Scriptural Insights Into Human Behavior and The Facilitation of Behavior Change

Burton C. Kelly
SCRIPTURAL INSIGHTS INTO HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE FACILITATION OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

By Burton C. Kelly, Ph. D.*

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Following the Savior's famous challenging and somewhat abstract sermon on the bread of life, "... many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:66.) Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67.) Simon Peter, serving as spokesman for his brethren, gave a most illuminating and direct answer to this query. "... Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God." (John 6:68-69.) Jesus is the Christ and does have the words of eternal life. If his words are sufficient to bring us eternal life, should they not also be sufficient and have the power to bring us the happiness and joy we seek in this life? Despite the assertions of some who have stated that the scriptures are not designed to answer social and psychological questions but rather to teach doctrine and moral principles, I submit that the scriptures serve as a meaningful foundation for all helping relationships. The rationale for this assertion follows:

Rationale for Using the Scriptures in Helping Relationships

1. They teach pure and correct principles. President Heber C. Kimball, President Spencer W. Kimball's grandfather, many years ago gave this thought provoking statement. "... we become degenerate by receiving principles that are less pure and perfect than the principles of God." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4, p. 222.) Accepting this statement as true, false and inadequate principles are not just harmless but harmful. It suggests that pragmatic principles are not adequate just because they work. They also need to be true. There have been various therapeutic techniques that have been found to "work" at least for the moment which subsequently have been found to have deleterious effects in a person's life.

2. Reason two is a corollary of reason one, i.e. the scriptures contain the truths to prevent and correct the bases of psychogenic psychopathology. (Please keep in mind that throughout these comments I am not talking about psychopathology due to physiological trauma, hormonal imbalances, etc., but due to psychological factors.) I submit, that the bases of psychogenic psychopathology are (1) violations of laws of thought and/or action by self, and perhaps others; (2) disruption of healthy, loving relationships.

Although there are those who may state that there are psychological problems caused entirely by the behavior of others, I believe this view is not supported by reason nor by most current professional thinking, especially by cognitive theorists. We don't really get into trouble nor have problems by knowing and living the truth. We get into trouble when we don't know the truth or know it and don't live it--either in thought and/or action. The Savior stated, "... If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples in deed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32.) It is important to distinguish between challenges and problems. We all experience various challenges probably every day of our lives. Oftentimes these challenges are largely due to the behavior of others and other circumstances often beyond our control. These challenges, however, do not become problems to us as long as we face them openly and follow correct principles of thought and action in dealing with them. The problems result when we try to hide from our challenges, deny or project our responsibilities, or in other ways seek to deal with challenges by avoiding and/or distorting truth and reality. For example, a person may be berated, ridiculed, castigated, etc., but until he internalizes these negative comments and responds with bitterness, resentment, anger, non-forgiveness, or the like, he does not have a problem--a challenge, yes, but a problem, no.

Both clinical experience and empirical research unequivocally have found that persons suffering from emotional disorders have experienced a disruption of healthy, loving relationships. The scriptures contain the basic principles essential for, and of, healthy, loving relationships.

3. Reason three is that the scriptures offer fundamental insights into each of the three basic elements of counseling relationships: (1) identification of the problem(s); (2) determination of the desired outcome(s); (3) a behavior change process. These three elements are found in all counseling relationships and usually in each interview thereof. The professional behavioral sciences do make significant contributions in each of these three areas. However, I submit that the contributions thereof are neither adequately validated nor sufficient.

*Brother Kelly is Professor of Educational Psychology and a counselor at BYU.
It is well known that therapists of different theoretical persuasions and even within the same persuasion not only define problems differently but some therapists see given behaviors as problems while others do not. To illustrate, Dr. Louis A. Moench in his session earlier this morning indicated that he would rather have been in either of the other sessions than his own. For one, he would like to have been in the session on the treatment of masturbation, remarking that this was the only group that he knew of that treated masturbation as an illness rather than a treatment. Among the many other examples that could be given are homosexuality and anger. As you may know, various of the professional organizations have defined homosexuality as no longer a problem, very much contrary to the teachings of the prophets. Many therapists would be satisfied with helping people to learn how to express their anger constructively and not suppress it. Others, such as myself, believe that with most people the elimination of anger and dealing with the causes thereof is more important and see anger itself as a problem.

