Seek Learning by Faith
Elder David A. Bednar

A Grove, a Hill, and a Mountain: Lessons on Overcoming Evil
Cameron J. Packer

The Only True Church: Boldness without Overbearance
Eric-Jon K. Marlowe

God’s Manifestations: The Authoring and Finishing of Our Faith
Richard D. Hawks

The Interplay between Forgiveness and Lost Opportunities
C. Robert Line

The Deseret Alphabet Experiment
Richard G. Moore

An International Perspective in Teaching
Church History and Doctrine and Covenants
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Transcultural Considerations in Teaching the Gospel
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Biblical Hebrew Words You Already Know and Why They Are Important
Dana M. Pike

Comprehending the Character of God: A Key to Successful Relationships
Kent R. Brooks

“Assurance and hope make it possible for us to walk to the edge of the light and take a few steps into the darkness—expecting and trusting the light to move and illuminate the way.”
“Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception.”

Elder David A. Bednar

ON THE COVER:
Walking with hope in Christ is represented by this wondrous nature scene in Harz Forest, Germany.

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Editors’ Introduction

Although many instructors know the principle of teaching by the Spirit, Elder David A. Bednar focuses on a companion principle: helping people to “learn by faith.” This latter principle challenges learners to open their hearts to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, who is the true teacher.

“Both Joseph Smith and Moses faced severe opposition from the adversary in their quest to know God and fulfill His will,” writes Cameron J. Packer. “Through difficult experiences they learned valuable lessons on how to prevail when attacked by Satan.”

As we boldly proclaim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Savior’s church, we can also acknowledge the good that exists in other religions, as Eric-Jon K. Marlowe states in his article.

Father in Heaven frequently manifests His favor to us in ways we do not see with our physical eyes but rather with our spiritual insight. In “God’s Manifestations: The Authoring and Finishing of Our Faith,” Richard D. Hawks identifies the companionship of the Holy Spirit as one of the most important manifestations of God’s love that we can have in mortality.

In sections 66 and 75 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord counsels William E. McLellin to join in the cause of building the kingdom. In a thought-provoking article, C. Robert Line looks at the life of Brother McLellin and the interaction between forgiveness and lost opportunities.

After witnessing the struggles of early immigrants to learn how to spell in the English language, President Brigham Young initiated spelling reform in what was called the Deseret Alphabet. Learn what became of this bold experiment.

How does learning about the international growth of the Church affect how instructors teach the Doctrine and Covenants? Professor Donald Q. Cannon testifies that we belong to a worldwide organization, not just an American church, concluding that it helps to share the stories of pioneering members throughout the earth as examples of faith.

Jesus, as the Master Teacher, adapted His message to the culture of the listener. In like manner, we can consider differences of language, culture, ethnicity, and gender as we prepare messages that will reach the hearts of our students.

We close with an article on biblical Hebrew words that we may use without being aware of their heritage, as well as an article on how understanding the character of God can deepen and strengthen our relationship with others.

Finally, we thank Thomas Valletta and Melinda Shaha for their help in producing this issue in conjunction with the Church Educational System.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Editor-in-Chief
R. Devan Jensen, Executive Editor
Ted D. Stoddard, Associate Editor
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Seek Learning by Faith

Elder David A. Bednar

Elder David A. Bednar is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

This address was broadcast to Church Educational System religious educators on February 3, 2006.

I express my love to and for you—and the gratitude of the Brethren for the righteous influence you have upon the youth of the Church throughout the world. Thank you for blessing and strengthening the rising generation. I pray that the Holy Ghost will bless and edify us as we share this special time together.

Companion Principles: Preaching by the Spirit and Learning by Faith

We are admonished repeatedly in the scriptures to preach the truths of the gospel by the power of the Spirit (see D&C 50:14). I believe the vast majority of us as parents and teachers in the Church are aware of this principle and generally strive appropriately to apply it. As important as this principle is, however, it is only one element of a much larger spiritual pattern. We also frequently are taught to seek learning by faith (see D&C 88:118). Preaching by the Spirit and learning by faith are companion principles that we should strive to understand and apply concurrently and consistently.

I suspect we emphasize and know much more about a teacher teaching by the Spirit than we do about a learner learning by faith. Clearly, the principles and processes of both teaching and learning are spiritually essential. However, as we look to the future and anticipate the ever more confused and turbulent world in which we will live, I believe
it will be essential for all of us to increase our capacity to seek learning by faith. In our personal lives, in our families, and in the Church, we can and will receive the blessings of spiritual strength, direction, and protection as we seek by faith to obtain and apply spiritual knowledge.

Nephi teaches us, “When a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the message] unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). Please notice how the power of the Spirit carries the message unto but not necessarily into the heart. A teacher can explain, demonstrate, persuade, and testify and do so with great spiritual power and effectiveness. Ultimately, however, the content of a message and the witness of the Holy Ghost penetrate into the heart only if a receiver allows them to enter.

Brothers and sisters, learning by faith opens the pathway into the heart. We will focus upon the individual responsibility each of us has to seek learning by faith. We also will consider the implications of this principle for us as teachers.

The Principle of Action: Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

The Apostle Paul defined faith as “the substance of things hoped for, [and] the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Alma declared that faith is not a perfect knowledge; rather, if we have faith, we “hope for things which are not seen, [but] are true” (Alma 32:21). Additionally, we learn in the Lectures on Faith that faith is “the first principle in revealed religion, and the foundation of all righteousness” and that it is also “the principle of action in all intelligent beings.”

These teachings of Paul and of Alma and from the Lectures on Faith highlight three basic elements of faith: (1) faith as the assurance of things hoped for which are true, (2) faith as the evidence of things not seen, and (3) faith as the principle of action in all intelligent beings. I describe these three components of faith in the Savior as simultaneously facing the future, looking to the past, and initiating action in the present.

Faith as the assurance of things hoped for looks to the future. This assurance is founded upon a correct understanding about and trust in God and enables us to “press forward” (2 Nephi 31:20) into uncertain and often challenging situations in the service of the Savior. For example, Nephi relied upon precisely this type of future-facing spiritual assurance as he returned to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass—“not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do. Nevertheless [he] went forth” (1 Nephi 4:6–7).

Faith in Christ is inextricably tied to and results in hope in Christ for our redemption and exaltation. And assurance and hope make it possible
for us to walk to the edge of the light and take a few steps into the darkness—expecting and trusting the light to move and illuminate the way. The combination of assurance and hope initiates action in the present. 

Faith as the evidence of things not seen looks to the past and confirms our trust in God and our confidence in the truthfulness of things not seen. We stepped into the darkness with assurance and hope, and we received evidence and confirmation as the light in fact moved and provided the illumination we needed. The witness we obtained after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6) is evidence that enlarges and strengthens our assurance.

Assurance, action, and evidence influence each other in an ongoing process. This helix is like a coil, and as it spirals upward it expands and grows wider. These three elements of faith—assurance, action, and evidence—are not separate and discrete; rather, they are interrelated and continuous and cycle upward. And the faith that fuels this ongoing process develops and evolves and changes. As we again turn and face forward toward an uncertain future, assurance leads to action and produces evidence, which further increases assurance. Our confidence waxes stronger, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

We find a powerful example of the interaction among assurance, action, and evidence as the children of Israel transported the ark of the covenant under the leadership of Joshua (see Joshua 3:7–17). Recall how the Israelites came to the River Jordan and were promised the waters would part, or “stand upon an heap” (Joshua 3:13), and they would be able to cross over on dry ground. Interestingly, the waters did not part as the children of Israel stood on the banks of the river waiting for something to happen; rather, the soles of their feet were wet before the water parted. The faith of the Israelites was manifested in the fact that they walked into the water before it parted. They walked into the River Jordan with a future-facing assurance of things hoped for. As the Israelites moved forward, the water parted, and as they crossed over on dry land, they looked back and beheld the evidence of things not seen. In this episode, faith as assurance led to action and produced the evidence of things not seen which were true.

True faith is focused in and on the Lord Jesus Christ and always leads to action. Faith as the principle of action is highlighted in many scriptures with which we are all familiar:

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26; emphasis added).

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22; emphasis added).
“But behold, . . . awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith” (Alma 32:27; emphasis added).

And it is faith as the principle of action that is so central to the process of learning and applying spiritual truth.

Learning by Faith: To Act and Not to Be Acted Upon

How is faith as the principle of action related to gospel learning? And what does it mean to seek learning by faith?

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 agency—the capacity and power of independent action. Endowed with agency, we are agents, and we primarily are to act and not only to be acted upon—especially as we seek to obtain and apply spiritual knowledge.

Learning by faith and from experience are two of the central features of the Father’s plan of happiness. The Savior preserved moral agency through the Atonement and made it possible for us to act and to learn by faith. Lucifer’s rebellion against the plan sought to destroy the agency of man, and his intent was that we as learners would only be acted upon.

Consider the question posed by Heavenly Father to Adam in the Garden of Eden, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9). Obviously the Father knew where Adam was hiding, but He, nonetheless, asked the question. Why? A wise and loving Father enabled His child to act in the learning process and not merely be acted upon. There was no one-way lecture to a disobedient child, as perhaps many of us might be inclined to deliver. Rather, the Father helped Adam as a learner to act as an agent and appropriately exercise his agency.

Recall how Nephi desired to know about the things his father, Lehi, had seen in the vision of the tree of life. Interestingly, the Spirit of the Lord begins the tutorial with Nephi by asking the following question, “Behold, what desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2). Clearly the Spirit knew what Nephi desired. So why ask the question? The Holy Ghost was helping Nephi to act in the learning process and not simply be acted upon. (I encourage you at a later time to study chapters 11–14 in 1 Nephi and notice how the Spirit both asked questions and encouraged Nephi to “look” as active elements in the learning process.)

From these examples we recognize that as learners, you and I are to act and be doers of the word and not simply hearers who are only acted upon. Are you and I agents who act and seek learning by faith, or are we waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are the students we serve acting...
and seeking to learn by faith, or are they waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are you and I encouraging and helping those whom we serve to seek learning by faith? You and I and our students are to be anxiously engaged in asking, seeking, and knocking (see 3 Nephi 14:7).

A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy Ghost—and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness. Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception. It is in the sincerity and consistency of our faith-inspired action that we indicate to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our willingness to learn and receive instruction from the Holy Ghost. Thus, learning by faith involves the exercise of moral agency to act upon the assurance of things hoped for and invites the evidence of things not seen from the only true teacher, the Spirit of the Lord.

Consider how missionaries help investigators to learn by faith. Making and keeping spiritual commitments, such as studying and praying about the Book of Mormon, attending Church meetings, and keeping the commandments, require an investigator to exercise faith and to act. One of the fundamental roles of a missionary is to help an investigator make and honor commitments—to act and learn by faith. Teaching, exhorting, and explaining, as important as they are, can never convey to an investigator a witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Only as an investigator’s faith initiates action and opens the pathway to the heart can the Holy Ghost deliver a confirming witness. Missionaries obviously must learn to teach by the power of the Spirit. Of equal importance, however, is the responsibility missionaries have to help investigators learn by faith.

The learning I am describing reaches far beyond mere cognitive comprehension and the retaining and recalling of information. The type of learning about which I am speaking causes us to put off the natural man (see Mosiah 3:19), to change our hearts (see Mosiah 5:2), and to be converted unto the Lord and to never fall away (see Alma 23:6). Learning by faith requires both “the heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34). Learning by faith is the result of the Holy Ghost carrying the power of the word of God both unto and into the heart. Learning by faith cannot be transferred from an instructor to a student through a lecture, a demonstration, or an experiential exercise; rather, a student must exercise faith and act in order to obtain the knowledge for himself or herself.

The young boy Joseph Smith instinctively understood what it meant to seek learning by faith. One of the most well-known episodes in the life of Joseph Smith was his reading of verses about prayer and
faith in the book of James in the New Testament (see James 1:5–6). This text inspired Joseph to retire to a grove of trees near his home to pray and to seek for spiritual knowledge. Please note the questions Joseph had formulated in his mind and felt in his heart—and which he took into the grove. He clearly had prepared himself to “ask in faith” (James 1:6) and to act:

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? . . .

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right . . . and which I should join. (Joseph Smith—History 1:10, 18)

Notice that Joseph’s questions focused not just on what he needed to know but also on what he needed to do. And his very first question centered on action and what was to be done! His prayer was not simply which church is right. His question was which church should he join. Joseph went to the grove to learn by faith. He was determined to act.

Ultimately, the responsibility to learn by faith and apply spiritual truth rests upon each of us individually. This is an increasingly serious and important responsibility in the world in which we do now and will yet live. What, how, and when we learn is supported by—but is not dependent upon—an instructor, a method of presentation, or a specific topic or lesson format.

Truly, one of the great challenges of mortality is to seek learning by faith. The Prophet Joseph Smith best summarizes the learning process and outcomes I am attempting to describe. In response to a request by the Twelve Apostles for instruction, Joseph taught, “The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching.”

And on another occasion, the Prophet Joseph explained that “reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God.”

Implications for Us as Teachers

The truths about learning by faith we have discussed thus far have profound implications for us as teachers. Let us now consider together three of these implications.
Implication 1. The Holy Ghost is the only true teacher. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, and He is the teacher and witness of all truth. Elder James E. Talmage explained: “The office of the Holy Ghost in His ministrations among men is described in scripture. He is a teacher sent from the Father; and unto those who are entitled to His tuition He will reveal all things necessary for the soul’s advancement.”

We should always remember that the Holy Ghost is the teacher who, through proper invitation, can enter into a learner’s heart. Indeed, you and I have the responsibility to preach the gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter, as a prerequisite for the learning by faith that can be achieved only by and through the Holy Ghost (see D&C 50:14). In this regard, you and I are much like the long, thin strands of glass used to create the fiber-optic cables through which light signals are transmitted over very long distances. Just as the glass in these cables must be pure to conduct the light efficiently and effectively, so we should become and remain worthy conduits through whom the Spirit of the Lord can operate.

But brothers and sisters, we must be careful to remember in our service that we are conduits and channels; we are not the light. “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matthew 10:20). It is never about me and it is never about you. In fact, anything you or I do as an instructor that knowingly and intentionally draws attention to self—in the messages we present, in the methods we use, or in our personal demeanor—is a form of priestcraft that inhibits the teaching effectiveness of the Holy Ghost. “Doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17–18).

Implication 2. We are most effective as instructors when we encourage and facilitate learning by faith. We are all familiar with the adage that giving a man a fish feeds him for one meal. Teaching the man to fish, on the other hand, feeds him for a lifetime. As gospel instructors, you and I are not in the business of distributing fish; rather, our work is to help individuals learn to “fish” and to become spiritually self-reliant. This important objective is best accomplished as we encourage and facilitate learners acting in accordance with correct principles—as we help them to learn by doing. “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God” (John 7:17).

Please notice this implication in practice in the counsel given to Junius F. Wells by Brigham Young as Brother Wells was called in 1875 to organize the young men of the Church:
At your meetings you should begin at the top of the roll and call upon as many members as there is time for to bear their testimonies and at the next meeting begin where you left off and call upon others, so that all shall take part and get into the practice of standing up and saying something. Many may think they haven’t any testimony to bear, but get them to stand up and they will find the Lord will give them utterance to many truths they had not thought of before. More people have obtained a testimony while standing up trying to bear it than down on their knees praying for it.

President Boyd K. Packer has given similar counsel in our day:

Oh, if I could teach you this one principle. A testimony is to be found in the bearing of it! Somewhere in your quest for spiritual knowledge, there is that “leap of faith,” as the philosophers call it. It is the moment when you have gone to the edge of the light and stepped into the darkness to discover that the way is lighted ahead for just a footstep or two. “The spirit of man,” as the scripture says, indeed “is the candle of the Lord.” (Prov. 20:27.)

It is one thing to receive a witness from what you have read or what another has said; and that is a necessary beginning. It is quite another to have the Spirit confirm to you in your bosom that what you have testified is true. Can you not see that it will be supplied as you share it? As you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase?

