individuals who are too certain of their own brilliance. It is really hard to teach a know-it-all. This educational hubris can occur in both students and university professors, in inexperienced as well as experienced Church leaders, and in new converts and longtime members of the Church. It appears that the risk, however, is greater in those with more education and more experience.

Mindful of this risk and desirous to be a lifelong determined learner, President Eyring said, “I am still a child with lots to learn. Most folks can teach me something.” When he extended the call to me to be a General Authority, President Eyring taught me an important lesson. He said that when he hears someone tell a story that he has heard before or use a scripture that he is very familiar with, he asks himself the questions why is the Lord underlining that for me? and what have I yet to learn from that story or scripture? Likewise, if we wish to increase our spiritual stability, we will be willing to learn and we will be sufficiently humble to accept guidance no matter our age and experience.

On one occasion I was assigned to accompany Elder Neal A. Maxwell, then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, to a stake conference. It was marvelous to be with one of the most remarkable gospel teachers of this dispensation. At the conference I gained an insight into how he had developed
and magnified what was undoubtedly a God-given gift. As we were driving away from the stake center on Saturday evening, he turned in his seat and asked me, “What could I have done better to teach the principles we taught?”

I thought he had to be joking. But he kept on grilling me until he extracted from me a comment about some minor thing that might have been slightly unclear. The next day, in the Sunday general session of the stake conference, he clarified that minor thing that I had mentioned. I realized that I was with a humble disciple of Jesus Christ who welcomed counsel, was committed to being a lifelong determined learner, and desired to become better.

How we receive counsel makes a difference in whether those around us will feel comfortable in giving us counsel. We can become prickly, cantankerous, and defensive, or we can welcome the input, knowing it is given with loving motives and, if taken in the right spirit, will help us learn and improve.

It really is our choice. We can listen to and heed counsel given to us by Church leaders, especially those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators; by parents; and by trusted friends—or not. We can seek to be determined lifelong learners—or not. We can increase our spiritual stability—or not. If we fail to increase our spiritual stability, we will become like the Vasa: a long, skinny, top-heavy ship—a boat that won’t float.

**Serving Others**

Third, being outwardly directed, caring about others, and serving others increases our spiritual stability. It is akin to constructing an outrigger for a canoe. Such an outrigger dramatically increases the canoe’s lateral stability.

A desire to help others is paradoxically both a consequence of true conversion and an attribute that helps us remain converted. President Marion G. Romney stated, “Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.”

Eternity stays in clearer focus when we focus on others as we seek to help Heavenly Father’s children in some way. I have always found it much easier to receive inspiration when I am praying to find out how I can help another than when I am simply praying for myself.

We may believe that at some future point we will be in a better situation to help our fellowman. In reality, now is the time. Having this “fiber” of service become part of who we are is not situational. We are sorely mistaken if we think that at some future point it will be more convenient when we have more time, more money, or more anything to serve others better. Now is the time to begin. Our spiritual stability will instantly improve.

My father taught my brother, sisters, and me that helping others is a duty, a choice that we make regardless of our own circumstances. My dad was born in northern Finland, outside the town of Jakobstad, which is also known as Pietasaari. He loved Finnish literature, especially the works of a Finnish poet, Johan Ludvig Runeberg. Runeberg had also been born in Jakobstad.

Dad would quote Finnish literature at night as bedtime stories. These stories were really rather somber. It seemed to us as children that the moral of these stories was to fight valiantly against impossible odds and then die. It was like listening to the book of Job without the happy ending.

One of Runeberg’s poems that we heard over and over told the story of Farmer Paavo. Paavo was a poor peasant farmer who lived with his wife and children in Saarijärvi in the lake region of central Finland. Several years in a row, some combination of the runoff from the spring snowmelt, summer hailstorms, or an early autumn frost killed most of his crop.

Each time the meager harvest came in, his wife said, “Paavo, Paavo, you unfortunate old man. God has forsaken us.”

Paavo, in turn, said, “Woman, mix bark with the rye flour to make bread so we won’t go hungry. I will work harder to drain the marshy fields. God is testing us, but He will provide.”

Every time the crop was destroyed, Paavo directed his wife to double the amount of bark that she mixed into the bread to ward off starvation. Poor Paavo worked even harder. He dug ditches to drain the marsh to decrease his fields’ susceptibility to the spring snowmelt and to the exposure of an early autumn frost.

Finally, Paavo harvested a rich crop. Overjoyed, his wife said, “Paavo, Paavo, these are happy times! It is time to throw away the bark and bake bread made only with the rye.”

But Paavo took his wife’s hand and said, “Woman, mix the bread with half bark, for our neighbor’s fields have frosted over.”

Left unstated in the poem was Paavo’s intent to help his devastated, destitute neighbor.

As I have reread that story as an adult, I have come to understand a little bit better what my dad was trying to teach me and my siblings. Regardless of circumstances, we have a choice. Will we help others or not? We flunk a significant test of mortality if we do not choose to help those in need. And if
we do help, we increase our own spiritual stability. Serving others allows us to express that fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.

Making Jesus Christ Our Foundation

Fourth, finally, and most important, our spiritual stability increases in proportion to the degree to which we establish Jesus Christ as our foundation. The prophet Mormon lamented the change that occurred when his people stopped making Christ their foundation. Of those who abandon the sure moorings of faith in Christ, he stated, “They are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they” (Mormon 5:18).

Without Christ, we are driven like a vessel tossed about upon the waves. We have no power because we have no sail. We have no stability, especially in times of storm, because we have no anchor. We have no direction or purpose because we don’t have anything with which to steer.

If we wish to avoid navigating through life in a long, skinny, top-heavy ship, we must make Christ our foundation and seek His counsel. The ultimate in educational hubris is to believe ourselves to be so wise that we do not need to seek direction from the Lord through the Holy Ghost. Remember, “to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29; see also verse 28).

Conclusion

In order to face, overcome, and be prepared for the crosswinds and crosscurrents of life, we must obey God’s commandments; become humble, willing, and determined lifelong learners; serve others; and establish Jesus Christ as the foundation of our lives. As we do so, we dramatically increase our spiritual stability. Unlike the Vasa, we will be able to return to safe harbor, having fulfilled our destiny.

Not too long ago, in the central part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ruth and I met with a large number of Latter-day Saints who live in impoverished circumstances. I asked the assembled congregation, “What are your challenges?”

There was no response. I asked again. Again, there was no response. I asked a third time.

Finally, an older man stood slowly and asked me in all sincerity, “Elder Renlund, how can we have any challenges? We have the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Initially I felt like grabbing him and telling him to look around. They had nothing—no electricity and no running water. But then I understood. It is not what they possess that gives them strength; it is what they know. Their commitment to what they know gives them extraordinary spiritual stability. They keep the commandments. They are determined to be lifelong learners of spiritual things. They help each other. And they have Christ as their foundation.

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify to you that our Redeemer lives. I know that Jesus Christ rose from the tomb. I know that the resurrected Lord, along with God our Heavenly Father, appeared to the Prophet Joseph that day in 1820, just as Joseph said. I know that we are led by God’s prophet on the earth today, President Thomas S. Monson. But it is Jesus Christ who directs this work through His prophet and through others whom we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. I know that this is true. I pray the richest blessings to be upon you as you go through your mortal sojourn and navigate this challenging, wonderful life. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

“Fear Not, I Am with Thee”: The Redeeming, Strengthening, and Perfecting Blessings of Christ’s Atonement

Elder Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen

Elder Bruce C. Hafen is an emeritus member of the Seventy who recently served as president of the St. George Utah Temple. Marie K. Hafen recently served as the matron of the St. George Utah Temple.

Editor’s Note: Elder Hafen was invited to speak about the Atonement in the 1988 New Testament Symposium for Seminary and Institute Teachers. After revisions that reflected input from these teachers, that talk became the introductory chapter of The Broken Heart, published in 1989 and expanded in 2008. Now, twenty-five years later, in this issue of the Religious Educator, he begins a two-part conversation with religion teachers that offers some reflections on how we currently understand and teach about the Atonement. Part 1, “Fear Not, I Am with Thee,” is based on a talk he and his wife, Marie, gave at the 2014 BYU Women’s Conference. Part 2 (“Peter, the Priesthood, the Temple, and Christ’s Atonement”), which will appear in the next issue of the Religious Educator, is based on his 2014 BYU Sperry Symposium keynote.

Bruce: It is a privilege to be part of this wonderful gathering with you. As I think of the Relief Society general presidency’s significant role
in cosponsoring this Women’s Conference, I’m reminded of what Elder LeGrand Richards reportedly said years ago when he attended a Relief Society gathering with Belle Spafford, then the Relief Society general president. Just before Elder Richards spoke, she said, “Elder Richards, we sisters want you brethren to know that the Relief Society is 100 percent behind the priesthood.” Elder Richards went to the pulpit and said, “Sister Spafford, I’m glad to know that the Relief Society is 100 percent behind the priesthood, because the priesthood is 100 years behind the Relief Society!” That’s still true, but we’re working on it.

Severe Mercy

Marie: At our dinner table the other night, a friend shared a story from what she calls her “spiritual first-aid kit.” It’s a story she remembers when life feels cold and harsh—when the exhaustion is deep, the snow is getting deeper, and “Rocky Ridge” is still ahead. It comes from the high plains of Wyoming in October of 1856. Our friend calls this story “Severe Mercy.”

Nine-year-old Agnes Caldwell had been wading through the wind-driven snow with the rest of the Willie handcart company for what must have felt like an eternity when relief wagons appeared on the trail ahead of them. Before the storm hit, Agnes had been taking each mile of the autumn trail in stride, even the one that had been strewn with rattlesnakes. For that mile, she and her friend Mary held hands and jumped again and again over the snakes until they were out of danger, mercifully unharmed.

But after days of dragging her nearly frozen feet through the deepening snow, she wasn’t skipping any more. And she was literally starving. The death toll in her company was rising with every passing night. Yet, of the arrival of the relief party, all Agnes records in her understated history is, “It certainly was a relief.” And then she describes her own rescue: “The infirm and the aged were allowed to ride, all able-bodied continued to walk. When the wagons started out, a number of us children decided to see how long we could keep up with the wagons, in hopes of being asked to ride. One by one they all fell out, until I was the last one remaining, so determined was I that I should get a ride. After what seemed the longest run I ever made before or since, the driver, [Brother] Kimball, called to me, “Say, sissy, would you like a ride?” I answered in my very best manner, “Yes, sir.”

“At this he reached over, [took] my hand, [then clucked] to his horses [and made] me run, with legs that seemed to me could run no farther. On
simple clarity of the restored gospel because, at least in part, we share so many of the same key words with other Christian churches. With the increased volume of our discourse, we are also sensing a little confusion.

One LDS woman, in trying to unravel the confusion for herself, made a list of stories from the Book of Mormon in which God’s power delivered or strengthened someone, often miraculously. Going down the list she asked, “When is this the Atonement’s enabling power, when is it priesthood power, or when is it simply an answer to a prayer?” She asked us, “Are there situations when we should be calling on one of these powers rather than another one?” The doctrine of the Atonement was feeling like a puzzle to her.

Our hope is that we can help clarify some key elements of the doctrine of the Lord’s Atonement, including how we participate in that doctrine. In doing this, we hope you will feel reassured about Christ’s desire to help us lift our burdens, and that you will feel more confident in your ability to stick with Him no matter what. We also hope that as we increase our understanding of what Christ has done for us, we might also increase our willingness to submit to whatever He may ask of us.

The Purpose of Christ’s Atonement—Our Growth and Development

Bruce: Our doctrinal discussion of the Savior’s Atonement begins with the story of Adam and Eve. A friend once asked me, “If Jesus Christ is at the center of the gospel and the center of the temple, why doesn’t the temple endowment teach the story of the life of Christ? What’s all this about Adam and Eve?” As I have thought about his question, I have come to believe that the story of Christ’s life is the story of giving His Atonement. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of receiving His Atonement—and their story is our story.

Lehi told his children that if Adam and Eve had remained in the Garden of Eden, they would have known only innocence, and their spirits could not have grown and developed. “And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy for they knew no misery” (oh, I get it—no children, no misery!). And there is more: “Having no joy for they knew no misery, doing no good, for they knew no sin. Adam fell that men might be [mortal], and men are [mortal] that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:23–25).

So the Fall was not a disaster, as traditional Christianity teaches. It was a grand victory that opened the door for all of us to the school we call mortality. When we walk through that door, we will learn from daily experience—some of it harsh experience—the difference between evil and good, misery and joy. Yet this earth is not our home. We are away at school. Knowing just that much gives us a unique understanding of who we are, who God is, and why we are here—and why we need the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Let us look then at the overall purpose of the Atonement, which relates directly to our own purpose in coming to earth. That purpose-driven perspective explains why the Lord would at times take us by the hand and stretch us into a run.

We see the purpose of the Savior’s grace and His Atonement in an entirely different light from the way other Christian churches see it. To understand that difference, let’s take a brief look at what happened during the Great Apostasy. Since about the fifth century AD, traditional Christianity has taught—incorrectly—that because of the Fall, we are born with an evil nature. As one well-known Christian creed states, Adam and Eve “by their disobedience . . . lost their purity and happiness, and . . . in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved.” This idea says that humankind’s inborn evil nature is the primary cause of human sins; people sin mostly because they can’t help it. In this incorrect view, only Christ’s grace can overcome our depraved nature, and overcoming that depravity is the main purpose of grace. And only God decides to whom He will extend grace. Because we are evil, we couldn’t choose grace ourselves. This view inaccurately sees grace as a one-way infusion, not as the two-way interaction it really is, as we will see shortly.

So we Latter-day Saints have a challenge when we use terms like “grace” and “enabling power,” because those terms, long used by other churches, sometimes proceed from incorrect doctrinal assumptions. That means the vocabulary of traditional Christianity won’t always work for us, and it may confuse us. On the other hand, the Restoration corrected those doctrines with clarity and light about who we are and why we’re here. That clarity resonates in the heart of every child who sings “I Am a Child of God,” with echoes of divine parents, of having wandered from another sphere, of an inward yearning for home in the arms of a Father who has not only a body, but also a heart—a heart like ours. We came to the earth not as depraved sinners but “trailing clouds of glory,” carrying the seeds of a potentially divine nature within us.

Modern-day scripture teaches us that we are born neither evil nor good by nature; rather, we are born “whole” (Moses 6:54) or “innocent” (D&C 64:13). Adam and Eve “by their disobedience . . . lost their purity and happiness, and . . . in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved.” This idea says that humankind’s inborn evil nature is the primary cause of human sins; people sin mostly because they can’t help it. In this incorrect view, only Christ’s grace can overcome our depraved nature, and overcoming that depravity is the main purpose of grace. And only God decides to whom He will extend grace. Because we are evil, we couldn’t choose grace ourselves. This view inaccurately sees grace as a one-way infusion, not as the two-way interaction it really is, as we will see shortly.

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Then, in a mortal environment that is subject to death and sinful influences, we will taste some sin and bitterness—not because we are innately bad, but because we can’t learn to prize the sweet without actually tasting the bitter (D&C 29:39; see also Moses 6:54–55). And because the effects of that bitterness may separate us from our Heavenly Father, we need Christ’s Atonement to overcome whatever separates us from Him—such as the physical separation caused by death and the spiritual separation caused by our sins. That’s what the word means: “at-one-ment,” or the act of reuniting what has been separated.

In addition, we need the Atonement to help us grow to become like our Father, because we cannot be “with Him” forever in His celestial realm until we are “like Him.” In this sense, our immature capacity separates us from Him—that’s why He sent us away to school. So at birth we are completely innocent, literally babes in the woods. Then, as we grow up, like our first parents we wrestle with afflictions—sin, misery, children—and that wrestling, paradoxically, teaches us what joy means. In that way, our children also help us discover the “joy” part. The Savior’s Atonement makes that process possible by protecting us while we learn from practice what love really is or why wickedness cannot produce happiness (see Alma 41:10). Because of the Atonement, we can learn from our experience without being condemned by it. So the Atonement is not just a doctrine about erasing black marks—it is the core doctrine that allows human development. Thus its purpose is to facilitate our growth, ultimately helping us to develop the Christlike capacities we need to live with God.

Marie: With that purpose in mind, the Lord’s Atonement plays a key role in two categories of essential blessings—(1) unconditional and (2) conditional blessings. We will discuss each of these in that order, even though these blessings may at times overlap and interact with each other in our lives.

The Unconditional Blessings of Mercy and Grace
First are the unconditional blessings bestowed upon everyone by the mercy and grace of our Father and His Son. These gifts bless all humankind endlessly, no matter what we do. This foundational dimension of mercy is in some sense the source of all our blessings, starting with the Creation and our very
presence on earth. For example, we heard one LDS woman express the abso-
lute wonder she felt when she realized, “I live in a world where the Master of
the Universe—the most powerful being in existence—just happens to know
me and love me and to care about my eternal happiness. What did I ever do to
deserve this? Aside from choosing to come to earth, not one thing.”

The gift of the universal resurrection is also an unconditional miracle of
the Atonement for every person. Because He is risen, all will rise, and eventu-
ally all will kneel to acknowledge Him. The Savior’s Atonement also paid for
Adam’s original sin. Other Christian churches believe, incorrectly, that each
person still needs grace to be cleansed from Adam’s stain, which they believe
cause our sinful nature. But as the second Article of Faith states, we will not
be punished for Adam’s transgression (see also Moses 6:54).

The resurrection is also the first of the Atonement’s two fundamen-
tal “redeeming” blessings—redemption from death and redemption from
sin. Redemption from death is unconditional; but, as we will now consider,
redemption from sin (and therefore forgiveness) is a conditional blessing.

The Conditional Blessings of Christ’s Atonement—Forgiving

Bruce: The Atonement offers us three conditional blessings. We can be (1) for-
given, (2) strengthened, and (3) perfected—on the condition that we participate
in those processes.

The eternal law of justice requires payment for our sins. Yet the eternal law
of mercy allows Christ’s suffering to pay justice for our sins—if we repent. As
we repent, then, the grace allowed by the law of mercy assures our forgiveness.
As we sometimes stumble along, we have a perpetual need to repent and learn
from our mistakes. This repenting and learning are matched by His perpetual
willingness to forgive. Our repentance does not repay Christ—in that sense, we
don’t “earn” His grace. However, as a condition of extending grace to us—and
to help us grow—He asks us to undertake a process of change or rehabilitation
that begins with forsaking our sins. In this context, grace is a two-way street
that allows us to interact with him through our repentance. Thus He will help
us change, if we humbly do all within our power—even when our sins are of the
habitual or addictive kind. We then need to draw on the continuous power of
Christ’s Atonement to gain additional strength to change.7

In terms that apply both to forgiveness and to the other conditional bless-
ings of strengthening and perfecting, Nephi said, “It is by grace that we are
saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). Some people think this means the
Lord won’t help us until we have totally exhausted ourselves. But the larger
doctrinal context makes clear that “after” in this verse means “along with”—
His grace is with us before, during, and after we do all we can.

Conditional Blessings—Strengthening

When we take our repentance seriously, we can have the conversion experi-
ence that Alma called the “mighty change of heart” (Alma 5:12–26; see also Mosiah 5), which may be either sudden or gradual. Thus begins the
Atonement’s interactive strengthening process, as our obedience interacts
with His grace. When this happened to King Benjamin’s people, they desired
good rather than evil, and they made covenants to become “the children of
Christ.” They took upon themselves His name, for He had “spiritually begot-
ten” them—they were born again, then began to follow Him (see Mosiah 5).

The experience of King Benjamin’s people demonstrates the covenant
relationship Christ creates with His disciples through the covenants of bap-
tism and the sacrament. As our lives show that we are sincerely willing to take
upon us His name, to always remember Him, and to keep his commandments,
He keeps his covenant to us—we will always have His Spirit to be with us.
Through this intimate, two-way relationship, the Savior offers us the ongo-
ging assurance of forgiveness, strength, and the increasing light of becoming
like Him. He continually nourishes our spirits, like a flowing spring. Then, as
we comprehend more of His light, He offers us more because we are able to
receive more. This relationship is then the foundation and the source of the
strengthening and perfecting blessings that follow baptism.

Marie: Thus begins the process of becoming a Saint—or being sancti-
ﬁed—through the Atonement of Christ, as we yield “to the enticings of the
Holy Spirit,” and put off “the natural man” and become “as a child, submissive,
meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things” which the
Lord sees “fit to inflict upon [us]” (Mosiah 3:19). If, however, we yield to the
adversary more than we do to the Spirit, then we will become as Adam and
Eve’s children, who “loved Satan more than God” (Moses 5:13). Alma said
that pursuing this carnal, sensual, and devilish path will ultimately “subject
you to the spirit of the devil” who will “seal you his” (Alma 34:55; emphasis
added). How chilling! In contrast, if we remain on the covenant path, we
have the priceless promise from King Benjamin that Christ will eventu-
ally “seal you his” (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added). We’d like to illustrate this
strengthening process with two stories.
Allison was married in the temple and had several children. As they became teenagers some of them fell into deep trouble, which created turbulence in her marriage. For years their family had tried to do everything “right”—scriptures, prayer, Church, temple, family home evening. However she said, “What I had imagined and hoped for was not happening and I [felt] completely stuck. My frustrated mind cried out to Him, ‘I was faithful and you left me anyway. Where [is] my support when all the fiery darts [are] being thrown at us?’”

Then, after four years of such dark times, a scripture opened to her as if it were a personal message from the Lord. “But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work” (D&C 3:10). In response, Allison said, “Hope began to again peek through my doubts. That small particle of hope in me stretched heavenward. Was God really merciful? Could I repent, [let] go of my doubting, and again be worthy of his support? I was willing to try.”

She worked as hard as she knew how to keep her spiritual commitments and to reach out to her family members in healing ways. The healing didn’t happen overnight, but over years it came in small and simple ways. “Our burden,” she said, “is being lifted—one scripture at a time, in a quiet prompting in the temple, as Primary children sing their testimonies, and through the kind words of friends who sometimes have no idea [about] the past heartache.”

After seven years of exerting herself and continuing to interact with the Lord, Allison describes how her children began to return. “[My daughter] came into my room, sat on the bed, and for nearly two hours we talked, laughed, and cried. I had dreamed of moments like this. [From my son], I [now] receive my daily hug, which is expected and initiated by him. To see the light of Christ again reflected in him brings such marvelous, peaceful joy that it far outweighs the sorrow of his past choices.” Allison said that she simply trusted Jesus. He carried her when she felt she could no longer move forward. She supplied her desire and her work, and He supplied His strength.

Bruce: Another friend we’ll call Tyler had long been an active Church member, but he had been so abused during his early years that he couldn’t believe the Savior’s strengthening promises would apply to anyone as broken as he felt. As he began learning that those promises were anchored in the deep roots of the Atonement, he sensed that the promises were real, but he still thought they were for other people. He was afraid to reach for those blessings because he thought they would be tainted by his touch. Gradually he found that Christ would strengthen him to fuel the process of developing his spirit. Then came the key insight that, with the Savior’s help, the pain he had suffered in his life could fill him with empathy and compassion that would help him be of greater service to the Lord and His other children in need. He has since become an inspiring teacher and counselor, helping others to find what he found—that the Savior could help him grow his weaknesses into strengths.

The experiences of Allison and Tyler echo a pattern in many scriptural stories about how the Lord strengthens His people in their afflictions. He does this because of His covenant relationship with them. When the children of Israel were in Egypt, “God heard their groaning, and [He] remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” And God said, “I have seen the affliction of my people. I know their sorrows” (Exodus 2:4–7). Then this to Moses after crossing the Red Sea: “Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians [now that’s an understatement!]—and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself.” To myself—at one with the Lord. “Therefore, if ye will obey my voice and keep my covenant, ye shall be unto me an holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6).

The same pattern and language appear in the Lord’s interaction with Alma’s people when Amulon held them captive. “I, the Lord God, do visit my people—not the people—because of His covenant relationship with them. “Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me” (Mosiah 24:13). Just as when Alma’s people were in bondage, the Lord will keep His covenant with us to strengthen us as we try diligently to keep our promises to Him.

However, He may not always deliver us out of bondage—at least not immediately—even if we are faithful. But He will strengthen us until our burdens feel lighter, often using the burdens to bless and teach us. Perhaps we can’t exactly say that He “atoned for” our burdens beyond death and sin, and it may not be logically precise to say that “the Atonement” delivered the people of Moses or Alma—or Allison or Tyler. But His Atonement is what qualifies Christ to enter into a personal, covenant relationship with His faithful followers, and then Christ Himself strengthens them through that Atonement-based relationship. In His words, “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, and thou art mine” (Isaiah 43:1). “I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee” (Isaiah 41:10).
The term “strengthen” in this context is clearer to me than the term “enable.” “Strengthen” means “to make or become stronger,” which assumes that we are already exerting our agency to do whatever we can. “Enable,” on the other hand, means “to activate or make operational,” which could imply that we lack the will (or the agency) to act righteously by ourselves. Said more simply, “strengthen” suggests that the Lord adds His strength to ours, while “enable” could imply that He simply acts for us. Perhaps for this reason, some standard versions of Protestant theology teach that when God elects to extend grace to a sinner, the sinful person is then freed from sin, and “grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good.”

We don’t mean to overdo semantic issues, even when they have doctrinal implications. We recognize that the use of “enabling power” is so new in today’s LDS vocabulary that many of us may not be quite sure what it means. And in some sense, whatever enabling means, if seeking it draws us to the Savior, and that process helps lift our burdens, we may not need to know much more.

At the same time, the essential place of covenants in the scriptural and other stories we have shared does show that Christ extends his strengthening power only on certain conditions. We needn’t be perfect, but we must strive wholeheartedly, not halfheartedly. As Jacob put it, “Come [to him] with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:5). This doctrine of conditional grace differs from the traditional Protestant idea that grace is entirely a free gift. But this pattern of two-way, interactive covenants is the Lord’s way of encouraging us to do what only we can do—exert ourselves enough to participate meaningfully in the growth process.

Without our exertion, even God can’t make us grow, no matter how much grace He extends. Think of the nearly frozen Agnes Caldwell. That severe mercy was unbelievably hard for her, but it pulled her into action that only she could exert, and it saved her life.

Latter-day scriptures and hymns use the term “grace” in a rich variety of strengthening ways—nearly all of them conditioned on our taking some clear, energetic action. Here are some samples that illustrate our active role in qualifying for the Lord’s grace: “Teach ye diligently, and my grace shall attend you” (D&C 88:78). Alma’s “priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God” (Mosiah 18:26). To Moroni, the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27). “Though hard to you this journey may appear, / Grace shall be as your day, / ’Tis better far for us to strive . . . .” That promise from “Come, Come, Ye Saints” is echoed in another favorite hymn, “As thy days may demand, so thy succor shall be.”

In the midst of our striving, He will succor and strengthen us as fully as our hardest days may require.

Marie: For some of us, “as thy days may demand” can mean unspeakable grief and pain from tragedies beyond our control. A man we know, for example, unaware that his child was behind his car, ran over and killed his own two-year-old in the family driveway. This was the most devastating experience of this faithful man’s life. He blamed himself and felt unworthy before God and with his family. But his mistake was not his fault, and it wasn’t a sin. It was an accident. How does the Atonement help this man? Or is the question better stated, how does Christ help him, or any of us, in the deepest anguish of our lives?

A woman we met asked her version of the same question. She had been severely abused as a little girl. She felt betrayed, abandoned, and alone—tormented, psychologically and spiritually. “For years,” she said, “I have felt unclean and shut out from God’s presence. But I didn’t sin; I was sinned against. Will the Atonement help me?” We can answer her sincere question with a resounding yes! Because of His Atonement, Christ will help her—and you, and us. Help from that source is His ultimate expression of compassion toward each of us whatever our circumstances may be.

Alma tells us that Christ, apparently as part of His Atonement, took upon Himself the “pains” and “infirmities” of “His people” (Alma 7:11–12). That means, at the very least, that we do not suffer alone. And if we let Him, He will also join us in lifting our burdens—His hands beneath ours, His shoulders helping us bear the brunt of the load.

But beyond that, did Alma mean that the Savior somehow “paid” justice for our infirmities the same way He paid for our sins? Or, more broadly, did Alma mean that Christ unconditionally took upon Himself all human misery, thus relieving us of all unfairness, injustice, and all other forms of suffering?

We don’t believe so, because these interpretations would undermine both the Atonement’s reach and its purpose. For one thing, He took upon Himself the infirmities of “His people,” not “the people”—Alma is talking only about how Christ strengthens His covenant children. Yet even for them, He does not always eliminate the burden altogether, because doing so would...
not always further the Atonement’s purpose of helping His children grow and mature to become “purified even as He is pure” (Moroni 7:48).

To snatch us completely out of life’s unfairness and injustices—out of our “effectual struggles,” to use King Limhi’s phrase (Mosiah 7:18)—would negate the very reason we came to earth, which is to master the traits of godliness even while under intense pressure. His grace allows us to be healed from and sanctified by that pressure without being crushed by it.

Christ earned the right to extend His grace by “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind.” And He did so “that He may know according to the flesh how to succor his people” (Alma 7:11–12). “Succor” means to help, aid, or relieve in time of need or distress. So His succoring can bless us with support, healing, and strength.

