

"His Hand Is Stretched Out Still": The Lord's Eternal Covenant of Mercy

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Many times in the scriptures we read of the Lord's outstretched hand or arm. It serves as a metaphor both for his forbearance and for his invitation to come to him. Nephi reports the Lord's assurance that "mine arm is lengthened out all the day long" (2 Nephi 28:32). We find such references scattered throughout Isaiah's writings. "His anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 9:12, 17).¹ In his prophecies that hand is sometimes extended in anger and a moment later in mercy, but always in love. There is a sense that God is reaching for us even when we are turning away. His outstretched hand offers us his continuing covenant of peace.

Isaiah first saw the Lord in the temple in a magnificent outpouring of light and sound. The ground shook beneath his feet. Holiness reverberated, surrounding him with heavenly voices, praising God. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3 New International Version [NIV]). And indeed, it was for the man Isaiah. For a moment he glimpsed heaven and in the midst of it, the Lord, "seated on a throne, high and exalted" (Isaiah 6:1 NIV).

Isaiah was utterly overcome by the chasm he saw between himself and the Holy Being before him. His first uttered cry described his feeling of being unclean in the presence of such purity. "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, [Jehovah]² Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5 NIV). One can only guess at the feelings of shame, fear and awe that filled his trembling heart.

Nothing had been asked of him yet. He alone had reached deep into his own soul and assessed himself unworthy of the experience. But in moments his apprehension turned to joy, for he was touched by the Lord's messenger. He heard a voice uttering the transforming words, "See, ... your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:7 NIV). One can imagine the rapture that filled his heart replacing the dread of moments before.

But this was not all. In the midst of the light and praise, he heard the voice of the Lord himself, and it pierced him to the very center of his being. The newly cleansed Isaiah glimpsed a heavenly council; the words he heard were simple and clear. "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8 NIV). These were familiar words he had witnessed long before in a similar council. In that setting the Firstborn Son of God had offered, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27). And that had made all the difference for everyone forever.

On hearing the Lord's question, Isaiah was spectator no longer. He responded with the familiar, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8 NIV). Dennis Rasmussen observes:

With a question God gives the gift of choice. He asks; man must respond. To complete his work God Omnipotent seeks for help. Will man choose to give it? ... Will man through his choosing finish the work that God through his choosing began? Will man freely respond, freely return? God asks, then God waits. ... "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have *mercy* upon you." (Isaiah 30:18.)³

Isaiah continues: "For the Lord is a God of *judgment*: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18 King James Version [KJV], emphasis added).

The Mercy of God and Man's Choice Culminate in Covenant

In this account of the call of Isaiah we encounter the three ideas I wish to examine in detail. They are embodied in three Hebrew words: *esed*, *hinnēn*, and *br< or b#rt*.

esed is defined as “goodness, kindness, mercy, love to God, piety, favour.”⁴ Often it is translated into English as “loving-kindness.” It is a word I loved at first sight. I even loved the way it sounded. We find an example of its use in Isaiah.

I will mention the *lovingkindnesses* of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his *mercies*, and according to the multitude of his *lovingkindnesses*. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour. (Isaiah 63:7–8 KJV, emphasis added)

The second word, *hinnēnî*, is really a compound with a suffix. The root is *hin*; *hinnā* is the word, and it means “lo! behold!” When the suffix is added, the word becomes *hinnēnî*, which means, “Behold me! *Here am I!*” We might add “ready to serve,” or “at your service.” It is the sort of response a servant would give to his master, or a son to his father, or merely someone calling attention to himself as one who is ready to listen and obey, as in the present case. *Hinnēnî* is also a word I love, with a meaning that followers of God should hope to adopt in the pattern of the prophets and the Son of God himself. Other occurrences of this term are found in Genesis 22:11, when Abraham answers an angel in this way; in Genesis 31:11, when his grandson, Jacob, also responds to an angel in this pattern; in 1Samuel 3:4–10, where the boy Samuel is finally instructed to change his *hinnēnî* to “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”; then, predating other examples, we find Jesus offering himself with the words, “Here am I, send me,” in Abraham 3:27.

The third word, *bārā*, is a root that means “covenant.” Its derivation, *bərît*, is the common expression used for circumcision and carries the idea of “cutting a covenant.” When applied to an agreement between God and man, it means “an alliance of friendship” accompanied by “signs or pledges.”⁵ *Bərît* is the word used almost exclusively in the Old Testament for “covenant.”