While obviously the definition of the problem helps determine the target(s) of therapy, even with similar problem definitions different outcome targets might be selected. Both the determination of what the problem is and the determination of an appropriate target are based on a value system. Every therapeutic system and every theory thus involves a value system, though there may still be a few professionals who claim that they don’t. For example, nearly all therapy systems have two basic philosophical assumptions that I believe are false. One of them is hedonism, or that which gives the individual the greatest pleasure and the least pain is best for him. The second is relativity of values—every person’s values are as good as everybody else’s and there is no such thing as an absolute value system. Everything is relative. Ethics are situational. Perry London (The Modes and Morals of Psychotherapy. San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1946, pp. 6 an 173) rightly stated that psychotherapy is a “moral enterprise.” There is in reality only one true set of values and where two values differ, while both may be wrong, only one can be true and correct. That true set of values is contained in the scriptures and teachings of the prophets.

It is in the third element, that of the behavior change process, that I think our professions have the most to offer. But I submit that to the degree that we understand what the scriptures teach, we find within them the most fundamental behavior change processes both in general and specific terms. All change involves the principle and process of repentance (recognition of undesired behavior, remorse for such, restitution where appropriate, and reformation), a principle of growth and change which is described nowhere else as well as in the scriptures.

To recapitulate, I find that the scriptures have answers in each of the three basic elements cited, and that generally the answers given in the scriptures are superior to most of what I have been taught professionally. It was the finding of a plethora of confusing and contradictory ideas both in theory and research that primarily led me to accept the scriptures many years ago, while studying at the University of Chicago, as the standard by which I would judge those things read and experienced pertaining to helping relationships. Experiences and learning through these many intervening years have supported this early decision that the gospel and the scriptures do contain the answers that we need.

A fourth reason for using the scriptures, in this instance directly and not just indirectly, was that with active Latter-day Saints having an abiding faith in the scriptures, such use helps them to have the necessary confidence in us and the methods we use that enables us to be of help to them. Without meaningful confidence in us and our approaches as being helpful, we have very little chance of really being helpful to others. For an inactive Latter-day Saint who has only limited, if any, faith in the scriptures, and may be fighting against the Church, the direct use of the scriptures may very frankly have opposite results.

After carefully reviewing and evaluating studies of therapeutic outcomes, Allen Bergin and Michael Lambert have concluded that while the primary determining factor of psychotherapy outcome(s) is pre-existent client factors, the second largest factor accounting for change is the characteristics of the therapist—with technique variables coming in a distant third (Bergin, Allen E. and Lambert, Michael J. “The Evaluation of Therapeutic Outcome,” in Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change, 2nd Ed. edited by Garfield, Sol L. and Bergin, Allen E., 1978, p. 180.) Also since therapy is largely a teaching process and probably in all teaching the first and last thing we teach is ourselves, it seems not discordant with reason to concur that the personality of the therapist is critical. From my own personal experience I have come to believe that, as we immerse ourselves deeply in the scriptures, daily make them a part of our lives, and not only read them but meditate and ponder upon them, we do become like the teachings found in the scriptures. Yes, “as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he...” (Prov. 23:7.) We are commanded to read the scriptures not only to strengthen our faith and testimonies and to gain additional understanding of the gospel, but perhaps more fundamentally that we might become as the scriptures teach. I believe for this commandment, and virtually if not all other commandments, we come
to know the personal reason(s) thereof only after we’ve lived the commandment and not before. You will recall that as Adam was offering sacrifices unto the Lord an angel came to him and asked him, “Adam, why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?” and Adam responded, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.” (Moses 5:6) Then the angel told him the why of the commandment.

Although I am committed to the belief that the scriptures form a meaningful foundation for all helping relationships, there are some necessary cautions. The Savior said that his word was a two-edged sword, and the scriptures can be a two-edged sword. I think they must be used with as much emphatic sensitivity, if not more, than other tools and aids in therapy. We must not only be very sensitive as to how to use them but very sensitive as to the individual’s ability to profit from them and be led by the Spirit in using God’s word. The scriptures also need to be used with love and warmth, not with coercion nor to induce fear. I believe these elements are contrary to the principles of the scriptures and the gospel. We also need to keep in mind the 13th Article of Faith, “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report of praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” There are teachings and principles in our professional backgrounds and training that are virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy, so that I am not suggesting we forget everything that we have learned professionally, but that the scriptures serve as our standard and guide and as a basis for our therapeutic endeavors. Further, the scriptures are used sometimes I think to create dependence, a very inappropriate use of the scriptures. They can and ought to be used to foster self-reliance.