I have observed a common characteristic among the instructors who have had the greatest influence in my life. They have helped me to seek learning by faith. They refused to give me easy answers to hard questions. In fact, they did not give me any answers at all. Rather, they pointed the way and helped me take the steps to find my own answers. I certainly did not always appreciate this approach, but experience has enabled me to understand that an answer given by another person usually is not remembered for very long, if remembered at all. But an answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught.

The spiritual understanding you and I have been blessed to receive, and which has been confirmed as true in our hearts, simply cannot be given to another person. The tuition of diligence and learning by faith must be paid to obtain and personally “own” such knowledge. Only in this way can what is known in the mind be transformed into what is felt in the heart. Only in this way can a person move beyond relying upon the spiritual knowledge and experience of others and claim those blessings for himself or herself. Only in this way can we be spiritually prepared for what is coming. We are to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).
Implication 3. An instructor's faith is strengthened as he or she helps others seek learning by faith. The Holy Ghost, who can “teach [us] all things, and bring all things to [our] remembrance” (John 14:26), is eager to help us learn as we act and exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Interestingly, this divine learning assistance is perhaps never more apparent than when we are teaching, either at home or in Church assignments. As Paul made clear to the Romans, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (Romans 2:21).

Please notice in the following verses from the Doctrine and Covenants how teaching diligently invites heavenly grace and instruction: “And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” (D&C 88:77–78; emphasis added).

Consider that the blessings described in these scriptures are intended specifically for the teacher: “Teach . . . diligently and my grace shall attend you”—that you, the teacher, may be instructed! The same principle is evident in verse 122 from the same section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege” (D&C 88:122; emphasis added).

As all speak and as all listen in a dignified and orderly way, all are edified. The individual and collective exercise of faith in the Savior invites instruction and strength from the Spirit of the Lord.

Seek Learning by Faith: A Recent Example

All of us were blessed by the challenge from the First Presidency last August to read the Book of Mormon by the end of 2005. In extending the challenge, President Gordon B. Hinckley promised that faithfully observing this simple reading program would bring into our lives and into our homes “an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God.”

Please note how this inspired challenge is a classic example of learning by faith. First, you and I were not commanded, coerced, or required to read. Rather, we were invited to exercise our agency as agents and act in accordance with correct principles. President Hinckley, as an inspired teacher, encouraged us to act and not just be acted upon. Each of us,
ultimately, had to decide if and how we would respond to the challenge—and if we would endure to the end of the task.

Second, in proffering the invitation to read and to act, President Hinckley was encouraging each of us to seek learning by faith. No new study materials were distributed to members of the Church, and no additional lessons, classes, or programs were created by the Church. Each of us had our copy of the Book of Mormon—and a pathway into our heart opened wider through the exercise of our faith in the Savior as we responded to the First Presidency challenge. Thus, we were prepared to receive instruction from the only true teacher, the Holy Ghost.

In recent weeks I have been greatly impressed by the testimonies of so many members concerning their recent experiences reading the Book of Mormon. Important and timely spiritual lessons have been learned, lives have been changed for the better, and the promised blessings have been received. The Book of Mormon, a willing heart, and the Holy Ghost—it really is that simple. My faith and the faith of the other Brethren have been strengthened as we have responded to President Hinckley’s invitation and as we have observed so many of you acting and learning by faith.

As I stated earlier, the responsibility to seek learning by faith rests upon each of us individually, and this obligation will become increasingly important as the world in which we live grows more confused and troubled. Learning by faith is essential to our personal spiritual development and for the growth of the Church in these latter days. May each of us truly hunger and thirst after righteousness and be filled with the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 12:6)—that we might seek learning by faith.

I witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father. He is our Savior and Redeemer. I testify that as we learn of Him, listen to His words, and walk in the meekness of His Spirit (see D&C 19:23), we will be blessed with spiritual strength, protection, and peace.

As a servant of the Lord, I invoke this blessing upon each of you: even that your desire and capacity to seek learning by faith—and to appropriately help others to seek learning by faith—will increase and improve. This blessing will be a source of great treasures of spiritual knowledge in your personal life, for your family, and to those whom you instruct and serve. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.
Notes

4. Smith, History of the Church, 6:50.
Sacred Grove, Manchester, New York, August 13, 1907

Photo by George Edward Anderson

Courtesy of Church Archives
A Grove, a Hill, and a Mountain: Lessons on Overcoming Evil

Cameron J. Packer

Cameron J. Packer is an instructor at the Orem High School Senior Seminary.

The Book of Mormon contains an interesting prophecy of Joseph of Egypt in which the Lord correlates the Prophet Joseph Smith with the ancient Israelite lawgiver, Moses. “And he [Joseph Smith] shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel. And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt. But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word” (2 Nephi 3:9–11). In studying the lives of both Joseph Smith and Moses, we can see several ways that the two prophets are “like unto” each other. Both spoke with God face to face, delivered their people from bondage—whether physical or spiritual—and brought forth the word of God. One early Church member, W. W. Phelps, even likened Joseph’s receiving the gold plates at the Hill Cumorah to Moses’s bringing down the law from Mount Sinai.¹

Another aspect in which the two mirror each other is in their experiences overcoming the adversary. Specifically, the experiences of Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove and at the Hill Cumorah provide parallels with those of Moses while he “was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1). Both Joseph Smith and Moses faced severe opposition from the adversary in their quest to know God and fulfill His will. Through difficult experiences, they learned valuable lessons on how to prevail when attacked by Satan. While the specific circumstances under which they were learned vary, the lessons Joseph Smith and Moses learned can apply to members of the Church as they seek to prevail in their personal struggles against the adversary.
The Sacred Grove

As a boy, Joseph Smith was no stranger to hardship and opposition. Before walking into the Sacred Grove, he dealt with poverty, illness, and even an attempt on his life. Walking into the grove, however, would bring him a different—or at least more intense—experience with the opposition of the adversary. His decision to seek God brought an attack intended to disrupt what President James E. Faust called “possibly the most singular event to occur on the earth since the Resurrection.”

Referring to the reason for this, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Great things do not come easily; events that shake the earth run into mountains of resistance. There is an opposition in all things; every person who seeks to find the true church runs counter to the ways of the world. Joseph Smith was no exception. . . . Such are the ways of Satan that when the God of heaven seeks to send the greatest light of the ages into the world, the forces of evil oppose it with the deepest darkness and iniquity of their benighted realm.”

Two accounts of the First Vision written under the direction of Joseph Smith include details about this attack. The most prominent account is canonized in the Pearl of Great Price, written in 1838. Joseph described that when he entered the grove and began to pray, the attack commenced. “I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction” (Joseph Smith—History 1:15). Additionally, verse 16 informs the reader that the power from this “actual being from the unseen world” filled him with feelings of despair, impending destruction, and abandonment. Before this account, Joseph included additional details in an 1835 record of the First Vision. He said, “I made a fruitless attempt to pray. My tongue seemed to be swoolen [sic] in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some one walking towards me. I strove again to pray, but could not; the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprang upon my feet and looked round, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking.”

Later Joseph Smith learned that Moses had a similar experience in overcoming the adversary. Interestingly, Moses was also attacked while seeking knowledge and wisdom from God. Moses had just finished a vision wherein he spoke with God “face to face” and had “other things to inquire of him” when Satan “came tempting him” (Moses 1:2, 18, 12).
The adversary used “darkness” and intimidation to instill fear and doubt in Moses (see Moses 1:15). “And now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me. And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell” (Moses 1:19–20). The adversary endeavored through similar means to keep Joseph Smith and Moses from calling upon God. In both cases, Satan tried to prevent a miraculous vision and the accompanying light and truth from being received.

At this critical juncture, both Joseph Smith and Moses demonstrated something that can be applied by anyone who is struggling with opposition: they redoubled their efforts and continued to pray. In his 1838 account, Joseph wrote that he “exert[ed] all [his] powers to call upon God to deliver [him] out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon [him]” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16). In his 1835 account, after being unable to ascertain the source of the footsteps, he said, “I kneeled again, my mouth was opened and my tongue loosed; I called on the Lord in mighty prayer.” Likewise, Moses had to expend his best efforts in prayer in order to dispel the presence of evil. In his record, we see that as he continued to call upon God, he “received strength” (Moses 1:21), which allowed him to command the adversary to depart. In both Joseph Smith’s and Moses’s experiences, their efforts and energy in calling upon God brought deliverance from the adversary and allowed them to receive the greater knowledge they were seeking.

While their specific circumstances may differ from Joseph’s and Moses’s, many people today find themselves feeling overwhelmed by darkness, doom, and despair. These feelings always have been and always will be part of the adversary’s arsenal. As people find themselves under attack, they too can redouble their efforts and energy in prayer and find an escape from the adversary. Using Joseph Smith’s experience in the Sacred Grove, President Boyd K. Packer has emphasized the power of prayer in our day: “Remember the First Vision when young Joseph knelt in the grove. Immediately thick darkness gathered around him. He was seized by the power of the enemy, an actual being from the unseen world. He did what every one of you can do. He called upon God, and the evil power left him. There is great power in prayer. As a son or a daughter of God, you can, as Joseph did, pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ for strength.” The principle of prayer has and will continue to dispel the powers of darkness and bring relief to those who seek God.
The Hill Cumorah

Although Joseph only briefly encountered the power of the adversary in the Sacred Grove, this experience was foundational in the young prophet’s growing understanding of good and evil. Three years later, beginning in 1823, an angelic tutor gave Joseph additional instruction on overcoming some of Satan’s more subtle tactics. Regarding this, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, “Then followed the years of instruction, the instructor an angel of God who on a number of occasions taught, rebuked, warned, and comforted the boy as he grew into a young man.”

September 21, 1823, marked the beginning of these “years of instruction” that, as President Hinckley intimates, were quite rigorous at times. On this evening, Moroni appeared three times, giving specific instruction to Joseph about his upcoming mission. Part of the instruction included a prophecy that Joseph Smith’s name would “be had for good and evil among all” peoples of the earth (see Joseph Smith—History 1:33). One of the main reasons for this was an ancient record that lay hidden in a nearby hill. Indeed, this record would prove to be a major source of both acclaim and persecution to the young prophet. During his last visit that night, Moroni added a vital caution. Joseph said: “Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them” (Joseph Smith—History 1:46).

Moroni warned that Satan’s efforts would be of a more subtle nature than the attack in the Sacred Grove and that Satan would attempt to influence Joseph’s mind to keep him from obtaining the plates. This instruction was emphasized the following day when he made his first visit to the hill. After arriving at the spot and removing the stone cover, Joseph Smith looked into the stone box and saw the plates, along with the Urim and Thummim and breastplate. He made an attempt to remove the plates “but was forbidden by the messenger” and was told that “the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived” (Joseph Smith—History 1:53).

Joseph Smith’s 1832 account of this experience contains additional information regarding why Moroni forbade him from taking the plates at that time:

I immediately went to the place and found where the plates was deposited as the angel of the Lord had commanded me and straightway made three attempts to get them and then being exceedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dreem of Vision but when I considred I knew
that it was not therefore I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul
why can I not obtain them behold the angel appeared unto me again
and said unto me you have not kept the commandments of the Lord
which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the
time is not yet fulfilled therefore thou wast left unto temptation that
thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the advisory
therefore repent and call on the Lord thou shalt be forgiven and in his
own due time thou shalt obtain them . . . for now I had been tempted
of the advisory and sought the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the
commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God
therefore I was chastened and sought diligently to obtain the plates and
obtained them not until I was twenty one years of age.\textsuperscript{10}

Writing in 1835, Oliver Cowdery published the following in the
Church’s official Kirtland publication, the \textit{Latter-day Saints’ Messenger
and Advocate},\textsuperscript{11} clarifying what Joseph had written in 1832. As Joseph
walked to the hill:

\begin{quote}
It seemed as though two invisible powers were influencing, or striv-
ing to influence his mind—one with the reflection that if he obtained the
object of his pursuit, it would be through the mercy and condescension
of the Lord, and that every act or performance in relation to it, must be
in strict accordance with the instruction of that personage who com-
municated the intelligence to him first; and the other with the tho’ts and
reflections like those previously mentioned—contrasting his former and
present circumstances in life with those to come. That precious instruction
recorded on the sacred page—pray always—which was expressly impressed
upon him, was at length entirely forgotten, and . . . a fixed determination
to obtain and agrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrived at the
place where the record was found.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Oliver went on to explain that upon seeing the sacred contents in
the box, Joseph reached in and tried to remove them. Three times he
attempted to remove them—each time being repelled by progressively
stronger shocks that drained his natural strength. In frustration, Joseph
cried out, “Why can I not obtain this book?” At that instant the angel
Moroni appeared again and answered, “Because you have not kept the
commandments of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{13} Oliver Cowdery later explained, “All
the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the
last days, were brought to his mind, . . . but he had failed to remember
the great end for which they [the gold plates] had been kept, and in
consequence could not have power to take them into his possession
and bear them away.”\textsuperscript{14}

The first lesson that Joseph learned at Cumorah would be one that
he would immediately recognize over four years later while translating
the gold plates. Approximately fourteen hundred years earlier, Moroni
had written: “The plates thereof are of no worth, because of the commandment of the Lord. For he truly saith that no one shall have them to get gain; but the record thereof is of great worth; and whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless. For none can have power to bring it to light save it be given him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory” (Mormon 8:14–15).

Joseph was taught, very poignantly, that the ancient record was divinely safeguarded against those with impure motives. At this time, the adversary used certain temptations to influence the Prophet’s motives. Although perhaps not as dramatic as the attack in the grove, this tactic just as effectively prevents anyone from being able to fulfill God’s will.

While Moroni’s chastisement would have perhaps wounded most egos, Joseph’s humility allowed him to learn further. Rather than taking offense because he had been reprimanded, he applied what he had learned in the Sacred Grove and knelt down to pray. As he did so, “the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him,” and Joseph “stood gazing and admiring.” At this point, Moroni, apparently wanting to teach by contrast, showed Joseph another vision, this time of “the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates.” Moroni explained: “All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one. Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one: It is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from henceforth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest.”

Lucy Mack Smith, also commenting on this experience and specifically on the effect that it had on her son, wrote: “While Joseph remained here, the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days . . . and he remarked, that ‘ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God.’”

By direct contrast, Moroni showed Joseph the glory of God versus the bitterness of hell, forever convincing Joseph not to succumb to the attacks of Satan, subtle or otherwise. Similarly, Moses experienced this same contrast between good and evil. The book of Moses records that “Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain, and he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence” (Moses 1:1–2).
In vision, Moses saw the worlds that were created and “greatly marveled and wondered.” He said in verse 11: “But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him.”

After this glorious experience, Satan began his attack, tempting Moses to “worship me” (Moses 1:12). Moses, just like Joseph, had already experienced the power and glory of God and recognized the contrast. He said to Satan: “For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man. Is it not so, surely? Blessed be the name of my God, for his Spirit hath not altogether withdrawn from me, or else where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God. . . . For his glory has been upon me, wherefore I can judge between him and thee” (Moses 1:14–15, 18).

Because Moses and Joseph experienced the contrast, they were forever able to discern and overcome the attacks of Satan. This same lesson applies directly to the Church today. Speaking of the need and availability of discernment to this generation, President James E. Faust said:

Satan has had great success with this gullible generation. As a consequence, literally hosts of people have been victimized by him and his angels. There is, however, an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift comes undeviatingly by personal revelation to those who strive to obey the commandments of the Lord and to follow the counsel of the living prophets. This personal revelation will surely come to all those whose eyes are single to the glory of God, for it is promised that their bodies will be “filled with light, and there shall be no darkness” in them.19

While Joseph and Moses experienced amazing visions and demonstrations of good and evil, President Faust stated the need for every member to apply what these two prophets had learned. For members as well as prophets, keeping one’s eyes single to the glory of God and being worthy of the gift of the Holy Ghost provide protection from the attacks of the adversary.