The setting for Isaiah's life-altering experience was Solomon's temple. This too is significant as we look at the *hesed* of the Lord who came to meet a man in the holy of holies, a place designed specifically for that purpose. We see the precedent for this in the experiences of Moses and his people.

Moses Meets the Lord in a Holy Tent While Israel Watches

In Exodus 33 we read of the tent of meeting, which is translated “tabernacle” or “tent of the congregation” in the King James Version and is the precursor of Solomon's temple (see Exodus 40:2).

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone [who was seeking to find] the Lord⁶ would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp. (Exodus 33:7–11 NIV)

Love and Trust: Integral Parts of God's Mercy

What kind of love is engendered between a father and his child who meet face to face and speak as friends? What kind of faith? What kind of mercy? Even reading of such an encounter invites the righteous to search for and find such a sacred place—a place where they may abandon their hurried prayers to wait upon the Lord with a broken heart and contrite spirit, with pleadings that can barely be uttered in the presence of such purity. In short, they must be willing to examine their own “unclean lips” in the lively hope that their guilt may be taken away and their sins atoned for, as we see described in Isaiah.

What a pattern of trust was perpetuated as the Lord came to tent among his people! They knew that even in their wanderings he would attend to their needs; he would be close by in the center of the camp.⁷ The Lord began this cycle of trust and love, and humankind completes it through the affirmation of faith. Adam answered an angel's query, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). With similar devotion, Isaiah answered quickly, “Here am I. Send me!” It is an eternal pattern begun in heaven. Eternal questions are asked and answered in the temple. In the temple the Lord's trust of his children and their trust of him come together. The sanctuary of the temple becomes a bridge of love, uniting the whole family of God. There the Lord promises, “I will come unto you,” and mortal beings reply, “I believe You will come.” Then he comes, and the cycle continues. It is a perfect pattern. “There will always be a need ... to walk to the edge of the light of [our] knowledge and testimony into the twilight of faith.”⁸ The assurance that others have knelt in temples and seen and heard and felt the peace of the Lord lights the way to modern temples. Isaiah also spoke of this:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” ... Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord. (Isaiah 2:2–3, 5 NIV, emphasis added)

In both Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 55, the word *ways* is translated from the Hebrew word *derekh*, which means “way, road, path.” In Isaiah 55:8–9 we are reminded that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, for they are higher than ours; nor are his paths our paths, for they are also higher. Yet he is willing to help us find his higher way. Isaiah tells us of a unique high way:

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way;⁹ the simple will not stray from it.¹⁰ No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; ... But *only* the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. (Isaiah 35:8–10 NIV, emphasis added)

Return where? To the presence of the Lord. This is his focus: his children moving ever toward him to become his rightful heirs. In a one-on-one encounter with Moses the Lord explains:

The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine. And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words. *For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.* (Moses 1:37–39)

If we combine this with Jesus' statement, it helps us understand the Lord's plan for us.

Jesus ... lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give *eternal life* to as many as thou hast given him. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* (John 17:1–3 KJV, emphasis added)

It is as if the Lord is explaining to man, “I have built you a place to learn—an earth—and I will show you while you are there the path that will bring you back into my presence.”

This lifting up and drawing all people unto him (see John 12:32) that they might eventually find themselves face to face with God is his work and glory, and finding their path to that moment of transcendent knowing is every mortal being’s work and eventual glory. Humankind was born for glory. Both the Lord’s and our tasks are essential. One without the other would be incomplete. Joseph Smith taught that as a person approaches God he or she is enlightened.

We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin; and like the ancients, *arrives at that point of faith where he is wrapped in the power and glory of his Maker and is caught up to dwell with Him.*¹¹

The wrenching pathos in the Lord’s bidding his children to come to him is scattered throughout Isaiah’s writings. Early on he speaks of a vineyard, well prepared, well planted, and well tended, which produces only bad fruit. His plaintive cry echoes across centuries and the whole earth that that vineyard might well symbolize. “What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?” (Isaiah 5:4 NIV).

Man Must Choose God

After all God has done, it remains for man to authorize, by his agency, the heavenly tutoring required to save him. Persuasion is the only tool allowed.

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 unflinching 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” (Moroni 7:36).¹²

In other words, each of us must respond to the Lord’s invitation with his or her own *Hinnēni*.

Later, Isaiah tells of God’s calling out with no one to answer his plaintive call. This is repeated almost like a refrain through many chapters (see, for example, Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). One can only guess at his delight when

Isaiah answered so promptly with what turned out to be absolute devotion. "*Hinnēni* [Here am I]!" he cried, determined to wear away his life in serving his heavenly King.