If you have watched some of my interviews, you might say, “Well, you never used the scriptures once, you never quoted them, you never cited them, you never referred them with the client, you never referred the client to them.” That would be true for a lot of my interview sessions--that I never quoted, cited, read, nor referred to a single scripture. Even though they may not be quoted or cited, I do use the scriptures to help me identify the true problem, to help the client to determine a truly helpful outcome and determine effective and appropriate behavioral change procedures; so while there are many different ways to effectively and directly use the scriptures with some clients, I always use them indirectly and endorse their indirect if not direct use.

Some “Hidden Treasures”

Now to look at some “hidden treasures” within the scriptures. In the promises at the conclusion of the Word of Wisdom the Lord stated, “And all saints who remember to keep and do these things, [and note especially] walking in obedience to the commandments... shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures...” (D&C 89:18-19.) With what study I have done, I testify that there are many “hidden treasures” in the scriptures pertaining to human behavior and behavior change, and that often it’s these “hidden treasures” that are most helpful in helping others to grow therapeutically. I share with you a few of those treasures which have been hidden to me until this more intensive study. Perhaps some of them are “hidden treasures” to you also and will hopefully be helpful to you.

The Savior stated, “Love your enemies.” (Matt. 5:44.) This commandment has often appeared to be an impossible challenge, an horrendous task, and many have asked, “How do you do it?” Recall Nephi’s classical statement (1 Ne. 3:7) “… I will go and do the things which the Lord has commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commanded them.” Now recall what the Savior said in the same verse immediately following the commandment, “… Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you…” (Bold added) Thus, with the commandment, the Savior did give the answer to how to obey it.

Although I have a great deal of respect for rational behavior therapy and use a number of the principles thereof, the adequacy of one of the criteria of rational thought that Dr. Maxie Maultsby gives is seriously questioned by a statement from Jacob 4:13: referring to the Spirit, Jacob said, “… it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be…” (Bold added) Dr. Maultsby’s related criterion is, is the thought in question concordant with objective reality? I submit that the present “objective reality” is often not sufficient but that we must have an awareness of situations not only as they appear to be, but as they really are and as they really will be. Without that knowledge, many thoughts and behaviors, as evidenced by a review of several of Dr. Maultsby’s cases, will be determined to be rational and healthy when in fact, in accordance with the scriptures, they are not. For further thoughts on Jacob’s statement, I suggest you read Elder Neal A Maxwell’s talk given at our October AMCAP conference, 1978, which is contained in the AMCAP Journal, Vol. 5, Issue one.

Questions regarding the why and purpose of human suffering and trials in life have been raised and discussed from antiquity. There are many beautiful statements in the scriptures giving the reasons for such, but note this one from Alma (7:11:13). Referring to the son of God, he stated, “He shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind... and he will
take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. . . " (Cf. Heb. 2:16-18 and D&C 62:1.) Thus is appears that even the Savior had to experience trials and difficulties in order to develop empathetic sensitivities to know how to best assist others. When I think of some of my most difficult and challenging experiences, I likewise note that I am better able to understand and help others because of them.

A rationale for the use of specific words and the importance of the words we use is given in the Doctrine and covenants 19:6-7. "... but it is written endless torment. Again, it is written eternal damnation; wherefore it is more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name's glory." Yes, often the specific words that we use do make a great deal of difference.

The true place and contribution of the helper is expressed in 3 Ne. 18:32 wherein the Nephite saints were commanded regarding those that may be excommunicated from them. "... ye shall not cast them out of your synagogues, nor your places of worship, for unto such shall you continue to minister; for ye know not but what they shall return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them."(Bold added) Yes, one of the necessary prerequisites of a fully functioning helper is humility and an appropriate recognition of his/her strengths and limitations in the helping process and how and by whom the healing actually occurs. This scripture places these factors in proper perspective.

We need various guidelines to help us in determining whose counsel we follow, what leaders we select, and whom we support. Recall the council in heaven where Satan came and presented his plan. Note the striking contrast in the words of his proposal to the Father to save mankind and that of the Savior. "... he [Satan] came before me, saying--Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor. But, behold, my Beloved son, which was my Beloved and Chosen done and the glory be thine forever."(Moses 4:1-2, Bold added) Note the accent on personal pronouns and self-aggrandizing sense. (I suggest the "I" criterion as an excellent one to use in our efforts to not be deceived.)