Conclusion

Amid the throes of Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith wrote to the Church regarding persecution: “Dear brethren, do not think that our hearts faint, as though some strange thing had happened unto us, for we have seen and been assured of all these things beforehand.”20 To Joseph, this
opposition was not strange but was surprisingly anticipated. He had learned to expect trials, opposition, and even attacks from the adversary. At key moments in Joseph’s life, Satan sought to lead him away from God through a variety of attacks. At the Sacred Grove and the Hill Cumorah, Joseph learned how to pray with all his heart, keep his eye single to God’s glory, and discern between good and evil in order to overcome the adversary. In so doing, Joseph Smith, like Moses, became someone through whom God was able to do a mighty work. The example of these two prophets holds out to all those who struggle with opposition and temptation the hope that they too can overcome evil and accomplish God’s will.

Notes


5. Milton V. Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 158–59. Contemporary accounts of this event were written by Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, and Alexander Neibaur; see pages 170–77 of Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*.


11. The *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* was the paper that took over printing duties after the destruction of the *Evening and Morning Star* press in Missouri. The purpose of the *Messenger and Advocate* was to disseminate the “doctrines believed” by the Church and to advocate its “character and rights” (*History of the Church*, 2:167n).

12. Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 1:157–58. This account matches well with information from Lucy Mack Smith’s preliminary manuscript, which states that prior to Joseph’s going to the hill the
first time Moroni cautioned him, “Now, Joseph, beware or when you go to get the plates, your mind will be filled with darkness and all manner of evil will rush into your mind to prevent you from keeping the commandments of God” (Lucy Mack Smith, The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], 107; compare with Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, 77–78).

15. Peterson, “Moroni: Joseph Smith’s Teacher,” 54.

To students of the Book of Mormon, it should be readily apparent that Moroni had recorded this same principle on the gold plates some fourteen hundred years earlier (see Moroni 7:12–13). As a result, Joseph, even before translating the plates, learned how to judge plainly between good and evil.

18. Lucy Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 83; emphasis added. This book is an 1853 edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s history of the Prophet Joseph Smith taken from one of the earliest manuscripts of Lucy’s history.


President Gordon B. Hinckley has asked Church members to “be more tolerant, more neighborly, more friendly” while sharing beliefs with those of other faiths.

Courtesy of the Office of the President
The Only True Church: Boldness without Overbearance

Eric-Jon K. Marlowe

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When I asked a pastor how members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints might be better neighbors, he suggested, “Becoming friends really helps.” Then, grimacing slightly and shaking his head, he continued, “But you know, I have to be truthful with you... Regardless of how much they may work on the friendly area, they have those teachings that are so exclusive, and they are so offensive.” President Boyd K. Packer said: “One doctrine presents a particular challenge. It is our firm conviction that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, as the revelations state, ‘the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth’ (D&C 1:30).”

The Reality of One True Church

Heavenly Father loves all of His children and in His wisdom has always provided them truth as He sees fit (see Alma 29:8). Simple observation readily confirms a good deal of truth in other churches. Yet the Lord has declared The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually” (D&C 1:30). The Church of Jesus Christ is not true because its members try harder than those of other faiths to please God; rather, the Church is true because Christ Himself established, authorized, and acknowledges the continuing work therein as valid and eternal. The Church is true because it possesses the necessary authority, ordinances, and true doctrine, all of which are bestowed by God.
President Spencer W. Kimball explained: “This church of Jesus Christ (nicknamed Mormon) is the ‘only true and living church’ (D&C 1:30) that is fully recognized by God, the only one properly organized with the authority to perform for him, and the only one with a total and comprehensive and true program which will carry men to powers unbelievable and to realms incredible. This is absolute truth. . . . This is not another church. This is the Church. This is not another gospel or philosophy. This is the church and gospel of Jesus Christ.”

President Packer further explains: “The position that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church upon the face of the earth is fundamental. Perhaps it would be more convenient and palatable and popular if we were to avoid it; nevertheless, we are under a sacred obligation and a sacred trust to hold to it. It is not merely an admission; it is a positive declaration. It is so fundamental that we cannot yield on this point.”

There is but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5; emphasis added).

Through personal revelation and meaningful experiences, Latter-day Saints come to know in a profound and personal way that this is Christ’s only true church. And, similar to Lehi after partaking of the fruit or to Enos after his conversion, we want to share the benefits of its membership with others (see 1 Nephi 8; Enos 1). Therefore, it grieves us to learn that our doctrine of only one true church can be offensive and confusing to others.

This article will examine perspectives and principles intended to help religious educators prevent the misunderstandings that sometimes surround this doctrine. By understanding how those of other faiths may perceive our doctrine and by reviewing principles that can reduce offense and confusion, we will be better equipped to boldly proclaim without overbearance our commitment to the doctrine of one true church (see Alma 38:12).

How Those of Other Faiths May View Our Doctrine

President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “Let us never act in a spirit of arrogance or with a holier-than-thou attitude. Rather, may we show love and respect and helpfulness toward them [not of our faith]. We are greatly misunderstood, and I fear that much of it is of our own making. We can be more tolerant, more neighborly, more friendly, more of an example than we have been in the past.” I conducted a study seeking to better understand public treatment of religion, and many participant comments confirmed President Hinckley’s concern that we are misunderstood and that to some degree it is of our own making. In the study,
nearly half of the forty-eight participants, without direct solicitation, brought up the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church. Participants were Utah residents from seven different faiths other than Latter-day Saint (thirteen church leaders, seventeen parents, and eighteen youth). Before I report study participant comments regarding our doctrine of one true church, some clarification may be helpful. First, no attempt is made to support or refute the accuracy of participant statements. Accuracy of their perception is not the subject of this article. Yet it should be noted that in our associations and in our efforts to find ways to better communicate our message so as not to alienate those of other faiths, their perceptions matter. Second, most study participants were respectful of the Church. Their statements here are not necessarily a denunciation of the Church and its membership as a whole but instead pertain mainly to the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church and the actions of individual members therein. The perspectives are meant to provide us with greater awareness and sensitivity to the challenges this doctrine can present to those of other faiths. It is anticipated that greater awareness will assist us in our efforts to help those we teach avoid unnecessary offense and clarify misunderstandings.

Several participants felt the doctrine of one true church was demeaning to their beliefs and was a cause of Latter-day Saint arrogance, superiority, and exclusivity and a cause of confusion. The participant perspectives that follow are taken from my dissertational study, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools: Perspectives of the Religious Minority.”

A common sentiment among study participants was that our declaration of one true church is demeaning to their religion. One parent explained: “If a fundamental tenet of the [LDS] faith . . . is that this is the only . . . true church, then inherent in that is that everybody else who’s not part of that is on the wrong track. And that just inherently sends the message that your church is not good.” Participants also connected our doctrine to a sense of Latter-day Saint arrogance and superiority. An Episcopal leader explained: “If I have a complaint about the LDS religion, it is that sense that there is only one true church. I understand how ‘tenet’ that is to the LDS Church, but on the other hand, it unfortunately almost always bears out in a certain sense of arrogance and superiority. It almost can’t help [it].” Study participants indicated three general ways this demeaning attitude or arrogance can occur: negative assumptions, demeaning religious discussion, and disassociations.

A number of study participants link our doctrine of one true church to the behavior and attitudes of some Latter-day Saints, who occasion-
ally make negative assumptions and ignorantly adopt stereotypes about the character and moral standards of their non-LDS neighbors. A young woman described a periodic Latter-day Saint reaction to finding out she is not Mormon this way: “You get the nasty glares of, ‘Oh, you must do drugs and all this bad stuff because you’re not LDS.’” In a more subtle description of the occasional Latter-day Saint assumption of lower morals in others, a minister said, “I’ve heard the comment, ‘Well you’re nice enough that you could be LDS,’ which assumes that most people aren’t very nice or not as nice as the Mormons are. So it’s meant to be a compliment, but it hurts.” A pastor described the arrogance he sees “built into” the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the only true church this way: “They can’t help but look at us and see an apostate.”

Discussion of religious beliefs is another situation in which participants occasionally connect our doctrine of one true church to sentiments of Latter-day Saint arrogance and superiority. For example, after describing a scriptural discussion his children had with Latter-day Saint kids on a school band trip, a father stated, “There was always this air of superiority by the ones who were a part of ‘the’ Church. And the result has always been a sense of being intimidated or put down.” A youth, somewhat annoyed with what he described as one-sided discussions, said, “Most [Latter-day Saint] people in my school, they really don’t want to hear about my religion. They just want to tell me about theirs.” Another youth echoed the responses of several participants when he said, “You can believe what you believe in, just don’t try to put anyone down for believing what they believe in.”

Some participants detect arrogance in our doctrine of one true church as it relates to the attitudes of some Latter-day Saints who disassociate themselves from peers of other faiths. One young woman described the reaction some Latter-day Saint peers have upon finding out she is not a member the Church as “shock or they just avoid you after that.” A leader of another faith said, “Some of the [Latter-day Saint] kids always feel that they should not lower themselves to play with Methodists and that is a great sadness. . . . [Our] kids don’t stop to think about . . . belief patterns. . . . All they know is that suddenly I am not good enough to play with Suzie down the street.”

In addition to expressing perceptions that Latter-day Saints can be demeaning and arrogant, a few study participants indicated that our doctrine of one true church suggests exclusivity and elitism in God’s dealings with His children. As evidence, some participants pointed directly to our scriptural account of the First Vision, specifically to Joseph Smith—History 1:19. A leader who paraphrased from this
account said, “You’re the only true . . . church, and all these other churches can’t get along and their beliefs are an abomination.” To which he added, “That’s really part of the exclusive [Latter-day Saint] mind-set that sometimes you see . . . and not on purpose necessarily, but it happens.” The extreme of this assumption is that Latter-day Saints are the only ones who can please God or have real access to His love and concern. A personal experience may further illustrate this. While attending a conference, a woman, upon learning I was a Latter-day Saint, asked if I really believed that my religion was the only true church. Sensing her aversion, I explained my affirmative response with some care. She replied to the effect, “Do you really mean to tell me that God loves you more than He does me?” She misinterpreted our doctrine of one true church as an exclusion of all others from God’s love and approval. To her, our doctrine conveyed a God of prejudice.

Finally, a few study participants expressed feelings of confusion in connection with our doctrine of the one true church. A Baptist leader posed the question, “Do you [Latter-day Saints] emphasize the unity, or do you realize the exclusivity?” The leader further explained it this way: “I have a presentation . . . called, choose a hand. It’s basically . . . that the LDS Church and community presents two hands and says, choose one. . . . Choose the right hand and they say, ‘Well, we’re Christians, you’re Christians, we’re all Christians, we believe in Jesus, we believe in God, we believe in family, and we believe in good values so won’t you accept us?’ And you say, ‘Okay, well what’s in the other hand?’ And they [Latter-day Saints] say, ‘We’re the only true church; all the churches are wrong.’ . . . And the issue is, which hand do we deal with? . . . That is confusing to us.”

Before proceeding, perhaps a caution and another clarification are worth noting. When information is gathered and placed in a concentrated format, such as has been done here, the issue may have a tendency to appear larger than it really is. This has simply been an attempt to provide a range of views that those of other faiths may have regarding our doctrine of one true church. It should also be noted that a couple of study participants suggested that the sporadic challenges they associate with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church are more of an issue to those of other faiths living in communities containing a Latter-day Saint majority. Yet President Packer made no distinction between the percentage of Latter-day Saint members in a community when he said, “This doctrine often generates resistance and repels the casual investigator.”

In summary, three general misunderstandings regarding our doctrine of one true church seem to emerge in the comments partici-
pants made. First, this doctrine may on occasion incorrectly suggest to Latter-day Saints and may convey to those of other faiths the idea that other churches have little or nothing of worth to offer. Second, some members of other faiths as well as some Latter-day Saints may mistakenly view this doctrine as ascribing exclusiveness to God’s love and concern for His children. This may lead some Latter-day Saints to assume they are more righteous than others based solely on their membership in Christ’s true church, while on the flip side it may engender a perception of Latter-day Saint arrogance, or even prejudice, toward those of other faiths. Third, membership in Christ’s true church does not excuse or exclude Latter-day Saints from charitable feelings toward and meaningful associations with those of other faiths. Nor does it exclude Latter-day Saints from joining with our brothers and sisters of other faiths in efforts to promote shared values. It is wrong to limit association with those of other faiths based on this doctrine. With these perspectives and misunderstandings in mind, how can we as religious educators help curtail such misguided views and actions?

**Principles That Help Prevent Misunderstanding**

Characteristically encouraging tolerance, President Hinckley said: “We can be a little more tolerant and friendly to those not of our faith, going out of our way to show our respect for them. We cannot afford to be arrogant or self-righteous. It is our obligation to reach out in helpfulness, not only to our own but to all others as well. Their interest in and respect for this Church will increase as we do so.” A number of principles, if understood and lived, will reduce the misunderstandings surrounding our doctrine of one true church. In accordance with the perspectives provided above and President Hinckley’s direction, several antidotes to misunderstanding follow. These include understanding that God’s plan is universal, acknowledging truth and goodness in other faiths, avoiding undue judgment, avoiding contention, and complying with the Golden Rule.

*God’s plan is universal.* Often misunderstandings that surround our doctrine of one true church have their roots in an inaccurate view of God’s dealings with *all* His children. We believe all people are children of Heavenly Father and have the potential to become like Him (see Acts 17:29; Ephesians 4:6; Hebrews 12:9). The Lord makes no exceptions when He says His work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Each child of God on the earth is included in God’s plan. Beyond obtaining a physical body, all are to some degree tested or proven in this probationary state
As BYU professors Robert L. Millet and Lloyd D. Newell explain: “We need only become acquainted with individuals of other religious persuasions to recognize their goodness and the truths that they possess. It would be blatant arrogance to suppose that the Latter-day Saints are the only people on earth with whom our Heavenly Father is concerned or to whom he seeks to make known his mind and will. God loves all of his children on earth and seeks to teach all that people are prepared to receive (Alma 29:8).”

The Light of Christ clearly illustrates God’s universal effort with the whole human family (see D&C 88:7; Moroni 7:16). President Packer explains: “Every man, woman, and child of every nation, creed, or color—everyone, no matter where they live or what they believe or what they do—has within them the imperishable Light of Christ. In this respect, all men are created equally. The Light of Christ in everyone is a testimony that God is no respecter of persons (see D&C 1:35). He treats everyone equally in that endowment with the Light of Christ.” He continues: “The Light of Christ is as universal as sunlight itself. Wherever there is human life, there is the Spirit of Christ. Every living soul is possessed of it. It is the sponsor of everything that is good. It is the inspirer of everything that will bless and benefit mankind. It nourishes goodness itself.” President Packer then adds, “It should not be difficult, therefore, to understand how revelation from God to His children on earth can come to all mankind through both the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Ghost.”

Furthermore, presently and throughout history, God has blessed many nations through those not of the Church who are given a portion of truth “that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8). In 1978 the First Presidency stated:

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. The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel. Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life
to come. We also declare that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to His Church in our day, provides the only way to a mortal life of happiness and a fullness of joy forever. . . . Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters because we are sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.11

Teachings of other religious leaders past and present help many people become more righteous, civil, and ethical.12 God also uses good people outside of the Church to further His work. President Ezra Taft Benson said, “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.”13 President Benson then quoted Elder Orson F. Whitney, who said:

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. . . . Hence, some are drawn into the fold and receive a testimony of Truth; while others remain unconverted . . . the beauties and glories of the gospel being veiled temporarily from their view, for a wise purpose. The Lord will open their eyes in his own due time. . . . 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. . . . We have no quarrel with the Gentiles. They are our partners in a certain sense.14

God’s plan and infinite love clearly span the globe and the generations. While the Lord has and does choose from among His children specific persons and groups with whom He establishes a covenant relationship, such choosing does not suggest abandonment of His love for, and work with, others. On the contrary, God often chooses and sets apart particular persons or groups of people with the intent of blessing more of His children (for example, missionary work, priesthood authority, temple work).

No doubt many Latter-day Saints desire, like Alma, to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ “unto every soul” (Alma 29:1–2). Yet in our current inability to do so, truth revealed through the Light of Christ, as well as dispersed through sincere and inspired persons of many faiths and cultures, gives us reason to rejoice that all God’s children to some degree are able, if they choose, to live “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

*Acknowledge truth and goodness in other faiths.* While an accurate view of God’s universal dealings with His children is key to reducing misunderstandings surrounding the one true church doctrine, acknowl-
edging that others possess and adhere to valuable truth can help as well. Note that such acknowledgment should not come at the diminution of Christ’s restored gospel with its authority, ordinances, and fulness of true doctrine. As President Hinckley has stated: “Let us acknowledge the diversity of our society, recognizing the good in all people. We need not make any surrender of our theology. But we can set aside any element of suspicion, of provincialism, of parochialism.”