Another striking example of this pathos concerns the lack of justice. For without justice, mercy has no starting point. Justice and mercy are inseparable. C. S. Lewis offers a window on this interplay between justice and mercy. "Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful. That is the important paradox. As there are plants which will flourish only in mountain soil, so it appears that Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: transplanted to the marshland ... it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety."¹³

The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intercede; so his own *arm* worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. (Isaiah 59:15–16 NIV, emphasis added)

He would do it himself. He had the power and the glory and the will.

Even more tellingly, the symbol of his hand conveys a message of absolute certainty that he will never desert us. We will not be forgotten or forsaken.

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." (Isaiah 49:14–16 NIV)

There is magnetism in such unfailing love. We are drawn to it. Just as Jesus suggested, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32 KJV). Such kindness, such goodness entices us to come closer. There is a remembered righteousness in us, carried in the spirit through a veil into mortality.

Sometimes during solitude I hear truth spoken with clarity and freshness; uncolored and untranslated it speaks from within myself in a language original but inarticulate, heard only with the soul, and I realize I brought it with me, was never taught it nor can I effectively teach it to another.¹⁴

Because persuasion is the only tool available, pointing out consequences becomes an effective means to help one choose among the many options in his or her path. Describing consequences is not coercive. It must needs be that there is an opposition in all things so that black and white are never confused with gray.

Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will *enjoy* the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be *paid back* for what their hands have done. (Isaiah 3:10–11 NIV, emphasis added)

Personal accountability is real. Each individual chooses his or her rewards. The Lord whispers over and over again, "There is no joy in sin, and joy is your destiny. I offer you joy!" Or he shouts, urging us to forsake pride and greed and selfishness. But the choice is always ours. Even though the wicked are given further opportunities, the unrepentant wicked do not make a good choice.

Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord. O Lord, your *hand* is lifted high, but they do not see it. (Isaiah 26:10–11 NIV, emphasis added)

Still he waits. He tells them where he is and trusts them to find him. He sees the sinners punished, humbled, then penitent, and he heals them. He points out the peace that only those who have forsaken sins can know. But in the same breath he reminds all of the restlessness of sin and the utter lack of any semblance of peace.

“I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me—the breath of man that I have created. I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near,” says the Lord. “And I will heal them.” But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.” (Isaiah 57:15–21 NIV)

Justice Must Be Satisfied

God paints the boundaries precisely where they are. There is no way he can deny his own justice; it is inexorable. Perhaps that is his most telling message. Yet, with justice one day to be paid, he everlastingly extends his hand, stretching to reach to mortal beings. The Sistine Chapel ceiling comes to mind, where Michaelangelo painted the hand of the Creator-God reaching through the clouds to the first man. So soaringly real is the painting that in studying it over time, one is led to feel that one of them must surely move the little distance to connect those outstretched hands, touching graceful index fingers. Who will move? What will justice require? The Lord began his “reaching out” with the first man.

Isaiah repeatedly sings a refrain that haunts the reader and confirms the idea that justice must be satisfied, that the wicked and the righteous will indeed harvest the fruit of their actions. But that same Creator-God still stretches across the vaulted sky to touch the reaching hands, the fingers of his struggling sons and daughters to lead them along the path to the Light. “For all this his anger [justice] is not turned away, but *his hand is stretched*¹⁵ *out [in mercy] still*” (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4 KJV, emphasis added).

His hand is eternally extended, reaching through a veil to his children to lead them to a place apart if they will only answer his call.¹⁶ In that sacred, silent spot he will teach them of the path to his glory (see Isaiah 2:3, 5). He will show them how it lies behind and before them. His prophets have left glimpses of the Light, records of brief encounters with glory. They witnessed majesty, the sound of rushing waters, whiteness above all earthly whiteness, light brighter than noonday sun, a voice of thunder, and a still, small voice. Yet it was only a shadow of the full reality.

For behold, the time cometh, ... that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles. ... And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; ... And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning. (Mosiah 3:5, 7–8)

The greatest of his miracles might well be his own capacity to suffer temptations, physical pain, thirst, and hunger “even more than man can suffer,” which enables him to succor others with complete compassion.

Jesus Personifies Mercy

This Light (see Isaiah 2:5; 9:2) came into the world that human beings might see clearly and know exactly how to align themselves perfectly with God—not just in heaven, but while living in this world. No longer did mortals see through a glass darkly (see 1 Corinthians 13:12); they became witnesses as he walked quietly among them, marking an everlasting path by his own footsteps. From desert valleys to verdant mountaintops, how beautiful were the feet of him (see Mosiah 15:18) who brought, and also lived, sublime tidings of the greatest joy.