However, we could miss what this understanding of succoring and grace offers us if we don’t also grasp what it asks of us, and why. It’s not that God will simply remove the hard things if we decode the hidden messages or if we just push the right button, such as when the computer screen says, “click here to enable.” He asks us to give all we have to the refining process of grace—not to appease Him, but rather to engage us. There’s Agnes again.

Being engaged in the crucible of refinement can, in our hardest times, make us feel as if we are walking through hell. And perhaps we literally are! But if we stick with Christ, He will show us the way through. He can do this, because He walked through hell himself without getting lost in it.

One of the survivors who had waded through the hellish handcart tragedy in Wyoming said, “We became acquainted with him in our extremities. . . . The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay.” When we also dig deeply enough to find him and know Him in such places, fears can become faith and trust, anger melts into meekness, anguish becomes empathy. Line upon line, grace for grace, He causes—if we will submit to it—the affliction to be consecrated for our gain (see 2 Nephi 2:2).

How does He consecrate our afflictions for our gain? It has something to do with what Elder Neal A. Maxwell called Christ’s “earned empathy,” derived from submitting Himself to all of life’s bitterness, descending “below all things” (D&C 88:6), so He could know from His own flesh-and-bones experience how to succor His people.

Perhaps His divine empathy was also partly a gift from His Father in answer to His prayer for His disciples. “Father, I pray unto thee for them . . . that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23). It is as if He were saying, “Let me feel with them, Father, the way Thou dost feel with me. Let me feel their pain the way Thou, Father, dost feel mine.”

By being in us, He can feel with us so completely, so perfectly, as to be “at one” with us in our afflictions. And so He whispers to strengthen us in our darkest nights of the refiner’s fire:

Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed.
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid.
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand. . . .
When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame will not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

Conditional Blessings—Perfecting

Bruce: Now we are ready to consider how the Lord’s perfecting blessings can endow us with divine qualities through a process of becoming holy, like Christ. After He has helped to cleanse us from our earthly stains and has strengthened us through our tribulations to the greatest degree possible, we can become “invested, over a lifetime, with holiness from God.”

Of this perfecting process, Moroni wrote, “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32). The “if-then” connection here says the Lord’s perfecting grace is also conditional—if we forsake ungodliness and love Him, then He will endow us with holiness.

Here is an image that depicts this process: An early Australian convert wrote, “My past life [was] a wilderness of weeds, with hardly a flower Strewed among them. [But] now the weeds have vanished, and flowers Spring up in their place.” The Savior’s Atonement helps us with both the weeds and with the flowers. Through the interactive miracles of repentance, forgiveness, and grace, Christ works with us to remove our sinful weeds and any other obstacles between ourselves and God. Then He can plant and help us nourish the seeds of divine qualities, like meekness, charity, and holiness. The Lord’s grace does help these flowers grow. But even then, there may still be a few weeds in our flowers, and a few flowers in our weeds—it’s an organic process.
The full blessings of His Atonement cannot be unveiled in us until our hand reaches for, and hangs onto, His.

Marie: As an example of His helping us to become holy, we can look at the gift of charity, the saintly capacity to love others as Christ does. Moroni explained, “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ, that when he shall appear we shall be like him” (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added). Is charity, then, a gift of grace? Yes, it is "bestowed"—it comes from outside us. But on what condition, since charity is also a conditional blessing? Those who receive charity are they who have become “true followers” of Jesus. The participation required of us at this higher level is more demanding.

Bruce: So in looking at “all we can do” to enjoy the perfecting blessings, the Lord asks us more about the spirit of the law, less about the letter of the law; more about our core internal attitudes, less about a mechanical list of do’s and don’ts; more about consecration and sacrifice, less about our activity percentages. Scriptures that describe the perfecting attributes say they are given to those who are “submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and] full of love” (Mosiah 3:19); or who are “meek and lowly in heart” (Alma 37:14); or whose lives reflect a “peaceable walk with the children of men” (Moroni 7:4); or those who yield “their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35). Moroni asked that we “love God with all [our] might” (Moroni 10:32). We must love Him as fully as our limited personal capacity allows, but that doesn’t mean we must reach some unreachable level of perfection by ourselves—for finally His grace is sufficient to perfect us in Him.

Marie: As we give everything we have to the Lord, and He gives us everything He has, together we replace our noxious weeds with abundant flowers. Moroni has described the complete process we’ve discussed today better than in any other scripture we know—from forgiveness, to spiritual strength, to the perfections of charity, and sanctification: “And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins [forgiveness]; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost [spiritual strength], which comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love [Christlike charity] endureth by diligence [our striving] unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints [the sanctified] shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:25–26).

To illustrate how charity can come, we remember Elder Neal A. Maxwell. The quest of his life became his desire to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. For years he thought about discipleship; he prayed, talked, and wrote about it. In his later years, he began to see in the lives of others that adversity could be sanctifying. He saw three sources of suffering—our own mistakes, life’s natural adversities, and, at times, afflictions the Lord might “inflict” on us to teach us. Of the latter category Elder Maxwell wrote, “The very act of choosing to be a disciple . . . can bring to us a certain special suffering. . . . [It is a] dimension that comes with deep discipleship. [Thus] all who will can come to know [what Paul called] 'the fellowship of his sufferings' (Philippians 3:10).” He also wrote, “If we are serious about our discipleship, Jesus will eventually request each of us to do those very things which are the most difficult for us to do.”

After years of teaching others about these principles, at age seventy Elder Maxwell was stricken with leukemia in 1996. As he worked to absorb the shock of that news, he said to those who knew the link he saw between discipleship and suffering, “I should have seen it coming.” This was what he came to call the “wintry doctrine”—the idea that we can’t internalize real consecration without our own “clinical experiences.”
During the following eight years until his death in 2004, Elder Maxwell's own empathy toward other people increased. He discovered for himself what he had tried to teach others: The Savior is able to succor us in our afflictions because he has drunk the cup of affliction himself. "Earned empathy," he called it. And those who knew him during his own season of the wintry doctrine saw a sanctifying process at work in his life, in his teaching, in his interaction with others, and in his visits to the homes of fellow sufferers. At one point, he sensed the Lord answering his questions about why he had been afflicted: "I have given you leukemia so that you might teach the people with more authenticity." No wonder Neal Maxwell would feel drawn to a phrase like "severe mercy."

Bruce: We believe he was receiving the gift of charity, as he discovered the connection between charity and affliction. Those who seek to be Christ's true followers may need to emulate His sacrificial experience, not only through physical pain but in other ways, at least enough to taste His empathy and His charity. For only then are we like Him enough to feel His love for others the way He feels it—to love "as I have loved you" (John 13:34). It may well be that charity and suffering are but two sides of the same coin. Little wonder, then, that Christ will not take away all of our suffering. After all, He said, "those who will not endure chastening cannot be sanctified" (D&C 101:5; emphasis added). May we not be surprised, and may we not shrink, when we discover, paradoxically, how dear a price we may need to pay to receive charity—which is, finally, a gift of grace.

I would like now to offer a final thought before Marie concludes for both of us. I have the personal sense that those who receive the full gift of charity will feel Christ's love not only for others—they will also feel His love for themselves. And they will feel it in a way that assures them beyond any question that—despite their remaining weaknesses—their sacrifices and their lives are finally and fully acceptable to Him. I foresee that day as the culmination of our efforts. If we have the good fortune to be present with us on a night in 1997 when President Gordon B. Hinckley talked to several thousand Australian Saints in a large stadium. As he concluded, he testified of the Lord's love for them, and he expressed his confidence in them in a way that somehow invited an especially calm spirit to descend. The next day, this sister said to us, "I have never believed that my life could really be acceptable to the Lord. But as President Hinckley spoke to our hearts, I felt for the first time that, despite all of my frailties, the Lord could accept me. I was astounded."

One final example: our friend Donna grew up desiring to marry and raise a large family. But that blessing never came. Instead, she spent her adult years serving the people in her ward with unmeasured compassion and counseling disturbed children in a large school district. She had crippling arthritis and many long, blue days. Yet she always lifted and was lifted by her friends and family. Once, when teaching about Lehi's dream, she said with gentle humor, "I'd put myself in that picture on the strait and narrow path, still holding on to the iron rod, but collapsed from fatigue right on the path." In an inspired blessing given just before her death, Donna's home teacher said the Lord had "accepted" her. Donna cried. No other words could have meant more to her.

These two women discovered that the Lord not only forgives us and eases our burdens, but ultimately He will also accept and perfect the honest heart who observe every sacrifice with a contrite spirit—even when their lives fall short of flawless perfection. The Atonement of Jesus Christ makes this acceptance both real and possible—and He stretches forth His accepting hands unto us "all the day long" (Jacob 6:4). I testify that each of us can one day experience that ultimate acceptance, if we really want it—so long as we don't want anything else more.

Marie: The heart of Agnes Caldwell's rescue lies in the moment her hand met the hand of the wagon master in that lifesaving clasp. So it is between each of us and Christ. The full blessings of His Atonement cannot be unveiled in us until our hand reaches for, and hangs onto, His. In all of His power, He can't force us to take His hand, but He does invite and beckon us to come to Him.

And He is waiting to meet us in His holy house. The temple's saving, healing, and perfecting powers come from the Atonement of Christ, but we can receive them only if we get ourselves there—like Agnes running for the wagon.

For the last three years we have spent cherished time in the St. George Utah Temple looking into the faces of those who have taken hold of and are hanging
on to the Lord’s hand. His presence in their lives is evident in their faces. A mom with an infuriating teenage daughter at home told me how it was helping her to sacrifice enough to be in the temple more often and to work harder to live what she learned and felt there. “Not a lot of changes yet with my daughter,” she said. “But I am becoming a different person, a better person.”

In light of Doctrine and Covenants section 84, we can see that this young mother—and any sacrificing disciple like her—is absorbing the power of the higher priesthood and higher ordinances. Without these, the mysteries of godliness—or the power to become like Him—cannot be manifest in the flesh. If you want this power in your mortal body—inscribed in the “fleshy tables of [your] heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3)—put yourself in the temple. Wherever we may be, just as we take the shoes off our feet when we enter the temple, could we take the shoes off our hearts when we think and speak of Him and His Atonement?

As I was walking up to the temple one day, I came upon a grandmotherly woman—one of our temple workers—bending over, tending to the flowers near the front door. She looked up. Her aging face was alive with light, the face of a lifetime of temple worship and temple living. Her countenance enveloped me in the aura of the temple and filled me with the desire to have that same happy holiness in me. Just as Joseph and Mary did, we will “find Him in the temple.” (See Luke 2:46) He is the template of the temple. He is making a temple of us.

“He marked the path and led the way, / And every point defines / To light and life and endless day, / Where God’s full presence shines.”22

Notes
5. We first heard this phrase from Terryl Givens.
8. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith states: “9.3 Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto. 9.4 When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he filleth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good” (emphasis added).
11. For a discussion on how Christ’s Atonement can help us heal from abuse inflicted on us by others, see “Forgiveness and Christ Figures” in Bruce C. Hafen, The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences, Expanded Edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 239–49.
14. See also D&C 50:40–44: “I am in the Father and the Father in me; and inasmuch as ye have received me, ye are in me and I am in you.”
17. Martha Maria Humphreys, quoted in Marjorie Newton, Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia (Laie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University–Hawaii, 1991), 227.
18. Maxwell, All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 32, 34, 36.
Religion Matters: A Conversation with Kevin J Worthen

INTERVIEW BY THOMAS A. WAYMENT

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Wayment: Religious Education at BYU has a unique charter or mission, and it also incorporates that mission into the larger goals and mission of the university. I wonder if you could reflect on the role of Religious Education.

Worthen: It has a distinctive role on campus, one that goes across the whole university. Religious Education is central to achieving one of the key aims of a BYU education, which is to spiritually strengthen students. That responsibility is shared with everybody, in a sense, but Religious Education is the only place where we know that all students are taking classes where that goal is systematically pursued. It’s the core of what happens at the university, and yet that work can’t be limited to Religious Education.

We don’t want to be just a university with an institute of religion. And distinguishing Religious Education from a typical institute of religion is kind of an interesting challenge both for Religious Education and for the rest of campus. On the one hand, the rest of campus could say, “Religious Education owns the spiritual strengthening aim; we don’t have to do that.” That would be a mistake. All need to be involved in that. But, at the same time, we want our students to come out of Religious Education classes understanding
the doctrine, the way in which it's presented, and the way in which it's discussed in the world. This may be different from what might be done at other universities.

Wayment: Conversely, would you say that we don’t want to make Religious Education the sole proprietor of spiritual education, and we don’t want Religious Education to leave the academic discussion to everybody else, that there should be more integration going both ways?

Worthen: Yes. I don’t really know what the research expectations are at an institute of religion, but my guess is that there are not the same scholarly expectations there as there are here. There’s something distinctive about the role of Religious Education here, because we really want the Religious Education faculty to be engaged in the scholarly conversation with the rest of the world, and we want to help our students engage in that conversation as well.

Wayment: We clearly see in our spiritual identity the need to help mentor students, to help educate them. And we also have this kind of academic identity as well, with the faculty being very passionate about their fields. How do you see a religious educator balancing those two roles? Do you have a sense of those boundaries?

Worthen: As I understand the gospel, there ultimately isn’t any tension between those two roles. It all fits together in some way, though it doesn’t always easily fit together. I think that if you start with the idea that the two can fit together, the right balance emerges in particular cases.

Wayment: It does; I would think so.

Worthen: It reminds me of President Uchtdorf’s saying “Doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith.” It’s saying, “We really do have faith that this will all work out. There are some things that don’t seem to square away right now, but we’ll keep working on them.” It isn’t simply putting the issue on the shelf, but continuing to work on it with the belief that there is a resolution that will bring this into harmony.

Wayment: I see a lot of maturity in Religious Education today, with the idea that we don’t see it as tension anymore between competing interests. Would you agree with that?

Worthen: Yes; I don’t see tension within the university. It’s a little like in the rest of the more traditional academic world, where we discuss setting the balance between teaching and scholarship. I really think in the ideal world, those two coexist and reinforce one another. I think that’s true of faith and scholarship as well; faith and academic scholarship really can help each other, because part of the mortal experience is learning how to deal with uncertainty and how to resolve ambiguities.

Wayment: And it seems the Church is probing in that area with the gospel topics.

Worthen: Exactly.

Wayment: I think there’s some trust now that we can go into these difficult areas, that we’re mature enough to say, “I don’t have an answer today, but I have answers to the following, or witness to the following.”

Worthen: Yes, and that’s a good way to go about it. It is a sign of progress that we can say, “OK, let’s talk about it. What do we know? What don’t we know?” We can be confident that, in the long run, discussion will move us towards the truth, rather than worrying that knowing more facts will somehow destroy someone’s faith.

Wayment: That’s a great perspective. I appreciate that. My next question is about BYU students. As a religious educator, I have an increasing number of Spanish-speaking students in my classes, along with students of Asian descent. We’re starting to see a bigger percentage. Can you share with us how that’s happening? Is that part of an intended mission? Or is it just happening on its own?

Worthen: There are some efforts to reach out to communities where people may not have had the same opportunities or access to BYU; that’s part of our enriched-environment effort. However, what you’ve seen is more of a reflection of what’s happening in the Church, particularly in the United States and Canada, where most of our students come from. Beyond that, we don’t have a targeted goal where we say, “OK, we’ve got to make sure that we reflect what the Church looks like.” I think that just happens as result of the growth in Church membership. There hasn’t been, and I don’t see in the near future, a real push to get more international students. We’ll continue to welcome international students in the same way we welcome those from the United States, but it would be a real challenge to make BYU look exactly like the Church internationally.

Wayment: Yes, I see that. We’re on the cusp of needing to offer courses in other languages, and that’s new since I’ve been here. I’ve been here for fifteen years, which isn’t a terribly long time, but I wondered if that was intentional and how it was going.

Worthen: Well, you know the mission statement does indicate a role for BYU in helping the Church throughout the world. The next-to-last
paragraph says, “In meeting these objectives, faculty, staff, students, administrators should also be anxious to share their service and scholarship with the Church in furthering the work of the Church worldwide.” Then it says, “In an era of limited enrollments, BYU can continue to expand its influence.”

So, we’re going to keep the enrollment cap in order to keep the focus on the students, but we “can expand [the university’s] influence by encouraging programs that are consistent with Church purposes, and by making our resources available to the Church when called upon to do so.” So you get two things from this part of the mission statement. One is to ask, “How can we enhance this education experience and maximize it so that its benefits go out to the rest of the world through the students or other ways?” Second, there may be an occasional time when the Church will say, “Look, we really need the university to do this for us.”

Wayment: Thanks. You’ve become president in a time where the university is in great shape. You made it very clear when you were called as president that we’re going to continue the same direction, at least for a time. We don’t want this question to come across as, “Do you have radical changes in store?” However, do you see certain trends that you want to address that you’re comfortable sharing?

Worthen: Well, one key objective of mine is to keep people focused on the mission of the university. If we do that, I think inspiration will come to people at the individual and department level. That’s the way that I see new ideas emerging. If people really think about what they can do in their roles to enhance the students’ experience, as described in the mission statement, things will happen that will be good for that department and for the whole university. For example, I’m not sure how mentored learning really got started here, but I’m quite certain that it wasn’t someone sitting in the Abraham Smoot Building saying, “OK, what we need to do is mentored learning.” I think that’s an example of a trend that has emerged, and I think we’re going to continue to emphasize that kind of individual, mission-focused innovation.

Mentoring fits directly in the mission of the university in terms of providing the students with a unique experience. It prepares them well for graduate schools and for other things. I think the outside world would say, “Look how well prepared they are academically,” but what happens in the relationship between faculty and students is just as significant, because you see what happens when students connect with faculty members in an individual way, and their conversations can go well beyond what the lab work is about. They’re the kinds of conversations that really shape and strengthen the testimonies of students in ways that are hard to measure but that are really important. That’s one aspect of a BYU education that we’ll continue to put resources into.

The major limiting factor on mentored learning is the time of the faculty. And I say that not to criticize the faculty, but to remind the administration that we need to be sensitive to the fact that mentoring is labor intensive. We’re not diminishing traditional classroom teaching; we’re not diminishing scholarship; mentoring is an add-on, so we need to be thoughtful as an administration about it. But I think that it’s a key component that’s essential for us to keep focusing on.

Wayment: OK. So your approach is to kind of let things come forward and then evaluate and strengthen as needed.

Worthen: Occasionally the board may have some things, and there may be ideas that we have as an administration, that we want to go forward. But I really think that as people get inspiration, the right kinds of things will happen for the university as a whole. So we’ll facilitate that process and sometimes we’ll see university-wide adoption of what faculty or departments are doing individually.

Wayment: Excellent. That’s a great insight. We’re going to ask you some questions about the RSC. You may not have known this when you quoted Karl Maeser in your opening remarks to the faculty, but Called to Teach: The Legacy of Karl G. Maeser is one of our most recent books. I take it you’ve had a chance to read the book, at least in part?

Worthen: Yes, I read it all this summer. I know it’s egocentric to think it was written just for me, but it was very timely to have the book come out just as I started my presidency. I knew some about Karl Maeser and some other things in the book, but not much. I have reread it a couple of times; it’s a wonderful story.

Wayment: We are proud of it obviously, and we were so very pleased to hear that you had used it. Is there anything that stands out in the book as helping you, like Pestalozzian philosophy or knowing Karl?

Worthen: Yes, a few things come to mind. One is the extent to which Maeser’s secular education prepared him for his spiritual insights. The philosophy of Pestalozzi and others was about the broader education of the entire person. Now, I’m not enough of a historian about educational theory to know if that was more commonplace than I thought, but you see a lot of Karl G. Maeser’s ideas coming from what others taught him outside the LDS context. I think that has a couple of lessons for me. Number one, we need to
remember we haven’t got a corner on the truth. Therefore we must engage with the world: many people out there will have insights for us that will prepare us for our unique mission.

Worthen: Which represents Karl well.

Worthen: Exactly. It’s a reminder there are a lot of people who may not share our doctrine but who do share our values, and we should not be afraid to share our ideas with them, to say, “Here are some things that you might resonate with.” The other lesson I learned from reading about Karl’s formal education was the need to recognize God’s hand in this work. Karl G. Maeser was really the founder of the academy in many ways, and all the things that happened to prepare him and to prepare others to be in that position are pretty remarkable. It’s more evidence of the hand of the Lord in establishing and guiding this university.

Wayment: These last couple of questions that we have are more about you. You were a BYU student, and you’ve been here for a quite a while. Could you speak to our college students, basing your statements on your own experiences here? What counsel would you give them?

Worthen: This statement wasn’t original to my father, but my father, who was a school administrator as I was growing up, constantly said, “Don’t let schooling get in the way of your education.” I have to be careful when I say this: I don’t want students to skip their classes. But there’s a lot to an education that happens outside the classroom. It’s easy for students who have been very successful and who are now in an environment where everybody’s been successful to think they’ve got to spend all their time studying. It’s important to spend a lot of time studying, but there are so many other things to do to enhance your education. There are two kinds of things that happen on campus that I would urge students to get involved in. One of those is all the things that happen on any campus, like artistic performances, athletic events, and lectures. There’s just always something happening on campus, and this is really a wonderful time to enjoy life. Add to that the spiritual things, like devotionals, that happen at BYU. It’s interesting that as we survey our students three years after they graduate, they say that the thing that most affected them spiritually was attending devotionals. There are more students who watch devotionals outside of the Marriott Center rather than inside, so they’re getting it. But I think that if you were to ask, “What would you do over again?” a lot of those alumni would say they would have gone to devotionals more often.

Wayment: Yes, and been physically in attendance.

Worthen: And been physically in attendance. I wish I would have paid attention to those kinds of things when I was a student. The Sperry Symposium is an excellent example. Attendance at something like that might have an impact spiritually that will be more important than most of the classes that students take here. So it really is important to take full advantage of what’s here at BYU.

That idea also provides a way of thinking about one of our challenges, which is that we have an increasing number of students who would succeed here academically but who are turned away because of our enrollment cap. The challenge is to come up with a mechanism of getting the right students here—and by right students, I don’t just mean academically qualified. We need the students who are going to take full advantage of the things that are unique to BYU. When we get students who say, “I don’t really care where I go; BYU is just another place to me. I could go to Stanford, Yale, or BYU; it’s all the same,” I say, “Then maybe you should go somewhere else, because we want people to whom it matters.” They are the ones who are going to take full advantage of the unique aspects of BYU.

Wayment: That’s a good insight. Would you speak to religion students for a moment? Would you share what you came away with or how it shaped you?

Worthen: Yes, that’s a good question. But my answer may be a reflection not so much of what I experienced here, as what I now wish I had known more fully at that time. And that is, to just reassure students that, as simple as it sounds, the gospel really is true, and it’s all-encompassing. It really answers all of our questions, and though that doesn’t mean that the answers are easy or that we’ll even discover them, they are out there. There is certainty out there, and in Religious Education, especially, we have the chance to look for truth with confidence. The gospel reassures us that truth really does exist, and part of our mortal experience is discovering true principles and learning how to apply them. We couldn’t sit up in the spirit world and just memorize all gospel truth. You don’t really understand those principles fully until you’ve experienced them in the midst of all the turmoil that comes with our mortal existence. It’s easy to get lost in that turmoil. Religious Education provides a place where you can step back and say, “There really are answers to these questions.” Think about how this Living Prophets class or this New Testament class relates to the struggles you are having in biology and everything else in life. Because of the gospel, you can put those struggles in context and learn
those skills that will enable you to move forward with faith in times of uncertainty, secure that there are answers out there.

It is focusing in on the basic skill set, if you will, of how you study, how you reconcile ideas, and how you approach uncertainties or things that appear to be inconsistent. Helping the students understand uncertainty is as important for learning as the content they acquire.

Wayment: So the comfort in seeing someone handle uncertainty and seeing how they handle it is more important than the answer.

Worthen: Yes, exactly, and I think it’s better if you can help them have the experience themselves. It’s helpful for the students to see that the faculty are really bright people who have studied with the best in ancient languages or ancient scripture and that they’re still faithful, and they still ask questions. It’s helpful for students to see faculty who can say that the original Greek word or the original Hebrew word means this, and that this provides a new way of thinking about the issue. For students to see that approach is good, but for them to experience it is even better.

Wayment: Well, I want to ask one concluding RSC question. Are you broadly familiar with us?

Worthen: Broadly familiar, that is a good description.

Wayment: We were founded by Elder Holland in 1975, and our mission has been to publish meaningful LDS studies that are academically responsible but at the same time faithful in their tone. If you reflected on that mission now, what would you say about it?

Worthen: Well, I’m certainly familiar with various RSC publications over the years—say, the Religious Educator and other publications. I think those publications are a good example of the part of the mission statement that says, “In meeting these objectives, faculty and students should be anxious to share their service and scholarship with the Church in furthering its mission worldwide.” I look at the Religious Educator and say, “That’s what it’s doing.” Its influence is not limited to BYU. I know that kind of material is used by lawyers I know. They read that kind of thoughtful material from BYU, and it makes a difference for them. They’re in an environment where there is a lot of cynicism. There’s a lot of uncertainty about things, and it’s easy sometimes to lose their way. It’s so good to have somebody who can say, “Here’s a thoughtful way to approaching this particular topic.” I think it’s easy to underestimate what a profound effect that kind of publication has on people—people who never set foot on campus, but who still read those kinds of things.

Wayment: That’s really helpful feedback. Sometimes we fall into the notion that we’re speaking to other professional faculty who teach religion. It helps to have a broader perspective that we are actually speaking to the Church and are sharing our skills.

Worthen: Yes, I really think it fits that part of the mission statement that speaks to our being “anxious to share” our service and scholarship in furthering the work of the Church worldwide. And it’s helpful not just for other professional educators. Everybody is a teacher in the Church at one time or another. Over the years people have told me, “Have you seen this article in this BYU journal?” They are people who want to be able to articulate the reason for the hope that lies within them. The Religious Educator provides it in a way that helps them explain it to others, and that’s a very powerful impact that goes well beyond professional educators.
The Prophet’s troubles began on the evening of May 6, 1842, when someone shot former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs in his home in Independence, Missouri.

On September 1, 1842, three days after emerging from three weeks of hiding to avoid arrest for allegedly plotting to assassinate former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs, Joseph Smith wrote a letter “to all the saints in Nauvoo” explaining the need for them to keep more complete records of their baptisms for the dead.1 Not surprisingly, Joseph also took the opportunity to comment briefly on his flight from legal authorities. “They pursue me without cause,” he wrote in the first sentence of his letter, “and have not the least shadow, or coloring of justice, or right on their side, in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; . . . their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest die.” Joseph then told those with whom he was doing business that he had left his affairs in capable hands, and assured his supporters that he would return when “the storm was fully blown over.”2

Two days later Joseph was back on the run, having barely escaped arrest while having lunch on September 3.3 Four days after that, on September 7, Joseph—still in hiding—dictated a second, longer letter to the church giving additional instructions on baptisms for the dead. Unlike his first letter, Joseph said nothing about his situation in this second letter, which concluded
Joseph's protestations notwithstanding, others soon took up the cry. Chief among these was John C. Bennett, whose immoral conduct and incorrigible attitude had resulted in his excommunication at precisely the same time news of the attack on Boggs was working its way east to Nauvoo. Evidently trying to save face after his fall from grace, Bennett wrote a series of letters to the editor of Springfield’s Sangamo Journal attacking Joseph Smith and the Church. In his first letter, dated June 27, 1842, Bennett merely repeated the charges that had been leveled against Joseph in Missouri in 1838. But in his second and third letters, dated July 2 and 4, 1842, Bennett brought his attack up-to-date by providing a plausible explanation for how, precisely, Joseph was involved in the attempt on Boggs’s life: Joseph had prophesied in a public meeting in 1841 of Boggs’s imminent death, Bennett charged, after which he sent Orrin Porter Rockwell to fulfill the prediction. Written from the perspective of a former insider on Nauvoo affairs and accompanied by several affidavits supporting his testimony, Bennett’s letters added an air of authority to what had earlier been vague rumor.

On July 20, 1842, less than one week after Bennett’s letters were published, Boggs—who recovered fully from his wounds—signed two affidavits before justice of the peace Samuel Weston regarding the attempt on his life. Boggs told Weston that “he believes and has good reason to believe from Evidence and information now [in] his possession that Joseph Smith . . . was Accessary before the fact of the intended Murder,” with Orrin Porter Rockwell serving as the trigger man. Boggs also reported that “the said Joseph Smith is a Citizen or resident of the State of Illinois” and asked the governor of Missouri to “make a Demand” on the governor of Illinois “to Deliver the said Joseph Smith . . . to some person Atherised to receive and Convey him” to Jackson County, Missouri, “there to be dealt with according to Law.”

In legal terms, Boggs was asking that Joseph Smith be extradited to Missouri to stand trial. According to the US Constitution, however, one can be extradited only if he is charged with committing a crime in one state and then fleeing to another. Boggs’s affidavit made no such charge; it simply accused Joseph, a resident of Illinois, of somehow being “accessary” to the crime before it was committed but made no reference to his being in Missouri to commit the crime or fleeing to Illinois afterward. Without such a charge, there was no legal basis for initiating extradition proceedings—a technical deficiency which Boggs, a former governor, should have been aware

Joseph spent the following day, beginning at 7 a.m., commanding the 2,000 troops of the Nauvoo Legion in the morning, visited an ailing Lyman Wight at some point, and possibly attended the Masonic lodge in Nauvoo in the evening. In spite of Joseph’s well-documented presence in Nauvoo, however, enemies of the Church were linking the attack on Boggs to Joseph Smith and urging public officials to arrest him as early as May 14—the same day, incidentally, that news of the attack first reached Nauvoo. The accusations hit print one week later when the editor of the Quincy Whig repeated a rumor that Joseph had prophesied a year earlier of Boggs’s death “by violent means.” Understandably alarmed at such reports, Joseph wrote immediately to the Whig’s editor, denying any complicity in the affair and making the very reasonable suggestion that Boggs, as a politician, had probably been shot by a political enemy.
of. Whether he was ignorant on this point or simply chose to disregard it is unclear.