We can acknowledge the good in other religions without demeaning our own. Ideally, our genuine acknowledgment that others possess and live by truth should be natural, since charity “rejoiceth in truth” (Moroni 7:45). Furthermore, acknowledging that others possess truth can establish common ground upon which to create an atmosphere of respect, which will limit contention. Two practical ways we can acknowledge that others possess truth and lead good lives are (1) by sharing the gospel, we add upon truth others already possess and (2) we can join others in the common good.

We do not want people to abandon any truths they now possess. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “We don’t ask any people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more. What if all the world should embrace this Gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul.” As Elder Brigham H. Roberts explained, “The purpose of God in the introduction of the Dispensation of the fullness of Times was not to destroy any truth that existed in the world, but to add to that truth, to increase it, and to draw together all truth and develop it into a beautiful system in which men may rest contented, knowing God and their relationship to Him, knowing of the future and their relation unto it.” When we refer to truth, blanket statements of “we are right and you are wrong” seldom portray reality. Though some possess less than a fulness of truth, that does not mean the truth they possess is wrong. Yet it is clearly our desire to share the entire gospel of Jesus Christ in an effort to make the full power of salvation available to each individual. Therefore, as Ammon did with King Lamoni, it is often helpful to acknowledge and build upon common truth (see Alma 18). As President Hinckley has said on multiple occasions: “We appreciate the truth in all churches and the good which they do. We say to the people, in effect, you bring with you all the good that you have, and then let us see if we can add to it. That is the spirit of this work.”

President Hinckley also stated: “We can and do work with those of other religions in various undertakings in the everlasting fight against
social evils which threaten the treasured values which are so important to all of us. These people are not of our faith, but they are our friends, neighbors, and co-workers in a variety of causes. We are pleased to lend our strength to theirs efforts.” Elder M. Russell Ballard said, “Perhaps there has never been a more important time for neighbors all around the world to stand together for the common good of one another.” Joining our brothers and sisters of other faiths in good causes acknowledges our commitment to common truths. Yet President Hinckley has cautioned that in such joint efforts, “there is no doctrinal compromise. There need not be and must not be on our part. But there is a degree of fellowship as we labor together.” Joining in common causes must not preclude firmness in our faith. Still, as Elder Roberts broadly explained, “All that makes for truth, for righteousness, is of God; it constitutes the kingdom of righteousness,” and “we seek to enlarge this kingdom of righteousness both by recognizing such truths as it possesses and seeking the friendship and co-operation of the righteous men and women who constitute its membership.”

Avoid undue judgment. Because we are members of Christ’s true church, our responsibility is to share, not to judge or demean. Because knowledge of truth does not always result in its application, we should refrain from assertions of righteousness based on the amount of truth an individual or group possesses. It has always been possible that those who possess less truth may live more righteously than those who possess more. President Packer has noted: “We know there are decent, respectable, humble people in many churches, Christian and otherwise. In turn, sadly enough, there are so-called Latter-day Saints who by comparison are not as worthy, for they do not keep their covenants. But it is not a matter of comparing individuals.” As previously stated, the Church of Jesus Christ is not true because its members try harder than other people to please God. The Church is true because Christ Himself established, authorized, and recognized the work therein as true and eternal.

Furthermore, it would be unjust to judge or demean someone harshly for not readily accepting our declaration that this is Christ’s true church. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “I don’t blame you for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself.”

Elder Ballard explained: “While it is true we declare to the world that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored . . . and we urge our members to share their faith and testimonies with others, it has never been the policy of the Church that those who choose not to listen or accept our message should be shunned or ignored. Indeed,
the opposite is true.” Elder Ballard further explained, “Surely good neighbors should put forth every effort to understand each other and to be kind to one another regardless of religion, nationality, race, or culture.” Rather than insisting that others readily accept that ours is the only true church, we should seek understanding, continue kind and joyful associations, and out of genuine love maintain hope that someday they will desire to plant and nourish the seed (see Alma 32).

Avoid contention. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “It is important in our relationships with our fellowmen that we approach them as neighbors and as brothers and sisters rather than coming at them flinging theological thunderbolts.” President Hinckley likewise explained: “We want to be good neighbors; we want to be good friends. We feel we can differ theologically with people without being disagreeable in any sense. We hope they feel the same way toward us. We have many friends and many associations with people who are not of our faith, with whom we deal constantly, and we have a wonderful relationship. It disturbs me when I hear about antagonisms. . . . I don’t think they are necessary. I hope that we can overcome them.”

Certainly we are to avoid the spirit of contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29). The Lord commanded Oliver Cowdery to “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” (D&C 18:20). Elder Roberts described the church of the devil as “the kingdom of evil, a federation of unrighteousness; and the servants of God have a right to contend against [it].” However, Elder Roberts cautioned: “But, let it be understood, we are not brought necessarily into antagonism with the various sects of Christianity as such. So far as they have retained fragments of Christian truth—and each of them has some measure of truth—that far they are acceptable unto the Lord: and it would be poor-policy for us to contend against them without discrimination. Wherever we find truth, whether it exists in complete form or only in fragments, we recognize that truth as part of that sacred whole of which the Church of Jesus Christ is the custodian; and I repeat that our relationship to the religious world is not one that calls for the denunciation of sectarian churches as composing the church of the devil.”

Rather than attack other religions, we are to teach the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a positive and constructive way. Elder James E. Talmage stated: “We are not assailing churches; we are not attacking sects; we have no war with any of the numerous denominations on the face of the earth. We are sending out our missionaries, we are using the columns of the press, not to attack Catholicism or Protestantism, or any form of religion, but to preach in a positive and
constructive way the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ as that gospel has been restored to the earth in this dispensation.”

*Follow the Golden Rule.* Few forces work more powerfully on people’s lives than religion. Furthermore, religion frequently plays a prevailing role in the definition of one’s personal identity. When we proclaim that ours is the only true church, it is important to remember the Lord’s injunction, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (3 Nephi 14:12). Let us not be cavalier regarding another’s religion and devotion to his or her faith.

After referring to a letter in which a man who is not a member of the Church described how his daughter had been ostracized by her Latter-day Saint schoolmates, President Hinckley said: “Let us rise above all such conduct and teach our children to do likewise. Let us be true disciples of the Christ, observing the Golden Rule, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us strengthen our own faith and that of our children while being gracious to those who are not of our faith. Love and respect will overcome every element of animosity. Our kindness may be the most persuasive argument for that which we believe.”

We need to treat others with the dignity and respect we desire. The Golden Rule should produce empathy and allow us to be more understanding in our associations and in sharing the gospel. We do not need to embrace everything that other churches teach; we can disagree respectfully. As we avoid a spirit of disrespect and as we treat others with dignity, they will be more likely to respond in a positive manner.

**Boldness but Not Overbearance**

Certainly we cannot avoid all the offenses those of other faiths may associate with this doctrine, nor does it appear that God expects us to do so. As previously indicated, however, President Hinckley and other Church leaders have expressed room for improvement. It is possible to be bold and not overbearing (see Alma 38:12). Regarding our doctrine of one true church, a Baptist pastor shared contrasting experiences he had with Latter-day Saint acquaintances. On one occasion, after the pastor explained why such a doctrine was offensive to him, a Latter-day Saint man replied, “I still believe it, but I know that it is [offensive].” The pastor commented, “That’s integrity to me.” Then, referring to another occasion when he similarly explained his offense to this doctrine, the pastor said, “I’ve had two [Latter-day Saint] guys say, ‘Truth hurts—tough.’” The pastor felt that response was arrogant. In both instances the Latter-day Saints held to the doctrine of one true church, yet to the pastor one attitude was acceptable (even revered as integral) and the other attitude was arrogant.
We cannot let our fear of offending others hinder our efforts to present the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in its full light. “Yield on this doctrine,” President Packer has said, “and you cannot justify the Restoration.” He added, “We did not invent the doctrine of the only true church. It came from the Lord. Whatever perception others have of us, however presumptuous we appear to be, whatever criticism is directed to us, we must teach it to all who will listen.” We need not apologize for, and certainly need not hide, the priesthood authority, ordinances, and fulness of truth afforded us. We must boldly proclaim to the world that Christ’s true church is again upon the face of the earth, but we must do so in a manner that avoids undue challenges to its acceptance.

Our boldness comes from a personal conviction that this is Christ’s true church and from a genuine love for all mankind. It is for these same reasons that we want to avoid overbearance. Like so many principles of the gospel, the doctrine of one true church is best conveyed in a spirit of charity, “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). This pure love naturally motivates us to boldly share with others “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). And it is this same love that leads us to do so in a manner that “suffereth long, and is kind, . . . and is not puffed up, . . . is not easily provoked, . . . rejoiceth in the truth, . . . believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (Moroni 7:45). As we share the gospel, we should declare that this is “the only true and living church” in a spirit of charity, reverence, and humility. In the proper spirit, this doctrine need not be divisive. In the proper spirit, we can be bold in our assertion that this is the only true church without being overbearing.

A City Set on a Hill—One True Church

In our effort to be bold but not overbearing, we should remember that this doctrine clearly sets the Church apart. President Hinckley said:

As members of the Church, we have become as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid (see 3 Nephi 12:14). Whether we like it or not, each of us is set apart from the world. We are partakers of the truth, and with that comes a responsibility. Our responsibilities are personal because testimony is a personal thing.

In this dispensation, when the Lord declared this to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30), we were immediately put in a position from which we cannot shrink and which we must face with humility and courage.

Furthermore, the Lord’s declaration that this is the only true church signals to the rest of the world that this church has something more to offer. A sister missionary explained, “When I share with people that I know that this is the only true church, I am letting them know
that religion is not just a matter of preference—it is a matter of truth.” Similarly, President Packer testified, “The position that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church upon the face of the earth is fundamental. . . . It is not merely an admission; it is a positive declaration.” The declaration itself can invite investigation. In sharing this doctrine, we boldly affirm our testimony that herein rests the authority, the fulness of truth, and the most correct path to happiness. It is a bold assertion; the Church is either true or it is not—there is no in-between.

Finally, declaration that this is the only true church should be accompanied by an invitation to “come and see” (John 1:38–39). There is a quiet confidence and comfort knowing that in our efforts to share the doctrine of one true church, the Lord will confirm its truth to all those who in humility and sincerity seek to know (see Moroni 10:3–5). President Packer said that each “soul has the right, indeed the obligation, to make an appeal through prayer for the answer to this question: Is there a true church? That is how it all began, you know, with a fourteen-year-old boy who went into a grove.”

Notes

6. See Marlowe, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools.”
12. See Preach My Gospel (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 46.


31. See Marlowe, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools,” 94.

32. Packer, “The Only True Church,” 80.


35. Packer, “The Only True and Living Church,” 40.

The Prophet Joseph Smith dedicated the Kirtland Temple “that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people” (D&C 109:5).

Courtesy of Community of Christ
For some people, the phrase “I see” pertains only to what they can see with their natural eyes—their sight. For others, the phrase goes beyond what the natural eye can see to include what they understand—their insight. This same distinction can apply to the manifestations of God. While some people have seen God’s manifestations with their natural eyes, others have seen His manifestations through their spiritual eyes, or their understanding and insight.

This idea has motivated me to reflect on my own experience with seeing God. As a young boy going to the Los Angeles Temple for the first time to do baptisms for the dead, I fully expected to see something—or more accurately, someone. I thought I would see God, His angels, or at least the departed souls for whom I was serving as proxy. I was surprised, however, when I left the temple that day that I had not “seen” anything at all. Although that was a long time ago, I still have the same hope and faith in seeing God, only now my desires are more of the spiritual understanding type. Furthermore, latter-day prophets and the scriptures teach me that if I am faithful—if I keep my covenants, repent of my sins, and endure to the end—I will be able to enjoy a variety of God’s manifestations in my life.

There are times when the manifestations of God are both needed and deserved. Through faith, repentance, and obedience, we qualify ourselves for His gracious manifestations, even if we “can no more than desire to believe” (Alma 32:27). The principle that “God’s children qualify for his manifestations through their faith, repentance and obedience” has been observed through the ages. In the sacred valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman,
Adam “called . . . the residue of his posterity who were righteous. . . . And the Lord appeared unto them” (D&C 107:53–54; emphasis added). God told Moses at Mount Sinai, “Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai” (Exodus 19:10–11; emphasis added). As part of His instruction to build the temple, the Lord spoke to Solomon of His desire to “dwell among the children of Israel” (1 Kings 6:13). The dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, found in Doctrine and Covenants 109, teaches that the Saints, in their tribulation and poverty, gave of their substance to build a house “that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people” (D&C 109:5; emphasis added). These scriptural references raise two questions: What is God’s intense interest in manifesting Himself to His people? What purposes do these manifestations serve?

God’s manifestations serve purposes in both authoring and finishing our faith (see Hebrews 12:2; Moroni 6:4). An author is “one who produces, creates, or brings into being.” With the veil drawn over our natural eyes, we must look to the Savior to author our faith. We depend on Him to bring our faith into being. The word finisher has several meanings that apply to the Savior’s role in developing and blessing us because of our faith. He is the one who completes or perfects our faith. To finish means “to polish to the degree of excellence intended.” The words author and finisher refer not only to the absolute beginning and ending of our faith but also to those things that occur in between that serve to develop and polish our faith. We therefore ought to be able to align the manifestations of God in our lives with the things that are necessary for developing and polishing our faith in Him.

Three things are necessary for the development and polishing of our faith: (1) the idea that God actually exists, (2) a correct idea of His character, perfections, and attributes, and (3) a knowledge that the life we are pursuing is harmonious with God’s will. These three ideas blend well with the manifestations of God and author and finisher of our faith concepts, and they are represented using the following outline:

1. God is the author of our faith.
   a. His manifestations reveal His existence.
   b. His manifestations reveal His nature.

2. God is the finisher of our faith.
   a. His manifestations reveal His blessings for our faith.
   b. His manifestations reveal that our lives are acceptable.
   c. His manifestations may reveal an assurance of personal salvation in the world to come.
Using this framework, I will show how the manifestations of God are consistent with His plan for finishing the faith of His people, leading them to joy in this life and eternal life in the world to come.

**God Is the Author of Our Faith**

As author of our faith, God has “revealed himself and his perfect character” (Bible Dictionary, “Faith,” 669; emphasis added). This suggests two types of knowledge that God reveals through His manifestations: (1) knowledge that pertains to His actual existence (revealing Himself) and (2) knowledge that applies to His character, personality, and attributes (revealing His character). The explanatory introduction of the Doctrine and Covenants alerts the reader to these types of knowledge: “In the revelations one hears the tender but firm voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking anew in the dispensation of the fulness of times . . . [and] the testimony that is given of Jesus Christ—his divinity, his majesty, his perfection, his love, and his redeeming power.” Through God’s manifestations, He provides the way for His children to increase their faith as they look for both evidence of His existence and disclosures of His nature.

*His manifestations reveal His existence.* Adopted children sometimes discover the existence of a parent they had never known. Similarly, the manifestations of God are designed to provide His children with an idea that He exists and help them discover Him. God revealed to Moses that one of His titles is “I AM,” for “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Such a name declares that “He is” and reveals His actual presence or reality.

God authors faith by manifesting His existence in a personal way, suited to the needs of each individual (see 2 Nephi 31:3). To very few who exercise exceeding faith, and only after much testing, God reveals Himself directly, giving them sure knowledge, whereas He expects most to believe the words of those who know. Doctrine and Covenants 46 explains: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (D&C 46:13–14). We also know that personal testimony excites a person to inquire after a knowledge of God. When a person hears the testimony or declaration of true faith by another person, God confirms the truth by manifesting Himself through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Having a testimony based on the testimony of those who know, or those who have “seen,” is not a second-class blessing. The Savior declared, “Blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after
that ye have seen me and know that I am. And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words, because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am” (3 Nephi 12:1–2; emphasis added).