Isaiah had seen this day and was moved to write, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: ... Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6–7 KJV). Isaiah even described the Savior’s childhood and ministry in the north: “He will honor Galilee. ... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (9:1–2 NIV). The prophet spoke of the gentleness of the Lord’s ministry—of his not discarding a bruised reed or putting out a sputtering lamp which only needed trimming, of his not rejecting even the grape mash left over from the vintage while there was still some good juice in it—using metaphors calculated to show how ultimate power would be used not to put people everlastingly down, but to lift them everlastingly up, reclaiming what might have seemed lost and of little worth to a less penetrating eye.

Isaiah had spoken of the Lord’s calling with no one to answer. In fulfillment, Jesus asked his dearest disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Though the multitudes sometimes thought him to be a prophet, Peter was able to reply with fervor, “Thou art the Christ [in Hebrew, the Messiah], the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13, 16 KJV).

Isaiah had said, “Your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21 NIV). In affirmation, Jesus promised, “I will not leave you comfortless: ... But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:18, 26 KJV).

Isaiah had repeated over and over again that although God’s justice would be satisfied, he would continue to stretch forth his hand in mercy and loving-kindness all the day long. In token, Jesus had beckoned with his hand to a few trusted men to follow him. He had promised that he would make them fishers of men, teaching them to teach and reach to those who needed the strength of their strong hands in order to rise. He truly gave them power to lift up hands that hung down and to lend their strength to those who could barely stand (see Isaiah 35:3).

Isaiah penned the most sublime description of this same Jesus, the living Christ, who would gather all humankind by his supreme atoning act.

To whom has the *arm* [compare Isaiah 59:16] of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot. ... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. ... Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ... Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his [soul, KJV] unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:1–6, 9, 12 NIV, emphasis added)

Thus we see the ultimate reaches of mercy spelled out in Gethsemane and on a cross. He had indeed engraved those he sought to draw to him on the palms of his hands (see Isaiah 49:16). A poetic response, echoing the *hinnēni* of Isaiah, reflects the deep feelings such a miracle of sacrifice evokes.

Dear Lord Jesus, Thou who lovest The people of the Mosque, Who would have gathered The people of the synagogue, Whose arms continue open To each saffron-robed monk And searching nun, Lord of the children And the childlike, Pulled by thy love, Seized by thy suffering, Drawn to thee By everlasting cords, I come!¹⁷

Yet, whether one reaches or never looks up, the invitation remains. The Lord continues to reach and eventually there is a meeting of minds, hearts, and hands, and the “everlasting cords” are tied. Whenever an individual plants his or her feet firmly on the path, determined to grasp the iron rod and never let go, the covenant (*berît*) is in force. Sanctification begins. The veil thins, and wisdom streams brightly through it. Although we are incomplete, we long to be whole, and all are invited to participate in the covenant. Now the relationship shifts; trust flows in both directions unimpeded. “Thy will be done” is the watchword at all times and in all places. Redemption is beginning. Having lived far beneath our spiritual privileges, we are lifted to a new level of life and light. The difference is dizzying. Like a ship floating through the locks of a canal, being lifted by water higher and higher, we emerge on a new ocean.

Covenants Differ from Laws

Covenants promise future behavior. The Hebrews in Abraham’s time spoke of “cutting a covenant,” and this is literally what they did, cutting animals in half in a sacrificial mode. Circumcision was a sign in the flesh that God had a people of his own and that the people had a God who would protect and exalt them. The Abrahamic covenant included property, priesthood, and progeny, all promised by God to Abraham, his proven friend. That covenant is a prototype for the covenants entered into in today’s temples. The blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still available and in force. The Lord spoke thus of that everlasting covenant to Abraham: “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an *everlasting covenant*, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Genesis 17:7 KJV, emphasis added). God then promised Abraham land and gave him the token of circumcision. In addition, he and Sarai were given new names. Even though past the age of childbearing, they were also promised the miracle birth of a son and heir to the covenant.