The same ambiguity exists regarding the understanding and motives of the then-current governor of Missouri, Thomas Reynolds, to whom Boggs was directing his plea. On July 22, 1842, two days after Boggs signed his affidavit, Reynolds filled out a printed requisition form and sent it to Illinois governor Thomas Carlin for the “surrender and delivery” of Joseph Smith to the state of Missouri. After referencing a supporting document (in this case, Boggs’s affidavit), the printed form noted that the person charged with the crime was a “fugitive from justice” who had “fled to” another state—even though, as we have seen, the supporting document made no such claim in this particular case. Whether Reynolds was aware of the transformation or not, his use of the printed form essentially rewrote Boggs’s affidavit to fit the constitutional requirements for extradition, and at the same time helped to hide its glaring deficiency under a layer of legal documentation.

The final step in the process presented no surprises. On August 2, 1842, having learned from “the Executive authority of the State of Missouri” that Joseph “fled from the justice of said State and taken refuge in the State of Illinois,” Illinois governor Thomas Carlin issued a warrant for Joseph’s arrest. Like Reynolds before him, Carlin was given Boggs’s affidavit but either missed or ignored its deficiency—a lapse that becomes positively ironic when he states that his actions were “pursuant to the Constitution and Laws of the United States.” Carlin addressed his warrant to Thomas King, undersheriff of Adams County, Illinois, and directed him to deliver Joseph into the custody of Edward Ford, agent for the state of Missouri. Carlin issued a similar writ for Rockwell’s arrest, based on a similar requisition from Reynolds.

Six days later, on August 8, 1842, King and two other men—probably Ford and James Pitman, a constable from Adams County—arrested Joseph and Rockwell for their alleged roles in the attempted assassination. Both men immediately applied to the Nauvoo Municipal Court for writs of habeas corpus. Demonstrating his knowledge of extradition law, Joseph justified his application on the grounds that he could show the court “the insufficiency of the writ and the groundlessness of the charge” against him. “I shall be able to prove before your honors that I was not out of the State of Illinois nor in the State of Missouri for the last two years,” he wrote, “and that I was not accessory to said assault, . . . not knowing anything about the intended assault nor anything concerning it until I was informed of it some time after it had occurred.”

Granting Joseph and Rockwell their petitions, the court issued two writs of habeas corpus directing King to bring both men before the court “without excuse or delay” for an examination into the charges against them.

The writs of habeas corpus saved Joseph and Rockwell from extradition but not in the way the municipal court intended. After being served with the writ, William Clayton recorded in Joseph’s journal, King “hesitated complying . . . for some time on the ground (as he said) of not knowing whether this city had authority to issue such writ.” After lengthy consultation, King and his companions decided to leave Joseph and Rockwell in the custody of Nauvoo city marshal Henry G. Sherwood “and returned to Quincy to ascertain from the governor,” Clayton continued, “whether our charter gave the city jurisdiction over the case.” King took the warrants for Joseph’s and Rockwell’s arrest with him to Quincy, however, having either forgotten or never known Sherwood could retain the prisoners only if he had the arrest warrants in his possession. No one present felt obligated to remind King of that specific requirement, with the result that Joseph and Rockwell were free the moment the lawman left Nauvoo.

King returned two days later, evidently with instructions to comply with Reynolds’s requisition and see that Joseph and Rockwell were conveyed to Missouri. Both men had gone into hiding during his absence, however—Rockwell ultimately traveling as far as Pennsylvania and New Jersey to avoid arrest, Joseph remaining closer to home. King spent several days in the area looking for them, at the same time threatening to burn Nauvoo to the ground if Joseph and Rockwell could not be found.

Joseph spent his first few days in hiding at the home of his uncle John Smith in Zarahemla, across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo in Iowa Territory. From there he moved to the home of Edward Sayers on the Illinois side of the river north of Nauvoo. After six days at Sayers’s home, he moved to Carlos Granger’s home in the northeast part of Nauvoo, where he stayed for two days before making his way to his red brick store. Four days later, having received a note from Emma indicating that she could care for him better at home than anywhere else, Joseph went home, although he waited until after dark to do so. Not until another six days had passed did he feel secure enough to make a public appearance.

With King and other lawmen lurking about, keeping Joseph both safe and informed during this three-week period of hiding was no small task for his friends and supporters. Every precaution was taken to ensure that someone
visiting Joseph did not accidentally betray his whereabouts to authorities from Illinois or Missouri. As he moved from John Smith’s home in Iowa to Sayers’s home in Illinois, for example, Joseph met with Emma and a few trusted friends on an island in the Mississippi River after dark on the night of August 11.26 The following day, William Walker, with Joseph’s favorite riding horse in tow, crossed the river to Iowa “in sight of a number of persons . . . to draw the attention of the Sheriffs and public, away from all idea that Joseph was on the Nauvoo side of the river.” Only after that idea had been firmly planted in everyone’s mind did William Clayton and John D. Parker visit Joseph at his hideout north of Nauvoo, and even then they waited until after dark.27 The ruse paid off, however, with “several small companies of men” searching for Joseph in Montrose, Nashville, Keokuk, and other places in Iowa Territory the following day. “They saw his horse go down the river yesterday,” Clayton recorded, “and was confident he was on that side.”

Emma and others went to even greater lengths to throw pursuers off Joseph’s track on August 13 and 14 after her preparations to visit Joseph in a carriage attracted unwanted attention. Leaving the carriage at home, Emma walked downriver to Elizabeth Durphy’s house. After a short wait, William Clayton and Lorin Walker folded up the cover of the carriage in front of Joseph and Emma’s home to make it clear that Emma was not inside and started down the river. The two men quietly picked Emma up at Durphy’s, after which all three continued down the river—the opposite direction from where Joseph was hiding at Sayers’s north of Nauvoo—for another four miles. They then doubled back towards Nauvoo, skirted the city on its east side by two miles, and entered the trees closer to the river north of town. Even then, Parker dropped Emma and Clayton off a mile away from Sayers’s and returned home with the carriage, leaving Joseph’s visitors to cover the remaining distance on foot. Returning home the following day, Clayton and Emma—accompanied by Erastus Derby, who had been staying with Joseph—slogged along a muddy road to the river where they boarded a skiff and crossed over to the islands in the river before turning south. “Soon after we got on the water,” Clayton recorded, “the wind began to blow very hard and it was with much difficulty and apparent danger that we could proceed.” Finally reaching a point opposite Nauvoo, they rowed west between two islands and landed at Montrose, at which point Derby left to return to Joseph, and Clayton and Emma hitched a ride in another skiff crossing to Nauvoo.28 Anyone who may have been watching Emma’s return in hopes of finding where Joseph was hiding would have thought he was on the Iowa side of the river.

Adding to the stress of the situation were the rumors that met Joseph’s supporters at every hand. On August 11, they heard that the sheriff of Lee County, Iowa Territory, might be joining the hunt.30 Two days later, two reports arrived: first, Carlin had decided that extradition was illegal in this case, and that he “should not pursue the subject any further”; and second, Edward Ford, the agent from Missouri who was charged with conveying Joseph to Jackson County for trial, had returned home. Although both were favorable, Joseph’s friends didn’t accept either as legitimate. “All this it is thought is only a scheme got up for the purpose of throwing us off our guard,” Clayton wrote, “that they may thereby come unexpected and kidnap Joseph and carry him to Missouri.”31 By the morning of August 15, rumors were rampant that a militia unit was on its way to Nauvoo. Although these were readily dismissed as “a scheme to alarm the citizens,” another report received that evening from the Carthage postmaster seemed more legitimate. “[H]e had ascertained that the Sheriffs were determined to have Joseph,” Clayton recorded, “and if they could not succeed themselves they would bring a force sufficient to search every house in the City, and if they could not find him there they would search state &c.” Seven men were soon on their way by different routes to Sayer’s house to pass the word on to Joseph, who “prepared to leave the city, expecting he was no longer safe” when he first heard the news. As he learned more, however, Joseph decided against leaving Sayers’s at that point, and sought to calm the frazzled nerves of his friends. “He discovered a degree of excitement and agitation manifest in those who brought the report,” wrote William Clayton, who was present, “and he took occasion to gently reprove all present for letting report excite them, and advised them not to suffer themselves to be wrought upon by any report, but to maintain an even, undaunted mind.” The men calmed down after hearing Joseph’s words, but all concluded that Joseph should be prepared at a moment’s notice to leave for the Church’s lumbering operation in Wisconsin Territory if necessary.32

Joseph’s ability to soothe others during this difficult period belies the stress he himself was feeling, and the almost desperate measures he considered taking to avoid capture. Both are evident, however, in some of the letters he wrote to various associates while in hiding. After six days on the run, for example, Joseph sent some instructions to Wilson Law, major general of the Nauvoo Legion, outlining what Law should do if Joseph were caught. Noting
that his orders were “the result of a long series of contemplation” and that he had concluded “never . . . to go into the hands of the Missourians alive,” Joseph instructed Law “forthwith, without delay, regardless of life or death to rescue me out of their hands” in the event of his capture. Joseph told Law that he would stay in hiding “for months and years” if necessary to avoid such a showdown and that he hoped his enemies would eventually “become ashamed and withdraw their pursuits” when they could not find him. “But if this policy cannot accomplish the desired object,” he reiterated, “let our charter, and our Municipality; free trade and Sailors rights be our motto, and go a-head David Crockett like, and lay down our lives like men, and defend ourselves to the best advantage we can to the very last.”

In a letter to Emma the following day, Joseph admitted that the only thing that “kept [him] from melancholy and dumps” was the kindness and conversation of Erastus Derby, “which has called my mind from the more strong contemplations of things,” he wrote, “and subjects that would have preyed more earnestly upon my feelings.” He also wrote almost wistfully about going to Wisconsin, the idea having been suggested just the night before. “I must say,” he told Emma, “that I am pre-possessed somewhat, with the notion of going to the Pine Country. . . . I am tired of the mean, low, and unhallowed vulgarity, of some portions of the society in which we live; and I think if I could have a respite of about six months with my family, it would be a savor of life unto life, with my house.” Indicating that this was no mere pipe dream, he then outlined a plan by which he could, if necessary, meet Emma and their children north of Nauvoo at the house of John Taylor’s father, after which they would all “wend [their] way like larks up the Mississippi” to safety.

As time progressed, it became clear that no such trip north would be necessary—at least not at the moment. The threat of capture had waned enough by August 23 that Joseph quietly returned home that evening, and by August 26 he was meeting with members of the Twelve and others about various issues. His first public appearance came three days after that, on August 29, when he appeared unexpectedly at a conference and addressed those present. Two days after that, on August 31, he addressed the Nauvoo Female Relief Society in an outdoor meeting. The following day, Thursday, September 1, 1842, either “in the large room over the Store” during the morning hours, or “at home attending to business” in the afternoon, Joseph wrote his first letter to the Church about baptism for the dead. To all appearances, life for Joseph seemed to be returning to normal.

Joseph evidently planned to read this September 1 letter himself to the assembled Saints the following Sunday, but such was not to be. The day after writing the letter, Joseph received word “to the effect that the Sheriff with an armed force, was on his way to Nauvoo.” More bad news arrived the next morning, Saturday, in the form of a letter from David Hollister, who informed Joseph “that the Missourians were again on the move.” Then, while Joseph was having lunch with his family shortly after noon that same day, three officers—including James Pitman and Edward Ford, two of the authorities who had helped arrest Joseph and Rockwell on August 8—arrived at his home, having reached it “on foot, undiscovered until they got into the house,” by coming up the river and hitching their horses below the partly constructed Nauvoo House. While John Boynton, who was visiting Joseph that day, stalld for time, Joseph quietly left the house through a back door and made his way to the red brick store. Later in the evening he moved to the home of Edward Hunter, where he stayed until returning home seven days later on September 10.

With Pitman, Ford, and others in the neighborhood watching for their chance, Joseph was unable to read the letter on baptism for the dead to Church members on Sunday, September 4. Rather than postpone its delivery, though, Joseph sent it to William Clayton with the request that it be read at the meeting. Clayton saw that Joseph’s instructions were followed, and while he did not record who actually read the letter to the Church, he did note that its contents “cheered their hearts and evidently had the effect of stimulating them and inspiring them with courage, and faithfulness.” At some point, too, Clayton began copying the letter into Joseph Smith’s journal, which was being kept at that time in “The Book of the Law of the Lord”—a large (17 × 11 × 2.25 inches), leather-bound volume in which donations for constructing the Nauvoo Temple were also recorded. Clayton copied approximately half of the letter’s first sentence (through “or coloring of justice, or right”) under the date of September 4, 1842, in Joseph’s journal before turning the task over to Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of Joseph Smith who was living with the Smith family at the time. Snow copied the remainder of the letter, including Joseph’s name at the end, into the journal. Clayton also made a separate copy of the letter himself at some point, and the Times and Seasons published a copy of it in the September 15, 1842, issue of the paper under the title “Tidings.” All of this is to say that in spite of the adverse conditions under which this letter was produced—or, perhaps, because of those conditions—multiple copies
of this letter were in existence within days of its delivery to the Church on September 4. The letter entered Mormon canon two years later as section 105 of the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.31

The letter’s contents suggest that Joseph wrote much of it after his narrow escape on September 3. As we have seen, Joseph was not in hiding the day the letter is dated—September 1, 1842—and he had recently made two public appearances, including one with the Nauvoo Female Relief Society just the day before. Yet the letter opens and closes with references to his flight, making it clear that he is on the run at the time of writing. Quite possibly he began writing the letter on September 1 or wrote an early draft of it on that date and then rewrote or amended it without changing the date after his circumstances deteriorated on September 3.

Joseph closed this letter by telling the Saints that he would “write the Word of the Lord from time to time” on the subject of baptism for the dead and other topics, and send such writings to them by mail.42 He was not long in making his promise good. On September 7, 1842, just three days after his first letter was read publicly, Joseph—still in hiding at Edward Hunter’s home—dictated his second letter on baptism for the dead, and "ordered [it] to be read next Sabbath."43 Four days later, accordingly, assembled Church members heard this second letter, "[t]he important instructions" of which, Clayton recorded, "made a deep and solemn impression on the minds of the saints."44 As with the first letter, multiple copies of this letter were quickly made: Eliza R. Snow copied it in its entirety into Joseph’s journal under the date September 11, 1842—the day it was read—in “The Book of the Law of the Lord,” Clayton made a separate copy, and a copy was published in the October 1, 1842, issue of the Times and Seasons.45 Two years later, the letter was published as section 106 of the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.46 All of these copies date the letter to September 1 or wrote an early draft of it on that date and then rewrote or amended it without changing the date after his circumstances deteriorated on September 3.

Joseph continued this same vein after line after line, to the point that the “short relation” of his circumstances to Bennet now occupies two full pages of the large Book of the Law of the Lord. Even then, he admitted, “I cannot express my feelings.”47

Joseph tentatively came out of hiding at the end of September, only to learn, again, that his hopes were premature. On September 19, 1842, after seven weeks of failure on the part of officers from both Missouri and Illinois to capture Joseph himself, Missouri governor Thomas Reynolds offered a reward of three hundred dollars to anyone who could capture either Joseph or Orrin Porter Rockwell, and six hundred dollars for the capture of both.50 Not to be outdone, Illinois governor Thomas Carlin issued a “Proclamation” the following day, September 20, 1842, offering a reward of two hundred dollars “to any person or persons, for the apprehension and delivery” of Joseph or Rockwell to the authorities.51 News of the rewards reached Nauvoo on October 1, and it was followed five days later by a report that ”many of the Missourians were coming to unite with the Militia of this State [Illinois], voluntarily and at their own expense” to search Nauvoo if Joseph was not arrested elsewhere. The Prophet and his associates initially tried to downplay the potential effectiveness of the rewards and the reliability of the report about the Missourians, but eventually concluded “[f]rom the situation and appearance of things abroad” that Joseph should leave home “untill there should be some change in the proceedings of our enemies.”52
returned home on October 28. “From the appearance of thinks [things?] abroad,” Clayton wrote after Joseph’s arrival in Nauvoo, “we are encouraged to believe that his enemies wont trouble him much more at present.”

Joseph’s reading of the situation proved correct, with November and the first part of December 1842 passing by uneventfully. As a fugitive with a price on his head, however, Joseph’s only hope of finding lasting security was through due process of the law. An opportunity to do so safely first presented itself in mid-December, when Illinois State Supreme Court justice Stephen A. Douglas suggested to some of Joseph’s supporters that they petition newly elected Illinois governor Thomas Ford to revoke Carlin’s warrant and proclamation for Joseph’s arrest. With the help of Justin Butterfield, US district attorney for Illinois, Joseph’s associates immediately prepared and presented such a petition to Ford, who, unsure of his authority to “interfere” with Carlin’s official acts, asked the six justices of the state Supreme Court who were in the area how he should proceed. All six agreed, Ford wrote to Joseph later, “that the requisition from Missouri was illegal and insufficient to cause your arrest, but were equally divided as to the propriety and Justice of my interference with the acts of Governor Carlin.” Not wishing “to assume the exercise of doubtful powers,” Ford recommended that Joseph “submit to the Laws and have a Judicial investigation of your rights” and promised Joseph protection should he find it necessary to go to Springfield to do so. Butterfield, in his own letter to Joseph, seconded Ford’s counsel and told him that he (Butterfield) could bring the case up on a writ of habeas corpus before either the Illinois Supreme Court or the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Illinois. “I will stand by you and see you safely delivered from your arrest,” the district attorney promised.

With the district attorney of Illinois, all available justices of the Illinois Supreme Court, and the new governor of Illinois all on his side, Joseph’s fortunes had clearly turned. Their immediate and decisive support also validates Joseph’s claim that the proceedings against him were blatantly illegal and calls into question—as Joseph also had—the motives of Thomas Carlin and other officials in their pursuit of Joseph when the case against him was so obviously problematic. Of more immediate concern to Joseph, though, was the glimmer of hope such support provided, which he wasted no time acting upon. Taking Ford and the others at their word, Joseph and several of his friends left Nauvoo two days after Christmas for Springfield, where they arrived on December 30, 1842. Joseph made the trip in the custody of his friend Wilson Law, who

had arrested him on the authority of Carlin’s September 20 proclamation in order to prevent someone else from doing the same as they traveled. After Joseph arrived in Springfield, Ford issued a new arrest warrant against him that replaced Carlin’s original August 2, 1842, warrant and allowed Joseph to be arrested by William F. Elkin, sheriff of Sangamo County, Illinois, to whom a writ of habeas corpus on Joseph’s behalf could then be issued.

Other cases and delays prevented Joseph’s habeas corpus hearing from being held for another five days, by which time Justin Butterfield, who was serving as Joseph’s legal counsel, had decided that the Federal Circuit Court was the appropriate court for the hearing, since extradition was a constitutional issue. When Joseph’s case was finally called up on January 4, 1843, before Judge Nathaniel Pope, Butterfield argued for Joseph’s discharge from arrest on the grounds that Missouri governor Thomas Reynolds’s requisition to Illinois governor Thomas Carlin had misrepresented the contents of Boggs’s affidavit. Boggs had accused Joseph of being an “accessory before that fact” and a “resident of Illinois,” Butterfield pointed out, but had said nothing that would justify Reynolds identifying Joseph as a “fugitive from justice” who had committed a crime in Missouri and then fled to Illinois.

The final validation for Joseph’s position came the following day in the official decision of Judge Nathaniel Pope, who fully agreed with Butterfield’s assessment of the situation:

It must appear that he [Joseph] fled from Missouri to authorise the Governor of Missouri to demand him. . . . The Governor of Missouri, in his demand, calls Smith a fugitive from justice . . . [and] expressly refers to the affidavit as his authority for that statement. Boggs, in his affidavit, does not call Smith a fugitive from justice, nor does he state a fact from which the Governor had a right to infer it. . . . [T]he governor [Reynolds] says he [Joseph] has fled to the state of Illinois. But Boggs only says he is a citizen or resident of the state of Illinois. . . . For these reasons, Smith must be discharged.

After reviewing Pope’s opinion, Thomas Ford issued an official order the following day, January 6, 1843, discharging Joseph from arrest and certifying “that there is now no further cause for arresting or detaining Joseph Smith herein named by virtue of any proclamation or executive warrant heretofore issued by the Governor of this state.”60 Joseph was free.

In the end, the case against Joseph was a casualty of its own illegality—an illegality that was evident to everyone who examined it with an unbiased eye. Unfortunately for the Prophet and his friends, it had taken five months before such people could be found in Illinois’s legal system. With the searches,
the hiding, the rumors, and the threat of returning in chains to Missouri, the ordeal had been a difficult one for everyone involved. But it had not prevented Joseph from fulfilling his role as a prophet. The two letters he wrote to the Church during this time provided the doctrinal and procedural foundation upon which the Church initiated its practice of baptism for the dead, and upon which it continues the practice today in temples around the world.

As dark and frightening as this five-month period was, it had not stopped the work of the Restoration from rolling forward.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith first taught about baptisms for the dead at the funeral of Seymour Brunson on August 15, 1840, and members of the Church were performing such baptisms in the Mississippi River by September of that year. Records of these early baptisms had been inconsistently kept, however, and had not included names of eyewitnesses. Simon Baker, “15 August 1840 Minutes of Recollection of Joseph Smith’s Sermon,” Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library; Jane Neymon and Vienna Jacques, statement, November 29, 1854, Historians Office, Joseph Smith History Documents, Church History Library; Nauvoo Temple, record of baptisms for the dead, 1841–1845, Church History Library. For more on the early history of baptisms for the dead, see Alexander L. Baugh, “For This Ordinance Belongeth to My House: The Practice of Baptism for the Dead Outside the Nauvoo Temple,” Mormon Historical Studies 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 47–58.


5. Smith, journal, May 6, 1842, in JSP, J2:254. While the Masonic lodge in Nauvoo held a meeting on the evening of May 6, 1842, Joseph’s name does not appear on the list of attendees. Justin Butterfield, however, who represented Joseph at the January 4, 1843, habeas corpus hearing in Springfield, Illinois, reported that he had, in fact, been present. See Nauvoo Masonic Lodge Minute Book, May 6, 1842, Church History Library; Smith, journal, January 4, 1843, in JSP, J2:222.


10. The First Presidency, nine members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and three bishops in Nauvoo had "withdraw[n] the hand of fellowship" from Bennett on May 11, 1842, "he having been labored with from time to time, to persuade him to amend his conduct, apparently to no good effect." “Notice,” Times and Seasons, June 15, 1842, 3:810. See also “To

“they pursue me without cause”: Joseph Smith in Hiding and D&C 127, 128


16. Joseph Smith, petition for writ of habeas corpus, August 8, 1842, copy, Nauvoo, IL, Records, Church History Library; Rockwell, petition for writ of habeas corpus, August 8, 1842, copy, Nauvoo, IL, Records, Church History Library.

17. Smith, journal, August 8, 1842, in JSP, J2:136.

18. Smith, petition for writ of habeas corpus, August 8, 1842; Rockwell, petition for writ of habeas corpus, August 8, 1842.

19. Writ of habeas corpus for Joseph Smith, August 8, 1842, copy, Nauvoo, IL, Records, Church History Library; writ of habeas corpus for Orrin Porter Rockwell, August 8, 1842, copy, Nauvoo, IL, Records, Church History Library.


22. Carlin did not believe that the Nauvoo Municipal Court had authority to issue a writ of habeas corpus in a case like Joseph’s and Rockwell’s where “persons [were] held in custody under the authority of writs issued by the courts, or the executive of the State.” Thomas Carlin, Quincy, IL, to Emma Smith, Nauvoo, IL, September 7, 1842, copied into Smith, journal, September 11, 1842, in JSP, J2:151–52.

23. Orrin Porter Rockwell per S. Armstrong, Philadelphia, PA, to Joseph Smith, Nauvoo, IL, December 1, 1842, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library; Smith, journal, March 15, 1843, in JSP, J2:107.


27. Smith, journal, August 12, 1842, in JSP, J2:84.


31. Smith, journal, August 13, 1842, in JSP, J2:85–86.


39. Joseph Smith to “all the saints in Nauvoo,” September 1, 1842, copied in Smith, journal, September 4, 1842, in JSP, J2:121, n. 449. Snow was sealed to Joseph Smith as a plural wife on June 25, 1842, and lived with the Smith family from August 18, 1842 to February 11, 1843. Eliza R. Snow, affidavit, Salt Lake Co., Utah Territory, 1869, in Joseph F. Smith, Affidavits about Celestial Marriage, 1:25, Church History Library; Eliza R. Snow, journal, August 14 and 18, 1842, February 11, 1843, Church History Library.


42. Joseph Smith to “all the saints in Nauvoo,” September 1, 1842, copied in Smith, journal, September 4, 1842, in JSP, J2:133.

43. Smith, journal, September 7, 1842, in JSP, J2:137.

44. Smith, journal, September 11, 1842, in JSP, J2:150.

45. Joseph Smith to “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” September 6 [7], 1842, copied in Smith, journal, September 11, 1842, in JSP, J2:145–150; Revelation Collection, Church History Library; “Letter from Joseph Smith,” Times and Seasons, October 1, 1842, 3:394–396.

46. JSP, R2:680–690.

47. The journal entry under September 6 notes that Joseph counseled various members of the Twelve about a mission assignment and worked with William Clayton and Newel K. Whitney on a business transaction, and that “nothing of special importance transpired” in the evening. The September 7 entry notes that Joseph “wrote—or rather dictated a long Epistle to the Saints which he ordered to be read next Sabbath and which will be recorded under that date.” Smith, journal, September 6 and 7, 1842, in JSP, J2:133, 137.


49. Joseph Smith, Nauvoo, IL, to James Arlington Bennet, September 8, 1842, copied in Smith, journal, September 8, 1842, in JSP, J2:137–143; quotes from pages 139 to 141.


52. Smith, journal, October 2 and 7, 1842, in JSP, J2:160, 162.


As we learn about Adam and Eve, we learn about every man and woman. Their dilemmas are essentially our dilemmas; their story of salvation is our story of salvation.

Among the doctrines restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith is the soul-pleasing assurance that we are infinitely valued by our Father in Heaven and that his work and glory is to bring to pass our eternal life (see Moses 1:39). The Prophet further taught, “At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it.” Indeed, we “shouted for joy” at the plan when it was made known to us as we learned that it was “God’s will that we be free men and women enabled to rise to our full potential both temporally and spiritually.”

Essential to God’s “great plan of happiness” that enables the glorious possibility of life eternal in his presence is both the necessity and assurance of absolute freedom to choose our eternal fate, and thus from the very beginning God placed us in a “sphere to act for ourselves” in the great saga of eternal progression (see D&C 93:30–31). In the heavenly plan, “agency is absolutely central to our ability to learn and to make correct choices, making it possible to return to our Heavenly Father.” How did God ensure unfettered agency and thus create an equitable sphere for us to act in as we choose our eternal
Wherefore, Ye Are Free

In 2 Nephi chapters 2 and 9, the prophet Lehi and his son Jacob eloquently teach us about agency, accountability, and salvation through the experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As we learn about Adam and Eve, we learn about every man and woman. Their dilemmas are essentially our dilemmas; their story of salvation is our story of salvation. As these prophets unravel the mystery of Adam and Eve and their agency to choose the course of life they would travel, we likewise begin to understand God’s plan for all mankind and how our agency and accountability are perfectly preserved within that divine plan.

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient. . . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator . . . or to choose captivity and death, according to the . . . power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27). In this passage, Lehi assures us that every “expedient thing” has been provided in God’s eternal plan such that his children are ultimately free to choose liberty and eternal life or captivity and spiritual death. No external force or entity can, or will, prevent us from realizing the desires of our hearts unless we choose to give away that agency. The Prophet Joseph taught: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. . . . The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.” Thus our fate rests in our hands, not that we can “save ourselves,” but that we may choose Christ, who can save us, or Satan, who desires to enslave us.

Elder David A. Bednar has taught: “In the grand division of all of God’s creations, there are things to act and things to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:13–14). As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity for independent action and choice. Endowed with agency, you and I are agents, and we primarily are to act and not just be acted upon. To believe that someone or something can make us feel [or think a particular way] . . . diminishes our moral agency and transforms us into objects to be acted upon. As agents, however, you and I have the power to act and to choose how we will respond to outside influences.”

To meet the purposes of God in our salvation then, he ordered the plan of salvation such that we were placed in a condition (sphere) wherein we could act for ourselves. To act for ourselves we must have the knowledge, right, and ability to choose something or to not choose it, otherwise there is no meaningful accountability. The range of agency we experience expands as we choose “light and truth,” or contracts as we choose darkness through disobedience (see D&C 93:18–40; Alma 12:9–11). As Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word . . . ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32).