The development of self-reliance in ourselves and clients is one of the most important goals of therapy and life in general. Let's examine how the Savior taught self-reliance. First, keep in mind what He says in Doctrine and Covenants 58:27-28. "Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves."(Bold added) Yes, even with the most seriously disturbed, there is power to make some steps in a positive direction. Note what the Savior said in speaking to the Twelve in 3 Ne. 28:1. "What is it that you desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?"(Bold added) He placed the responsibility squarely on them to do their own thinking, to exercise their own initiative, to sort out their own values. Also in 3 Ne. 27:22, as he spoke to his disciples he said, "What will ye that I shall give unto you?" Although he knew not only what they needed but what they wanted, he did not tell them. He was concerned about developing self-reliance. Note also the illustration of the Brother of Jared in the second chapter of Ether. The Lord said unto the Brother of Jared after he had constructed his vessels to cross the ocean, "What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? . . . " Then after Socratically questioning Jared, he said, "... therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?"(Ether 2:23 and 25) No, the Lord didn't tell him how to light the vessels, although he no doubt knew many ways. The Brother of Jared went and thought about his situation and then came back to the Lord with a solution and asked the Lord to light the stones that he had prepared. Yes, the Savior effectively taught and practiced the principle of self-reliance.

Coping Successfully with Stress

Let's now look at the application of gospel principles to a significant psychological problem, perhaps the most significant, that of unhealthy psychological stress. Stress obviously lies behind all anxiety reaction, underlies depression, and is probably involved with every emotional difficulty we deal with. Let's look very briefly at 12 principles which I accept as being true and that are either derived from or supported by the scriptures. (Following each principle, I list a few of the key scriptures pertaining thereto.)

1. I will not let my heart be troubled; as I think in my heart, so am I; I will think truths. (Prov. 23:7 and John 14:1 and 27) As the writer of Proverbs indicated, we are as we think in our hearts. As we think truths, we reap the fruits thereof; as we think irrational, unhealthy, untrue ideas, we reap the fruits of those.
Note carefully the Savior’s blessing of peace found in the 14th chapter of John. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”(Bold added) This could be very threatening to think that in order to be troubled or afraid I have to let myself be troubled or afraid, yet it is very comforting also, for it suggest that I have the power within me to modify my feeling. I am in control. As I think, so am I. The next principle is a direct corollary.

2. I create my own stresses; therefore, I can uncreate and prevent them by living the laws of peace.(Luke 2:13-14, John 10:10, D&C 130:20-21) Again, this is potentially an extremely threatening statement, but also a most comforting one. While pressures may come from the outside, internal stress is caused by how we receive and interpret those pressures, and they can be either a curse or a blessing to us. The mission of the Savior and the gospel is to bring us peace and an abundant life. This is derived by obedience to the specific laws pertaining to peace. Note that in D&C 130:20-21 the Lord states, “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” Contrariwise, we can’t become anxiety laden without obeying the laws of anxiety. You, no doubt, have had people say to you, “I pay a full tithing, pay my fast offerings, go to church every Sunday, accept and try to magnify my callings, and therefore why am I depressed? [anxious, or whatever the problem may be] Is the gospel not true?” This fallacious interpretation results from not noting carefully what the scripture states—that every blessing is obtained by obedience to that law upon which it is based. I’ve developed a gross and perhaps somewhat dumb analogy to emphasize this point. Suppose we have a person who’s had no previous experience with gardens decide to follow the counsel of the Prophet and plant a garden. It being late in the season, he doesn’t take the necessary time to learn about the various seeds. To save money, he buys in bulk rather than by package. His family really loves corn so they plant a lot of corn, presumably. After three weeks or so he invites one of the neighbors over to look at his beautiful corn crop. The neighbor makes no response and after feeling additional pressure to respond, embarrassedly states, “Well, John, I’m sorry to say this, but that isn’t corn at all. That’s watermelon.” The neophyte gardener then says, “Well, how could that be? I’m an active member of the church, I’m following the counsel of the prophet, I’m as obedient as I know how to be to the Gospel. How could the Lord allow that?