Covenants *are* the path. They define the “Way of Holiness” Isaiah described. These holy vows bring humankind closer and closer to the Lord. One speaks in today’s vernacular of bonding with a child or loved one. Covenants are truly the bonding of mortal beings to the Lord. It is a bond that he will not break; this is guaranteed by one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

“You, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you.” I said, “You are my servant”; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right *hand*. (Isaiah 41:8–10 NIV, emphasis added)

The Lord’s mercy and love are sure. He will support his children. Those that bind themselves to him are promised transcendent blessings, riches beyond anything the world can offer.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar

on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:29–31 NIV)

The proof of the Lord’s trust in us is the atonement. The proof of our trust in the Lord is our willingness to be taught. Once taught, we covenant our absolute obedience. These two trusts flow together in the temple. The mercy of the Lord, the willingness of humankind, and the binding of them to one another seem to me to be captured in the three Hebrew words with which this treatise began: *hesed*, loving-kindness and unfailing patience on the part of the Lord; *hinnēni* (Here am I), symbolizing tender submission to the Lord by mortal beings; and *bērīt* (covenant), the everlasting binding of humankind to God. Elder Neal A. Maxwell helps to summarize these ideas:

The Lord’s reach for us is so redemptive and constant. His *arm*, we are told in the Book of Mormon, extends “all the day long.” ... Jesus waits with open *arms* to receive us, and if we are fully faithful, ... we can eventually know at the entrance to His kingdom that sublime moment the prophet Mormon described when we could be “clasped in the *arms* of Jesus” (Morm. 5:11).¹⁸

After examining these principles primarily through the words of Isaiah, I am filled with gratitude for the elegant expressions of this great prophet. Over and over he finds the precise metaphor to spell out truth for any who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel. He invites us on behalf of the Lord to come up to meet him in his temple. Isaiah himself met the Lord there, as did Moses in his tent temple. The temple has become my personal center for light and truth, where I have begun to understand the significance of sacred covenants.

In addition to Isaiah, I credit others on both sides of a thin veil whose hands have showed me how one stretches to reach the Lord. Some I have singled out by quoting them in these pages but the one who has taught me most I have left until last.

For all of us there is something about the temple that can change our lives. We need to reach for it, to honor it, if need be to sacrifice for it, even our sins. Some of us have fought against that ... because it means change, maybe some painful change. But that change is the Spirit of God working on the soul and it will come to each one of us [if] we will honor the promptings and let the Lord take over in our lives. The Lord *is* in His temples, where He ministers personally and manifests himself to the faithful therein. With the power of Christ in His sanctuary, it is intended that all of us drink deeply, receive powerfully, and then testify worthily of that glorious truth.¹⁹

Notes

1. See also Isaiah 53:1; 63:5; and 65:2 for a few of many.

2. My preference is to insert the word *Jehovah* wherever the KJV or NIV has the word *Lord* in capital and small capital letters, which indicates the translators’ substitution for the name of God. See Keith H. Meservy, “Lord=Jehovah,” *Ensign* (June 2002): 29.

3. Dennis Rasmussen, *The Lord’s Question: Thoughts on the Life of Response* (Provo, Utah: Keter Foundation, 1985), 5, emphasis added.

4. All Hebrew definitions are taken from Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 338–39, s.v. *hesed*; 243–44, s.v. *hinnā*; and 136–37, s.v. *bārā*’ and *bērīt*.

5. Ibid., 136, s.v. *berit*.
6. See *ibid.*, 134, s.v. *mevakesh*, “seek to find.”
7. See Numbers 2:1 and 17 for a description of the tent of meeting, which was later pitched in the center of the camp, encircled by the Levites and then the rest of the tribes. This was the case both while they were camped and as they were moving from place to place.
8. Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely,” BYU devotional, 23 January 2001.
9. The NIV translator adds a capital W to “way” to be certain that path is understood to be the Lord’s.
10. Or, in an alternate NIV reading, “wicked fools will not go about on it.”
11. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 51, emphasis added.
12. Howard W. Hunter, “The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign* (November 1989): 17.
13. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 294.
14. Hugh B. Brown, *Eternal Quest*, ed. Charles M. Brown (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 435, quoted in Truman G. Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), frontispiece.
15. The Hebrew word is *naṭah*, which means to “stretch out, spread out, extend, incline, bend.” Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, 639.
16. Several years ago, as I examined the Princeton Index of Christian Art, I found in the earliest art, ca. A.D. 300–400, many instances of the hand of God extending through a veil and often even the figure of God from the waist up extending his hand through a veil.
17. Ann Madsen, “Beneath the Violet Windows—Gethsemane,” unpublished poem, 17 October 1976.
18. Neal A. Maxwell, “Insights from My Life,” *Ensign* (August 2000): 10, emphasis added.
19. Truman G. Madsen, *The Radiant Life* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 127–28.