In acting for ourselves, we inexorably move in the direction of the desires of our heart and over time develop a character and destiny of our choosing. This was the fundamental purpose of our Heavenly Father’s plan. That plan perfectly provided for this purpose and hence allowed everyone to ultimately choose his or her eternal fate—no wonder it was also called the “great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) and the “plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25–34). No child of our Heavenly Father would be forced into an eternal kingdom not of their choosing, nor be precluded from attaining the condition of their choice. Indeed, “agency is the impelling source of the soul’s progress. It is the purpose of the Lord that man become like him. In order for man to achieve this it was necessary for the Creator first to make him free.”

All Expedient Things

Expediency gets at the idea of that which is useful or suited to the circumstance in effecting the desired result. What does Lehi include in “all expedient things”? Or, we might ask, what things are required in time and eternity such that every person is free to choose their eternal destiny without force on the one hand or ignorance on the other? Since this is what God desired for his children, what did he include in the gospel plan to make possible the desired result? In 2 Nephi, Lehi masterfully explains God’s plan to ensure perfect freedom through five essential elements and conditions (i.e., “expedient things”): knowledge, opposition, enticement, time, and accountability. The inclusion of each and all of these elements creates a “sphere” wherein our agency can fully function and which allows everyone to attain the desires of their heart (see D&C 93:30).
Knowledge
See 2 Nephi 2:5–8, 13, 26; 9:13–14; Alma 12:28–34; Helaman 14:30–31; Moroni 7:16; D&C 84:46–51; 138:56

SUMMARY
The plan of salvation requires that we be “instructed sufficiently.” This instruction began in the premortal realm and continues in mortality through the Light of Christ, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, the holy scriptures, words of the living prophets, and personal inspiration. Our instruction is completed in the postmortal spirit world preparatory to final judgment.

Every one of our Heavenly Father’s children is progressively instructed relative to the plan of salvation through one means or another throughout their existence. Before final judgment, adequate (i.e., “sufficient”) teaching and choosing will have been the blessing of all mankind. Our understanding of the plan of salvation began at the feet of our Father in Heaven in the premortal world, where we “received [our] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth [to the earth] in the due time of the Lord” (D&C 138:56). In the mortal sphere, some have more or less opportunity to continue in learning truths of the gospel, but all who hearken to the light of Christ within them will be prepared to receive more knowledge of truth when it is available (see D&C 84:47). No person living in any time, culture, or place will be ultimately deprived of any element of truth that would limit their ability to know God, to understand the plan, or to choose salvation prior to their final judgment. To suppose such would deny the perfect character of God and his love for each of us.9

While we are counseled to seek knowledge of every sort (see D&C 88:77–80; 130:18–19), Lehi emphasizes that the critical knowledge we need most to know is twofold: (1) Above all the knowledge imparted by God, awareness of our inability to “work ourselves into heaven,” and hence the absolute need for a redeeming Messiah, stands at the pinnacle of truth’s hierarchy (see 2 Nephi 2:5–8). In the Atonement of Christ, we “have become free forever” to act for ourselves and not to be acted upon (2 Nephi 2:6–9, 26); and (2) knowledge imparted via the “law” or commandments of God (2 Nephi 2:5).

The laws of God teach us right from wrong, good from bad, and better from worse. On the role of the commandments in enabling moral agency, Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught that “God will not act to make us something we do not choose by our actions to become. Truly He loves us, and because He loves us, He neither compels nor abandons us. Rather He helps and guides us. Indeed, the real manifestation of God’s love is His commandments.”10 The “plan” provides that accountability is imposed only after knowledge is gained. Speaking of Adam and Eve, Alma wrote, “Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption” and the consequences of choosing evil (Alma 12:28–32; emphasis added; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Romans 5:13).

Notice that 2 Nephi 2:5 simply states that “sufficient” instruction is necessary. Not perfect instruction or perfectly complete instruction, but merely sufficient instruction. Sufficient to the moment, to the person, to the situation according to the Lord’s will and design. The Prophet Joseph Smith summarized an eternal perspective on gaining sufficient knowledge in this way: “When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil [died] before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.”11

Opposition
See 2 Nephi 2:11–12, 15

SUMMARY
The plan of salvation requires all things to have opposition. Without such opposition we may have awareness of something but cannot discern whether it is good or bad, because it does not exist in contrast to something else. Without such contrasts, all things become a “compound in one,” or without meaning.

Imagine yourself in a restaurant of a foreign country. There are two menu choices before you, neither of which you have any visual recognition for, and you are not able to read the menu description. Are you free to choose? Technically yes, but effectively no. Upon what criteria would the decision be made and what would be the meaning of that decision? If the food looks neither appealing nor unappealing, if you cannot discern whether one is sweet or bitter, spicy or mild, then the choice between them certainly cannot constitute actual freedom but rather mere blind decision. For true agency
to operate, there must be both knowledge and contrasts, or opposition, for choices to really reflect personal desires.

Years ago, I had a friend who was in a coma and on life support for months following an automobile accident. Gratefully, she eventually awoke and partially recovered enough to marry and have a family. During the period of her coma, family and friends struggled over her state and future. She wasn’t dead but could not be considered more than technically alive; she didn’t seem happy but neither did she seem sad. Was she hungry or full, at peace or anxious? No one could tell. Sadly, she seemed to be a “compound in one” (2 Nephi 2:11). That is precisely Lehi’s point. If things do not exist in contrast or opposition to one another, there is technically nothing between which to choose and hence we could experience neither “happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Nephi 2:11). We would not be free to choose because our choices would have no distinguishing characteristics. The plan of happiness required opposition to be introduced such that agentive choice could reflect the desires of our hearts.

An oft-asked question deals with whether God’s perfections would allow him to place Adam and Eve in the midst of “contradictory” or opposing commandments (e.g., “multiply and replenish” but don’t partake of the tree of knowledge). Second Nephi 2:15 settles the question: Yes, God did place the two trees (commandments) in opposition to one another because Adam and Eve could not have been “free to choose” (2 Nephi 2:27) if there was only one choice. President Boyd K. Packer taught, “There was too much at issue to introduce man into mortality by force. That would contravene the very law essential to the plan.”12 So it is with us, and though God is not the author of evil, he made provisions for evil to be present in mortality, thereby requiring active choosing from moment to moment.

Enticement

See 2 Nephi 2:16–18; D&C 29:39; Moroni 7:12–17; James 1:12–14

SUMMARY

Though one may have knowledge and opposition (thus creating a sphere wherein agency may function), we may not act without being “enticed” by the choices. God always entices us to choose good, and Lucifer always entices us to choose evil. Each pulls in opposite directions such that we must make the choice. God will not force us to choose good and he has not given Lucifer power to force us to choose evil.13

Think again of the food dilemma in the foreign restaurant. If the menu items had a description in your language, the description would “entice” you one way or another. For example, “spicy hot and delicious,” or “low-fat and soothing.” Now the foods beckon to your desires and entice you towards consumption or avoidance. You are left to choose as informed by the nature of the product and your personal desire of the moment. But mortality was not designed to simply reflect a choice between “spicy or mild.” It is a purposeful tutorial often studded by contrasts between good and evil. God always entices us toward goodness, joy, and peace, while Lucifer always entices us toward evil, misery, and unrest (see 2 Nephi 2:18; Moroni 7:12–17).

This concept is the theme of a hymn: “Know this, that ev’ry soul is free / To choose his life and what he’ll be; / For this eternal truth is given: / That God will force no man to heaven. / He’ll call, persuade, direct aright, / And bless with wisdom, love, and light, / In nameless ways be good and kind, / But never force the human mind.”14 In opposition, lyrics reflecting Lucifer’s plan might read like this: “Know this, that no soul is free to choose his life and what he’ll be; for this eternal truth is given: that Satan wishes no man to heaven. He’ll call, persuade, direct awry, and impart ignorance, hate, and darkness, in nameless ways be evil and unkind, and always try to force the human mind.”

Contrast the edifying descriptions of God and his great plan of happiness with what Jacob calls the “cunning plan of the evil one.” Lucifer’s plan was to usurp the power of God and destroy our agency as he seeks to make us all miserable like unto himself (see Moses 4:11, 3; 2 Nephi 2:18, 27). In 2 Nephi 9:28–39, Jacob observes the consequences of vain, frail, and foolish mortals who reject God and hearken to the enticements of Satan. Satan’s plan encourages them toward intellectual pride, which leads to disobedience; love of money and neglect of the poor; ears that will not hear the word of the Lord and eyes which will not see truth and salvation; uncircumcised hearts; lying; murdering; immorality; idol worship; and a persistent refusal to repent. In summary, President Packer taught that it is “the single purpose of Lucifer to oppose the great plan of happiness.”15 Elder Robert D. Hales has observed:

It is our sins that make the devil laugh, our sorrow that brings him counterfeit joy. Although the devil laughs, his power is limited. Some may remember the old adage: “The devil made me do it.” Today I want to convey, in absolutely certain terms, that the adversary cannot make us do anything. . . . Every decision we make, we are either choosing to move in his direction or in the direction of our Savior. But the adversary must depart if we tell him to depart. He cannot influence us unless we allow him to
do so, and he knows that! The only time he can affect our minds and bodies—our very spirits—is when we allow him to do so. In other words, we do not have to succumb to his enticements.

President Howard W. Hunter also noted:

God's chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, but he will not do so in violation of our agency. . . . To countermand and ultimately forbid our choices was Satan's way, not God's, and the Father of us all simply never will do that. He will, however, stand by us forever to help us see the right path, find the right choice, respond to the true voice, and feel the influence of his undeniable Spirit. His gentle, peaceful, powerful persuasion to do right and find joy will be with us "so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved."17

In bitter irony, Lucifer, who in the premortal realm had "sought to destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3) and make them "miserable like unto himself" (2 Nephi 2:27), was cast down to earth to help ensure the full exercise of that agency. Though not responsible for every temptation in the world (see James 1:14–15), Lucifer plays a role in providing both opposition and enticement: "And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves" (D&C 29:39). Because he "knew not the mind of God," he thought he could destroy the plan of happiness by enticing us toward evil, while in reality he was merely assisting the plan to work precisely as designed by God (see Moses 4:6).

Lucifer, who entices with evil and lies, became known among the righteous as the deceiver, "the father of all lies" (Moses 4:4–6). He must entice with lies because the truth is that the things he wants us to love and do always will bring misery and captivity in time. Thus, in order to entice us, he has to lie and tell us they'll bring happiness! When we partake, we eventually become miserable like him and often proclaim in our hearts, "It was a lie—I'm not happy like I was persuaded to believe I would be" (see Helaman 13:38; Alma 41:10; 30:53, 60). What sadness is reaped when we follow Lucifer! What joy and peace comes from following God! "God loves us; the devil hates us. God wants us to have a fullness of joy as He has. The devil wants us to be miserable as he is. God gives us commandments to bless us. The devil would have us break these commandments to curse us."18

It is important to note that if the force and power of enticement from either God or Lucifer were overwhelming, we would not be free. The very power of such enticement would coerce our choice in that direction. Generally, God ensures that the forces of enticement are relatively equal in strength, thus leaving us to choose according to the desires of our hearts. During difficult challenges, we sometimes forget this principle and cry out: "Why doesn't God just make it more plain if he wants me to do this?" "Why didn't God prevent that?" Or "Why doesn't he just give me a clear sign so I'll know without any doubt?"

Though heartfelt, each of these yearnings would, if answered, contravene the plan and nearly force us by the sheer strength of their "enticement" (i.e., answer) to choose that path. Instead of living by faith and the "still small voice" beckoning us to choose good or to proceed in a certain direction, we sometimes want God to make the choice for us by virtue of the very power of his enticements. Though understandable, such desires would in reality weaken our agency that is the fundamental building block of the plan of salvation.

"The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. . . . Occasionally it will press just firmly enough for us to pay heed. But most of the time, if we do not heed the gentle feeling, the Spirit will withdraw and wait until we come seeking and listening and say in our manner and expression, like Samuel of ancient times, 'Speak, for thy servant heareth.'"19

Time

See 2 Nephi 2:27; Alma 12:24, 26; 34:32–35; 42:4–13; Mormon 9:28; D&C 29:42; Matthew 6:24

SUMMARY

The plan of salvation mercifully includes a period of time (probation) for us to learn by our own experience to choose good or evil. With time, we experience the necessary repetition that enables us to see clearly the consequences of our choices. Eventually, our minds and hearts become settled in a determination to "hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24).

Lehi taught that our days "were prolonged, according to the will of God, that we might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, [our] state became a state of probation" (2 Nephi 2:21). Subsequent prophets repeatedly emphasize the same theme, that our time on earth is a time of choosing and experiencing
the consequence of those choices and they continually encourage us to mark
that time by drawing near to God: “For behold, this life is the time for men
to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to
perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). “And thus we see, that there was a time
granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and
serve God” (Alma 42:4).

President Ezra Taft Benson has noted, “Daily, constantly, we choose by
our desires, our thoughts, and our actions, whether we want to be blessed or
cursed, happy or miserable.”20 In time, we become more disposed to choose
in the direction of past choices. The outcomes of our persistent choices begin
to evidence the “rewards” of such choices and incline us to choose similarly
again. Habits and opinions are formed and the desires of our hearts become
clearer to us. Such clarity may, at times, startle us and give the necessary impe-
tus to change (repent), or it may simply confirm in us the direction we have
chosen to travel.

A favorite story gets at this point: “Once there were two men who met in
the sunshine on the street. These men often spoke of important things. And
one day one of them said, ‘Good and evil are like two dogs inside me, vying
for dominance, clawing and biting and snarling.’ ‘Oh?’ his companion asked.
‘Which one wins the fight?’ The first man looked at his friend with candid
eyes and answered simply, ‘The one I feed.’”21 So it is with all of us—over
time we decide to nurture certain types of thought patterns and behaviors
that eventuate into a settled character for eternity. This truth is effectively
conveyed in these couplets: “We sow our thoughts, and we reap our actions;
we sow our actions, and we reap our habits; we sow our habits, and we reap
our characters; we sow our characters, and we reap our destiny.”22 Similarly,
Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “What we insistently desire, over time, is what
we will eventually become and what we will receive in eternity. . . . Only by
educating and training our desires can they become our allies instead of our
enemies.”23 Though a sometimes reluctant convert to this principle of char-
acter development, I have come to be grateful for the blessing of time. If we
are faithful, time heals wounds, salves the troubled soul, brings wisdom, and
gives us opportunity to discover who we really are and what we most desire.
And God has provided in the end that all will obtain that kingdom which we
most truly desire as evidenced by our thoughts, actions, habits, and character
developed through the exercise of agency.

While we may experience a powerful instantaneous witness of a gospel
principle through the Spirit, only time yields the proving ground for our
adherence to such witnessed principles. We may hear a talk on service to oth-
ers and feel the burning witness that the principle is divine, but only through
our sacrifice in service over time do we really learn that “when ye are in the
service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah
2:17; see also Matthew 25:34–45). We may be deeply stirred by a call to share
the gospel with others, but only through sharing it ourselves over time do we
truly understand that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” and if
we “bring, save it be one soul unto [Christ], how great shall be [our] joy with
him in the kingdom of [the] Father” (D&C 18:10, 15). Our hearts may be
touched by the soft wisdom seen in those who have endured great suffering
and trials, but only through our own righteous endurance of such trials do we
feel the indescribable kinship with our Lord, who counseled that “all these
things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 121:7–9).
The very nature of learning in this mortal sphere requires time, or, as the scrip-
tures phrase it, “a state of probation” (2 Nephi 2:21).

Accountability

27; D&C 101:78; 130:20–21; 137:7–10

SUMMARY

The plan of salvation requires that every person be accountable for, and at some
time experience, the consequences inextricably tied to their choices. However, we
also realize that there are consequences that befall us incident to actions of others
and from which we may not fully escape during mortality. In the “merciful plan
of the great Creator” we will be freed from all such consequences as they are swal-
lowed up in the Atonement of our Lord.

What good would freedom to choose be if we did not receive the conse-
quences of such choices? Our faith would wane and our desire to act would
wither if accountability had little or nothing to do with our actions. We could
not be sure if our righteous actions would become a blessing or curse, ben-
efit or disadvantage. At its worst, the resulting insecurity would paralyze our
faith and our will to choose. Perhaps this is precisely how Satan “sought to
destroy the agency of man,” by simply disassociating agentive action from
consequential accountability and thus, no matter what a person chose or
failed to choose, Lucifer would still “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1–3). In contrast, God knew that for true agency to be granted unto us, perfect accountability must also be preserved. The plan of salvation requires that no good thought, deed, or desire of the heart will go unrewarded and vice versa.

“God intends,” said Elder Christofferson, “that His children should act according to the moral agency He has given them, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. It is His plan and His will that we have the principal decision-making role in our own life’s drama. God will not live our lives for us nor control us as if we were His puppets. . . . In matters both temporal and spiritual, the opportunity to assume personal responsibility is a God-given gift without which we cannot realize our full potential as daughters and sons of God. Personal accountability becomes both a right and a duty that we must constantly defend.”

In time, our spirits and bodies take on the nature of the eternal kingdom in which we choose to dwell. In the resurrection and final judgment, we receive a body consistent with the choices we make. Those who hearken to a will that we have the principal decision-making role in our own life’s drama. God will not live our lives for us nor control us as if we were His puppets. . . . In matters both temporal and spiritual, the opportunity to assume personal responsibility is a God-given gift without which we cannot realize our full potential as daughters and sons of God. Personal accountability becomes both a right and a duty that we must constantly defend.”

Elder Christofferson has noted, “The Atonement also satisfies the debt justice owes to us by healing and compensating us for any suffering we innocently endure.” President Packer further emphasized this comforting truth when he taught, “The mercy and grace of Jesus Christ are not limited to those who commit sins either of commission or omission, but they encompass the promise of everlasting peace to all who will accept and follow Him and His teachings. His mercy is the mighty healer, even to the wounded innocent.”

Our time of probation allows us to learn by our own experience the consequences of our choices. Those choices will be both bad and good as we develop the desires of our hearts and determine the direction we wish to travel in this mortal state. To our everlasting gratitude, sinful choices can be atoned for and healing can come through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Alma summarized the absolute necessity of the Atonement in allowing perfect accountability despite the perils inherent in our time of mortal probation when he taught: “And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

W e cannot escape the consequences of our choices for better or for worse. We are free to choose how to act but the “merciful plan of the great Creator” has set the boundaries and outcomes of those decisions.
We are not free to choose the consequential dimension of our actions, but we are free to access the compensating grace of the Atonement (see 2 Nephi 2:26).

Summary

The holy scriptures testify that without true agency being granted unto humankind, God's very work and glory could not be realized. Through the Book of Mormon, we learn that like Adam and Eve, all of God's children are—in time and eternity—placed in spheres to act for themselves through knowledge, opposition, enticement, probation, and accountability. Together, these elements ensure perfect freedom of choice and thus our eternal judgment and destiny are, in the end, absolutely controlled by the choices that grow out of the desires of our hearts (see D&C 137:9).

In God's perfect plan, we have been made free to act, not to be acted upon. This could not have been the case without the plan of salvation and the divine Atonement of Christ that is the very heart of that plan. With its saving grace, the Atonement unconditionally delivers us from the grasp of consequences that resulted from acts not of our own doing. And with its enabling grace, we can be delivered from our own sins and find strength beyond our own to choose that which will best benefit us and others.

Indeed, in our sphere of agency we have been made "free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil," and we must "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" (2 Nephi 2:27–28). 18

Notes

1. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 209.
8. The style of this presentation includes a set of scriptural references after each element is introduced. From the information in these references, a summary statement in italic has been crafted. The author hopes that the reader will take time to study the references when each element is introduced to further set the stage for remarks made in each section.
11. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 268.
21. Author unknown.
22. Quoted by Wayne S. Peterson, "Our Actions Determine Our Character," Ensign, November 2002, 84; see also Mosiah 4:30; and Alma 12:14.
23. Neal A. Maxwell, "According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts," Ensign, November 1996, 21–22. "If you are not proactive in educating your desires, the world will do it for you. Every day the world seeks to influence your desires, enticing you to buy something, click on something, play something, read or watch something. Ultimately, the choice is yours. You have agency. It is the power to not only act on your desires but also to refine, purify, and elevate your desires. Agency is your power to become. . . . Always ask yourself, ‘Where will this choice lead?’ Develop the ability to see beyond the moment." Randall L. Ridd, "The Choice Generation," Ensign, May 2014, 56–57.
24. Christofferson, "Free Forever, to Act for Themselves" (inscript scriptural quote is from D&C 101:78).
The Apostle Paul communicated eternal principles that were important in the meridian of time and remain important in the restored Church today.

Much can be gained in understanding scripture passages by learning how modern prophets have employed them. For example, Mary Jane Woodger and Michelle Vanegas Brodrick demonstrated how our perceptions of 1 Nephi 8 and 11–14 have been shaped by the manner in which Church leaders have utilized these verses. The purpose of this paper is to examine how members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve have used the writings of Paul between 1970 and 2013. Paul’s writings are clearly of great importance; biblical scholar F. F. Bruce referred to Paul as one of “the great letter-writers in world literature,” and James D. G. Dunn writes that “Paul was the first and greatest Christian theologian.”

In order to determine which Pauline passages (including Hebrews) have been most frequently quoted by modern prophets, we utilized the database located at scriptures.byu.edu. This database links scriptures to general conference talks and other quoted writings of Church leaders. A screenshot from scriptures.byu.edu is displayed in figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that Romans has been quoted 1,421 times; 1 Corinthians, 2,459 times; and so forth. Figure 1 focuses on 2 Thessalonians 2 (quoted 86
times), and one can see a breakdown (by chapter) of how many times each chapter has been utilized. By exploring further, one can see which verses in 2 Thessalonians 2 have been used. For example, next to 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2, we see “(61-O, 66, LR).” This indicates that in the October 1961 general conference, Elder LeGrand Richards utilized these verses on page 66 of that conference’s report.

Because scriptures.byu.edu includes references to talks given by people outside the scope of this study (e.g., members of the Seventy or Apostles speaking prior to 1970), the first step in analyzing how the Pauline epistles were quoted was to identify instances in which modern Apostles (members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, referred to as “Apostles”) have quoted any verse of the Pauline epistles. Table 1 illustrates the number of times the Pauline epistles have been cited by Apostles during the period 1970–2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pauline Epistle</th>
<th>Number of Times Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Corinthians</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galatians</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippians</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colossians</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thessalonians</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Thessalonians</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Timothy</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Timothy</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titus</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philemon</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Screenshot of scriptures.byu.edu

Our specific purpose in this article is to focus on the most frequently cited Pauline passages and identify how they have been utilized. After tabulating how frequently individual Pauline verses were employed, we found that many verses had multiple references in which a single verse was used. For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 was quoted seven times within the parameters of this study, but 2:1–4 was quoted twice, 2:1–10 once, 2:2–7 once, and 2:3, 7 twice. Because 2 Thessalonians 2:3 was a part of multiple sets of verses, we counted it as being quoted thirteen times instead of seven. Because this situation arose with many other verses, we consistently used the accumulated count (often resulting in a passage of multiple verses) in order to determine which passage was most frequently utilized. A list of the ten single verses that were most frequently utilized is found in appendix B.
The Top Ten Most Frequently Quoted Pauline Passages

The ten Pauline passages that have been most frequently utilized by modern Apostles are outlined in Table 2.

In the following sections we describe how these ten passages have been utilized by Apostles over the past forty-four years.

Table 2: The ten most frequently quoted Pauline passages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Number of Times Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 15:19–23</td>
<td>“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 4:11–16</td>
<td>“Carried about with every wind of doctrine”</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 2:18–22</td>
<td>“Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 2:9–14</td>
<td>“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Timothy 3:1–7</td>
<td>“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 3:16–17</td>
<td>“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God . . . ?”</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Timothy 4:12</td>
<td>“Let no man despise thy youth”</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 6:10–18</td>
<td>“Put on the whole armour of God”</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 10:13</td>
<td>“But will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippians 4:6–7</td>
<td>“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Corinthians 15:19–23

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Three major themes emerged from an analysis of the Apostles’ use of 1 Corinthians 15:19–23. First, these verses were employed to teach that our divine inheritance of immortality can provide hope and can aid in our quest to live gospel principles. For example, Elder Neal A. Maxwell emphasized this point when he said, “Viewing life without the prospect of immortality can diminish not only hope but also the sense of personal accountability.”

A second theme in which these verses were used was to explain relationships between the Fall, the Atonement (including the Resurrection of Christ), and the resurrection of all mankind. For example, President James E. Faust said, in conjunction with these verses, “through the Atonement and those singular events surrounding it, all of the terrible individual and collective sins of all mankind were taken upon the Lord’s shoulders. The marvelous result of this great suffering was that He was able to redeem from physical death the believers and the obedient as well as the unbelieving and disobedient. Every person ever born or yet to be born is the beneficiary of both the mediation and the atonement of the Savior.”

A third theme in which these verses were used was to bear simple yet profound apostolic testimony of the Savior of the world, even Jesus Christ, who overcame death that we might live again. Just prior to quoting 1 Corinthians 15:22, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who utilized 1 Corinthians 15:20–22 more than any other Pauline passage (see appendix A), said, “Thanks be to the Almighty. His glorified Son broke the bonds of death, the greatest of all victories.”

Ephesians 4:11–16

“And be gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints. . . . That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”

An overarching theme illustrated by the use of these verses is that of the Apostasy and the Restoration. They talk not only of the Restoration in a proselytizing context but also of the blessings of having apostles and prophets on the earth today. One such blessing is that of being warned against false doctrine, as when Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “Those who view every calamity and measure every new assertion of discovery against the standard of revealed truth need not be ‘tossed to and fro’ but can be steady and at peace.” Another warning against false doctrine is when President Spencer W. Kimball said, “We cannot expect to live in times of turbulence without experiencing some of that turbulence ourselves. But we do not need to be ‘tossed to and fro, and carried about [by] every wind of doctrine’ without anchor. . . . We have present-day prophets to guide us.” Other blessings mentioned by the Apostles
in connection with this passage include correcting the Saints as needed and helping the Church strive in unity\(^{18}\) to achieve perfection.\(^{19}\)

_Ephesians 2:18–22_

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

President Harold B. Lee, who quoted this passage more than any other Pauline verses (see appendix A), utilized Ephesians 2:20 to establish the principle that the true Church of Jesus Christ "could not be accomplished as set forth by a man-made formula; it could only be accomplished when the fullness of the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ are taught and practiced."\(^{20}\) Spencer W. Kimball and Gordon B. Hinckley, each speaking as President of the Church, referenced this passage in a similar fashion, in order to state that Christ established a divine church that continues into the present day.\(^{21}\)

Another prevalent theme illustrated by Apostles in the use of these verses is that members of the Church, especially new converts, are now part of the "household of God." As members of God’s household, we have both privileges\(^{22}\) and responsibilities\(^{23}\) regarding this matter. For instance, repentance is a prerequisite to full enjoyment of fellowship with the Saints.\(^{24}\) On six different occasions between 1970 and 2013, President Thomas S. Monson used these verses to invite members of the Church to reach out and include others in the household of God. Most recently, he said, "With this thought in mind, let us reach out to those for whom we are responsible and bring them to the table of the Lord to feast on His word and to enjoy the companionship of His Spirit and be ‘no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.’"\(^{25}\)

A third theme is the metaphor of the Church as a building with a foundation of prophets and apostles and the Savior as the chief cornerstone.\(^{26}\) The Apostles illustrate the need for prophets and apostles in the lives of Latter-day Saints and of all people. Most frequently, they used the metaphor when testifying of the restored Church,\(^{27}\) as when President Harold B. Lee said, "When the revelations of the Lord are clearly understood, there is set forth the only basis of a united and universal church."\(^{28}\)

1 Corinthians 2:9–14

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Many Apostles relate these verses to the acquiring of spiritual knowledge. Some provide suggestions about how to know things that are spiritually discerned—for example, "[evaluating] our experiences in terms of the enlarged perspective of eternity,"\(^{29}\) keeping a humble attitude,\(^{30}\) relying on the Spirit,\(^{31}\) and putting off "the things of the flesh."\(^{32}\)

Others gave insight into ways spiritual knowledge is not acquired. Elder Oaks said, "Scientific methods will not yield spiritual knowledge."\(^{33}\) President Boyd K. Packer taught that "the witness is not communicated through the intellect alone, however bright the intellect may be."\(^{34}\) President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught that "spiritual light cannot be discerned by carnal eyes."\(^{35}\)

The phrase "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" has been consistently quoted in each decade from 1970 to 2013. When this verse is quoted, Apostles consistently focus on the power that can come as we keep an eternal perspective. For example, President Kimball, who referenced 1 Corinthians 2:9 more than any other Pauline verse (see appendix A), encouraged Latter-day Saints to pay tithing, assuring them that rich blessings are promised to those who do so.\(^{36}\) Other areas highlighted in connection with this verse include how an eternal perspective can help us overcome trials,\(^{37}\) handle grief,\(^{38}\) and recognize our divine potential.\(^{39}\) One unique way in which this passage was used was by Elder Maxwell, who said, "We are not now ready for all things the Lord has prepared in the City of God for them that love Him. Our present eyes are unready for things which they have not yet seen, and our ears are not prepared for the transcending sounds and music of that city. The trek will be proving and trying. Faith, patience, and obedience are essential, but he who completes the journey successfully will be immeasurably added upon."\(^{40}\) Thus Elder Maxwell illustrates that there is still much work for each of us to do.