Well, my family and I will fast and pray this weekend that the Lord will change that watermelon to corn.” Please do not take this as being sacrilegious or overly facetious about a sacred principle. Yes, the Lord could change that watermelon to corn if he wanted to, but ordinarily he doesn’t and won’t. Why? Because he wants us to learn the specific laws and be obedient to the laws. If he lifted from us all of our depressed moments, our anxiety reactions, etc. when we prayed and fasted for such, he’d be doing us a great disservice. We would not learn the laws of peace and happiness. He allows us to take consequences in order that we might learn more effectively. I think our prayers and fasting would be more effective if we asked the Lord to help us to know the laws which we need to follow in order to have the peace that we desire.

3. I will prepare myself well for my responsibilities, including spiritual preparation, so that I shall not fear.(D&C 38:30, Isaiah 57:20-21) Yes, the Lord promises us that we shall not fear if we are prepared. My experience suggests that we must not only be prepared to deliver a talk, to perform a given act, but also must have our hearts and spirits right, must be speaking and serving for the sake and blessing of others rather than to obtain adulation and glory. If we are truly prepared spiritually and for the specific task at hand, I submit we shall not fear.

4. I will develop increasing love for others and myself and let virtue garnish my thoughts unceasingly that my confidence shall wax strong.(D&C 121:45-46, Matt. 22:36-40, Romans 14:22, Moroni 8:16) Perhaps the best key that I know of to having healthy self-confidence is “Let thy bowels also be full of charity toward all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong.” And may I suggest also, self-confidence in the presence of others. Yes, perfect charity does cast out all fears, (Moroni 8:16) and, as Paul told the Roman saints, we are to have faith in ourselves not condemn ourselves. (Romans 24:22)

5. I can do no better today then my today’s best; my best tomorrow will be better.(2 Nephi 28:30) The Lord does give us line upon line and precept upon precept. We often act as if we should have been able to make the decisions of yesterday with the knowledge that we received today or should have been able to perform yesterday’s skill with the skill that we have developed today. In the process of so thinking we berate ourselves and suffer anxiety. If only we would remember that the best we can do today is in accordance with our present knowledge and skills of today.

6. I believe in becoming perfect; I also believe in the law of eternal progression(President Joseph Fielding Smith quote from McConkie, Bruce R., Doctrines of
Salvation, 1955, Vol. 2, pp. 18-19) I have often startled and quickly obtained the full attention of some devoted Latter-day Saints by asking them why they didn't believe in the gospel. Both perplexed and somewhat irritated, they ask, "What do you mean?" I respond that they have been telling me in nearly every sentence that they believed that they had to be perfect today and since they weren't, they were worthless, but that they didn't really believe in the law of eternal progression. If they really believed in that law in a functional rather than in an abstract sense, they wouldn't have the problems they had just cited to me. I then cite the quote of President Joseph Fielding Smith from the reference above. "I believe the Lord meant just what he said: that we should be perfect, as our Father in Heaven is perfect. That will not come all at once, but line upon line, precept upon precept, example upon example, and even then not as long as we live in this mortal life, for we will have to go even beyond the grave before we reach that perfection and shall be like God. But here we lay the foundation... It is our duty to be better today than we were yesterday, and better tomorrow that we are today... If we are keeping the commandments of the Lord, we are on that road to perfection, and that can only come through obedience and the desire in our hearts to overcome the world."

7. I will do all things in order and be diligent, but not attempt to run faster nor labor more than I have strength. (Mosiah 4:27, D&C 10:4, Luke 10:39-42) Yes, in order to achieve the prize, we must be diligent, but it is not requisite nor desirable, in fact it is undesirable, that we should run faster than we have strength. However, "all things must be done in order." I have repeatedly reminded myself of that verse and continue to do so as needed. Note also the Savior's counsel to Martha regarding Mary's work in Luke 10:39-42.

8. I will have Godly sorrow for my sins that leads to repentance, not the sorrow of the world; I will keep my eye on the next time, not the last time. (II Cor. 7:10) This statement of Paul to the Corinthians is a most beautiful one. Probably most of the people who come to us are initially expressing the sorrow of the world rather than godly sorrow. A good way to distinguish between the two is that in godly sorrow we look only at the past long enough to learn how to do better the next time, and our focus is on the next time rather than the last time. This focus strengthens us and helps us to do better in the future while worldly sorrow, focusing on the last time, keeps us in the failures of the past. It is like driving too fast over a bad road, hitting a chuckhole and then continuing to drive forward while looking backward through the rearview mirror saying, "Oh, that was a horrible chuckhole I hit. I wonder if my springs were damaged, my axle cracked. I should have been driving slower," etc. What's likely to happen. Of course, a more serious accident and more problems. Similarly, our emotional lives get more troubled and problem ridden with worldly sorrow.