His manifestations reveal His nature. Once a person has an idea of God’s actual existence, he or she is prepared to learn about His nature, what He is like physically and spiritually. The dictionary defines nature as “the essence, essential qualities or attributes of a thing, which constitute what it is.” Coming to a correct understanding of God’s nature thus includes a clear understanding of His essence and qualities. God’s manifestations are, therefore, designed to reveal His nature as a physical being with “a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22) as well as His spiritual being—the qualities that make up His character.

Jesus declared that some sayings in the Doctrine and Covenants are given that we might “know how to worship, and know what [we] worship, that [we] may come unto the Father in [His] name, and in due time, receive of his fullness” (D&C 93:19). This stated purpose of scripture is consistent with what was taught and understood among the earlier Saints of this dispensation: “We are indebted to the revelations which he has given to us for a correct understanding of his character, perfections, and attributes; because, without the revelations which he has given to us, no man by searching could find out God.” The same Saints were taught that we are also expected to be diligent in our search of God if we hope to know Him and find out His real character: “The extent of [our] knowledge . . . will depend upon [our] diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him.”

God’s plan has always been to reveal His nature, personality, and attributes to His children on the earth, making it possible for them to find Him out. His plan has not changed in the latter days. Not long ago, a colleague of mine asked me what I thought President Gordon B. Hinckley would say if asked what the greatest contribution of the Prophet Joseph Smith is. I told him I didn’t know. With a smile, he said that President Hinckley actually responded to that question, and that his answer had been published in a recent news article about the Church. Here is what President Hinckley was asked, followed by his own response:

Newsweek: “What do you believe is [Joseph] Smith’s most meaningful contribution, not only to the church but also to the world?”

President Hinckley: “His greatest contribution I think is defining the nature of deity. He saw the Father and the Son. He spoke with them. They were beings of substance. They were in form like a man. And they could express themselves and he could speak with them. Such an interpersonal relationship. And such a warm and reassuring thing to know the nature of God.”
President Hinckley’s response suggests that God has a plan for His children to learn of Him and to understand what kind of a person He is, both physically and spiritually.

Part of God’s plan includes revealing Himself to His prophets in a way that we understand Him as a person. In April 2000, President Hinckley used different titles for the Savior when he identified Him as his Friend, Exemplar, Teacher, Healer, Leader, Savior and Redeemer, and God and King. By pondering on the meanings of each name-title, we grow to better understand the nature of God. Analyzing names and the insight they give to God’s character can be done with the scriptures too. The process of searching the scriptures for words that describe God’s actions can tell us much about His nature, character, and attributes.

God Is the Finisher of Our Faith

The manifestations God uses to author or develop our faith may also be classified as blessings or “finishings” for our faith. God not only initiates our faith but also finishes it. The ultimate finish to our faith is the blessing of eternal life with God. However, we may not have to wait until the judgment day to see His face. The Lord has said, “Sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (D&C 88:68). He also declared, “It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am” (D&C 93:1).

His manifestations reveal His blessings for our faith. One way that God “finishes” our faith is by manifesting Himself in our lives through great blessings and gifts of the Spirit. Such blessings can include visions, dreams, healings, miracles, and more. All blessings produced by true faith can be classified as God’s manifestations. Some are listed in the Bible Dictionary: “Individual and personal testimony, guidance, revelation, and spiritual knowledge. Where there is true faith there are miracles, visions, dreams, healings, and all the gifts of God that he gives to his saints” (“Faith,” 670). These kinds of blessings serve not only to bless us for our faith but also to continue its development. Divine manifestations we receive here in mortality give hope for things that sometimes we do not see but that are true (see Alma 32:21), such as faith that God is mindful of us during our trials.

The manifestations that God provides during our times of trial and adversity often include the spirit of peace, comfort, and consolation.
Jesus said, “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” (John 14:27). The peace God gives is not the world peace for which so many pray (at least not yet). Rather, the peace He describes is peace of heart. This peace gives us the assurance and strength to be faithful in our trials. It provides us with peace that has been described as being as “calm as a summer’s morning” (D&C 135:4), despite the terror that may surround us. This assurance enables us to move forward in faith, progressing and receiving the blessings God has prepared for us.

*His manifestations reveal that our lives are acceptable.* God’s manifestations serve as evidence that the course of life we are pursuing is according to His will. With that evidence, we “have that confidence in God without which no person can obtain eternal life. It was this that enabled the ancient saints to endure all afflictions and persecutions, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing (not just believing) that they had a more enduring substance (Hebrews 10:34).”

An illustration of how God provides evidence that our lives are agreeable to Him is found in the writings of Joseph Smith’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith. Prior to being expelled from Missouri, at a time of terrible sorrow and persecution, Lucy Smith enjoyed the peace and assurance of God because of her faith. She wrote:

For some time our house was filled with mourning, lamentation, and woe; but, in the midst of my grief, I found consolation that surpassed all earthly comfort. I was filled with the Spirit of God, and received the following by the gift of prophecy: “Let your heart be comforted concerning your children, they will not be harmed by their enemies; and, in less than four years, Joseph shall speak before the judges and great men of the land, for his voice shall be heard in their councils. And in five years from this time he will have power over all his enemies.” This relieved my mind, and I was prepared to comfort my children. I told them what had been revealed to me, which greatly consoled them.

Later, at the time of Joseph’s and Hyrum’s deaths, she again described God’s manifestation:

I was swallowed up in the depths of my afflictions, and though my soul was filled with horror past imagination, yet I was dumb until I arose again to contemplate the spectacle before me. . . . As I looked upon their peaceful, smiling countenances, I seemed almost to hear them say, “Mother, weep not for us, we have overcome the world by love; we carried to them the gospel, that their souls might be saved; they slew us for our testimony, and thus placed us beyond their power;
their ascendancy is for a moment, ours is an eternal triumph.”

I then thought upon the promise which I had received in Missouri, that in five years Joseph should have power over all his enemies. The time had elapsed and the promise was fulfilled.¹²

Sister Smith, because of her exceeding faith, was blessed with the peace of God and with the assurance that she and her family would not be forsaken. Like Lucy Smith, God’s faithful children can know with assurance that during times of adversity their lives are acceptable to God and that if they continue faithful, their reward of eternal life can be certain. For God’s children who diligently seek Him, His manifestations witness that He is pleased with them (see Hebrews 11:6). It was by faith that “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts” (Hebrews 11:4; emphasis added).

Perhaps the greatest witness we can have that God is pleased with the course of our lives is the companionship of the Holy Ghost. God does not require perfection before blessing us with His Spirit; rather, His spiritual gifts and blessings are for “those who love [Him] and keep all [His] commandments, and him that seeketh so to do” (D&C 46:9; emphasis added). It is safe to conclude that if we are enjoying a manifestation of His gifts at a time in our lives when we are seeking to love Him and to keep all His commandments, we can know that the manifestation is His confirmation to us that we are on course and that our life is pleasing to Him.

This confirming witness represents at least one purpose for the blessing of always having His Spirit to be with us—a covenantal promise made to us through baptism and the sacrament (see D&C 20:77, 79). Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught how the presence of the Holy Ghost signifies the blessing of a cleansing effect when he said: “Attendance at church each week provides the opportunity to partake of the sacrament, as the Lord has commanded us (see D&C 59:9). If we act with the right preparation and attitude, partaking of the sacrament renews the cleansing effect of our baptism and qualifies us for the promise that we will always have His Spirit to be with us.”¹³

While the presence of the Holy Ghost in our daily life cannot be understood as a final judgment on our lives, it can serve as evidence that the course we are then pursuing is approved by God. If we continue faithfully, repenting of our sins, keeping the commandments, loving the Lord and our neighbors, our faith will “take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41).
“That which is of God [including His manifestations] is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light growth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). The Savior also taught this principle when He said, “If it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall greater things be made manifest unto them” (3 Nephi 26:9).

God’s assurance of our faithfulness is manifest to us through the Holy Spirit of Promise. The scriptures teach that the Father “sheds forth” His Holy Spirit of Promise “upon all those who are just and true” (D&C 76:53). We are also told in section 132 that all contracts or covenants must be “sealed,” or “validated” (v. 19), by the Holy Spirit of Promise if they are to have efficacy when people are dead (vv. 7, 18–19, 26). President James E. Faust explained that to have a covenant “sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise means that the compact is binding on earth and in heaven.”14 “When any ordinance or contract is sealed by the Spirit, it is approved with a promise of reward, provided unrighteousness does not thereafter break the seal, remove the ratifying approval, and cause loss of the promised blessing.”15 The scriptures warn that “there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God” (D&C 20:32). The scriptures also provide help for preventing this loss: “Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:32–34; see also D&C 132:26).

The presence of the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit of Promise), in addition to blessing us for our faith, signifies God’s assurance that His promises are remembered and the associated blessings will be given based on our present condition and future faithfulness. Quoting Elder Melvin J. Ballard, President Harold B. Lee taught how the Holy Ghost seals promises upon us: “The Holy Ghost is one who reads the thoughts and hearts of men, and gives his sealing approval to the blessings pronounced upon their heads. Then it is binding, efficacious, and of full force.”16 Having God’s Spirit with us is His way of telling us that the covenants, ordinances, blessings, and promises are “binding, efficacious, and of full force.”

The Apostle Paul taught that ordinary members of Christ’s Church can enjoy the Spirit’s presence and the assurance of promised blessings when he told the Ephesians, “Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:13–14; see also 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). Paul teaches that God gave the Ephesian Saints the Holy Spirit of Promise as His earnest, or evidence, that the blessings of their
inheritance would come, as promised, at the time of their redemption. Like a family that makes an offer toward the purchase of a home, there is included in that offer a sum of “earnest” money that assures the seller that the remaining funds will be coming in due time. The Holy Spirit of Promise, given by God to His faithful children, is God’s earnest that the promised blessings will come in due time.

*His manifestations may reveal an assurance of personal salvation in the world to come.* An assurance of eternal life in the world to come should be the desire of every person. It represents a more sure word of prophecy for the faithful—that is, something more sure than the knowledge that the course of their life is pleasing to God. It is a blessing of sure knowledge that comes through the Holy Spirit of Promise in God’s “own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (D&C 88:68).

Scripturally, we are taught that the “other Comforter” mentioned by John in the New Testament refers to the Holy Spirit of Promise and the promise of eternal life we can receive while still in mortality. In this context, the Holy Spirit of Promise becomes an even greater (more sure) word of promise from God. Doctrine and Covenants 88:4 reads, “This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom” (see also D&C 124:124). This ultimate manifestation of God—the assurance of a promised eternal life—while in mortality, represents a grand *finish* to the handiwork of faith that He *authors* in the lives of His children. Perhaps we could sing more faithfully the fourth verse of “Come, Listen to a Prophet’s Voice”:

> Then heed the words of truth and light<br>That flow from fountains pure.<br>Yea, keep His law with all thy might<br>Till thine election’s sure,<br>Till thou shalt hear the holy voice<br>Assure eternal reign,<br>While joy and cheer attend thy choice,<br>As one who shall obtain.17

The scriptures also teach plainly that we do not have to receive this promise of eternal life while in mortality in order to be saved. Good and faithful members of the Church who endure to the end and die while strong in the faith will receive the blessing of eternal life. Nephi wrote, “If ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). Dying while on the gospel path is sufficient to be saved, “even though [we] are far from perfect in this life.”18 Elder McConkie taught:
What we are doing as members of the Church is charting a course leading to eternal life. . . . We must determine in our hearts and in our souls, with all the power and ability we have, that from this time forward we will press on in righteousness; by so doing we can go where God and Christ are. If we make that firm determination, and are in that course of our duty when this life is over, we will continue in that course in eternity. . . . If we go out of this life loving the Lord, desiring righteousness, and seeking to acquire the attributes of godliness, we will have that same spirit in the eternal world, and we will then continue to advance and progress until an ultimate, destined day when we will possess, receive, and inherit all things.¹⁹

Conclusion

Wherever we find ourselves on the pathway toward eternal life, God’s manifestations can serve both to author and also to finish our faith. If we will seek God and respond faithfully to the manifestations He gives us, the day will come that we shall see Him in His fullness (see D&C 93:19)—both naturally and spiritually. In that day when we shall say “I see,” it will be for more than mere insight—“we shall see him as he is” (Moroni 7:48). President Romney provides an appropriate conclusion to this topic when he said: “I know that God our Father lives, that we are, as Paul said, his offspring. I know that we dwelt in his presence in pre-earth life and that we shall continue to live beyond the grave. I know that we may return into his presence, if we meet his terms. I know that while we are here in mortality there is a means of communication between him and us. I know it is possible for men to so live that they may hear his voice and know his words and that to receive ‘the Holy Spirit of promise’ while here in mortality is possible.”²⁰ God be praised for His initiation, development, and polishing of our faith. Let us also praise Him for His gracious finishing of our faith, both now and in the worlds to come. ²²

Notes

5. American Dictionary, s.v. “nature.”
18. Bruce R. McConkie, “Seven Deadly Heresies,” in *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 150.
William E. McLellin began serving a mission to the eastern states in 1831, but this commission was revoked “because of disobedience.”

Courtesy of Church Archives
Religious educators often encourage their classes with this statement: “It is better to prepare and prevent than it is to repair and repent.” While inherently true, such statements need not imply that repentance is thus a flawed “plan B” approach to our mortal probation. Accordingly, those in need of mercy and forgiveness must not conclude that they will be forever flawed and left wanting, even after repenting. On the other hand, individuals in sin must not react bitterly to this principle. By so doing, they might deprive themselves of much-needed humility that is a consequence of their transgressions. Indeed, it is this very humility, accompanied by godly sorrow, that becomes the catalyst for true and lasting repentance. Unfortunately, those who demand mercy sometimes ignore or downplay the importance of justice. Likewise, some who become overzealous with justice may be prone to diminish the need for mercy. Finding balance between these two principles is challenging yet necessary.

A wonderful principle found in sections 66 and 75 of the Doctrine and Covenants can give added understanding to the process of repentance and the corresponding miracle of forgiveness of sin. This principle likewise helps discerning souls to properly balance the principles of justice and mercy, while understanding the sobering truth that true repentance does not mitigate consequences that come as a result of sin.

Background on Sections 66 and 75

Section 66 of the Doctrine and Covenants came as a response to a request made by William E. McLellin to know the Lord’s will concerning
him. At the time this revelation was given, William E. McLellin was in relatively good standing in the Church. McLellin was born January 18, 1806, in Smith County, Tennessee. He joined the Church at age twenty-five and was called as one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1835. McLellin, a schoolteacher by profession, demonstrated his dedicated service to the Church many times, yet his problematic relationship with Church leaders and doctrines eventually led to his excommunication in 1838. He is generally remembered as the individual who failed miserably in his attempt to produce a supposed revelation from God. This attempt came in response to the criticism of certain Church members and their disdain for the wording of the revelations in the soon-to-be-published Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord, in essence, issued a challenge to see if the “most wise” among the members of the Church could create a revelation comparable to “even the least” of the existing revelations (see D&C 67:6–7). If it were possible to create such a revelation, it would justify some of the Church members’ position that the revelations were not of God. Supposing that William McLellin was the most intelligent member at the time, several members chose him to make an attempt, but he ultimately failed.

In section 66, the Lord commends William E. McLellin for turning away from iniquity and accepting the fulness of the gospel (see vv. 1–2). The Lord warns him, however, that he is not completely free from sin and specifically warns him of weaknesses and temptations to violate the law of chastity (see v. 10). The Lord extends the invitation to William E. McLellin to serve a mission in the “eastern lands” (v. 7) and gives him guidance and instruction relative to this mission. These items of instruction, the mission call, the warnings, and other items of counsel, were given on October 25, 1831. Although McLellin and his companion, Samuel Smith, did commence this mission on November 16, 1831, they were not able to continue for very long. Explaining the reason for limited service, Samuel Smith stated, “We went a short distance, but because of disobedience, our way was hedged up before us.”