2 Timothy 3:1–7

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be . . . ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."
Apostles have consistently cited 2 Timothy 3:1 to state that we are living in the perilous times foretold by Paul.44 It is interesting to note that this claim has been continually made throughout the decades from 1970 to 2013. For example, in 1971, President N. Eldon Tanner stated, “We must remember that Satan is always on the job, determined to destroy the work of the Lord and to destroy mankind, and as soon as we deviate from the path of righteousness, we are in great danger of being destroyed. . . . Conditions in the world today cause us to reflect on the prophecy made by Paul to Timothy, wherein he said: ‘This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.’”42 In addition to stating that we are living in perilous times, Apostles also specify the signs of the perilous times by continuing to list the signs of the times outlined by Paul.43 Others focused specifically on the condition of the human family during these perilous times44 as well as the strength of the adversary during these times.45

In 2 Timothy 3:7, Paul speaks of those who are “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” For example, Elder Oaks used this verse to point out that we need to be selective with the information we choose to consume and allow significant prayer and contemplation as we seek to transform our knowledge into wisdom.46 Elder Maxwell taught that we need to accumulate knowledge but have a purpose with it.47 President Marion G. Romney stated that man’s divine nature is a portion of “the knowledge of the truth” that intellect alone cannot grasp.48 Thus intellectual knowledge alone is not sufficient to withstand the perilous times in which we live.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

Of the thirty-three times this verse has been quoted, 40 percent (thirteen) have been by President Monson. When he employed these verses, he frequently emphasized the personal choice involved in choosing to treat our bodies as temples.49 He also listed things that are physically harmful to our bodies as temples and those things that are physically helpful to our bodies as temples. He emphasized that pornography, drugs, certain music, alcohol, immodesty, coffee, and tea all hinder the building of ourselves as temples. However, he emphasized that physically building our bodies as temples includes “nutritious meals, regular exercise, and appropriate sleep.”50

President Lee used these verses in connection with “the sacredness of our individual bodies.”51 In 1971, prior to his call as Church President, President Kimball used these verses as a contrasting point with contemporary voices calling for more sexual permissiveness.52 In October 2000, President Hinckley used these verses in two separate conference talks (Relief Society and priesthood sessions) to emphasize that the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve have taken the position . . . that ‘the Church discourages tattoos. It also discourages the piercing of the body for other than medical purposes, although it takes no position on the minimal piercing of the ears by women for one pair of earrings.”53

1 Timothy 4:12

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

This verse has been quoted thirty-two times since 1970, and it is particularly noteworthy to examine in which general meetings this verse was used. Among the four general sessions of general conference, this verse was quoted thirteen times. In contrast, it was used nineteen times in the priesthood and Young Women sessions. In the historical context of this verse, Paul is speaking to young Timothy and, appropriately, it has been used in conference to address the young men and young women of the Church.

A recurring theme emphasized by multiple Apostles centers on the phrase “Let no man despise thy youth.” In 2009, President Packer outlined scriptural accounts of great prophets accomplishing great tasks at young ages to reiterate this point.54 Likewise, in 1997, President Hinckley shared a story in which he answered the BBC Radio Worldwide Service reporter’s claim of missionary callowness with these words: “Callow youth? It is with these missionaries today as it was with Timothy in the days of Paul. It was Paul who wrote to his young companion, saying, ‘. . . Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.’”55 In addition to addressing the youth, some Apostles referenced 1 Timothy 4:12 as they spoke to youth leaders. For example, President Monson, who used 1 Timothy 4:12 more than he used any other verse in the Pauline epistles (see appendix A), stated, “Leaders of youth, remember the Apostle Paul’s counsel to Timothy. . . . Bishops, place worthy, righteous men as leaders of the Aaronic Priesthood, and the same requirement should be expected concerning Scoutmasters.”56
Ephesians 6:10–18

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

An enduring theme through almost all quotations of these verses is putting on “the whole armour of God.” Many of the Apostles who quoted these verses focused on personal preparation, as when President Howard W. Hunter said, “May I say once more to the youth of the Church—prepare, believe, be ready, have faith. Do not say or do or be that which would limit your service or render you ineffective in the kingdom of God. Be ready when your call comes, for surely it will come. Keep your gospel shoes on.”

The warning that “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” has been proclaimed by President Lee and others. For example, after quoting Ephesians 6:12, President Hinckley said, “We must stand firm. We must hold back the world. If we do so, the Almighty will be our strength and our protector, our guide and our revealer. . . . We will not be left alone. There are many not of our faith but who feel as we do. They will support us. They will sustain us in our efforts.” Presidents Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, and Howard W. Hunter also spoke of the wrestle against spiritual wickedness in high places. President Henry B. Eyring personalized the idea of this battle, stating, “[The Master] faced opposition, and He said that facing opposition would be the lot of those He called. The forces arrayed against you will try not only to frustrate your work but to bring you down.” Many references to these verses included a discussion on elements of the armor of God, with a focused importance of living the gospel in order to survive these troubled times.

1 Corinthians 10:13

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

In analyzing the use of 1 Corinthians 10:13 by the Apostles, it is first interesting to note some basic patterns. Since 1998, it has been quoted eleven times, but only by three Apostles—Thomas S. Monson, Boyd K. Packer, and Robert D. Hales. Since 1989, President Monson has used this scripture eight times, five of which have been during the priesthood sessions of general conference.

Prior to the October 2002 general conference, the language of 1 Corinthians 10:13 was used to refer to the general topic of resisting
temptation. However, since that time, six of the nine instances in which 1 Corinthians 10:13 was used had a specific connection with immorality.64 For example, in the April 2006 general conference, just prior to quoting from 1 Corinthians 10:13, President Monson referred to "the maka-feke of immorality."65

A pattern in which 1 Corinthians 10:13 has been frequently employed is as a source of hope to encourage members in overcoming temptations and other difficult trials. Apostles refer to this verse as a source of assurance,66 promise,67 and wise counsel.68 In some instances, prophets expanded on the idea of temptation to state that God would not allow us to undergo any situation that we could not handle. For example, Elder Maxwell taught, “The Lord knows our bearing capacity, both as to coping and to comprehending, and He will not give us more to bear than we can manage at the moment, though to us it may seem otherwise. Just as no temptations will come to us from which we cannot escape or which we cannot bear, we will not be given more trials than we can sustain.”69 Similarly, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin stated, immediately after quoting 1 Corinthians 10:13, “The Lord does not expect anything of you that you cannot do.”70

Philippians 4:6–7
"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Almost all references to Philippians 4:6–7 focus on the phrase “peace . . . which passeth all understanding.” Multiple prophets discussed how to obtain this peace. For example, Elder M. Russell Ballard stated, “That peace for our troubled hearts only comes to us as we follow the Light of Christ.”71 Other principles that were mentioned as leading to the peace which “passeth all understanding” were obedience,72 repentance,73 and keeping an eternal perspective.74

Frequently Quoted Verses from the Remaining Pauline Epistles
The top ten quoted Pauline passages include references from just five of the fourteen Pauline epistles: 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In the following section of this paper we focus on the most frequently quoted verses from each of the remaining Pauline epistles. This information is summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Most frequently used passages from the eight Pauline epistles not referred to in table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Number of Times Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romans 8:13–17</td>
<td>“Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Corinthians 12:7–10</td>
<td>“A thorn in the flesh”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galatians 6:7–9</td>
<td>“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colossians 1:21–23</td>
<td>“Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thessalonians 5:18</td>
<td>“In everything give thanks”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Thessalonians 2:1–4</td>
<td>“For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titus 2:7–9</td>
<td>“For a bishop must be blameless”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philemon</td>
<td>Philemon was not quoted by any Apostles in general conference from 1970 to 2013.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 11:1</td>
<td>“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Romans 8:13–17
“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

Most of the references to these verses focus on the fact that we are God’s heirs and therefore have the potential to become like him. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “As the sons of God, we also have power to advance and progress until we become ‘joint-heirs with Christ.’”75 In some instances, prophets emphasized that our status as heirs of God comes with the condition of obedience. For example, after quoting verses 16 and 17, Elder Oaks said, “We take these Bible teachings literally. We believe that the purpose of mortal life is to acquire a physical body and, through the atonement of Jesus Christ and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, to qualify for the glorified, resurrected celestial state that is called exaltation or eternal life.”76
2 Corinthians 12:7–10

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

While various segments of this passage have been employed, the most frequently emphasized portion of scripture was the phrase "a thorn in the flesh." This phrase has been utilized in a variety of ways. For example, President Lee likened the thorns to persecution received by Church members, while President Faust likened them to physical appetites. President Monson cautioned that while we may find "thorns in the flesh" of our Church leaders, we must remember that "The Redeemer chose imperfect men to teach the way of perfection. He did so then. He does so now."

Apostles have also taught what to do with the thorns in the flesh with which we are faced. Elder D. Todd Christofferson outlines the importance of covenant keeping in helping to foster the faith necessary to face such thorns. Elder Maxwell indicated that we should have patience with our trials, stating that "when we are given thorns in the flesh, let us not demand to see the rose garden."

Galatians 6:7–9

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. . . . And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Half of the references to these verses focused on the law of the harvest: "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Many of the prophets who quoted them did so to illustrate the positive consequences of righteous living as well as the inevitable suffering which results from wicked choices. President N. Eldon Tanner illustrated this point when he shared, "Punishment and remorse, one way or another, will come to all who wander from the path of truth and righteousness, while obedience to God’s laws brings blessings and happiness. It is that simple: as we sow, so shall we reap."

Colossians 1:21–23

"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

This passage has been most frequently cited by Elder Maxwell (seven of the eight references to this scripture within the parameters of this paper were made by Elder Maxwell). In one instance, Elder Maxwell referred to this passage to encourage members: "being blessed with hope ourselves, let us, as disciples, rather than being contracted, reach out, including to those who, for whatever reason, have 'moved away from the hope of the gospel.'" This verse was also applied for the purpose of encouraging members to build on a sure foundation to avoid falling away from the Church.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Of the three times 1 Thessalonians 5:18 has been quoted by Apostles since 1970, it has been used twice by President Monson. In each of the three instances in which it was used, the speaker indicated the importance of rendering our gratitude to God, even during trying circumstances.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

Second Thessalonians 2:3 has been quoted eleven times by various Apostles since 1970, with one consistent pattern: it has always been quoted in relation to the Apostasy, and the speaker in each instance has followed up by talking about the Restoration. In the words of Elder Ballard, "Do you see how naturally and easily one principle of the Restoration leads to the next?" While others go on to highlight other topics, such as the nature of dispensations, ordinances, specific doctrine, and historical settings of the given time period, all include the coupling between the Apostasy and the Restoration.

Titus 1:7–9

"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre."

Since 1970 this passage has only been employed in conference by President Hinckley. Rather than apply the scripture to the general populace of the Church, he specifically applied these verses to the bishops of the Church. In a span of twenty-five years, his use of this verse and the outline of the message that follows it are nearly identical. In each talk, President Hinckley begins by quoting the verse. Then he expressly states that "those words aptly describe a bishop today in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."
Following, he specifically expresses his love for the bishops and asserts his confidence in them.

Hebrews 11:1

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The Apostles refer to this verse in reference to faith in several different contexts, each of which can be categorized into four groups. Most frequently they speak of faith in its relationship to testimony, as when Elder Wirthlin said, "If we study, ponder, and pray, our faith in the unseen but true things of God will grow. . . . 

With nurturing attention, a tiny seed of faith can grow into a vibrant, strong, fruitful tree of testimony." Faith is also referred to in the context of righteous Saints facing their doubts, its relationship to hope and charity, and its role as the first principle of the gospel.

Therefore, What?

Although it is interesting to see which passages the Apostles use when speaking in general conference, perhaps of greater value is seeing how we may use these findings in our personal scholarship or in the classroom. For instance, these findings illustrate how the Brethren use the teachings of Paul to explain, clarify, or support their teachings. Canonized scripture has been and will continue to be a major source for validating doctrine taught to the Saints, and should be in our classrooms as well.

These findings also show how Paul's teachings may be applied in today's circumstances and spiritual environment. For example, BYU Religious Education typically offers this learning outcome in its New Testament curriculum: "Students who successfully complete the requirements for this course will be able to demonstrate that they have acquired an understanding of how selected New Testament passages can be applied to daily living." The verses we have described in this study could be focal points of classroom discussion at appropriate times so that students can clearly see how to apply the passages in their lives.

We believe that the words of Paul, similar to those of other ancient prophets, were meant not only for those in his time but also for us in the latter days. Through teaching eternal truths in his epistles, Paul reached out to future generations while instructing early Christians. Perhaps Paul offered these truths to prepare Latter-day Saints for the prophesied Second Coming of the Son of God. Paul's perspective transcends the major dispensations of mortality as well as the veil between mortality and life after death.

These findings will help instructors of religious education enhance their teaching by (1) using quotes from the Brethren to understand Paul's teachings, (2) helping students appreciate the value of Paul's teachings for modern-day challenges and personal application, and (3) identifying passages and general conference quotes not previously utilized that will strengthen students' understanding of the Pauline epistles.

This paper raises additional questions for further research and analysis. For example, consider the following questions:

1. When teaching certain topics, do the Apostles refer equally to other scriptures, such as the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants? How do the passages from Paul's epistles uniquely contribute to their teachings?

2. Have leaders from other Christian religions used Paul's passages in a similar way? How have truths revealed through the Restoration influenced our understanding of these same passages?

Conclusion

Paul's teachings have reverberated throughout the centuries. Elder Delbert L. Stapley stated, "I have a great respect for the apostle Paul. I admire his courage, honesty, strength of faith, and deep testimony. I love his teachings and find them equally applicable to the people of today. He was specially chosen, a true witness of the resurrected Christ." Quotes from modern Apostles help us understand Paul's teachings and see their relevance to contemporary conditions in the world.

The Apostle Paul communicated eternal principles that were important in the meridian of time and now remain important in the restored Church nearly two thousand years later. Continual use of Paul's teachings by modern Apostles further validate the value of Paul's teachings for Latter-day Saints. In the same way that today's Church leaders enhance their understanding of gospel doctrine using the Pauline epistles, Latter-day Saints should seek their own understanding by pondering Paul's teachings.
Appendix A

Table 4 illustrates which Pauline passage has been most frequently utilized by each Apostle since 1970. Because some of these individuals spoke infrequently after 1970, we included all quotes given by these individuals in general conference, including years prior to 1970.

Table 4: Most frequently used Pauline passage by each Apostle since 1970

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<thead>
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<th>Apostle</th>
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<th>Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harold B. Lee</td>
<td>73-A, 70-A, 68-A, 63-A, 55-A, 55-A</td>
<td>Ephesians 2:20</td>
<td>“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer W. Kimball</td>
<td>80-O, 77-A, 68-A, 52-A, 49-O, 45-A</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 2:9</td>
<td>“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra Taft Benson</td>
<td>89-O, 87-O, 67-A</td>
<td>1 Timothy 5:8</td>
<td>“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delbert L. Stapley</td>
<td>76-O, 73-A, 70-A, 66-A, 64-O</td>
<td>Romans 1:16</td>
<td>“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion G. Romney</td>
<td>81-O, 71-A, 65-O, 49-O, 49-O, 49-O</td>
<td>2 Timothy 4:6-8</td>
<td>“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeGrand Richards</td>
<td>71-A, 75-A, 75-A, 74-A, 72-A, 70-A, 69-O, 66-O, 58-O</td>
<td>Ephesians 1:10</td>
<td>“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard L. Evans</td>
<td>58-A, 58-A, 58-A, 58-A</td>
<td>Romans 8:6</td>
<td>“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard W. Hunter</td>
<td>88-A, 69-A, 69-A, 63-A, 63-A, 63-A</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 15:5-8</td>
<td>“And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. . . . And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Eldon Tanner</td>
<td>75-O, 67-O, 64-O, 64-A, 63-A, 63-A</td>
<td>Romans 1:16</td>
<td>“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marvin J. Ashton97 76-A, 71-O Hebrews 13:16 "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." 2

Boyd K. Packer 08-O, 05-O, 04-A, 95-A, 94-O, 90-A, 85-A, 70-O 2 Timothy 3:1-2 "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy." 8

Bruce R. McConkie 81-O, 64-O, 64-O, 64-O, 51-O Romans 10:14 "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" 5

David B. Haight 81-A, 73-O 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2

L. Tom Perry 07-A, 06-O, 05-A, 78-0 Ephesians 4:14 "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." 4

James E. Faust 04-O, 04-O, 98-A, 95-A Galatians 3:29 "And if ye be Christ’s, then ye are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise." 4

Neal A. Maxwell 03-O, 01-O, 00-O, 99-A, 95-A, 93-A, 90-O, 95-A Ephesians 4:19 "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." 8

Russell M. Nelson 13-A, 96-O, 96-O, 93-O, 90-O, 87-A, 93-O 1 Corinthians 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 7

Dallin H. Oaks98 09-O, 00-A, 98-A, 87-O 1 Corinthians 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 4

M. Russell Ballard 00-A, 94-O, 99-O, 93-O, 90-O, 88-O Ephesians 4:11 "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." 4

Joseph B. Wirthlin 94-A, 92-A, 89-O, 88-O 1 Corinthians 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." 4

Richard G. Scott No references quoted more than once

Robert D. Hales 13-A, 04-A, 95-O Ephesians 6:17 "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." 3

Jeffrey R. Holland99 98-O, 95-O 1 Corinthians 6:20 "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s." 2

Henry B. Eyring 98-A, 98-O 1 Corinthians 13:4 "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." 2

Dieter F. Uchtdorf 13-A, 12-A, 10-A, 09-A, 08-A, 07-A Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." 6

David A. Bednar100 07-O, 07-A Romans 6:4 "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." 2

Quentin L. Cook No references quoted more than once
Appendix B

As described in the body of the paper, we utilized accumulated counts to determine the most frequently cited Pauline passages. Table 5 lists the most frequently quoted single verses from Paul.

Table 5: The ten most frequently quoted Pauline verses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Number of Times Used</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 15:22</td>
<td>“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Timothy 4:12</td>
<td>“Be thou an example of the believers.”</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 10:13</td>
<td>“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.”</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 2:20</td>
<td>“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippians 4:7</td>
<td>“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 11:11</td>
<td>“Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Timothy 5:8</td>
<td>“But if any provide not for his own, and special for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 2:19</td>
<td>“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prophetic Use of the Pauline Epistles, 1970–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Number of Times Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 1:10</td>
<td>“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 2:14</td>
<td>“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.”</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 11:1</td>
<td>“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

2. We chose 1970 as the starting point of our study because the death of David O. McKay in January of 1970 seemed like an appropriate point with which to begin our focus.
6. This database has been used by others to uncover instances in which prophets have utilized various scriptures. For example, see Ben Spackman, “The Story of Judah and Tamar,” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 1 (2010): 64–74.
8. These quotation counts include general conference addresses as well as teachings found in *Journal of Discourses* and *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*.
9. The prophets, seers, and revelators between April 1970 to December 2013 include the following: Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Mark E. Petersen, Delbert L. Stapley, Marion G. Romney, LeGrand Richards, Richard L. Evans, Hugh B. Brown, Howard W. Hunter, Gordon B. Hinckley, N. Eldon Tanner, Thomas S. Monson, Marvin J. Ashton, Boyd K. Packer, Bruce R. McConkie, L. Tom Perry, David B. Haight, James E. Faust, Neal A. Maxwell, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, David A. Bednar, Quentin L. Cook, D. Todd Christofferson, and Neil L. Andersen. In some instances these individuals spoke in conference prior to being ordained as an Apostle. For example, Elder David B. Haight was an Assistant to the Twelve prior to his call to the Twelve. Quotations prior to an individual being called to the Twelve were not included in our count.


19. For example, see Neal A. Maxwell, "Repentance," Ensign, November 1991, 30.


23. For example, see Thomas S. Monson, "True Shepherds," Ensign, November 2013, 68; and Russell M. Nelson, "Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods," Ensign, April 1996, 16.


26. For example, see Russell M. Nelson, "Salvation and Exaltation," 10; and Mark E. Petersen, "Signs of the True Church," Ensign, May 1979, 23.


42. N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, October 1971, 137.


52. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1971, 10–11.


61. See Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1967, 64; Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1967, 61; and Howard W. Hunter, in Conference Report, April 1979, 35. Note that while the time period for the quotations from Presidents Kimball and Benson is outside the scope of our study, and while these citations were not included in our citation count (which began at 1970), we mention them here to indicate that five of the seven Apostles who later became Presidents of the Church have utilized Ephesians 6:12 in general conference.


73. For example, see Boyd K. Packer, "The Touch of the Master’s Hand," Ensign, May 2001, 14; and Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom," Ensign, November 1996, 84.


75. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and 5:22 were also quoted three times. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 was chosen because it included the most quotations from a President of the church.

76. Titus 2:11–7 has been quoted four times.


84. For example, see Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Have We Not Reason to Rejoice?,” Ensign, November 2007, 20; and James E. Faust, "Of Seeds and Soils," Ensign, November 1999, 48.


86. N. Eldon Tanner, "Why is My Boy Wandering Tonight?", Ensign, November 1974, 87.

87. Neal A. Maxwell, "Hope through the Atonement," 63.


89. M. Russell Ballard, "How Is It with Us?", 53.


91. For example, see Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," Ensign, November 2013, 24; and Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Shall He Find Faith on the Earth?", Ensign, November 2002, 85.

92. See Neal A. Maxwell, "Hope through the Atonement," 61; and Neal A. Maxwell, "Plow in Hope," 60.

93. For example, see Howard W. Hunter, "Faith—The First Step," Ensign, May 1975, 58; and Robert D. Hales, "Finding Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," Ensign, November 2004, 75.


95. Harold B. Lee also quoted Ephesians 4:11 six times (accumulated count). The reason for including Ephesians 4:20 was that it had the most recent use.

96. According to scriptures.byu.edu, Ezra Taft Benson also quoted Galatians 3:17 three times. Upon further investigation, it was seen that two of the counts were for the same reference in the same talk, thus resulting in only two quotations of Galatians 3:17.

97. Marvin J. Ashton also quoted Galatians 6:7, Ephesians 4:31–32, and Romans 11:16 two times each. Reference chosen to be included in the table was based on elimination of accumulated count prevalence, the use of multiple verses, and time reference was used—most recent being preferred (in this order of elimination).

98. Dallin H. Oaks also quoted 1 Corinthians 15:40 four times, but they were not included in the table because it was an accumulated count.

99. Jeffrey R. Holland has also quoted 1 Corinthians 6:18 and Hebrews 11:3 two times each. We chose 1 Corinthians 6:20 because Hebrews 11:3 And 1 Corinthians 6:18 both had one instance in which the text was not directly quoted in the talk.

100. David A. Bednar quoted 1 Corinthians 4:17 and Ephesians 4:13 twice. Ephesians 4:13 was an accumulated count, so it was eliminated from the table. 2 Corinthians 5:17 was not an explicit quotation.

101. Of the verses here, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ephesians 2:20, Ephesians 2:19, and 1 Corinthians 2:14 were included in the accumulated count for the top ten passages.
Dear Son: Lessons from Moroni Chapter 9

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Mormon and Moroni “supply the epilogue to the Book of Mormon, the son drawing freely on his father’s notes and letters.”¹ These notes and letters include fervent testimony, explicit doctrinal teachings, and description of decadence and dissolution. Compared with chapters 8 and 10, Moroni 9 is rather foreboding. The careful doctrinal epistle in chapter 8 turns to a father explaining the horrors of war in chapter 9 as the plight of a family is matched against the predicaments of an era. President Ezra Taft Benson suggests that while reading scriptures we reflect on the purpose and the context of the writers by saying: “If they saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’”²
This paper aims to contextualize Moroni chapter 9 and develop applications that may help teachers in any setting sequentially teach Moroni 9 in a powerful way that leads to understanding and edification. 3 The context is readily established by using the footnotes and other teaching resources, and the given applications are not exhaustive, but rather important principles that lead students and teachers to understand and feel the importance of the doctrine. Ideally, putting the context and content succinctly in this paper will help teachers and students understand the powerful lessons held in Moroni 9.

The Context of Mormon and Moroni’s Scriptural Writing

Near AD 385, Mormon commences to “finish out [his] record” (Words of Mormon 1:9) under the “whisperings” and “workings” of the Spirit (see Words of Mormon 1:7) “according to the knowledge and understanding” (Words of Mormon 1:9) which God revealed to him. Near the completion of the abridgment, Mormon understands the prophecies of Christ, “knowing that many of them have been fulfilled” (Words of Mormon 1:4). Additionally, Mormon believes in other prophecies that “go beyond this day” and “must surely come to pass” (Words of Mormon 1:4). Mormon’s capacity for prophecy and testimony, coupled with inspiration from God, direct his writing. Thus it was under these spiritual conditions that Mormon was led to choose to write about “these things” (Words of Mormon 1:5).

Moroni begins his scriptural writing in Mormon chapter 8 by introducing himself. When reporting the death of his father, he simply states, “I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends” (Mormon 8:5). Moroni chooses to be lonely because the Lamanites put to death anyone who will not deny Christ and Moroni asserts, “I will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander” (Moroni 1:3). The next chapters include information concerning ordinances and church government (chapters 2–6), and chapter 7 is written from “a few of the words of my father Mormon which he spake...unto the people as he taught them in the synagogue” (Moroni 7:1), verses 2–48 being a direct quotation from Mormon’s teaching. Moroni chapter 8 is similarly written, with Moroni clarifying that it is “an epistle” written to him soon after his “calling to the ministry” (Moroni 8:1) to teach against abominations that some members had been practicing by having infant children baptized.

Thus Moroni chapters 1–8 provide a compilation of introductory material and doctrinal treatises from Mormon and Moroni to certify, improve, and teach order in the church. Moroni 9, however, begins intimately. It is not called an epistle but starts simply, “My beloved son, I write unto you” (Moroni 9:1). This communication is different. It isn’t a doctrinal treatise and it lacks the didactic nature of specific priesthood protocols in earlier chapters. This personal letter from father to son is heart-wrenching as it talks about the horrors of war and heart-rending (see Joel 2:13) in its application.

It appears that Mormon died sometime around the age of seventy-four in AD 384 after being fatally injured in the last great Nephite-Lamanite battle. Before Mormon’s death, he entrusts Moroni with the gold plates (Mormon 6:6) and delivers other writings to Moroni which now constitute Moroni 7–9, perhaps knowing “they will be choice unto my brethren” (Words of Mormon 1:6). Some scholars believe that the book of Moroni was written near AD 420–21.5 If these estimates are accurate, Moroni kept the letters from his father for thirty-seven years before transcribing them in the gold plates.

Cultural Context

The scene in which Mormon and Moroni are gripped is one complete revolution of wickedness (see Mormon 2:8, 18–19), a time filled with horror seemingly impossible to describe (see Mormon 4:11–12). Mormon reports on several occasions that he experiences staggering sorrow (Mormon 2:13, 15, 19, 27; 5:9, 11; 6:20), and at one point the sorrow is cut short as he dares “not to give a full account” of what he saw, fearing that others “might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of the people” (Mormon 5:9). The pervasive wickedness simply leaves Mormon “without hope” (Mormon 5:2). Under these circumstances, Mormon writes the now-canonicalized letter to his son.

Moroni chapter 9 is a grisly description of Moroni’s time period. “My beloved son,” Mormon writes, then quickly reports that he is “yet alive” (Moroni 9:1). After the report (which must have comforted Moroni) the letter turns to an awful description of darkness and depravity. Mormon recites the death and destruction of warriors, the thirst for blood and revenge, and complete hatred between warring parties. He also reports the spiritual destruction coinciding with the moral decay: Satan stirring people up in anger, the removal of the Spirit of the Lord, and the absence of love for one another (see Moroni 9:2–5).

Mormon adds to the sickening tale of war, explaining that prisoners taken from the tower of Sherizzah are fed by the flesh of their executed fathers with
minimal amounts of water (see Mormon 9:7–8). Those who remain in abandoned Sherrizah were left with little or nothing for sustenance, forcing the widows and children to forage and wander for food and water, “and many old women do faint by the way and die” (Mormon 9:16). Mormon also concedes that the depravity of his people has left him incapable of enforcing commands and that the people are weak, perverted, brutal, merciless, without civilization, wicked, without principle, and past feeling—“yea, the tongue cannot tell” (Moroni 9:11–19) the awfulness of the situation.

Sadly the events of Sherizzah “doth not exceed” (Mormon 9:8) the actions of Nephite warriors in Moriantum. As a token of bravery, these inhumane soldiers captured many daughters of the opposition and “depriv[ed] them of that which is most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue” (Moroni 9:9). Inexplicably, as if that “token of bravery” were not enough, the daughters were brutally tortured “in a most cruel manner” (Moroni 9:10). Finally, the soldiers would then “devour their flesh like unto wild beasts” (Moroni 9:10). Thus Mormon reports, “My heart cries” (Moroni 9:15).