9. I will remember to live by "want to" rather than "have to." (2 Nephi 2:26-27, Helaman 14:30-31, D&C 58:26-29) Yes, we do have our free agency, we really do, and the power is in us to do many things of our own free will. As we examine carefully what we do, we see that we really do live by "want to's." Everything you and I do is because we want to do it. There isn't anything we do that we have to. While you may question that, think about it. For example, even if you are a bishop, you don't have to go to church on Sunday--no, you don't. If you want to remain a bishop, you need to go to church on Sunday, but you don't have to go to church unless you want to remain a bishop. That is, we do what we do because we want the consequences of those actions. Yes, lots of times we would like to be able to do other things and get the desired consequences, but we do what we want to because we prefer the consequences we get or think we'll get by following a given course of action. Just telling ourselves regularly, particularly when in a stressful situation, "I'm doing what I am because I want to rather than because I have to" gives a whole different feeling about what we're doing and dramatically reduces stress. This is not just a play on words; it has significant impact.

10. I am responsible for my behavior but I cannot or will not attempt to control the agentive behavior of others. (D&C 121:41, Moses 4:1-2, Ezekial 18:4, 14-20, 33:7-9) Many of our problems result from thinking, at least at a subconscious level, that we can control the behavior of others and, being in control of others' behavior, we are fully responsible for their behavior rather than realizing that they had at least some responsibility for their own behavior. It is true that in certain instances we can physically control the behavior of others by physically moving them, particularly children, but we cannot control the agentive behavior of others, what they think and feel, and hence, how they act. We can influence others' behavior, however, and are responsible for that influence, and hence, are responsible for our behavior. Note carefully what the Lord said, "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned..." (D&C 121:41) There is only one way that we can, let alone ought to, maintain an influence on the behavior of others.

11. I will live the spirit of the Word of Wisdom. (D&C 89, 88:124, Luke 2:52) Yes, only if we get proper rest, eat properly, exercise appropriately, etc. do we enjoy the necessary physical health essential to emotional well-being and peace. We are promised that we will be able to "run and not be weary." (D&C 89:20)
Just a question to ponder—if we don’t run, how do we know if that promise will be fulfilled?

12. I will focus my life on the Savior, learn of Him, become “meek and lowly of heart,” and I shall have peace in Him. (D&C 19:23, Matt. 11:28-30) I believe that herein is the key to the heart of the gospel. We do need to focus our lives on the Savior and learn of Him. For many months I have quoted Matt. 11:28-30 to myself at least once a day—because I have needed it! “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’” To take the Savior’s yoke upon us, or to be fully and unreservedly committed to obey His commandments and follow the counsel of His leaders is critical. To learn of Him and to understand and obtain His meekness and lowliness of heart is likewise critical. When I am being criticized, when do I get uptight, angry, or upset at my critic? Only when I am not meek and lowly in heart. When my total desire is to grow and to help others grow, when my total desire is to learn and help others to learn, then when I desire to be the greatest blessing in the lives of others, I am not defensive. I am not uptight. I do not get angry. It is when I want others to think certain things about me such as how great I am or to really like me and my ideas, etc., and when I don’t want to think about changing and growing, that anxiety and other negative feelings arise.

(I have used the above “peace” principles with a number of individuals with marked success. In the process I have found that these principles, like others, are effective to the degree that they are internalized. To help effect internalization, I have requested that the principles be read and pondered upon each day, preferably twice—morning and evening—for 30 days or more.)

In Conclusion

From this very brief and cursory review, I hope that I have been able to convey why I believe that the words of Christ (from the scriptures, the prophets, and personal revelation) do tell us all things that we should know. (Cf. II Ne. 32:3) Hopefully, it is also evident, as Nephi stated, that in order to know these things, we must “feast upon the words of Christ,” not just “nibble upon them occasionally” as Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated. I conclude as I began with the response of Peter to the Savior in answer to the Savior’s query if the Twelve would also go away. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” That is my testimony to you, my brothers and sisters, that the Savior has the words of eternal life and emotional well-being in this life and that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Son of the living God. May He bless each of us to be his worthy helping servants, I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.