Several months later, on January 25, 1832, another revelation was received that, in part, again revealed the Lord’s will relative to William E. McLellin and his call to serve a mission. In this revelation, the Lord chastens him for his sins and murmurings (see D&C 75:7–8) and emphatically declares, “I revoke the commission which I gave unto him to go unto the eastern countries” (v. 6). The Lord then says, “I forgive him and say unto him again, Go ye into the south countries” (v. 8). President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “William E. McLellin was rebuked for his failure to magnify a commission which had been given
him, and this commission was revoked. He was now appointed to travel with diligence and to labor with his might, as were all the others, but *he was to go to the south while formerly he was sent to the east.* The Lord, once more forgave him for his disobedience and he was to have as a companion Luke Johnson.”

Despite the fact that McLellin eventually apostatized from the Church, this canonized revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants still has relevant application to each of us. The purpose in presenting the following is not to hold McLellin up as any sort of positive example but rather to “liken the scriptures” to ourselves by showing not only what the Lord was willing to do for William McLellin but also, more importantly, what He is willing to do for us.

Understanding the Principle

The scriptures contain priceless principles that can be applied in our lives. President Boyd K. Packer observed, “A principle is an enduring truth, a law, a rule you can adopt to guide you in making decisions. *Generally principles are not spelled out in detail.* That leaves you free to find your way with an enduring truth, a principle, as your anchor.” In light of President Packer’s definition, it is interesting to note that neither the Doctrine and Covenants nor Samuel Smith specifically reveals what William E. McLellin’s shortcoming was—only that he sinned and was forgiven. The fact that things were not spelled out in more detail invites us to discover a scriptural principle that we can apply to our lives.

McLellin sinned but then was forgiven. He was subsequently given another chance to serve a mission. However, the call to go to the eastern lands was revoked. The principle here is that although the Lord is willing and able to forgive, that does not preclude us from suffering certain consequences. In this case, an opportunity was forever lost—the opportunity McLellin had of fulfilling a mission call to the East. Although a similar opportunity was presented later, along with the promised forgiveness, the fact is that this particular opportunity was lost forever. With that lost opportunity, we can only speculate about all the experiences, associations, spiritual growth, and overall good that could have been realized had McLellin fulfilled the call. Forgiveness is real, and our Father in Heaven is willing and able to forgive when we follow His plan. But forgiveness does not bring about an automatic reinstatement of all opportunities and blessings that an individual may have squandered. The repentant transgressor can go on in faithful service in the kingdom. Yet, despite the miracle of forgiveness, sin can leave an indelible mark on our mortal lives. This principle is vividly portrayed in the following story from the life of President
Spencer W. Kimball:

One day, I came home from school to find one of the horses tangled in the wire fence, bleeding profusely. He had been struggling to extricate himself and had cut deep gashes in his shoulder and legs. I shall never forget that day. As I remember it, the larger gash was about six inches long and so deep that a heavy piece of flesh and hide hung down, leaving an ugly bleeding wound. What could I do? There was no veterinarian in the town, my father was away, the neighbor men were at work, and perhaps none of the boys in the area could do any better than I could do and time was of the essence, and so I faced the task, with the help of my sister, realizing that at best, I might do a clumsy job, but there was no alternative. I must try.

I washed the wound with hot soapy water, spread over the gash some of the common liniment we always had for our animals, and, with a large needle and common thread, I began to sew it together. When I pushed the needle through his sensitive flesh and skin, he jumped back and struck at me with his front feet and bit me on the arm. I had some mixed emotions at this juncture as I nursed my own wound. Here I was trying so hard to relieve him and this was the thanks I received. I realized he did not fully comprehend what I was trying so earnestly to do for him.

Now, I put a noose on his lower lip with a stick in it and twisted his lip so that his attention was turned to his lip agony while I could sew up the gash and get the wound fixed so it could heal itself. I had my little sister hold the noose tight. In and out, I pushed the needle through the quivering flesh until the edges of the wound were tied tight together.

Even after I had released the noose and the wound was firmly sewed together, I was still sure that this horse never knew nor fully realized what I had done for him. If he remembered me at all, it was probably as the one who had pricked his tender flesh with needles and severely pinched his lip in a noose.

The wound healed. There was always an ugly scar on the shoulder but the horse lived to give much service on the little farm. 7

This story highlights two very crucial principles relative to sin. First, as with William E. McLellin, sin can cause individuals to miss out on certain opportunities in life—opportunities that often never return. Additionally, sin can carry consequences that may last for a lifetime, even after an individual has repented. Often, visible and invisible scars are left that might not be removed during one’s mortal life. An example of this is an individual who becomes a chronic smoker, later changes his ways, and faithfully abstains for the rest of his life—but he must endure irreparable lung damage. Even though he might repent, there are some things he can never get back. The same applies to a youth who is involved in illicit sexual relations. Pregnancy, defilement, emotional damage, and sexual disease may leave scars. Yes, such a youth may repent, have a change of
heart, and endure faithfully in the covenant; but that does not eliminate the fact that there are certain consequences they must live with for the rest of their mortal lives.

Youths today who desire missionary service have been counseled by prophets that their future opportunities to work in the vineyard may be compromised forever if they indulge in sin, even if they repent later. An example of this can be seen in Elder M. Russell Ballard’s recent warning to prospective missionaries: “Please understand this: the bar that is the standard for missionary service is being raised. The day of the ‘repent and go’ missionary is over. You know what I’m talking about, don’t you, my young brothers? Some young men have the mistaken idea that they can be involved in sinful behavior and then repent when they’re 18 1/2 so they can go on their mission at 19. While it is true that you can repent of sins, you may or you may not qualify to serve.”

This concept might seem harsh to some, but it underscores the seriousness of sin, especially the wasted opportunities that can occur in youth, a time that can never be repeated. President Joseph F. Smith lamented this awful predicament:

I wish that all young men could appreciate the value there is in this practice, and in giving their youthful days to the service of the Lord. Growth, development, progress, self-respect, the esteem and admiration of men naturally follow such a course in youth. . . . Waiting to serve the Lord until the wild oats of youth are sown, is reprehensible. There is always something lacking in the man who spends his youth in wickedness and sin, and then turns to righteousness in later years. Of course, the Lord honors his repentance, and it is better far that a man should late turn from evil than to continue in sin all his days, but the fact is clear that the best part of his life and strength is wasted. . . . There are regrets and heartburnings in repenting late in life from the follies and sins of youth, but there are consolation and rich reward in serving the Lord in the vigorous days of early manhood.

God is merciful to the repentant sinner. Forgiveness is real. Sin, however, can carry consequences even after an individual has completely repented. The Book of Mormon speaks of the sons of Mosiah in this regard. “For they were the very vilest of sinners. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities” (Mosiah 28:4). Even after their mighty change of heart, they still had to repair much of the damage that had been done (see Mosiah 27:34–35). We can only guess that perhaps there were some things they were never able to completely repair—wounded hearts of others and their own damaged reputations. How sobering it can be to realize that the availability of God’s forgive-
ness cannot change or turn back the unrelenting forward motion of the clock of opportunity.

Second, although sin is serious—indeed, very serious—repentance is real. There is forgiveness and healing. There can be a genuine change of heart and a return to purity. To put it another way, the horse in President Kimball’s story did go on to give “much service on the little farm.” The fact that people might have the ailments of missed opportunities or lifelong trials caused by sin does not mean they are disqualified from eternal life. Did they miss out on certain blessings and joy in this earth life? Yes! Are they ultimately cast out from God’s presence? No! Not as long as there is sincere and lasting repentance.

Teachers and leaders must be careful not to steal hope from starving souls who sincerely come back to the table of the Lord only to be left to mistakenly think that only scraps remain. Individuals who sincerely repent must not rob themselves of hope. It is a precarious thing to deny ourselves and others of the Lord’s mercy. In the Book of Mormon, we read of the prophet Zenock, who taught, “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son” (Alma 33:16). To fret, complain, or murmur about the availability of grace and forgiveness is displeasing to our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ.

President Packer cautioned, “Some worry endlessly over missions that were missed, or marriages that did not turn out, or babies that did not arrive, or children that seem lost, or dreams unfulfilled, or because age limits what they can do. I do not think it pleases the Lord when we worry because we think we never do enough or that what we do is never good enough. Some needlessly carry a heavy burden of guilt which could be removed through confession and repentance.”

Yes, sin causes pain, and blatant sin can cause us to squander many opportunities—some that are lost forever. But those who transgress should never be made to feel that all they can now offer to the Lord is feeble, worthless service. To communicate to repentant souls that they will be spiritual dunces the rest of their lives is not only callous but also entirely wrong. Elder Richard G. Scott said:

If you have repented from serious transgression and mistakenly believe that you will always be a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God, learn that is not true. . . . Find encouragement in the lives of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah. They were tragically wicked. Yet their full repentance and service qualified them to be considered as noble as righteous Captain Moroni.
To you who have sincerely repented yet continue to feel the burden of guilt, realize that to continue to suffer for sins when there has been proper repentance and forgiveness of the Lord is prompted by the master of deceit. Lucifer will encourage you to continue to relive the details of past mistakes, knowing that such thoughts can hamper your progress. Thus he attempts to tie strings to the mind and body so that he can manipulate you like a puppet to discourage personal achievement.\textsuperscript{11}

**Finding the Balance**

Why might an individual deny himself of the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness? Why might a parent, a teacher, or a leader be apt to do the same thing to the sinner? Perhaps it is a sincere yet misplaced desire to avoid giving license to sin. Elder Bruce C. Hafen cautioned that at times there are “some Church members [who] feel entitled to ‘a few free ones’ as they sow their wild oats and walk constantly along the edge of transgression. Or they believe that repentance requires little more than saying they are sorry. Constant emphasis on the availability of forgiveness can be counterproductive in such cases, suggesting—wrongly—that they can ‘live it up’ now and repent easily later without harmful consequences.” Elder Hafen then warned, “Despite these reasons for caution, the blessing of making the Atonement more central to our lives outweighs any associated risks. When we habitually understate the Atonement’s broad meaning, we do more harm than leaving one another without comforting reassurances—for some may simply drop out of the race, weighed down beyond the breaking point with self-doubt and spiritual fatigue.”\textsuperscript{12}

Teaching youth how to properly understand the meaning of forgiveness can be a rewarding yet daunting task. Striking the right balance between mercy and justice is easier to achieve when basic gospel principles are properly taught and understood. Two of these basic principles relating to forgiveness are justification and sanctification. There is a critical need to help youth understand the difference between the two. Justification, in essence, means to be forgiven—it is to be “pardoned from punishment for sin and declared guiltless.”\textsuperscript{13} Sanctification, on the other hand, is more than simple forgiveness or pardon: it is “the process of becoming free from sin, pure, clean, and holy.”\textsuperscript{14} Both of these come through the Atonement as an individual exercises faith in Jesus Christ, repents of sin, and lives according to the laws and ordinances of the gospel (see D&C 20:30–31).

Although these two terms might seem esoteric, they are nevertheless real and important principles of the gospel of forgiveness. Whatever
terms or expressions are used, these two concepts are vital for youth to better understand the repentance process. It is one thing for a youth to recognize sin, to confess, to abandon the sin, and to be forgiven. It is altogether another thing to have a mighty change of heart (see Alma 5:14) and thus overcome the very disposition to commit sin (see Mosiah 5:2). Through the Atonement of Christ, a person can not only be forgiven of a sin but over time can also have the desire to commit that sin completely purged. Elder Merrill J. Bateman once said that the Savior “has the infinite capacity not only to heal our wounds but also to lift us up to the Father as sanctified sons and daughters.”

Understanding the difference between these two principles is crucial, not just in understanding scriptural phrases on these two topics but also in understanding exactly where one is in the repentance process.

In the Book of Mormon, there is a verse of scripture that, if understood incorrectly, can breed complacency and even give license to sin. If understood in its proper context, however, this verse can be very redeeming and can give the sinner needed hope to move on in life. “Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34:31; emphasis added).

Some might be inclined to interpret this verse as saying that repentance is easy and forgiveness is quick. On the contrary, this verse is a wonderful summary of the process of justification, or, in other words, of being forgiven of sin and getting back on the strait and narrow path. As stated, this can happen immediately. What should not be confused is the process of sanctification—the “becoming” part of repentance. Although a person can be forgiven of sin in an instant, he or she may still have a long road to travel as far as having nature changed. Sanctification, becoming like the Savior, is a lifelong process. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s words are instructive regarding these two aspects of repentance:

You can change anything you want to change, and you can do it very fast. Another satanic suckerpunch is that it takes years and years and eons of eternity to repent. That’s just not true. It takes exactly as long to repent as it takes to say, “I’ll change”—and mean it. Of course there will be problems to work out and restitutions to make. You may well spend—indeed, you had better spend—the rest of your life proving your repentance by its permanence. But change, growth, renewal, and repentance can come for you as instantaneously as they did for Alma and the sons of Mosiah.
Elder Holland’s statement highlights these two important aspects of repentance. First, forgiveness of a sin, getting back on the path—this is what would be called justification. As Elder Holland says, this change can happen immediately, just as we read in Alma 34:31. Second, overcoming sinfulness, the disposition to sin, becoming like Christ, and coming to have His mind—this is the process of sanctification, and it can take years, even “the rest of your life.” It is imperative to help youth understand that they can get on the path quickly, that they can repent immediately and start to feel the Holy Ghost again; but growing in the light and moving along the path of righteousness (and staying on) is not always easy or quick. Hope comes from the realization of the merciful immediacy of justification. Humility is born when the just and staggering process of sanctification is understood. Both these come by way of Christ’s Atonement. When youth understand these valuable principles and how both are essential elements of the repentance process, it is less likely that teachers, parents, and leaders will need to worry about youth thinking they can get away with “a few free ones.” Grace, mercy, justice, and the law of the harvest—all these principles stay intact and work together!

Conclusion

Sections 66 and 75 of the Doctrine and Covenants contain priceless principles that can be very powerful in the lives of those who apply them properly. From these verses we learn that our Father in Heaven is a God of forgiveness and that through repentance sin can be forgiven. Despite the availability of God’s forgiveness, however, sin can cause an individual to lose opportunities forever.

As religious educators, we must be careful never to give students license to sin. However, and more importantly, we cannot understate the power and ability of Christ’s Atonement to change, redeem, and bless. No, mercy cannot rob justice (see Alma 42:25), but mercy can and does overpower justice (see Alma 34:15). We must not be either afraid or ashamed to speak of mercy, forgiveness, grace, and God’s divine love.17 “And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ?” (Jacob 4:12).

In the end, everyone needs the Atonement. We cannot save and redeem ourselves. All of us inevitably sin to some degree (see Romans 3:23). We all fall short and thus miss out on certain opportunities. Will we squander the precious gift of forgiveness that Christ has offered us? Or will we come down into the depths of humility and accept His great atoning sacrifice? Elder Ballard asked:
Are you struggling with some sin or weakness? It can be something as simple as not having the willpower to rise in the morning early enough to have time for scripture study and prayer. It can be something so powerful, such as Internet pornography or lack of moral self-control, that you feel like you have been pulled down into an abyss and there is no hope for you. Do you find yourself hating what you are doing but not able to find the willpower to turn away from it? Then reach out and humble yourself. The Lord’s enabling power is sufficient to change your heart, to turn your life, to purge your soul. But you must make the first move, which is to humble yourself and realize that only in God can you find deliverance.18

May we all humbly and gratefully recognize the wonderful gift of repentance in our own lives and in the lives of those we love and teach. May we continually remember that the Savior’s grace and love really are “sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify.”19

Notes

1. Although not the originator of this statement, President Ezra Taft Benson often used this axiom. For example, see The Law of Chastity, Brigham Young University devotional, October 13, 1987.


4. In Hoyt Brewster’s D&C Encyclopedia (pp. 547–48), the “south countries” referred to in D&C 75 are explained as follows: “This charge did not include territory foreign to the United States, but merely meant he was to go into the southern states, or, that country which was south of his present location. Similarly, Major Ashley and Burr Riggs were sent into the ‘south country’ (D&C 75:17).”