**Mormon and Moroni to the Reader**

The scene produced by Mormon pushes the boundaries of imagination. It is here that Mormon and Moroni bridge millennia and use the cultural context to teach doctrines and principles of the gospel. Moroni states that future readers were shown to him by Jesus Christ in such detail that he simply explains, “I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). Moroni knew what our day would look like (see Mormon 8:36), and much of the pervasive wickedness may have been similar to his own time period. Like us, Moroni grew up in an era with large population centers and buildings (see Mormon 1:7), a time when governments had enormous numbers of soldiers (see Mormon 1:11), a time when sorceries and magic were in the land (see Mormon 1:19), and a time when society seemed to be in one continual round of wickedness (Mormon 8:8). Though today’s reader of the Book of Mormon and Moroni lived millennia apart, cultural demise occurs regardless of the era, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell explains. He teaches, “Cultural decline is accelerated when single-interest segments of society become indifferent to general values once widely shared. This drift is facilitated by the indifferent or the indulgent as society is led carefully down to hell.” Moroni not only saw our day but also lived in a time that was very similar in terms of wickedness. Mormon and Moroni aptly understood the difficulty of living in trying times and therefore wrote to future readers who must endure the same. Within this cultural and spiritual context, at least three powerful principles and applications emerge from Mormon’s letter to his son.

**Lesson 1: “My Son, Be Faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).**

After reporting the horrific time in which Mormon and Moroni live, Mormon implores his son to rise above the difficulty by simply stating, “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). By describing the atrocities in Moroni chapter 9, youth and young adults (along with their teachers, leaders, and parents) should take heart and square their shoulders, knowing that being faithful is possible even (or especially) when societies and cultures are engrossed in sin. As Hugh Nibley taught, “The picture that these two [Mormon and Moroni] paint of their world, which in their minds has a significant resemblance to our own, is one of unrelieved gloom. The situation is unbelievably bad and, in view of the way things are going, quite without hope.” In the latter days, though society and culture become “unbelievably bad” and “without hope,” Saints can still remain unbelievably good and possess strong hope for the future. The question is not how bad society will become, rather, the interrogatory Mormon wishes upon all readers is “How good can I be?” The battle-hardened Mormon writes of the deplorable nature of war, yet keeps the intensity of a father teaching in the conclusion of his letter: “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).

The difficulty in Mormon’s appeal is all the more stunning as the reader knows Moroni must be faithful while being all alone. In this isolation, Moroni never gives in or gives up. Like Moroni, President Thomas S. Monson was a soldier and has reflected on the wartime necessity of seemingly solitary righteousness. On a Sunday in boot camp an officer separated soldiers by religion to attend worship services. President Monson was left alone at the front, standing at attention after soldiers in the Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant religions were excused. President Monson reflected: “Monson, you are not a Catholic; you are not a Jew; you are not a Protestant. You are a Mormon, so you just stand here!” I can assure you that I felt completely alone. Courageous and determined, yes—but alone. In essence, Mormon teaches his son years ago through writing, and President Monson teaches Latter-day Saints today, that “there will be times when you will face challenges which might jeopardize your testimony, or you may neglect it as you pursue other interests. I
plead with you to keep it strong. It is your responsibility, and yours alone, to keep its flame burning brightly. Effort is required, but it is effort you will never, ever regret.” A first lesson from Moroni 9 inspires the introspective question “Do we have the moral courage to stand firm for our beliefs, even if by so doing we must stand alone?”

Elder Robert D. Hales taught, “In recent decades the Church has largely been spared the terrible misunderstandings and persecutions experienced by the early saints. It will not always be so.” Latter-day Saints have endured and will endure trials that will test their capacity to be “faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). These trials may not come in the form of war and such extreme violence as depicted by Mormon, but they will come, and the same tenacity with which Moroni remained faithful will be required to remain true. A faithful person has the ability to “Look unto [the Lord] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36), acknowledging that “The world is moving away from the Lord faster and farther than ever before. The adversary has been loosed upon the earth. We watch, hear, read, study, and share the words of the prophets to be forewarned and protected.” The faithful are safeguarded by adherence to prophets’ words and council, not only under every circumstance in a difficult world but in every circumstance.

A sorrowful father who has rehearsed the nightmare of living in the midst of cultural demise, war, and spiritual decline clearly defines the lesson to his son—and by Moroni’s inclusion, to us: “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). That is the message. This piece of fatherly council written in a letter, then etched in gold, and ideally written “in the fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3) is needed as Saints traverse today’s culture. Thus Mormon’s methodical recitation of evil is turned into a motivational narrative always to remain “faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).

Lesson 2: “May Christ Lift Thee Up” (Moroni 9:25).

When Mormon reports that he is “without hope” (Mormon 5:2), it is not his “hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19) that is waning. Thus Mormon writes, “May not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death” (Moroni 9:25). To think that Mormon’s writing could lead Moroni to such grief is astonishing. Like Moroni, individuals experiencing the last days may have similar profound grief; however, like Moroni’s time, placing grief in the Atonement of Jesus Christ provides the second lesson: “May Christ lift thee up. . . . and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Mormon 9:25).

Grief is a companion to mortality. The lesson in chapter 9 is that those who grieve can be lifted up by having hope in Christ and letting that hope take mental precedence over grief. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf explains, “Hope is not knowledge, but rather the abiding trust that the Lord will fulfill His promises to us. . . . It is believing and expecting that our prayers will be answered. It is manifest in confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, and patient
perseverance.” It is this type of hope that fortifies Saints to live the gospel, be productive, and illuminate a despondent world by being “lifted up” (Moroni 9:25) by Christ.

This type of hope is necessary in varying circumstances that life imposes upon us. This hope is indispensable for parents yearning for a wayward son or daughter to come home, or a mother who calls the hospital only to find her child is on a waiting list of several hundred, or a father who is trying to focus on the special rather than all the needs when caring for a special needs child. To be lifted up is not to be rescued from burdens, but rather encouraged and motivated within them. The qualities of optimism, enthusiasm, and perseverance converging and centering in the Atonement of Christ allows individuals to find true and lasting hope.

President Monson teaches that having a hope in Christ and a testimony centered in him provides the guidance and supplies the courage to “be faithful in Christ” and to have “Christ lift thee up” (Mormon 9:25). After giving several examples of scriptural Saints who remained righteous in difficult circumstances, President Monson explains:

Perhaps each of these accounts is crowned by the example of Moroni, who had the courage to persevere to the end in righteousness.

All were fortified by the words of Moses: “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid . . . for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee [Deuteronomy 31:6].” He did not fail them. He will not fail us. He did not forsake them. He will not forsake us.

It is this sweet assurance that can guide you and me—in our time, in our day, in our lives. Of course we will face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but also as a determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well.

Hope centered in Christ provided the necessary courage for Moroni to remain faithful. The same hope and courage must remain in individuals who experience grief in the latter days.

Lesson 2 teaches that despondency, dejection, depression, and a life void of hope will not produce the faith necessary to overcome. Living the gospel requires courage and effort in eras of wickedness; however, the wickedness cannot quench hope placed in the Savior. Mormon’s message rings true: may the “hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

Lesson 3: “May the Grace of God Be, and Abide with You” (Moroni 9:26)

Lastly, Mormon desires that Moroni will have “the grace of God the Father” and for that grace to “be, and abide with you forever” (Moroni 9:26). The last recorded doctrinal gem from Mormon is grace, and it is grace that Moroni needs. The Bible Dictionary says it is through “the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power.” Thus Mormon underscores the importance for Moroni to depend on the “enabling power” of Christ and his Atonement to do good works throughout his life. It is the grace of Christ that allows Moroni and Saints in any era to live righteously in degenerate and dissolute societies. Mormon is a father with implicit and unreserved faith in Christ’s capacity to help his son become what President Marion G. Romney called “a heroic example of one’s continuing unto the end under the most trying circumstances.”

The doctrine of grace must have struck Moroni with great force, as it remains one of his last parting thoughts to every reader of the Book of Mormon. Moroni teaches:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:3–5; emphasis added)

It is the same pattern of divine means and assistance that will sanctify and glorify individuals for eternal life with God. To Isaiah the Lord said, “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4). As the gloom of sinful society permeates cultures, Saints must rely on the Savior to carry, bear, and deliver burdens through his grace.
Conclusion

Moroni chapter 9 stands as an unpleasant yet gentle reminder in “the most correct of any book.” The gospel principles and applications discussed in this paper teach that the promise of testimony on page 529 (in the current edition of the Book of Mormon) is an exacting and beautiful reminder that these testimonies must match the faithful fortitude that page 528 demands. In the words of Jeffrey R. Holland, “The reminder is that we cannot sign on for a moment of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence without knowing it will be a fight—a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless.”

These compelling ending chapters of the Book of Mormon portray a culture that is similar to our contemporary society in wicked decadence. Anciently, prophets and parents hoped and pleaded for faithful children, and it remains the same today. The grace of Christ comes to the faithful, extinguishing sorrow and providing hope to the sons and daughters of God who can and will be triumphant in their own personal quest for righteousness. In today’s difficult times, Mormon implores each person and especially his “beloved son” (Moroni 9:1) Moroni to “be faithful in Christ” and have the hope of Christ “lift thee up,” that the “grace of God be and abide with you forever” (Moroni 9:28–29).

Notes

7. Nibley, Since Cumorah, 496.
10. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” 60.
15. For a perspective on caring for a special needs child, see www.oursilentprincess.com.
19. Joseph Smith, as quoted in Book of Mormon title page.
In October 2012, a change in age requirements for full-time missionaries was announced. In the weeks following, missionary applications increased from 700 per week to 4,000, with women making up more than half of the applicants.

In recent years, the rapid growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has caught the attention of scholars, the media, and the public.1 The Church was formally organized in upstate New York in 1830, with only 6 members.2 By the end of 1830, there were 230 members of the Church. In September 2013, Church membership reached 15 million (fig. 1). The Church has been consistently ranked among the fastest-growing religions in the United States, ahead of Catholicism,3 and since 1996, the majority of its membership has resided outside the United States.4 This growth has led some to speculate about the future ratio of Church members to the world population both because world growth is slowing down and because religious demographics are transforming worldwide.5

Several factors probably contribute to the Church’s rapid growth. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was listed as a religion with great

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“I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw” (1 Nephi 14:12).
overall member commitment, with three-quarters attending church services at least once a week.6 Latter-day Saints also have strong social networks, large families, and a thriving missionary program.7 Political and religious climates throughout the world may also have an effect on LDS growth, although it is unknown to what extent this is the case.

Since 1964, the world’s population has grown at a decreasing rate.5 For example, from 1963 to 1964, the world population increased by 2.2 percent, but from 1964 to 1965, the increase was 2.1 percent.6 In the 1970s, the average annual percent increase in the world’s population was 1.9 percent, in the 1980s it was 1.7 percent, in the 1990s it was 1.5 percent, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century it was 1.2 percent. In some countries, including Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, and China, the birthrate is lower than what is required to maintain the current population size, and many other countries are expected to follow suit within the next century.10 According to Census Bureau projections, the pace of the world’s population growth will continue to decline to less than 0.5 percent by 2050.11

In addition, the world’s religious composition seems to be turning away from mainstream Christianity. Over the last century, Christianity in some parts of the world has begun to give way to increasing portions of agnostics, atheists, or other groups. A comprehensive demographic study conducted by the Pew Research Center identified that 34.8 percent12 of the earth’s population was Christian in 1910. This number dropped slightly to 31.7 percent13 in 2010. Although an increase in the percentage of Christians has occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia Pacific, an overall decrease in the percentage of the earth’s population associated with Christianity may be due in part to slow Christian growth in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East–North Africa.14

While the proportion of Christians in the world appears to be shrinking, some Christian sects have countered this trend. For example, the rate of growth among Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses in the United States currently exceeds the world growth rate.15 A small religious group, the Amish, has recently been deemed one of America’s fastest-growing religious organizations, doubling every twenty-one to twenty-two years.16 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently received the distinction of being the fastest-growing of the ten largest churches in the United States.17 These changing dynamics have led to questions regarding how world religious belief, especially among Christians, will shift in coming years in relation to the world population.

Given changes in the world population and differing trends in religious growth, is the growth of the Church keeping pace with the world’s population growth? While Church growth has been well studied for years, little has been done to examine that growth in light of changes in the size of the population. This article will examine the current growth in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints compared with world population growth, and how current Church trends may impact that growth in the future.

Methods
This descriptive report is based on world population estimates from the US Census Bureau and Church membership data from the Church’s Management Information Center. Average annual growth rate is expressed as percentage per ten-year time period. The number of Latter-day Saints is presented per 1,000 people in the world. This number is extrapolated through 2050 based on the US Census Bureau world population estimates and different possible growth rates in the Church.

Results
Figure 1 provides a comparison of the estimated number of the world’s population (based on the US Census Bureau) to the membership population of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (from 2014 through 2050 based on an assumed 2 percent annual growth rate) from 1830 to 2050. As can be seen, the world’s population grew from 1.2 billion in 1830 to 7.2 billion in 2014 and is projected to reach almost 9.4 billion in 2050. The Church’s population grew from 0 in 1830 to 15.3 million in 2014 and is projected to reach 31.3 million by 2050.

During its first ten years, the Church grew by 67 percent annually (fig. 2). During the 1840s, that rate dropped to 12 percent, and for each decade thereafter through the 1940s, it averaged between 2 percent and 4 percent. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the average annual growth rate was near 5 percent. However, since 2000, the average annual growth rate has remained near 2 percent. For each decade since 1830, the average annual growth rate of the Church has exceeded the earth’s average annual population growth rate. The world population growth rate has been fairly constant since the early 1800s at around 2 percent. The current growth rate is now closer to 1 percent.
Figure 3 provides a ratio of Latter-day Saints per 1,000 people in the world. In 2014, there were 2.1 Latter-day Saints per 1,000 people in the world (fig. 3). World population growth estimates are available from the US Census Bureau through 2050. On the basis of these estimates and different assumed growth rates for the Church, the number of Latter-day Saints per 1,000 people in the world in 2050 is expected to be around 3.3 (assuming a 2 percent annual Church growth rate). If the annual Church growth rate were 3 percent it would reach 4.9 per 1,000 people in the world in 2050. If it were 5 percent, it would reach 10.3 per 1,000 people in the world in 2050.

Discussion
The results of this study show that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is growing at a faster rate than the world population. While this news is positive for Church members, there are three important considerations to make about this finding: first, the proportion of Church members as compared to the world population; second, factors that may influence the Church’s growth rate over time; and third, how well these statistics reflect active membership.

Church membership will continue to represent a small part of the world population into the future. While sociologist Rodney Stark predicted that the Church would become a “major world religion” by the middle of the twenty-first century, we predict that Church membership at an optimum realistic growth rate will remain below 1 percent of the world’s population through 2050. This is consistent with the Book of Mormon scripture where
Nephi prophesied in about 600 BC that the Church would remain proportionally small to the world population before the Second Coming of Christ but would be represented in all nations (see 1 Nephi 14:12). This prophecy is more accurate than any suppositions that the Church is becoming the largest world religion at this time.

The rate of Church growth has remained between 2 and 5 percent since the 1850s. Considering this trend, one might be tempted to continue to place Church growth within that range in the future, as one influential scholar did in the 1980s. Church growth rates dropped in the 1990s from 5 percent to 2 percent annually, and an increasing change in growth rate is just as possible in coming years. Future Church growth may be influenced by an increasing number of missionaries that resulted by lowering the minimum age for missionaries, changes in birthrates among the Latter-day Saints, and the global population and global modernization.

In the Church’s October 2012 general conference, a change in the minimum age requirements for full-time missionaries was announced (from age nineteen to eighteen for men and age twenty-one to nineteen for women). In the weeks following this announcement, the Church reported that missionary applications increased dramatically (from 700 applications per week to 4,000), with women making up more than half of the applicants. In the Church’s 2012 Statistical Report, the ratio of convert baptisms to full-time missionaries was approximately 4.5:1, and between October 2012 and October 2013, the number of missionaries serving jumped from 58,500 to 80,333. This spike in number of missionaries may plateau or decrease slightly as nineteen-year-old sister missionary applicants take over for twenty-one-year-old sister missionaries who are currently serving, but it may remain higher than previous rates, because nineteen-year-old women are less likely than twenty-one-year-old women to have marriage and other competing interests in mind. Further research on the impact of the change in missionary age would be beneficial to understanding the future growth rate of the Church.

Changing birthrates may also impact Church growth, especially as compared to changes in the world population. The current world fertility rate is 2.58, just enough to replace and expand slightly on the current population. David G. Stewart notes that active LDS families have 3 children on average, while non-LDS families have 2. Data show that states with large Latter-day Saint populations have higher general fertility rates than the average population. In Utah, fertility rates are greater than overall Latter-day Saint fertility rates, especially because families can be influenced by prevailing cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and living space available in an area. One Latin American study found that LDS fertility was lower in Mexico and Brazil than the national averages, but found that those same rates were higher after adjusting for socioeconomic circumstances. Another study showed that Latter-day Saint fertility in Japan and England was higher than national averages.

Globalization and technological advancements will likely push Church growth more than has been previously seen. The Church has a large public relations committee, member and missionary bloggers, and Twitter and Facebook users who utilize this technology to spread religious beliefs.
worldwide.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, programs like familysearch.org, LDS.org, and mormon.org are increasing the Church’s public visibility among target groups. The Church has recently launched a massive “I’m a Mormon” media campaign in New York, London, and Ireland, which has caught the attention of international media and local residents.\textsuperscript{28} Of course, increased technological availability also increases visibility of anti-Church groups to the public, but the impact of either positive or negative technological influences is difficult to measure. Further research concerning the influence of technology on Church growth may be beneficial to the social-scientific community.

International political trends and secularization can also impact future Church growth. In February 1996, 4,720,000 members of the Church lived outside of the United States and 4,719,000 lived in the United States.\textsuperscript{29} At the time, 35.0 percent of Latter-day Saints in the United States and 17.5 percent of all Latter-day Saints in the world lived in Utah. In 2010, however, only 31.1 percent of Latter-day Saints in the United States and 12.7 percent of all Latter-day Saints in the world lived in Utah.\textsuperscript{30} Church growth has risen significantly in Asia, Africa, and South America, although growth has slowed in European countries. Some researchers have suggested that the growth of structured religions, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists, occurs most in areas of the world undergoing the process of modernization.\textsuperscript{31} In these nations, individuals who feel the stresses of war, revolution, or societal change seek more for stability and order in life than those in modernized nations. If this is the case, the Church may experience more significant growth rates in these areas. However, in stable regions, proponents of this theory might suggest that Church growth may continue at a sluggish pace for the time being.

While the world increase in Christianity is not keeping pace with the world population growth, the annual growth rate in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has marginally exceeded world growth. Nevertheless, these statistics do not take active membership into account, and even under very optimistic projections of growth, there will likely be fewer than 10 Latter-day Saints per 1,000 people in the world by 2050.

Active membership has not been included in our analysis because this statistic, generally considered attendance at one church meeting every quarter, is not published on a global level by the Church.\textsuperscript{32} Sacrament meeting attendance has been estimated at 40–50 percent in North America, 35 percent in Europe and Africa, and 25 percent in South America and Asia.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, 50–75 percent of converts worldwide fail to attend church altogether after one year.\textsuperscript{34} While the children born into Latter-day Saint families remain on membership rolls, not all of these children are baptized. Seventy percent of children who are raised as Latter-day Saints consider themselves as such in adulthood,\textsuperscript{35} but others may remain on record if they choose not to remove themselves from Church rolls.

While reporting methods of church activity differ, religious activity appears to be higher in the Church than in other religious denominations. Research has shown that self-reported Latter-day Saints in the United States tend to pray daily and attend weekly church services more often than those who affiliate themselves with other religious groups. Eighty-three percent of Latter-day Saints say religion is very important to them, compared with 56 percent of Catholics and 79 percent of evangelicals. These are among the findings of the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life of more than 1,000 Mormons across the country.\textsuperscript{36} Many inactive members still have Latter-day Saint beliefs and share experiences that have the potential to spark religious discussion. For example, a study of returned Latter-day Saint missionaries, seventeen years postmission, found that 90 percent still paid tithing and 97 percent still followed the Word of Wisdom even though only 87 percent attended sacrament meeting weekly.\textsuperscript{37}

Conclusion

The annual growth rate in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has marginally exceeded the world population growth rate and will change in the future according to missionary efforts, media campaigns, and sociopolitical factors. Interactions between these factors and religious growth have not been studied in great depth and should be considered in further research. Although Church membership is greater than Church activity, religious activity is higher in the Church than is generally observed in other religious denominations.

Notes

2. See “Growth of the Church,” online newsroom of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.


7. See Stark, “Modernization and Mormon Growth.”


10. See Wise, “About That Overpopulation Problem.”

11. See “Global Population Growth.”

12. 95.9 percent in the Americas, 94.5 percent in Europe, 91.1 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1.7 percent in Asia Pacific, and 9.5 percent in the Middle East–North Africa.

13. 86.0 percent in the Americas, 76.2 percent in Europe, 62.7 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 7.0 percent in Asia Pacific, and 3.8 percent in the Middle East–North Africa.


17. See Kwon, “Fastest-Growing ‘Churches’ in U.S.”


22. See “Total Fertility Rates,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, last modified April 2011.


24. See “Query Results for Birth Query Module for Utah Counties and Local Health Districts,” Utah’s Indicator-Based Information System for Public Health, last modified May 27, 2013.

Although I have not been studying and experiencing the world’s religions for over seventy years as Huston Smith has, I fully concur with his conclusion. In my case, the central meal has always been and continues to be Mormon Christianity. At the same time, I believe that it is important for Latter-day Saints to learn about, appreciate, and be nourished by the good of other religions. Why? Both pragmatic and spiritual reasons are central to what I am proposing, yet in what follows I am able to offer only a few markers in a discussion that certainly ought to extend beyond a single article.

I begin my remarks by briefly highlighting one motivation, of particular contemporary relevance that has strong pragmatic connotations, before turning to address three perceived obstacles that prevent a gospel-driven doctrinal appreciation of the light and truth of different religions. My hope is to demonstrate that these obstacles, which emerge every so often in the Mormon...
Learning about Other Religions: False Obstacles and Rich Opportunities

I conclude my analysis by listing three principles, articulated by the late Lutheran theologian Krister Stendahl, which can assist Latter-day Saints in relating to other faiths. Ultimately, I base my remarks on a firm conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ generally requires balance between true principles such as balance between a sympathetic approach to other faiths and loyalty to one’s own, and balance between openness to learning from the “religious other” and the ability to share Mormonism’s truths in love.

Religious Freedom and Interfaith Collaboration

In recent years, General Authorities have repeatedly addressed the topic of “religious freedom” in a variety of settings. The Church has also produced online print and video resources that deal with this very topic. These resources are now available on the website mormonnewsroom.com, for members and nonmembers alike. A clear message of these speeches and videos is that religion as a whole is good and beneficial to civilization, that it provides a solid foundation to ethical behaviors, and that it should be given a voice in contributing to important public discussions about morality. Furthermore, these messages underscore the importance of freedom for the many consciences shaped by religious teachings while also recognizing that our society’s multiplicity of perspectives requires patience, understanding, and respect for opinions that often conflict with each other. In short, our leaders have stressed the fact that religious freedom is not a “denominational” issue; instead, it is a value commonly shared by people of all faiths that must be defended by the united efforts of people from all faiths.

If Mormon history has taught us anything, it is that religious freedom is not to be taken for granted and that its preservation requires forces which are larger than a single religious denomination. Whether the attacks originate from rival religious groups or from nonreligious secularists, like the “new atheists” who want to remove all religious influences from the public sphere, preserving the religious freedom of all is the best way to preserve one’s own religious freedom. Latter-day Saints obviously have a vested interest in this process, particularly when responding to the claims that distinctive Mormon teachings on the family and society are incompatible with the rights of individuals in a secular world. Yet religious freedom is a universal principle with much deeper roots in the restored gospel than what may be suggested by a single focus on the need to preserve the Church’s rights in the present circumstances. Joseph Smith and other prophets have repeatedly taught about the significance of religious freedom, not only by recognizing it as a founding principle of the US Constitution, but also more broadly by highlighting the sacred role played by agency in leading people to God or to any principle of truth. In other words, within the plan of salvation, religious freedom is a necessary means that leads not only to the ultimate truth of Mormonism but also to any other “religious” truth that is contained and expressed by other religions. Religious freedom is good, because various manifestations of religion will function, to different degrees, as tools of spiritual progression for individuals throughout the world.

Therefore, learning about other religions is a pragmatic necessity rooted in a spiritual foundation for Latter-day Saints who want to build effective and mutually fulfilling relationships of collaboration with members of different faiths. Whether the issue that brings us together is the defense of religious freedom, humanitarian work, some other commonly shared value, or simply friendship, working teams are most successful when individual members trust each other. Mere tolerance will not do; people will experience and extend trust only in an atmosphere of emotional and intellectual respect, including respect for deeply held beliefs with which the other may ultimately disagree. It is one thing to disagree with a particular belief while recognizing that it has some value and credibility (thus retaining respect for the believer); it is another thing to reject that same belief as utterly absurd or as the product of lazy motivations. In other words, even while disagreeing on specific doctrines or theology, deep respect among cooperating people of faith will emerge when interlocutors detect the good motivations, upright values, and at least enough credibility in the doctrines of the “other” to make his or her religion respectable. Thus Latter-day Saints cannot really build strong collaborations and deep friendships with committed members of other faiths without stretching beyond generalizations, stereotypes, or caricatures of other religions, which only hamper mutual understanding. Indeed, the fruits of mutual respect will only grow on foundations of reciprocal sympathetic attitudes with engaged education about the beliefs and practices of the religious other as a key element of the process of interaction.

Here one may justifiably ask whether I am suggesting that other religions should only be approached sympathetically, and not be approached critically. Furthermore, could such an approach potentially weaken the unique claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as its missionary
commission? There is obviously a need for balance between the recognition of the light and truth that can be found in other religions and a personal commitment to the unique and all-embracing truths of Mormonism. To be sure, finding this balance may be challenging, and in this context we do not need to look too hard to find examples of two very different kinds of excesses. On the one hand, overzealousness and skewed conceptions of loyalty close the door to dialogue with the “religious other,” thus allowing prejudice to reign supreme. On the other hand, radical liberality of thought reduces all differences among faiths to naught and gives rise to conversations built more on fears of offending than on desire to learn and to be challenged. Latter-day Saints are not immune from the difficulty of finding an appropriate balance. Yet Mormonism advocates equilibrium, and the gospel may be rightly viewed as a harmony of correct principles that ought to be kept in fruitful tension with each other. It is then balance between the faith’s exclusive claims and its liberal recognition of the general goodness of religion that allows Mormonism to be both particularist and inclusive. When we fail to live in this tension and do not experience this balance, we risk losing the full perspective of the restored gospel.

**False Obstacles to Learning and Appreciation**

There are sound doctrinal reasons for learning about other religions and for appreciating the truth they contain. I am going to address these core reasons somewhat indirectly by responding to some perceived obstacles to a sympathetic and engaged approach to other religions, obstacles that sometimes emerge among Latter-day Saints. In so doing, I should highlight that I am not referring to official prophetic pronouncements or to authoritative exegesis of scripture. Instead, I am focusing on a cultural level of theological interpretation which I have encountered primarily through personal experience, particularly in conversation with members and students. It is not my intention to argue that these lines of reasoning are the most prevalent within the Church—in fact, I do not have the tools to measure their frequency—but my experience suggests that they are prevalent enough. Therefore, I think that they need to be addressed, since they function as false obstacles to the appreciative learning of other religions in the direction of excessive exclusivism.

Of course, uncritically positive approaches to other faiths would also miss the balance, but in the present context I am not going to address that side of the equation, since in some ways it is more explicitly dealt with in official LDS teachings. My main concern is to address those claims, occasionally heard among some Latter-day Saints, which affirm an inherent incompatibility between a positive approach to other religions and the foundational principles of the restored gospel. Specifically, I have encountered at least three kinds of arguments, loosely interrelated and usually based on particular scriptural passages, which purportedly highlight the dangers of approaching other religions favorably. I will label these arguments the “fullness,” the “only true church,” and the “creedal abomination” arguments respectively, an ordering which also reflects the increasing rejection of the study of other religions that they advocate.

**Fullness**

The “fullness” argument is perhaps the most common and the least negative of the three. It centers on the idea that Mormonism possesses the fullness of saving truth, namely of the truth that leads to the greatest happiness in this life and to exaltation in the life to come. According to this line of reasoning, fullness of truth or fullness of the gospel is mostly synonymous with completeness or perfection, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the unique possessor of this repository of perfect knowledge, doctrine, ordinances, and authority, which enable individuals to obtain salvation in its highest possible form. Therefore, the argument goes, whatever is good or admirable in other religions is already possessed by the Mormon fullness or is included in it. To study other religions, in the best-case scenario, is like reviewing the multiplication tables once you have started working on calculus; it is not bad, but it is mostly a waste of time because it focuses on a lower level of knowledge now redundant. Thus the study of other religions is mostly an irrelevant enterprise, and time and effort would be better spent in studying the gospel as taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which would ensure greater salvific returns. The most memorable illustration of this particular approach in my personal experience emerged in a conversation I had with a Latter-day Saint with whom I have been acquainted since childhood. At that time I was studying interfaith dialogue at a Vatican university in Rome, and when I shared with him the subject of my studies he responded, “When you have the fullness of truth, there cannot be any dialogue.”

I find the conclusions of this argument to be unsatisfactory, both in a broad philosophical sense as well as in the more specific LDS doctrinal context, even though I concur with some of its premises. On the one hand, it is
quite appropriate, even anticipated, that a person should hold one's own religion to be preferable to other religious alternatives, contrary to the politically correct dogma which requires value equality of all concepts, statements, and organizations. As a Latter-day Saint, I also believe that my religion has something unique and additional in relation to what other faiths have to offer; it is one of the reasons I am a Mormon and one of the reasons I served an LDS mission. Thus identifying hierarchies of truth is inherent to the human experience and is not in itself an indication of arrogance; some of the humblest people I have ever met have also been among the most devoted to the fixed standards of truth found in their respective religions. On the other hand, one's strong commitment to a particular ideology becomes suspect if it hides an unwillingness to listen to or to encounter any potentially problematic evidence and if it is rooted in a sense of personal superiority that admits no challenge. Therefore, when the fullness argument is used to masquerade this kind of rigidity and is motivated primarily by a fear-driven refusal to step outside one's comfort zone, it becomes a serious problem. True, all humans, whether religious or not, experience some of the laziness, pride, and accompanying anxiety which are inherent in this refusal to look beyond the familiar, but this approach belongs to “the natural man” rather than to the person enlightened by the fullness of the gospel.

Furthermore, the argument’s conclusion is problematic above and beyond the specific motivations that may be driving it. The first issue is that the argument implies a definition of fullness that is excessively closed and static, thus being in conflict with the foundational LDS principle of continuing revelation. If fullness of truth or fullness of the gospel means that all the answers relative to God and to eternal salvation are already found in the teachings and practices of the Church as presently constituted, there would be no need for additional revelation, whether institutional or personal. If we have all the answers, then we have no questions, and if we run out of questions, then we cease to learn or to seek for divine guidance. Joseph Smith often denounced similar approaches to truth inherent in established traditions or in well-defined definitions of beliefs, since what they underlie is a completion and restriction of learning. He warned the Saints against “setting up stakes” that limit God’s revelation and emphasized the open-ended progression in knowledge and understanding by stating, “We believe that He [God] will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” What, then, is the fullness of the gospel? Without delving into the different possible definitions of the term gospel, I would suggest that the term fullness should be more closely associated with an idea of sufficiency rather than of completeness. The Church administers all the necessary ordinances and teaches all the key principles which lead to eternal life, but it does not claim that additional, expanded, or reworded knowledge of truth would be useless in the process of achieving this same objective. In short, fullness understood as perfection or completion, whether in knowledge or action, is always necessarily an objective ahead of us, not a condition already achieved.

Indeed, the great majority of those who have expressed the fullness argument to me are very much aware of their need for development in knowledge, character, and understanding. They do not feel that they “have it all” and do not object to the need for greater and more refined truth, particularly in matters relating to salvation. What they argue, however, is that the unique source of this knowledge is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is the divinely chosen channel for the conferral of additional light and truth to the world. Then, since the Church already gathers all the partial truths taught by other religions, the argument continues, no additional truth of salvific value can be found in other faiths because all knowledge of this kind is already available through official Mormon teachings. In my view, however, the meaning and the sources of truth are quite broader than what this particular interpretation implies. While I subscribe to the belief that the prophetic authority of the Church ensures a preferential revelatory channel, and even an exclusive authority in the realm of doctrinal declarations, I also understand truth to involve more than mere propositional statements or declarations of beliefs. Truth includes actions, thoughts, emotions, and many other visible expressions of the created world; channels of divine influence and communication, with greater or lesser intensity, are spread throughout history, geography, and religions. In short, I believe that any manifestation of goodness and light, whatever its specific source, is of some salvific value inasmuch as it embodies a witness of the divine’s connection to the world.”

Several Mormon prophets have also expressed an understanding of truth which emphasizes great breadth. For example, John Taylor once stated, “I was going to say I am not a Universalist, but I am, and I am also a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic, and a Methodist, in short, I believe in every true principle that is imbibed by any person or sect, and reject the false. If there is any truth in heaven, earth, or hell, I want to embrace it, I care not what shape it comes in to me, who brings it, or who believes it, whether it is popular or
unpopular.” In another context he declared, “If there are any religious ideas, any theological truths, any principles pertaining to God, that we have not learned, we ask mankind, and we pray God, our heavenly Father, to enlighten our minds that we may comprehend, realize, embrace and live up to them as part of our religious faith. Thus our ideas and thoughts would extend as far as the wide world spreads, embracing everything pertaining to light, life, or existence pertaining to this world or the world that is to come.” Wilford Woodruff put it succinctly in these terms: “If any man has got a truth that we have not got, let us have it. Truth is what we are after. . . . If we have not the truth, that is what we are after, we want it.” More recently, President Gordon B. Hinckley exhorted: “The learning process is endless. . . . It therefore behooves us, and is our charge, to grow constantly toward eternity in what must be a ceaseless quest for truth. And as we search for truth, let us look for the good, the beautiful, and the positive.”

There is no reason to think that other religions should be excluded from this rich picture of available knowledge, which does not necessarily emerge from standard Mormon channels. Even when accounting for missing or distorted elements in these religions’ teachings, there remains much in their distinctive expressions of faith that is uniquely beautiful. There is much that we Latter-day Saints can learn from them. For example, the lives and spiritual experiences of many devotees from most religious traditions can be a source of inspiration as they reveal much that may be worthy of emulation. Poetic, musical, and scriptural writings of various kinds may also highlight a degree of commitment and adoration of God, which any person of faith can find uplifting. Certainly, unique formulations of beliefs or interesting connections among various aspects of theology and religious practices can provide enlightening intellectual insights. In short, there are many possible areas of learning which are visible, available, and open to discovery as soon as one seeks for this encounter. Does it not make sense that jewels of divine inspiration can be found in many different cultures and settings when God is truly viewed as an eternal, loving Father who meets his children in their agency and at their levels of understanding? Indeed, when recognizing that the present LDS population accounts for about 0.2 percent of the current world population, it would seem quite provincial to believe that God’s hand should not be manifested in some visible and magnificent manner among faithful followers of the world’s faiths, even in their unique beliefs and practices. Then why would any believer be indifferent or even opposed to such divine evidences simply because they emerge from a different religious or cultural context than the one to which one is accustomed?

The Only True Church
The “only true church” argument is a second argument commonly used by those Latter-day Saints who struggle to reconcile the study of other religions with the restored gospel. It overlaps somewhat with the fullness concern in its emphasis on exclusivity, but it presents additional challenges for the starker language with which it juxtaposes Mormonism to other religions. At its core it claims that since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is “the only
true church” on the face of the earth, other religions are at best a mix of half-truths and distorted knowledge and at worst a tool of the adversary to spread lies and falsehood in the world. As a result, if one approaches these faiths at all, it is often with the goal of identifying their unique problems rather than with the desire to learn anything from them. Indeed, those who espouse this argument feel the need to add a qualification, a “but” of some sort, which underlies a problem or significant failure in the other faith, if anything positive about it happens to be mentioned. For example, after mentioning a visit to the beautiful cathedrals in Europe, a member quickly added, “but the Spirit was not there,” and a fellow Mormon spoke highly about a neighbor while feeling the need to specify, “but he is not a member.” True, emphasizing the negative or the deficient in other religions further legitimizes Mormonism as the only true church and functions as a way of expressing one’s full commitment to its truths, but these juxtapositions also convey a very black-and-white picture, which does not do justice to the gradations of truths found in other faiths.

Again, the problem with this argument is not its emphasis on the uniqueness of Mormonism or its status as the truest religion; instead, it is its failure to explicitly recognize any truth or salvific value in alternative religious paths. Perhaps this is not what most members want to communicate when they justify their indifference to the world’s religions through the “only true church” argument, but it is certainly difficult for any non-LDS observer to feel that Mormonism is sympathetic to other faiths when remarks on different religions regularly culminate in patronizing criticism. If asked whether other religions are considered to be primarily good (although somewhat misguided) or primarily evil, I would hope that most Latter-day Saints would opt for the former choice. Yet many members of different faiths would be confused in hearing Mormons state that theirs is “the only true church,” particularly when these words are used as a set formula without additional explanations. They would probably understand it to imply that non-Mormon religions are false and possibly evil because the “only true church” formula underlies the claim that truth is exclusive to Mormonism. To use an illustrative analogy, if the Church is the only true original Mona Lisa painted by Leonardo, then other religions are cheap imitations which falsely claim to be what they are not; they are frauds. Any LDS clarification articulating the significance of priesthood authority or the claim of historical continuity with the early Christian church would then need to be included to prevent misunderstandings of this kind.

It is also enlightening to examine the scriptural passage from which this particular statement has traditionally been extracted. Doctrine and Covenants 1:30 indeed states that the Church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth,” and those who see in this statement a divine condemnation of other churches often point to the following clause “with which I, the Lord, am well pleased.” However, the text does not necessarily imply that the Lord is not at all pleased with other churches, only that he is “well pleased” or “very satisfied” with the church to which he is speaking. Furthermore, the qualifier that follows, “speaking unto the church collectively and not individually,” seems to be a warning against the use of this formula in support of personal pride or self-righteousness. In fact, the cross-referenced scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 50:4 recognizes that God can also be unhappy with his church when it states that “I, the Lord, have looked upon you, and have seen abominations in the church that profess my name,” with the context obviously indicating that the church being referenced is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of that time. In short, whatever interpretative tool one chooses to employ in understanding this particular passage, I do not see a sweeping divine condemnation of other religions or a warning to keep one’s distance from them.

Certainly, President Ezra Taft Benson saw God’s involvement in the world to be much broader than the “only true church” when he stated that “God, the Father of us all, uses the men of the earth, especially good men, to accomplish his purposes. It has been true in the past, it is true today, it will be true in the future.” In the same general conference speech he then cited the late Apostle Orson F. Whitney, who stated: “Perhaps the Lord needs such men on the outside of His Church to help it along. They are among its auxiliaries, and can do more good for the cause where the Lord has placed them, than anywhere else. . . . God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of His great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous for any one people. . . . They [the Gentiles] are our partners in a certain sense.”

Similarly, Elder William Bangerter posed the question: “Do we believe that all ministers of other churches are corrupt? Of course not. . . . It is clearly apparent that there have been and now are many choice, honorable, and devoted men and women going in the direction of their eternal salvation who
give righteous and conscientious leadership to their congregations in other churches. Joseph Smith evidently had many warm and friendly contacts with ministers of other religions. . . . Some of them who carried the Christian attitude of tolerance did not join the Church. There are many others like them today.”

**Creedal Abomination**

Still, a few Latter-day Saints find it particularly difficult to see much or any truth in other religions. Their focus is exclusively on the evil; in fact, they would be the first to suggest that important scriptural evidence indicates that God condemns other religions, especially apostate Christianity. For lack of a better term, I have labeled this particular obstacle to the study of other religions the “creedal abomination” argument, even though a different focus than the creeds may characterize some of its expressions. Where the fullness argument explicitly emphasizes the perfection of Mormonism (while implying the irrelevance of other religions), and the “only true church argument” explicitly emphasizes the exclusive truth of Mormonism (while implying the falsehood of other faiths), there is nothing implicit in the “creedal abomination” argument. Every religion has some members who feel so threatened by a different faith that when they encounter the “religious other,” they can only condemn it as evil. I have experienced this in a few instances with some who use scriptural references to state unequivocally that we should refrain from studying other religions, because God has condemned them. Specifically, a few have quoted the Joseph Smith—History account of the First Vision, where the Prophet reports, with reference to the Christian sects and denominations of his time, that “the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.”

There is no question in my mind that God has indeed condemned some of the beliefs and actions found in various religions throughout the history of the world. For example, my experience and understanding of God are such that I could not possibly conceive that he would require actual human sacrifices to take place in his name (the word **actual** accounts for the near-sacrifice in the Abraham and Isaac story). There has been, there is, and there will continue to be evil in humanity, which is contrary to God’s will and which God utterly rejects and condemns. Some of this evil may even receive religious sanction. However, before condemning something as evil simply because it emerges from a different religious context than one’s own, it is important to be aware of our human tendency of seeing only the bad in the **other** and only the good in **us**. For example, in relation to the previously quoted passage in Joseph Smith—History, retired BYU professor Roger Keller once stated, “There is a tendency to understand the word creed here as a confession of faith, such as the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. The whole context negates this interpretation, however, for that which precedes and follows this passage deals entirely with the religious people of Joseph’s day. Thus, their creeds were their professions of faith, which had few outward manifestations of love.”

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice the more amiable tone used by the Prophet Joseph in his later 1842 account of the same vision, where he reports that the Personages “told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.” There is no “condemnation” or “abomination” in this latter passage, thus possibly suggesting that the more polemical language used in 1838 may have emerged as a direct consequence of the persecutions the Prophet and the Saints suffered in Missouri by the hand of so-called Christians.

Still, regardless of specific scriptural interpretations, arguments of this kind possess significant psychological strength because they protect and legitimate one’s identity as it is rooted in a specific worldview. At least for a few of the Saints, it seems that a focus on the positive that exists outside of Mormonism represents a threatening challenge to the claims and commitments associated with one’s own faith. Hence, the more the religious other is understood to be bad, the more one’s religion shines in comparison as the ultimate good. An effective illustration of this particular human tendency is a conversation I once had with a student who was attending one of my courses on Islam. He came to speak with me about his difficulty in reading the course textbook, which he attributed to the reading process being so emotionally charged that it took him hours to complete every assignment. He specifically mentioned the anger and internal arguments he had experienced when finding in the textbook such expressions as “the prophet Muhammad,” “the revealed Qur’an,” and so forth (the book was authored by a non-Muslim who wrote sympathetically about Islam). While reading these words, he had felt driven to continuously deny them in his mind by retorting the exact opposite, namely that “Satan had inspired the Qur’an, and Muhammad was clearly a false prophet.”
As we continued our conversation, I realized that attaching any possible degree of divine inspiration to the Qur’an or to Muhammad would represent a challenge to his belief in Christ, Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon. He said, for example, that just as the Book of Mormon could only be either of God or of the devil, so the Qur’an must either be from God or from the devil, and it was obviously the latter. Moreover, if Jesus is truly the Savior, and Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God, then Muhammad must be a false prophet; it was all very logical in his mind, as he was simply reasserting his commitment to his faith while denying the truthfulness of a religion which advances competing claims.

I praised him for his devotion, but I began to challenge his core assumption. When I asked him whether he thought it possible that he could hold his commitment to Mormonism firm while at the same time being able to identify God’s hand within a different religion, he seemed very skeptical. So we turned to a statement of the First Presidency dated February 15, 1978, which affirms, among other things, that “the great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.” I reiterated to him that viewing individuals, sacred texts, and religions as either perfectly inspired by God or satanically motivated is a false dichotomy, because God can confer various degrees of light and knowledge as he sends portions of his Spirit to individuals and groups. In short, the interaction of God’s perfect light with the imperfect human filters who function as its receptors gives rise to many different intensities of light, some brighter and some darker. To recognize, to love, and to commit to the brightest of these lights does not require the denial of light in any of its other manifestations.

I do not know whether that student was completely convinced when he left my office, but I do know that looking for light rather than for darkness is a more rewarding experience when studying other religions. Obviously, there is a point and a time when error should be recognized and when disagreement is the only option, but since we are already trained and naturally accustomed to find problems in the religious other, we are probably better off in withholding judgment to begin with by giving a religion the benefit of the doubt, so to speak. If we set out with the desire to understand and identify what is true rather than false about a particular faith, then when we finally are in a position to evaluate it more broadly, it is more likely that our criticism will be fair. This is probably what we would want people to do when they approach the study of our own faith: we would hope that their preconceived notions would be suspended long enough to allow them to truly listen to our message. In that way they will be able to experience what Mormonism has to offer that is exciting, beautiful, and true. Similarly, if we listen and study primarily with the desire to learn rather than to criticize, we will be able to expand our own understanding as well as to offer an informed and less prejudiced judgment when needing to do so. Hence, if approached with the right attitude, the study of world religions can be a fascinating, enlightening, and ultimately faith-promoting experience. Conversely, the “fullness,” “only true church,” and “creedal abomination” arguments, although correct in some of their premises, ultimately hamper true appreciation by emphasizing the irrelevance or falsehood of other religions.

Therefore, there is no incompatibility between the sympathetic study of other religions and a solid commitment to the truths of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On the contrary, there are several pragmatic and spiritual benefits that are likely to emerge from this enterprise. Pragmatically, learning about different beliefs and practices will only facilitate communication and mutual understanding with individuals of different religious persuasions with whom we are increasingly likely to come into contact. Better education on other faiths will facilitate trust and respect as we join hands in the defense of religious freedom and of other foundational values like morality and the family. It will further assist us as we continue to expand our missionary efforts by endowing us with a better understanding of the cultural and religious backgrounds of the people we will teach. I find the best evidence of this conclusion in the many returned-missionary students in my classes who remark at the end of each semester that they wish they had taken a world religions course prior to their missions.

As far as spiritual benefits are concerned, we will be able to deepen our friendships with family, friends, and neighbors of different faiths by appreciating more fully the truth and beauty that they have embraced in their lives and by being able to express without prejudice our own enthusiasm for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, we will be able to enlarge our own repository of light and truth as we encounter revealed knowledge in other faiths that will shine even brighter when combined with the light of the gospel that
we have already internalized. In short, learning about the truth and goodness of other religions will help us become better people and better Mormons.

Three Rules for Religious Understanding

In 1985, during a press conference associated with the construction of the LDS temple in Stockholm, Krister Stendahl, the Lutheran bishop of the Swedish capital, spoke in defense of the Mormons' right to erect the sacred building. Those who opposed the temple's construction had used reports based on anti-Mormon publications to criticize the Church, its beliefs, and its practices. In that context Stendahl, who had previously served as the dean of the Harvard Divinity School, expressed what have come to be known as his three rules for religious understanding. These rules provide a solid philosophical and ethical foundation for any engagement in comparative religions and thus are particularly beneficial to any discussion about LDS approaches to other faiths. Indeed, they are useful for the broader context of dialogue and personal interactions of any kind, whether focused on potentially divisive issues like politics, religion, and athletics, or when applied to daily interactions within families and communities. If more people in the world would abide by these rules, there would not be as much conflict and misunderstanding, and greater dialogue and harmony would certainly ensue.

The first rule states that relevant information about a religion should be gained from the very source and not from a competitor or a secondhand account. A student of a particular faith should go to that church’s official literature or ask committed members of the same church when wanting to become educated about its beliefs and practices. In other words, it is better to err on the side of internal bias than on the side of external prejudice. As it relates to an LDS approach to another religion, this means that we will want to describe a religion in such a way that if a believer of that faith were to drop into our discussion unexpectedly he or she would not consider what was being presented to be a caricature of that religion. It also means that if we are ever uncertain about the details of what a religion believes or practices, we should refrain from assuming, generalizing, or judging prior to having acquired solid evidence to support our conclusions. Unfortunately, I have often heard both Latter-day Saints and members of different faiths comment ignorantly on a different religion when it was obvious that they had never taken the time to seriously try to understand it. Therefore, the first rule reminds us that it is important to do our studying and focus that study on the appropriate sources.

The second rule addresses the comparison between one’s religion and the religion being studied, which often follows the initial stage of information gathering. This comparison should not take place too early in the process, otherwise the religion under analysis will not have sufficient time to speak for itself. For us it means that we do not want to express an LDS perspective on a particular faith until we have had the time to examine and understand it. When this time arrives, Stendahl’s second rule reminds us that we need to be fair, namely to compare our best with their best and not our best with their worst. It is too easy and too human to pick and choose the best that one’s community has to offer and juxtapose it with what is most controversial and problematic in a competing group. It happens in sports, national politics, and international relations, and religion is no exception. Certainly most Mormons would protest if a focus on controversial historical issues like plural marriage or the pre-1978 restrictions on priesthood ordination for blacks would be used as a starting point of comparison between Mormonism and another faith, especially if great humanitarian achievements or virtuous and heroic lives originating from the other religion were to function as the other side of the juxtaposition. Similarly, if we were to compare Mormonism to Catholicism, for example, it would not be fair to highlight the great good that is brought about by bishops, missionaries, and other LDS priesthood leaders while painting the whole Catholic priesthood as abusive and corrupt by focusing exclusively on the recent scandals associated with a minority of priests. In short, whether we are dealing with human frailties, attractiveness of beliefs, or devotion to particular practices, we should extend to other faiths the same kindness and benefit of the doubt that we are prone to show ourselves.

Finally, after encouraging us to obtain the correct information about another faith and subsequently to err on the side of goodness and generosity in evaluating it, Stendahl asks us to open ourselves up to being changed by borrowing something of value from the religious other. Indeed, his third rule tells us to leave sufficient room for “holy envy,” namely a feeling of deep respect and admiration for some aspect of the other religion that we could integrate into our own life in whatever form may be compatible with our own faith. For example, a Latter-day Saint could feel motivated to improve his daily prayers after learning about the daily devotions of Muslims, of Catholic religious orders, or of a number of devotees from different religious traditions. Some other member of the Church could become so fascinated with the practice
Learning about Other Religions: False Obstacles and Rich Opportunities

We have nothing to learn from different faiths. Obviously, holy envy is built on the assumption that we are indeed able to identify something in the other faith, whether relating to history, sacred texts, beliefs, devotions, or other practices, that is lacking in our own or which finds better expression in the other religion. It also presupposes that our own religion is open to such forms of cross-religious learning and that our commitment to our own faith is not in question as a result.

Even though a theme of embracing all the truth is quite prevalent in the restored gospel, we Latter-day Saints probably struggle the most with this third rule. Some feel that they would manifest a lack of loyalty to their own religion if they allowed themselves to admire some aspect of a different faith to this extent. A Catholic friend of mine once put it simply when he said that believers have feelings of love and commitment towards their own religion that are similar to the feelings they hold for their own mothers. Hopefully, most people feel that their own mother is the best mother there could ever be, but recognizing that someone else’s mother may have done a few things a little better than ours does not diminish the value of our mother or our love and commitment to her.

A second obstacle to holy envy that may emerge among the Latter-day Saints was once expressed to me by one of my students in these terms: “Holy envy applies to people from religions which are incomplete; my religion is perfect and complete, thus there is nothing out there which I do not already have.” I have already addressed this issue in a previous section, so I will only add that for most people the concepts of “religion” and “church” are not completely separable from the individuals who embody their beliefs and lifestyles. Thus, if we enlarge our understanding of church or religion to include the words, actions, and lives of its devotees, we will at least be able to find something admirable and worthy of emulation in another faith even when unable to identify holy-envy material in their theologies or doctrine. In short, we are a special people—but not that special! We do not have a monopoly on goodness; we cannot claim the absence of problems among us or boast that we have nothing to learn from different faiths.

It is then in the spirit of these rules that I believe we could and should approach other religions as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although it may at times be difficult to find the perfect balance between openness to the truth of other faiths and firmness in our commitments to distinctive LDS doctrines, indifference and rejection of light in other religions are not doctrinally sound options. We can overcome false obstacles and follow Stendhal’s guidelines for comparisons, but more than anything else, it will be the excitement of the discovery that will push us forward, not in spite of our Mormonism but because of it. Many Latter-day Saints have already enjoyed this experience, and in so doing they have enlarged their circles of friendships while joining hands with others in defending faith, family, and society. Indeed, this is a time when we should feel more threatened by some aspects of the world, such as materialism, sexual immorality, pride, violence, and faithlessness, than by any religious competitor.

We will also notice that as we listen and sincerely desire to understand others we will be better listened to, and we will be better understood by others. In so doing we will share the gospel message in the spirit of President Hinckley’s words: “God bless us as those who believe in His divine manifestations and help us to extend knowledge of these great and marvelous occurrences to all who will listen. To these we say in a spirit of love, bring with you all that you have of good and truth which you have received from whatever source, and come and let us see if we may add to it.” He added, “Love and respect will overcome every element of animosity. Our kindness may be the most persuasive argument for that which we believe.”

Notes


6. “As the ruling principle of conduct in the lives of many millions of our citizens, religion should have an honorable place in the public life of our nation, and the name of Almighty God should have sacred use in its public expressions. We urge our members and people of good will everywhere to unite to protect and honor the spiritual and religious heritage of our nation and to resist the forces that would transform the public position of the United States from the constitutional position of neutrality to a position of hostility toward religion.” “First Presidency Warns Against ‘Irreligion,’” *Ensign*, May 1979, 108–9. Also see W. Cole Durham Jr., “The Doctrine of Religious Freedom,” in *BYU Speeches, 2000–2001* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2001), 213–26.


10. “But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge . . . that which is good and of God to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:13–14).


14. “Many Christians have voluntarily given sacrifices motivated by faith in Christ and the desire to serve Him. Some have chosen to devote their entire adult lives to the service of the Master. This noble group includes those in the religious orders of the Catholic Church and those who have given lifelong service as Christian missionaries in various Protestant faiths. Their examples are challenging and inspiring, but most believers in Christ are neither expected nor able to devote their entire lives to religious service.” Dallin H. Oaks, “Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 19.


Jensen: Recently you stepped down as editor of the Mormon Historical Studies journal. Would you tell our readers about your involvement with this journal from its early years, including the days when it was published as the Nauvoo Journal?

Baugh: The founder of the journal was Maurine C. Ward. She lives in Hyrum, Utah. She is a genealogist and a family historian, and in 1989 she decided to start a journal. She called it the Nauvoo Journal, published semi-annually, and it was basically dedicated to genealogy, but it had a biography and history slant to it. I don’t know where she got the money to cover her production costs, but she had enough subscribers that as she began to publish the journal twice a year. Interestingly, Richard N Holzapfel, a professor in Religious Education, became connected with Maurine and became the assistant editor, and helped solicit manuscripts and put the journal together. Originally, the Nauvoo Journal was published in an 8½ by 11 format, so it was kind of roughshod, but it had some good content.

In 1995 I received a faculty appointment in Religious Education at BYU and the following year, Richard Holzapfel asked me to come on as an advisory...
board member and I accepted. (At that time I had submitted one article for publication in the Nauvoo Journal.) Up until this time a number of people had contributed their time and expertise toward the journal, not just Maurine and Richard and I. Another key player was Ted Stoddard, who came on in 1996 as the copyeditor. Ted was a faculty member in BYU’s Marriott School and an excellent editor, having edited the publications associated with the Marriott School for a number of years. So the right people were in place for everything to come together.

In 1997, Richard stepped down. At that point, Maurine asked me if I would be the assistant editor, so beginning in 1997, I began to help her solicit manuscripts, edit them, and send them out for peer review, those kinds of things. I probably would have never become involved with the journal had it not been for the invitation by Richard Holzapfel.

When I came on as assistant editor I told Maurine, “We need to make some changes. The number one thing we need to do is give the journal a different name. Nauvoo Journal leaves the impression that the journal is specifically devoted to Nauvoo history. That’s not what it reflects; it’s a journal of a larger historical genre. We need to change the name.” I originally suggested we try to produce an issue in winter, spring, summer, and fall, and call it Mormon Historical Quarterly. She said, “Well, it’s really hard to produce a journal every six months, not to mention every three months.” We made the right decision to keep in a biannual publication.

Another individual who became involved with the journal about this time was William G. Hartley (Bill), a research historian in the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint Studies at BYU. In discussing some of the changes we envisioned, I think it was Bill who proposed we change the name to Mormon Historical Studies. At the time, the Journal of Mormon History had been published for a number of years, but we obviously needed to be distinguished from them, and Mormon Historical Studies was a distinctive enough name, plus we didn’t have to publish quarterly; we could just do it semiannually. So the name change from Nauvoo Journal to Mormon Historical Studies came in 1998.

At the same time, I suggested that we also needed to revise the format so that it has the look and feel of a genuine scholarly periodical, which included changing the size from 8½ by 11 format to the more standard journal size of 6 by 9. Then I said, “We need to have book reviews.” I talked to Andrew H. Hedges. Andy had been hired as a faculty member in Religious Education at the same time I was, and he agreed to be book review editor. He was the book review editor from 1997 to 2005. Next I said, “We need to have different kinds of departments. For example, we need to have a section in the journal for historical documents—a document section.” Then Bill Hartley said, “It would be nice if we could interview Latter-day Saint historians who have published and made significant contributions to the field of Mormon historiography, particularly those who have been part of the new Mormon history.” So we put our heads together and said, “Let’s have a section in the journal and call it ‘Conversations with Mormon Historians.’” Things started shaping up and making this more of a professional journal, complete with feature articles, documents, conversations with Mormon historians, and book reviews. We also created an advisory board and sent out papers for peer review assessment. So that’s how it started. Maurine got it going, but, realizing there was a need for more professionalism, we made a number of changes and brought the right kind of people into place.

In 1998, the journal had a pretty good subscription base, and things were going pretty well, but with the new format, the expenses of producing the journal went up and we were having a harder time trying to get enough subscriptions to underwrite the entire production process—printing the journal, mailing, and all of that. Maurine was underwriting some of it by herself, but it became evident that if we were going to make this go, we needed a little better cash flow and a more money from somewhere.