5. Church History and Modern Revelation (Salt Lake City: The Council of The Twelve Apostles, 1946), 46; emphasis added. A similar situation occurs in the Book of Mormon with Alma’s wayward son, Corianton. He is rebuffed for immorality (see Alma 39) but is ultimately called again to preach the gospel (see Alma 42:31).


Published throughout the 1860s, the Deseret Alphabet contained thirty-eight characters, one for each sound in the English language.

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The Deseret Alphabet Experiment

Richard G. Moore

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Elder George Q. Cannon wrote, “The Kingdom of God is a separate organization from the Church of God.” To the Prophet Joseph Smith and the early Saints, the Restoration of the gospel was more than just the creation of another Christian church. It was the return of God’s kingdom to the earth. This kingdom not only was to be religious in nature but was to influence and improve virtually all aspects of life—political, economic, social, and educational. Because the Lord instructed that “it is not meet that I should command in all things” and “men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will” (D&C 58:26–27), we can find in Church history a number of movements or experiments designed to improve society as part of building the kingdom of God. Some of these ideas were directly revealed from God, while others were ideas Church leaders came up with “of their own free will.” The layout of city plans, the United Order, and the minting of their own money were all part of the bigger picture of building a Zion society.

As Church president and governor of the Territory of Utah, Brigham Young was involved with numerous projects calculated to develop all areas of God’s kingdom on the earth. He once said, “We will continue to improve the whole science of truth; for that is our business; our religion circumscribes all things, and we should be prepared to take hold of whatever will be a benefit and blessing to us.” President Young was the driving force behind Mormonism’s experiment in alphabet reform and the creation of the Deseret Alphabet.
The Mormon pioneers began to arrive in the Great Basin during the summer of 1847. Over the next several years, the struggle for survival overshadowed all other concerns. Yet in the midst of that struggle, when the first settlers were not five years in the valley, Church leaders were considering an ambitious idea for orthographic reform—renovating the written English language.

The concept of revising language symbols was not original with the Latter-day Saints but was fairly common during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Great Britain, a man named Isaac Pitman developed a shorthand system that he published and began to teach in 1837. Pitman designed a phonetic system that consisted of having a character for every sound in the English language, thus doing away with spelling inconsistencies.

Considered the father of modern orthographic reform, Pitman generated numerous followers, as well as many imitators with their own systems of alphabet revision. George D. Watt was an avid student of the shorthand system devised by Pitman. Watt was born in Manchester, England, where he was raised by his mother, his father having immigrated to America. He moved to Preston, England, as an adult. In Preston he met and married Mollie Gregson and came in contact with missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On Sunday, July 30, 1837, George and his wife, along with some others, were baptized into the Church. George outran another man to win the honor of being baptized first, thus becoming the first Latter-day Saint convert in Great Britain.

Watt immigrated to the United States and settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, where he used his shorthand skills to report discourses given by Church leaders. Watt also taught phonography (shorthand) classes in Nauvoo. He was referred to in the Nauvoo newspaper Times and Seasons as a professor of phonography. Among those who studied shorthand under his direction were Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff.

George Watt was sent back to England in 1846 to serve as a missionary and to further his study of phonography. During the hectic time when Brigham Young was preparing for the difficult trek to the Great Basin, Young sent a letter to Watt indicative of the Church leader’s strong interest in a new orthographic system. Brigham Young wrote, “It is the wish of the council, that you procure 200 lbs. of phonotype, or thereabouts, as you may find necessary, to print a small book for the benefit of the saints . . . and cause same to be forwarded to Winter Quarters before navigation closes, by some trusty brother on his return so that we may have the type to use next winter.”
Although this particular plan was never completed, it is apparent that the intention of Church leaders, particularly Brigham Young, was to create and use a new alphabet to simplify the English language. The determination to develop a new form of English would continue with President Young and others into the valleys of Utah and would pave the way for an alphabet unique to the Saints.

After arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, the Saints immediately began to build homes, establish farms and ranches, and face the challenge of surviving in this new, sometimes hostile, environment. However unsettled or unstable their society may have been at that time, education was still a high priority in the minds of the Saints and their leaders. On February 28, 1850, the legislature of the provisional state passed an ordinance incorporating the University of Deseret. During that session, the legislature elected the university’s first chancellor, Orson Spencer, a board of regents, and a treasurer.8

The University of Deseret Board of Regents began meeting in March 1850. At the second meeting, held at the home of board member Parley P. Pratt, on March 20, the regents discussed reforming English so “that spelling and Pronunciation should be the same.” Brigham Young “gave his views upon the subject and placed it upon the Regency to do and act by the spirit of Wisdom.”9

It is obvious from early discourses by President Young that he had a tremendous interest in “correcting” the written form of the English language. He may have been considering the possibility of altering the spoken word as well by simplifying certain aspects of the language. Brigham Young felt that there were too many words to express the same idea, and he was in favor of standardizing word usage. Following an apparently difficult-to-understand speech given by Orson Spencer on April 8, 1852, President Young expressed his views:

Brother Spencer has used language quite beyond your reach. Well, I have the foundation, and he can make the building. When he commences the building, I have asked the Board of Regents to cast out from their system of education, the present orthography and written form of our language, that when my children are taught the graphic sign for A, it may always represent that individual sound only. But as it now is, the child is perplexed that the sign A should have one sound in mate, a second sound in father, a third sound in fall, and a fourth sound in man, and a fifth sound in many, and, in other combinations, sounding different from these, while, in others, A is not sounded at all. I say, let it have one sound all the time. And when P is introduced into a word, let it not be silent as in Phthisic, or sound like F in Physic, and let two not be placed instead of one in apple.
I ask, have the great and learned men completed their education? No, they are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Let the Board of Regents commence on the proper foundation, that when we have learned a great while, we may find to our satisfaction, we have at last come to the knowledge of the truth.

The English language, in its written and printed form, is one of the most prominent now in use for absurdity, yet as a vehicle in which to convey our ideas verbally, it is one of the best, for extent and variety it goes before, and far beyond, any other. Its variety is what I dislike. The schools in the Southern, New England, and Eastern States, all teach the English language, yet the same ideas are conveyed with entirely different classes of words, by these separate communities. If there were one set of words to convey one set of ideas, it would put an end to the ambiguity which often mystifies the ideas given in the languages now spoken. Then when a great man delivered a learned lecture on any subject, we could understand his words, for there would be only one word with the same meaning, instead of a multiplicity of words all meaning the same thing, as is the case now. For instance, there are men in this house so technical in their feelings with regard to their choice of words, that when their ideas are formed, and they commence to convey them, they will stop in the middle of a sentence, and introduce another set of words to convey the same idea. If I can speak so that you can get my meaning, I care not so much what words I use to convey that meaning.

In a message delivered to the members of the council and the house of representatives of the Utah legislature on December 13, 1853, Governor Brigham Young stated:

While the world is progressing with steam engine power, and lightning speed, in the accumulation of wealth, extension of science, communication and dissemination of letters and principle, why may not the way be paved for the easier acquisition of the English language? . . . The correction of its orthography, upon some principle of having characters to represent the sounds which we use, has occupied the attention of many scientific gentlemen from time to time, but through lack of influence, energy, or some other cause, they have failed to accomplish so desirable an object. If something of this nature could be introduced which could be brought into general use, I consider it would be of great utility in the acquirement of our language. I am happy to learn that the Regency are deeply engaged in investigating this interesting subject; and hope that ere long, they may be able to produce something that will prove highly beneficial.

The subject of language reform was often discussed at the board meetings, and they made several attempts to create a new writing system. The members of that board could not agree among themselves whether they wanted to use a phonetic system, use the current Roman symbols in a different manner, create an entirely new set of symbols, or keep the old alphabet intact. Willard Richards wanted a completely new
alphabet because he felt it would cause the learner confusion if the old alphabet symbols were simply jumbled around.¹²

During November and December of 1853, “the board labored and investigated the matter of a new alphabet diligently, then they adopted unanimously the alphabet presented by their committee.”¹³ The alphabet that the regents decided upon became known as the Deseret Alphabet.

It is not known where the actual characters of the Deseret Alphabet originated. Historians have proposed several theories, suggesting that the characters were taken from Ethiopian or other ancient alphabets, from Pitman’s phonetic system, or even from reformed Egyptian symbols found on the Book of Mormon plates. A comparison of Deseret Alphabet characters and other alphabets suggests that, although there may be some similarities, the Deseret Alphabet is for the most part original.¹⁴ A majority of scholars believe that George D. Watt was the principal creator of the Deseret Alphabet characters.¹⁵

The Deseret Alphabet contained thirty-eight characters, one character for each sound in the English language.¹⁶ The January 19, 1854, edition of the *Deseret News* reported:

The Board of Regents, in company with the Governor and heads of departments, have adopted a new Alphabet, consisting of 38 characters. The Board have had frequent sittings this winter, with the sanguine hope of simplifying the English language, and especially its orthography. After many fruitless attempts to render the common alphabet of the day subservient to their purpose, they found it expedient to invent an entirely new and original set of characters.

These characters are much more simple in their structure than the usual alphabetical characters; every superfluous mark supposable, is wholly excluded from them. The written and printed hand are substantially merged in one.

We may derive a hint of the advantage to orthography, from spelling the word *eight*, which in the new alphabet only requires two letters instead of five to spell it, viz: AT. There will be a great saving of time and paper by the use of the new characters; and but a very small part of the time and expense will be requisite in obtaining a knowledge of the language.

The orthography will be so abridged that an ordinary writer can probably write one hundred words a minute with ease, and consequently report the speech of a common speaker without much difficulty.

As soon as this alphabet can be set in type, it will probably be furnished to the schools of the Territory for their use and benefit; not however with a view to immediately supercede the use of the common alphabet—which though it does not make the comers thereunto perfect, still it is a vehicle that has become venerable for age and much hard service.

In the new alphabet every letter has a fixed and unalterable sound; and every word is spelt with reference to given sounds. By this means,
strangers can not only acquire a knowledge of our language much more readily, but a practised reporter can also report a strange tongue so that the strange language when spoken can be legible by one conversant with the tongue.\textsuperscript{17}

In the “Eleventh General Epistle of the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to the Saints,” issued April 10, 1854, the First Presidency stated:

> The Regency have formed a new Alphabet, which it is expected will prove highly beneficial, in acquiring the English language, to foreigners, as well as the youth of our country. We recommend it to the favourable consideration of the people, and desire that all of our teachers and instructors will introduce it in their schools and to their classes. The orthography of the English language needs reforming—\textit{a word to the wise is sufficient}.\textsuperscript{18}

In December of 1854, Brigham Young spoke to the territorial legislature, stating that it was an opportune time to introduce the Deseret Alphabet. He recommended “that it be thoroughly and extensively taught in all the schools.”\textsuperscript{19} Before this speech was delivered, B. B. Messenger was already teaching the new alphabet at a Farmington, Utah, evening school. The following spring, Messenger taught the Deseret Alphabet to the clerks of the Church Historian’s Office, after which some Church records were written using the new system.\textsuperscript{20}

A number of schools taught the Deseret Alphabet during 1855, including an evening class in Salt Lake City and John B. Milner’s classes in Provo, Lehi, American Fork, Mountainville, and Pleasant Grove.\textsuperscript{21} One of the difficulties of teaching the Deseret Alphabet at this time was that there were no printed materials except an 1854 broadside with the new alphabet characters and their pronunciations.\textsuperscript{22} Plans were under way to have type made and books published in the Deseret Alphabet. In a December 1855 letter to Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young wrote: “We contemplate having a set of school books printed at the Liverpool office, in the new alphabet; we would like to have you inform us in relation to getting up a font of type, and whether we will have to send any person to Liverpool for that purpose, or to oversee the printing of books, the manuscript of course being furnished from this territory. It is our intention to introduce this system in the schools throughout the territory.”\textsuperscript{23}

Several attempts were made to create Deseret Alphabet type, both locally and through an order to a St. Louis foundry.\textsuperscript{24} Although local efforts failed, the type made in St. Louis was used to print sections of the \textit{Deseret News} in the new alphabet for a number of months.\textsuperscript{25} But Brigham
Young was still not pleased with the quality of the St. Louis fonts. President Young was also convinced that the alphabet had not reached its completed state and “intended to have a new set cast, but would wait until the former had been thoroughly revised and improved.”

The movement for alphabetic reform lost its impetus for a time because of other more pressing matters. With the coming of Johnston’s army and the Utah War, followed by the Civil War, the push to have the Deseret Alphabet published and taught was neglected and nearly abandoned. During the mid-1860s, a renewed interest in phonography stimulated promoters of the Deseret Alphabet to revitalize their efforts. On February 12, 1868, the Deseret News reported that “a full board of regents met in President Young’s office, and discussed the best form of characters to be used for a phonetic alphabet. A reconsideration of the Pitman alphabet drew forth a universal expression in favor of our characters, known as the Deseret Alphabet, as being better adapted for printing and writing. . . . A motion was made to take the necessary measures to introduce it in printed works.”

Orson Pratt was given the assignment of preparing elementary texts to be printed in the Deseret Alphabet. David O. Calder was sent to New York City to oversee the printing of Pratt’s completed manuscript. The August 13, 1868, edition of the Deseret News reported that a specimen copy of the new primer had been printed. The book contained thirty-six pages, and although “the characters, to a person unaccustomed to them, may look strange . . . to the eye to which they are familiar they are beautiful.”

Two elementary readers, or primers, were published for the Deseret University by the Russell Brothers Publishing Company in New York. Ten thousand copies of each volume were printed and shipped to Salt Lake City. At the 1868 October general conference, Brigham Young said to the congregation:

We have now many thousands of small books, called the first and second readers, adapted to school purposes, on the way to this city. As soon as they arrive we shall distribute them throughout the Territory. We wish to introduce this alphabet into our schools, consequently we give this public notice. We have been contemplating this for years. The advantages of this alphabet will soon be realized, especially by foreigners. Brethren who come here knowing nothing of English language will find its acquisition greatly facilitated by means of this alphabet, by which all the sounds of the language can be represented and expressed with the greatest ease. As this is the grand difficulty foreigners experience in learning the English language, they will find a knowledge of this alphabet will greatly facilitate their efforts in acquiring at least a partial
English education. It will also be very advantageous to our children. It will be the means of introducing uniformity in our orthography, and the years that are now required to learn to read and spell can be devoted to other studies.\textsuperscript{30}

A number of errors were found in the two primers, and Orson Pratt, George D. Watt, and R. L. Campbell served on a committee to make corrections. An errata sheet was printed to include in each book.\textsuperscript{31} Orson Pratt was also assigned to transliterate the Book of Mormon into the Deseret Alphabet, a project he completed in the spring of 1869. Pratt then went to New York to have the books printed.\textsuperscript{32} The board of regents planned to publish the Book of Mormon in three parts, for use in the schools of the territory, and a complete Book of Mormon in one volume for use in the home.\textsuperscript{33}

Following the publication of the two primers, eight thousand copies of part one of the Book of Mormon were published in 1869. The second two parts of the Book of Mormon were never printed. A complete Book of Mormon was published in 1869, but only about five hundred copies were printed. All four books were advertised for sale in the Deseret News. The first primer sold for fifteen cents, the second for twenty cents. The family edition, (the complete) Book of Mormon sold for two dollars, and part one of the proposed three-volume set cost seventy-five cents.\textsuperscript{34}

Brigham Young may have believed that conditions were right for the success of alphabet reform. Latter-day Saints were isolated from the rest of the nation during their early years in the Great Basin, making the creation and adoption of a new alphabet more feasible. The Saints were united as a people in the exodus to the West and the colonization efforts, and most of the Saints seemed willing to follow the instructions of Church leaders. But for whatever reason, though encouraged and promoted by some Church and educational leaders, the Deseret Alphabet generated little interest among most teachers and students.

By the latter part of 1870, the Deseret News was no longer advertising the sale of Deseret Alphabet books. During the 1870s, the alphabet was mentioned less and less until interest in it had virtually disappeared.