On October 30, 1998, a special memorial service was scheduled to be held at Hawn’s Mill to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the tragedy. I helped plan this even along with Mark A. Scherer, the world historian for the RLDS Church (now called Community of Christ), which church owned the Hawn’s Mill site. A few weeks prior to the commemoration, I received a call from Kim R. Wilson, chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation (MHSF), a nonprofit organization. Kim was also a descendant of Thomas McBride, one of the Mormon victims who died at Hawn’s Mill. Kim had heard about the commemoration and called to ask me about it. He also expressed interest about the possibility of the Foundation cosponsoring the event along with the RLDS Church. Kim contacted Mark and within a short time the two groups came together and cosponsored the commemoration, which was very successful. I mention this simply because within a year, Kim invited me to be on the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation Board. None of
us realized it at the time, but just a year later, the foundation ended up taking charge of the publication of the journal.

Up until this time the most significant project the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation had done was to raise funds for the creation of Ensign Peak Park located on the foothills north of Salt Lake City. The Mormon Historic Sites Foundation was originally called the Ensign Peak Foundation, but after the completion of Ensign Peak Park, they decided to adopt a different, broader name, hence the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation.

After I was put on the board I told the board members about the Mormon Historical Studies journal. I indicated to them that the editor, Maurine Ward, could use some help in terms of funding to help keep this journal going. Fortunately, they agreed, and a deal was struck with Maurine. The timing was perfect. The Mormon Historic Sites Foundation took over as publisher of the journal in 1999, and the following year the name of the periodical was changed to Mormon Historical Studies.

For the next six years, I continued to work as the assistant editor, and I helped Maurine produce the journal. However, during this time she experienced some health problems, making it harder and harder for her to do the work associated with the journal. In 2005 she decided to resign. Since I had been the assistant editor and knew the ropes by that time, arrangements were made for me to be the new editor.

When Maurine resigned in 2005, Ted Stoddard stepped down as well, so I asked Don E. Norton, an emeritus professor of linguistics and English language if he would help with the copyediting. He was willing and proved to be invaluable. Don had also taught the editing class at BYU and was a perfect fit.

Other changes occurred. Andy Hedges, who had served as book review editor since 1998, also requested that he be replaced. In the early 2000s, I became acquainted with Jacob (Jake) Olmstead, a young BYU history student. After graduating and getting his master’s degree at BYU, Jake went to TCU to get his doctorate. At the time Andy stepped down, I thought about asking Jake, who was finishing up his degree at TCU, but I was worried it might interfere with him completing his studies. But I tossed the idea of him being the book review editor, and to my surprise, he said he’d be happy to do it.

I also needed someone who could to the layout for the journal, one who knew InDesign, the typesetting program used by publishers. My wife, Susan, became the obvious choice. She had graduated from Utah State University in business education and had come computer savvy. She had actually wanted to learn the InDesign program, so this gave her an excuse to do so. She enrolled in an InDesign course at BYU and learned the program.

The first issue of Mormon Historical Studies by our new editorial staff rolled off the press in 2006, but because it took us addition time to “transition,” we were only able to publish one number of the journal that year, which we combined to form a Spring/Fall issue. But we’ve been going strong ever since and we’ve had good success. Over the years a lot of people told me how much they like the articles and enjoyed reading the journal. And a significant number of Mormon historians began to take note of the journal and submitted manuscripts. Mormon Historical Studies has since been recognized as a legitimate Mormon periodical and filled a nice niche. For a number of years Mormon historians and scholars have published their research in BYU Studies (now BYU Studies Quarterly), the Journal of Mormon History (published by the Mormon History Association), and the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal, and more recently the Religious Educator (published by the BYU Religious Studies Center), and there are others, but for many years I believed that there was a need for additional publication venues for those in the field of Mormon history.

During my time as editor I was also able to get the journal indexed and abstracted in Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life. So I think it’s significant that the journal has become recognized as part of the larger landscape of professional journals and periodicals associated with Mormon history and to some degree American religious history.

One of the reasons I took the job as editor was that I felt I could help some of my own colleagues in Religious Education at BYU to get their work published. I can’t tell you how many articles were published from our faculty, but there have been a lot. I would say that probably half of our faculty in the Department of Church History and Doctrine and even several in the Department of Ancient Scripture have contributed articles.

Jensen: You and Reid Neilson recently compiled a number of the “Conversations of Mormon Historians” into a book. Why don’t we talk about that?

Baugh: I mentioned earlier that one of the departments in the journal is the section titled “Conversations with Mormon Historians.” These conversations were actually typescripts taken from oral history interviews with a number of faithful LDS historians who had made important contributions to the understanding of Mormon history. We published some wonderful interviews with what I would call big-time Mormon historians...
who almost everyone in the Mormon historical community would be familiar with—historians who made a real impact in the area of Mormon history and historiography—Richard and Claudia Bushman, Thomas G. Alexander, Carol Cornwall Madsen, James B. Allen, Stanley B. Kimball and Dean C. Jessee—including historians from among the Religious Education faculty at BYU—Richard Lloyd Anderson, Milton V. Backman Jr., LaMar Berrett, and Larry C. Porter—to name a few. We also had interviews with historians who made their mark in Western American history, such as Charles S. Peterson, a professor of Western American History at USU, and Kenneth W. Godfrey, who had a distinguished career in the LDS seminary and institute program. It was such a terrific mix of seasoned scholars who were respected in the Mormon historical circles and also in the larger historical community.

For a number of years I contemplated compiling the interviews into a book. Finally, I approached Reid Neilson about it. At the time, Reid was a member of the Church History and Doctrine faculty (he’s now the managing director of the Church Historical Department). Reid had put together several book compilations, so I thought I’d pass the idea by him and he liked the idea. Together we edited the interviews down a bit so the core content was there but it could still be a part of a larger book compilation. Then we submitted the manuscript to the Religious Studies Center, and it was accepted. I think the book will make a significant contribution to Mormon history. I’m really pleased with it.

**Jensen:** What can your colleagues in history learn from these seasoned historians?

**Baugh:** Anyone who is interested in the historical profession would benefit from reading about the journeys of those who have already been there, the sacrifices they made, and their perspectives on history. In each of the interviews we asked them, “Tell us a little bit about your historical journey. How did you get into it, and what do you see as your contribution to the field of Mormon history?” Anyone who is interested in making their own contribution to the study of Mormon history will be inspired by their journey and experiences and their ups and downs. I’m inspired by what they did, how they accomplished what they did, and their take on things.

A number of these professionally academically trained Mormon historians have been part of the generation that has been called pioneers of the new Mormon history. If I were a younger historian and asked the question “How would I chart my path in the historical profession?” I could get a lot of inspiration from reading about these historians, what they did, how they pursued their careers, what they felt they should publish, and the contributions they made. It’s just fascinating. I can’t say enough about the history that we’ve been able to capture from these premier historians which may have otherwise been lost. I feel sad about two historians we were not able to interview. One was Dean May and the other was Davis Bitton, both of whom were history professors at the University of Utah. Both of these men were heavy hitters in the Mormon historical community, and unfortunately, both of these men died before we could get their stories. I don’t know if their families did either, but fortunately we have these others—sixteen total—whose life stories will be a valuable treasure, not only to their families, but to the Mormon historical community.

**Jensen:** Back to the journal, what articles are in the pipeline?

**Baugh:** Like I said, for a number of years I’ve tried to develop different departments—such as the conversations with Mormon historians, general articles, book reviews, and documents. We’ve also tried to highlight important Mormon historical sites as often as possible. Since the journal is published by the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, I felt like we needed to include articles that would highlight these site locations. For example, the next issue will have an important article by Mark L. Staker on the location of the Harmony home of Joseph and Emma Smith. Mark’s done some incredible research on that site and property. He is also preparing an article highlighting the Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith home frame home in Manchester, New York. So these site articles will have some very new and important historical information.

**Jensen:** You and your wife worked on this journal for many years. What can you tell us about the transition to Ron and Marilyn Barney, who are the new editors?

**Baugh:** Let me just mention, I can’t say enough about the value it was to have my wife as the layout editor. I could not have done it without her help and assistance. Once the manuscripts were ready to be inputted into InDesign, Susan and I would sit down together and formulate the layout and how we were going to put the issue together. I might say, “This is where we need to put this article,” or “I need you to shift that photograph to this page,” or “Let’s insert the table before the endnotes.” You know, the stylistic kinds of things. I could sit down with her and say, “This is what I’d like,” and she’d lay it out. And I received a lot of compliments on the journal. I think it
had a pleasing aesthetic journal quality about it. Susan and I worked together on everything that had to do with the layout of the journal, and I think we made a pretty good team. In total, we did fourteen issues together.

I served as the assistant editor of the journal from 1997 to 2005, then editor from 2006 to 2014—seventeen years total. That’s a long time to do this sort of thing—too long in some respects. So it was time for both Susan and me to move on. Susan works full-time as the accompanist for the choral groups at American Fork Junior High School. She also teaches twenty piano students, and recently she was asked to be the accompanist for the Salt Lake Choral Artists Women’s Chorus. She’s already too busy and needed to cut back somewhere. I needed a change as well. I have a lengthy list of research and writing projects that need to get done, which I’ve left on the back burner for years. I remember my former colleague Paul Peterson would often say, “I’m closer to death than birth,” and now that’s the case for me. Mortality is slipping by and both Susan and I felt like this was the time to pass the baton to someone else. Hopefully, now I’ll be able to devote more time to work on several articles and a couple of books that I’ve got in my head—books I just need to get down on paper.

The members of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation board were the ones who approached Ron and Marilyn Barney about taking over as editors of the journal. Ron worked in the Church Historical Department for many years and was on the Joseph Smith Papers Project team. He and Marilyn recently served as the executive directors of the Mormon History Association so they are well connected to the historical community. I’ve been trying to be helpful in terms of transitioning from the Baughs to the Barneys. One thing I’ve stressed and emphasized to Ron and Marilyn is my hope that the journal will continue reflect the scholarship of our people in Religious Education at BYU.

**Jensen:** *We have some landmark anniversaries coming up in the Church. Where are we going with the field of Mormon studies generally?*

**Baugh:** One thing I think that is really exciting is that we’re approaching the two hundredth anniversary of a lot events that took place in early LDS Church history—the First Vision in 2020; the coming of Moroni in 2023, Joseph Smith receiving the plates in 2027; the publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church in 2030; and the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 2036, to name just a few. We’re going to have milestone after milestone after milestone. In fact, I’ve kidded with my family that I want to live until 2044. And they asked, “Why 2044?” And I said, “Well, June 27, 2044, is the two hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom. At that time I’ll be eighty-seven years old, and if I can live that long I will have been part of all the two hundred anniversaries associated with the life and mission of Joseph Smith, and that’s pretty good.” I’m fifty-seven right now, so that gives me thirty years. But just think what’s going to happen during the next thirty years—a lot of key anniversaries will be taking place in the Church.

We’ve got to have more history written about the international Church. I am so convinced about that. We’ve got to study it, write about it, and publish it. One of the things I’ve tried to do include in *Mormon Historical Studies* are more articles focusing on the international aspects associated with Mormon history. In some of these international areas the first generation of Latter-day Saints are still alive and we need to get their history. There’s a heavy emphasis in the Church Historical Department to gather and collect and get these histories in the countries where the Church has been emerging in the last generation or so. That information needs to be collected, researched, written, and published.

I think we’re doing much, much better in the area of Mormon women’s history, but we still need to do more. Women have always been key players in every aspect of our history, and their stories and experiences need to be told. I’m very pleased with Richard E. Turley Jr.’s and Brittany A. Chapman’s efforts to produce the multivolume *Women of Faith in the Latter Days* series, highlighting the biographies of Mormon women. We need more of that type of history.

Finally, there is so much negatively slanted and disingenuous history on the Internet, about the Latter-day Saints, and Joseph Smith and Brigham Young in particular. So we need to do a better job explaining our history more accurately to both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences. We also need to be more proactive in countering those who write critically against the Church, but of course do so civilly. Transparency is also important. The recent release of several historical and doctrinal statements by the Church illustrates a genuine effort to be more open about our history and issues related to the Church.

There are Church members who, in their search for truth and understanding, may experience a crisis of faith regarding some of the doctrines, practices, teachings, or the history associated with the Church. I totally understand that. But I can honestly say that I’ve never had any spiritual or intellectual hiccups with Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or
any of the prophets or leaders. Did they have shortcomings? Sure, they did. Were mistakes made by our people and our leaders? Why of course. And we certainly don’t have all the answers, but to me, our history has the power to produce and strengthen faith and testimony. I often say to my students, “If you don’t know Mormonism is true, you haven’t done your homework. And you won’t find historical or doctrinal truth by studying the wrong stuff written or presented by people whose purpose is to destroy faith, misrepresent the facts, or who have an ax to grind against the Church.” Our history is so faith-promoting and so fantastic! And it is so obvious to me that the guiding hand of God has directed the course of the Latter-day Saints.

Jensen: What other comments do you want to make about anything—the journal, anything else you want to add?

Baugh: I feel like Mormon Historical Studies was meant to be, and I hope the journal will have longevity. Maurine Ward, the first editor, did something that no one else did, she pulled things together to produce the journal and made it happen. Then she got a few people together to keep it going; then others came on board to take it to the next level. I was fortunate to become involved and when my turn as editor came, I had my own vision of what I thought would improve the quality of the journal, and I feel like we brought the journal to a point where the Barneys can raise the bar and improve it even further. I also hope the journal will continue to have a high standard of academic and scholarly professionalism but also reflect faith—I hope that the contributors and their writings will always emphasize the faith aspect. I'm a firm believer that Mormon historians can produce objective scholarly history and at the same time include the element of faith.

In my own pursuit scholarly endeavors, I have attempted to interpret Mormon history “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118) through what could simply be called Restoration eyes. And while I believe that nonbelieving historians have made wonderful contributions in the field of Mormon history, I am of the opinion that the best scholarship in Mormon history has been and will continue to be produced by believing Latter-day Saint historians and writers—those on the inside who understand the spiritual dimensions and workings of the Church and it leaders and members and who possess the gift of the Holy Ghost, which enables them to tap into the higher source of knowledge and truth, the truth that God possesses.

Some time ago, I was discussing with one of my colleagues in Religious Education about the incredible amount of historical scholarship and literature that has been produced about the Latter-day Saints. To this, he said something quite profound. “Yes, much has been done,” he remarked. “And yet, with all that has been done, what has been written is only a prelude. There is so much more to do.” Truly there is “much more to do,” much more to research, much more to write about. And the best in Mormon history is yet to be written. And I believe it will be written by believing Latter-day Saint scholars who will write through the lens of faith the ever-unfolding history of the Latter-day Saints.
The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception

**Review of**
The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception

**REVIEW BY DEVAN JENSEN**


This book tells the story of America’s perceptions of Mormonism over the past five decades, bookended by the presidential campaigns of George Romney and Mitt Romney. It deservedly won the Mormon History Association’s Best Book Award for 2013. The book provides valuable historical context to events of modern Church history. In terms of Church publicity, it was truly the best of times, the worst of times.

The introduction notes how little George Romney’s religion affected his presidential campaign of 1968. His credentials were impressive. George led American Motors to new prominence and gave rise to the compact car. His prominent role in company commercials made him a “household name” (1). Elected three times as Michigan governor, he led the state’s constitutional convention. He was also viewed as a progressive in the civil rights movement.

During his campaign, the media viewed his faith neutrally and even positively at times. *The New Republic* called him “a kind of political Billy Graham.”
The Nation commented on his faith as one of his “assets” and a significant part of his “attractive public image” (2). This was a surprising turn from the Church’s image just a few decades earlier when Senator Reed Smoot was grilled in a Senate hearing about his loyalty to the United States because of suspected ties to polygamy.

All seemed golden until a candid but politically damaging comment surfaced about George being “brainwashed” about US involvement in the Vietnam War. His campaign never recovered, but public perceptions of his faith did not contribute to his political downfall.

In contrast to his father’s campaign, Mitt Romney’s credentials were overshadowed by his religion. After years of success at Bain Capital, Mitt helped save the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. As a Republican, he won the governorship of Massachusetts. But his faith led to serious challenges from the Religious Right in his first presidential campaign. A Christian website posted the claim that “if you vote for Romney you are voting for Satan” (2). In an NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll on December 13, 2006, 53 percent of respondents reported that they were “very uncomfortable or have some reservations about voting for a presidential candidate who is Mormon” (3). Clearly the landscape had changed, but why?

The book offers an incredible perspective on swings in public perception toward the Church over the past fifty years. Like the world of politics, public perception is fickle, oscillating drastically as a result of world events and media portrayals. The civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s negatively impacted the view of the Church, but some ground was regained after the 1978 revelation extending the priesthood to all worthy men. The title “Church Rites versus Civil Rights” cleverly summarizes the tension between these two worldviews.

In the chapters titled “Familiar Spirits” (parts 1 and 2), Haws discusses the public relations nightmare of anti-Mormon efforts in the 1980s and 1990s. The book and film titled The God Makers had a devastating impact on the Church’s image, with some carryover into the early 2000s. The Mark Hofmann forgeries and bombings similarly left a crater in the Church’s public image. The book offers a noteworthy discussion of six excommunications in September 1993 and the tension growing between conservative and liberal intellectuals of that time. Haws briefly mentions the expulsion of several BYU professors in the 1990s, and this topic could have been explored more.

In today’s Church, we still feel the tension simmering between orthodox and progressive views in the Ordain Women and same-sex marriage movements.

In the 1980s to 1990s and on into the 2000s, the pendulum swung to the positive—for example, the national championship BYU football team in 1984, a Mormon Miss America, the Church’s sesquicentennial in 1997, and the 2005 celebration of the bicentennial of Joseph Smith’s birth. President Gordon B. Hinckley’s openness to the media sent a signal of new openness to interviews (158).

In more recent years, popular media portrayed the Church in a more complicated light. The Broadway musical The Book of Mormon surprised audiences with its irreverent but warmhearted tribute to Mormons, and the HBO drama Big Love burned in the public mind an afterimage of polygamy and discouraged some members with its portrayal of sensitive temple scenes.

Surprisingly, faith played a less important factor in Mitt’s second campaign in 2012. Mormon support for Proposition 8 in California did win the ire of same-sex marriage advocates. But media sources mainly portrayed the faith neutrally or positively, and Harry Reid’s presence as Senate majority leader perhaps limited the anti-Mormon rhetoric. Many from the religious right supported Mitt’s second campaign, although they thought of it as, in Larry Sabato’s words, a “shotgun marriage between two very different religions [that] are completely dependent on one another for victory” (265). Chief among those reluctant supporters in 2012 was Pastor Robert Jeffress, who just one year earlier labeled Mormonism a cult. He rejected President Barack Obama’s “perceived attack on religious values and religious liberties” and threw his support to Mitt. Richard Mouw was much more positive about supporting Mormon faith and values.

Haws concludes that public perception of Mormons remains ambivalent. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, professor at the University of North Carolina, wryly summed up deep-seated distrust of Mormons as the invasion of the body snatchers syndrome: “While Mormons embody the economic and moral success endorsed by the American Dream, they also subscribe to beliefs that to many, seem peculiar—even bizarre. . . . No matter how much Mormon behavior conforms to what most consider admirable (and maybe especially because they look so wholesome), some Americans are convinced Mormons secretly await an opportunity to take over the world” (277). This perception will continue as long as Mormons remain in the world but not of the world.
In the concluding chapter, Haws writes that the Church wants to be accepted as Christian, but with a distinctive brand. Terryl Givens stated the paradox this way: “You want to have acceptability . . . [so] that you can fraternize with . . . fellow Christians, but at the same time you don’t want to feel so comfortable that there’s nothing to mark you as a people who are distinct, who have a special body of teachings, a special [body of] responsibilities” (280). This different flair will likely always set us apart from our fellow Christians as well as our fellow Americans.

A limitation of the book is that its well-defined scope circumscribes discussion within the walls of the American political area. There are few references to Church events worldwide or international perspectives of Mormonism. Historians may dislike the placement of notes at the back of the book (rather than footnotes or endnotes).

This book would be excellent for general readers interested in Mormonism’s changing public perception, as well as for teachers of modern Church history seeking context for recent events and the status of the Church in American media and political arenas.

New Publications

To purchase any of the following publications, please visit www.byubookstore.com and search by book title or ISBN number, or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

- **Our Savior’s Love: Hope & Healing in Christ**
  - Editors: Alonzo L. Gaskill and Stanley A. Johnson
  - When we actually, really know, understand, and feel of our Savior’s love—we are transformed; we are changed in our understanding of what divine love is. It is the encounter with Christ’s love that causes us to submit our wills and lives to God’s will and way. Our Savior’s love enables us to see ourselves in proper perspective and helps us to see others as God sees them and to love them as deeply as he loves them.
Zion’s Trumpet:
1854 Welsh Mormon Periodical
Edited by Ronald D. Dennis

Dan Jones assumed the editorship of Zion’s Trumpet at the beginning of 1854. His first mission to his native Wales was in fulfillment of a prophecy uttered by Joseph Smith on the eve of his martyrdom: “You will see Wales and fulfill the mission appointed you ere you die.” Jones calls Zion’s Trumpet “a treasury of heavenly pearls, a gift given to the age that unfolds.” As with the English translation of the six preceding volumes of Zion’s Trumpet, this 1854 volume is published in a “facsimile translation” format to provide the reader with something of the appearance and flavor of the original Welsh publication.


Called to Teach:
The Legacy of Karl G. Maeser
A. LeGrand Richards

Karl G. Maeser has rightfully been called the spiritual architect not only of Brigham Young University, but also of the Church Educational System. As the first superintendent of Church Schools, he helped found and maintain over fifty academies and schools from Canada to Mexico. He helped develop the public education system in Utah and helped establish the Utah Teachers’ Association. The students he taught personally included future US senators and members of the House of Representatives, a US Supreme Court justice, university presidents, and many General Authorities.


Joseph F. Smith: Reflections on the Man and His Times
Edited by Craig K. Manscill, Brian D. Reeves, Guy L. Dorius, and J. B. Haws

This book is a compilation of presentations from a BYU Church History Symposium. It features more than twenty messages about the life of Joseph F. Smith, including chapters by Elder M. Russell Ballard and Joseph Fielding McConkie. Elder Ballard, great-grandson of Joseph F. Smith, describes how the Lord prepared President Smith to lead the Church. Several scholars, historians, educators, and researchers highlight aspects of President Smith’s life, including his boyhood and adolescence, family and personal relationships, doctrinal contributions, developments in Church government, initiatives taken during his presidency in education, building construction, building the Laie Hawaii Temple, creating the seminary program, and public outreach.


By Divine Design: Best Practices for Family Success and Happiness
Edited by Brent L. Top and Michael A. Goodman

The prophets of God continually raise their warning voices and lovingly give counsel to strengthen our families and heighten the spirituality of our children. This is a gospel-centered “best practices” book for husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, that is founded on prophetic teachings and substantiated by good science. This book will help readers gain new and important insights about our most important responsibilities in time and eternity—our families.

Nauvoo and Hancock County, Illinois: A Guide to Family History and Historical Sources
Kip Sperry
This comprehensive family history reference book describes hundreds of genealogical and historical resources for Nauvoo, Hancock County, and west-central Illinois. It includes descriptions of original records, primary and secondary sources, computer databases, finding aids, guides, websites, indexes, manuscript collections, newspapers, oral histories, historical and genealogical periodicals, library collections, and much more. It also includes an extensive bibliography of genealogical, local history, and historical resources.

The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle: The 43rd Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Edited by Frank F. Judd Jr., Eric D. Huntsman, and Shon D. Hopkin
This volume sheds important light on the mission of the man whom Jesus himself referred to as “the rock.” As a sometimes fallible but nonetheless earnest disciple, Peter is an important example of grace, transformation, service, and power. Essays in this collection treat his cultural background and context, his role in the apostolic church, many of his noted teachings, and his important legacy in early Christianity and the Restoration.

Upcoming Events

BYU Easter Conference
March 27, 2015
BYU’s annual Easter Conference will be at 7 p.m. in the Joseph Smith Building (JSB) auditorium on BYU campus. This year Elder Spencer J. Condie, emeritus member of the Seventy, will be the keynote speaker. Other speakers will be Matthew O. Richardson, advancement vice president at BYU, and Jennifer Brinkerhoff Platt, formerly a visiting professor of ancient scripture at BYU. Each will talk about certain aspects of the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. There will also be musical presentations to enhance the evening. For details, visit rsc.byu.edu.

Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Friday and Saturday, October 23–24, 2015
The 44th Annual BYU Sperry Symposium will be start in the Joseph Smith Building (JSB) auditorium on BYU campus. The title of this year’s symposium is “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder.” Presentations will cover the Book of Mormon’s role in restoring doctrinal truths, the translation process, the witnesses, and the printing of this book.

2016 Church History Symposium
Thursday and Friday, March 3–4, 2016
The 2016 theme is “Beyond Biography: Sources in Context for Mormon Women’s History.” Scholars of Mormon women’s history have long demonstrated a commitment to and an interest in biography. The resulting narratives have helped to recover and preserve voices that would have otherwise been lost to modern awareness.

These events are free of charge, and registration is not required. Some event details are subject to change. For more details, please visit us online at rsc.byu.edu/conferences or contact Brent Nordgren at 801-422-3293.
Staff Spotlight

Associate Director

Dana M. Pike is professor of ancient scripture and ancient Near Eastern studies, associate dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, and associate director of the Religious Studies Center. He was born in Boston and raised in New Hampshire. Brother Pike earned a BS degree in archaeology from BYU, and a PhD in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Since coming to BYU more than two decades ago, Brother Pike has taught two years at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Other assignments have included serving as the coordinator of BYU’s interdepartmental Ancient Near Eastern Studies major and as the publications director of the Religious Studies Center. He has worked as one of the international editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls and has been involved in researching and publishing about the scrolls, the Bible, and the Book of Mormon. Dana and his wife, Jane, have three children and six grandchildren.

Editing Intern

Hadley Griggs is a junior from Phoenix, Arizona, studying English with minors in editing and TESOL. She has been involved in too many opportunities on campus—from the BYU Writing Center to entomology lab work, from TAing for modern American usage to editing at the Religious Studies Center. After graduation, she plans to travel to Nepal to teach kids English. When she is not busily rushing around campus, she loves petting dogs, playing Scrabble, and trying to write the next great American novel.

Design Intern

Madison Swapp is a senior from Draper, Utah, studying art history and curatorial studies with a minor in business management. She has worked at the Religious Studies Center since September of 2013, beginning as a research assistant and now as a designer. She has loved her time as a designer and plans to pursue this new interest following her graduation in December of 2015. In her free time, Madison enjoys spending time with family and friends, going out to dinner (Café Rio in particular), and traveling.
Submission Guidelines

The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The beliefs of the respective authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Complete author guidelines are provided at rsc.byu.edu/RSCStyleGuide.pdf. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted only if an electronic copy is included.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including quotations. Authors should follow style conventions of The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, and the Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3rd edition, as reflected in a recent issue of the Religious Educator.

Manuscripts will be evaluated by the following questions:

1. Does the manuscript address a clear thesis? Does the argument proceed cautiously and logically? Is the writing clear? Is it engaging and interesting? If not, why?

2. To what degree is the author knowledgeable on the topic as a whole, as shown, for example, by content, phrasing, contextualizing, thorough use of the best sources, and bibliography? Does the author adequately acknowledge and deal with opposing views? If not, why?

3. Does the manuscript present significant new data or new perspectives? What is its main contribution? Will people want to read this ten years from now? Does it make a contribution without resorting to sensationalism or controversy?

4. Does the author follow the canons of responsible scholarship (uses sound and fair methodology; documents arguable facts)? If not, why?

5. Is the manuscript faith-promoting? Is the piece in harmony with the established doctrine of the Church?

If a manuscript is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to match the endnotes, and highlighted to show the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the highlighted quotations.

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We are deeply saddened to learn of the unexpected death of Stephen A. Hales in January. Stephen has contributed much to the Religious Studies Center (RSC). Former RSC publications director Richard Holzapfel wrote:

When we looked to increase the Religious Studies Center's professional look, we asked Stephen A. Hales to help us. He created the RSC logo, designed the Religious Educator journal, the Religious Education Review magazine, and a number of RSC books. Each bears the touch of his master's design. Following his creative efforts, we had to match the quality of our contents with his talented gifts to the RSC.1

In 2000, when Robert L. Millet was the dean of Religious Education at BYU, he asked Richard Neitzel Holzapfel to put together an academic journal now known as the Religious Educator. Richard recruited Ted D. Stoddard and Stephen A. Hales to help him launch the new journal. Ted taught business writing in BYU's Marriott School of Business, and Stephen was a professor at BYU and the founder and president of Stephen Hales Creative.

Together, Richard, Ted, and Stephen set out to find a niche that would enhance gospel scholarship and teaching without duplicating the excellent efforts at BYU Studies or the Ensign. The target audience, identified by Dean Millet and the Religious Education Administrative Council, was seminary and institute teachers, religion professors, and Church teachers who taught Relief Society, priesthood, and Sunday School (Gospel Doctrine).1 You, the reader, now hold the journal conceived by this team.

With the help of his team, Stephen helped conceive of the design, the look, and the feel of the journal. The Religious Educator is practical, yet beautiful. Each cover is adorned with a beautiful nature photograph and the interior, which has evolved over the years, is designed to be inviting to a broad audience of readers, including the academic and nonacademic. To make the journal more accessible, there is at least one image at the beginning of each article. Without Stephen's creative input, the Religious Educator would not be the journal it is today.

Not only was Stephen an exceptional designer of advertisements, websites, magazines, books, and other media, he was an incredible man and example of a life well lived.

Note