In 1877, Orson Pratt was sent to England to have the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants printed, not in the Deseret Alphabet, but in the Pitman phonotype system.\textsuperscript{35} Evidently, Brigham Young still had an interest in orthographic reform, but the Deseret Alphabet experiment had come to an end. When Brigham Young died in August 1877, so did plans to have books printed in the Pitman system.
Reading, Writing, and Speaking Deseret

In its formative stages, the Deseret Alphabet varied in characters from as many as forty-three to the thirty-eight that became the alphabet’s standard. All printed materials were done with the thirty-eight-character alphabet. Each of the characters had only one form, there being no difference between capital and lowercase letters except for size. It was decided not to have any tops, tails, or dots on any of the characters so that the type would last longer without wearing out. Only a few familiar characters from the Roman alphabet remained, and in most cases the sounds represented by these characters were different in the new alphabet.36

Because the Deseret Alphabet was a phonetic system, the creators simply assigned characters to specific sounds. By reading the characters of the Deseret Alphabet, one can see how words were pronounced by the people of that territory at that time, or at least the pronunciation of those who created the alphabet. It is interesting to note that the word Deseret was transcribed differently than the common pronunciation today. While most people today pronounce it “de-ze-ret,” the pronunciation from the new characters would make it “de-see-ret.” Other pronunciations found in the Deseret Alphabet readers, which are still common in some areas of Utah, are harse (horse), farbid (forbid), shart (short), barn (born), and archurd (orchard). Other unusual pronunciations include nur-see-ri (nursery), e-nee-mi (enemy), and to-urds (towards).

Some people have suggested that the Deseret Alphabet is the cause of some of the unusual accents found in Utah.37 With the little attention given the Deseret Alphabet and even less use, this is highly unlikely. It is more probable that some of the people who settled the Great Basin area already had this accent. These spellings, symbolized by Deseret Alphabet characters, reflect pronunciations in the Utah Territory at that time. It is doubtful that the Deseret Alphabet can be given any credit (or blame) for perpetuating this accent. Children typically learn to speak by listening to their parents speak—the accent is passed from one generation to the next.

How the Deseret Alphabet Was Used

Evidence suggests that the new alphabet was not taught or used to any great extent. Some classes were taught, and a few journal entries from teachers and pupils describe their experience with teaching and learning the Deseret Alphabet. As mentioned earlier, only four books were ever published in the new alphabet, and the Deseret News advertised these books on sale with discounted prices, perhaps implying that they
sold poorly. Indeed, boxes of the unsold primers were found in the late 1950s and were sold for fifty cents each. In addition to its use in the publications mentioned above, the Deseret Alphabet was used by a few people to write in their journals. Some Church records were kept in the new alphabet, including Brigham Young’s ledger and his personal history. Gold coins were minted in Salt Lake City with Deseret characters on them, and a tombstone was found in Cedar City with chiseled Deseret Alphabet characters. To what degree the alphabet was used in schools and by immigrants learning English cannot be determined. Examples of where the alphabet was used, such as coins and diaries, are scant. These outcomes suggest that the Deseret Alphabet movement never became popular.

Reasons for the Alphabet’s Creation and Demise

The motivation of Brigham Young and other Church and education leaders for the creation of the Deseret Alphabet has been credited to the following:

1. The Saints’ desire for exclusiveness, or to separate themselves even more from the United States, to the point of having their own writing and their own literature.
2. An attempt to teach English to Native Americans so they might more effectively be taught the gospel.
3. The intention to create a new worldwide system that would revolutionize the way people read and write.
4. The idea of making learning easier for children so they would have to spend less time in school.
5. A plan to keep “yellow-covered literature” out of the hands of the youth of the Church simply by publishing only approved material in the Deseret Alphabet.
6. The desire to teach English to immigrating converts in a shorter amount of time.
7. An effort to keep sensitive Church information secret by writing all the information down in a “secret Deseret code.”

Most of these explanations make sense and can be considered as possible reasons, or a combination of reasons, behind the creation of the Deseret Alphabet. But the idea of separating from the world by keeping writings secret does not make sense in the light of the Church’s desire to publish its literature in as many languages as possible. Also, the use of a secret code is not especially effective when the key to the code is printed on cards that are sold to anyone interested and is included in the front of each book published in the Deseret Alphabet.
Some purposes mentioned for the Deseret Alphabet may have been afterthoughts. It is likely that the original intent of Brigham Young, George Watt, and others was to simplify and improve the English alphabet so that children could learn to read and write with less time spent in school. Also, converts immigrating to Utah who did not speak English could learn the language more quickly and more readily adjust to a new way of life and the society into which they had recently moved.

Reasons why the Deseret Alphabet was not successful include the following:

1. The difficulty of reading Deseret characters.  
2. The cost to the citizens of the Utah Territory to develop a unique alphabet, create type, and print materials.  
3. The coming of the railroad and, with it, the availability of inexpensive published materials from the East.  
4. The inability of territorial leaders to demand that the new alphabet be taught in a non-tax-supported school system.  
5. And the key factor: most people had very little interest in learning a new system of reading and writing, including the teachers who were supposed to be promoting the system and educating people in its use.

Why were most of the Saints not supportive of Brigham Young’s desire to switch to a new alphabet? Perhaps it simply seemed too difficult or unnecessary when most already knew how to read and write in the existing system. It may be that some Church members perceived a difference between an idea proposed by their leaders and a direct revelation from God. It is doubtful that Brigham Young received a specific mandate from heaven instructing him to change to a new phonetic writing system. Were this the case, John Taylor probably would have picked up the cause at the death of Brigham Young. It is more likely that President Young believed a new alphabet would provide an easier way to learn English for non-English-speaking immigrants, Native Americans, and little children. He may have believed that this alphabet reform would sweep the nation and then the earth, just as the Church was destined to fill the earth. Perhaps it was a good idea that was ahead of its time. Whatever the reasons for not adopting the new alphabet, when the key figures and influential promoters behind the Deseret Alphabet died—particularly Brigham Young—the movement for alphabet reform within the Church died as well.

The Deseret Alphabet experiment lasted roughly from 1853 to 1877. The project cost the early Saints over twenty thousand dollars, a large sum in those days. The hours spent developing the alphabet, transliterating the scriptures, writing the primers, and promoting and
teaching the new system cannot be determined. Elder John A. Widtsoe called it “a noble experiment, with a thoroughly worth-while objective” that “appeared to be premature.” But whether considered to be a poorly thought out failure or a noble experiment, the Deseret Alphabet remains a fascinating episode in Church history because of the unusual background and unique circumstances of the people involved, the remote location and frontier setting of their society, and the remarkable efforts made to benefit the education of early Latter-day Saints through alphabet reform.

Notes


5. See Willard Richards, “Conference Minutes,” Times and Seasons, April 15, 1845, 871.


9. Minutes of the Board of Regents of the Deseret University, March 20, 1850, Utah Territorial Collection, Church Archives, as quoted in Kenneth Reid Beesley, “The Deseret Alphabet: Can Orthographical Reform for English Succeed?” (paper written for Brigham Young University honors program, 1975), 2–3; see also Diary of Samuel W. Richards, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 91.


16. The number of characters in the Deseret Alphabet varied as it was developed and altered over the years. The standard number arrived at was 38; however, there were times when the characters used in the new alphabet were as many as 43.
22. See “The Deseret Alphabet,” broadside, 1854, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
25. The first printed cut of the Deseret characters in the Deseret News appeared on February 16, 1859. The first few editions contained Matthew chapter 5 in Deseret Alphabet. Texts taken from the scriptures and transliterated into the Deseret Alphabet appeared for the following sixteen months until May 1860. The Deseret Alphabet column reappeared in the Deseret News in May 1864 and was continued until November of that year.
29. “The Deseret Alphabet—Its Advantages,” Deseret News, August 19, 1868, 218. It must be remembered that the statement “they are beautiful” referring to the Deseret Alphabet symbols was made by those promoting the use of the new alphabet and not by a nonbiased source or a professional linguist.
32. Orson Pratt was sent to New York to “superintend the publishing of the Book of Mormon in the characters of the Deseret Alphabet” (see “Items from Tuesday’s Daily,” Deseret News, April 28, 1869).
34. See Nash, “The Deseret Alphabet,” 26. Deseret News, April 28, 1869, has the first notice I could find of Deseret Readers for sale. The First Reader sold for fifteen cents. The Second Reader was not yet available but would eventually sell for twenty cents.
37. See Ken Connaughton, “Is Deseret Alphabet to Blame for Eating ‘Carn’


42. See “The Deseret Alphabet—Its Advantages,” *Deseret News*, August 19, 1868, 218. It should also be noted that Mormons believed that the pure language Adam spoke would someday be restored to the earth and that the phonetically based Deseret Alphabet might be a means whereby people could learn to read and write Adamic (see Journal History, August 2, 1855).


44. See T. W. Ellerback (secretary to Brigham Young) to Franklin D. Richards, as cited in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1940), 2:3.


47. *Juvenile Instructor*, October 2, 1875, 234, reported that “President Young has decided that they are not so well adapted for the purpose designed as it was hoped they would be. There being no shanks to the letters, all being very even, they are trying to the eye, because of their uniformity. Another objection some have urged against them has been that they are entirely new, and we should have characters as far as possible with which we are familiar” (see also Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964], 714).

48. The Deseret Alphabet venture cost over twenty thousand dollars. As early as 1859, however, Orson Pratt estimated it would cost a million dollars to provide Deseret Alphabet textbooks for Utah Territory schools. *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, November 18, 1873, printed a lecture given by Orson Pratt where he said, “A sufficient quantity of copies of each of the thousand volumes might probably be published in the phonotype form, and suitably bound, for about five millions of dollars.”


An International Perspective in Teaching Church History and Doctrine and Covenants

Donald Q. Cannon

Recently the Religious Educator asked me to consider three provocative questions: (1) What have you learned through studying and teaching about the international Church? (2) How does this learning alter the way you might teach a Church history class? (3) How would this knowledge affect the way you teach a course on the Doctrine and Covenants? In this article, I respond to those questions and offer practical suggestions for other teachers.

A New Perspective

Studying the events related to the international expansion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has indeed been a great learning experience. Just the factual knowledge alone concerning the history of the Church’s expansion outside of North America is both extensive and meaningful. My studies have taught me that the Church is indeed a global religion, a worldwide organization. It started as an American religious movement but over time has become a truly international institution.

Studying and teaching about the Church in its international setting have helped me understand how changes occur and why conditions are not static but are very fluid. Great Britain, for example, produced a huge number of converts in the early nineteenth century, but relatively few new converts are being made there today. Not only has the number of conversions changed greatly in the British Isles but also the environment has altered dramatically. Immigration and emigration have created a new population base, especially in England itself.
International expansion has brought the Church face to face with the issue of culture. Is there a distinctive Latter-day Saint culture? If so, does this culture conflict with national cultures? What is the relationship between general Latter-day Saint culture and the culture of a given country? Noel B. Reynolds addressed some of these questions in a paper presented at BYU in 1976 at a symposium on the expanding Church and later published in a book entitled *Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures.* His main thesis is that “the gospel is subversive of worldly cultures.”¹ By this he means that people in all nations who embrace the gospel must conform any cultural concepts that conflict with gospel principles to the concepts inherent in the gospel culture. As this interaction between gospel and national culture plays out, value conflicts sometimes emerge. For example, priesthood holders are taught to treat their wives as equal partners and typically display affection by kissing their wives as they leave for work, but this practice is not always accepted in some cultures.²

Nearly twenty years later, Elder Spencer J. Condie addressed the issue of culture. In a keynote address given in August 1995 at the Sixth Annual Conference of the International Society, he asked, “How much of a country’s culture can a Christian convert keep?” He answered the question by citing scriptures from the New Testament and the Book of Mormon (Galatians 3:28 and Mosiah 3:19) that explain how we become one with Jesus Christ by yielding to the influence of the Spirit. He then went on, in a very direct manner, to explain exactly what could be retained and what should be discarded:

If I read King Benjamin correctly, the northern Europeans are welcome to bring their industriousness, orderliness, and punctuality with them into the kingdom, but their brusqueness must give way to “gentleness, . . . meekness, and . . . love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). The peoples of the Mediterranean and Latin America are enjoined to bring their warmth and love of family and friends with them into the kingdom, but intrigue and lust must be left behind. The inhabitants of the isles of the seas are welcome to bring with them their faith and meekness but not their immodesty. Americans, saturated with smugness from living in the promised land, must leave behind their materialism, pride, and cutthroat competitiveness and become as little children if they are to enter the Kingdom of God.³

Both Condie and Reynolds recommend surrendering customs that run against the grain of the gospel while allowing people to retain distinctive features that are not counter to gospel truth. For example, the Church does not dictate American politics to members of the Church in other countries, nor does it require converts to adopt new cultural
practices to be accepted into the Church. It does, however, encourage universal obedience to the commandments. As Elder Condie said, “It is my humble view that while the restored gospel requires conformity to the commandments, covenants, and ordinances, the gospel does not require uniformity in all areas of endeavor.”

Many observers outside our faith have described Mormonism as unique and have recognized its authentic international character. In their insightful book *Mormon America*, Richard and Joan Ostling wrote, “The Mormon people are multidimensional and entering the third millennium as full-fledged citizens of an important new world religion.” If others see us as an important new world religion, it seems to me that we ought to view ourselves in the same way. A friend and colleague who taught the course on the international Church believed his study increased his tolerance and broke down prejudice. In other words, he learned to respect the cultures and beliefs of others. Some of the things we learn as a result of studying the Church in its worldwide setting are very similar to the kinds of things we learn through a study-abroad experience. As some experts on study abroad have expressed it, “Students in this way become, it is said, more mature, sophisticated, hungry for knowledge, culturally aware, and sensitive.”

As I have studied and evaluated hundreds of research papers concerning the international Church, many interesting facts and ideas have surfaced. I have become more familiar with certain key players in the Church, individuals who have played a crucial role in either establishing or furthering the Church in foreign lands. Sometimes these people are residents of a given foreign country, but sometimes they are expatriates, perhaps Utah Latter-day Saints whose careers have take them abroad. Examples of natives of foreign lands who have played such a role are Kresimir Cosic in Croatia, Augusto A. Lim in the Philippines, Karl G. Maeser in Germany, Masao Watabe in Japan, and Helvecio Martins in Brazil. Examples of expatriates are Arwell Pierce in Mexico, Maxine Grimm in the Philippines, William Fotheringham in Chile, and Frederick S. Williams in Uruguay.

From my research and from the findings of my students, I have learned that teaching English has been one of the most successful techniques for finding people to hear the gospel. English classes have been taught by missionaries during most of the history of the Church. Latter-day Saint missionaries have taught English all over the world since the 1840s. Classes have been offered in at least fifteen different nations. In fact, in some places such as Mongolia, teaching English constitutes the majority of the total missionary effort.
Certainly there are other things I have learned and continue to learn through my study of the Church in its global setting, but the foregoing examples sufficiently illustrate how a better understanding of the international Church has changed my overall perspective. As the Church continues to grow throughout the world, its membership becomes more and more diverse. Adaptation and open-mindedness are critical to continued growth.

**Applying the New Perspective to Church History**

Although the learning and understanding gained through studying the international Church is useful by itself, it also has great implications for teaching a conventional Latter-day Saint Church history class. Above all, I believe it makes teachers more aware of the feelings and needs of foreign students who might enroll in their classes. Knowing something about these students’ countries and understanding how the Church has developed there help sensitize instructors to their points of view.

Of course, we should also try to help students see the history of the Church in a broader framework and perspective. Students need to understand that this church is no longer merely an American church and, in fact, that Joseph Smith never intended it to be. It began in New York, but it has now spread around the world. In a real sense, the history of the Church is the story of its development in each country around the world. There are interesting parallels between the American segment of the story and events in other parts of the world. For example, Joseph Smith’s desire to find the only true church has been mirrored in the experience of others. Like Joseph Smith in America, Emmanuel Kissi searched for the true church in Ghana.

Furthermore, the story of the early pioneers has parallels across the world. In a very real way, there are other pioneers—pioneers in every nation. In an excellent book titled *Pioneers in Every Land*, some of these international pioneers have been described. The international pioneers whose stories are included in this book are Pornchai Juntratip of Thailand, Kresimir Cosic of Yugoslavia, Charles O. Card of Canada, Rhee Honam of Korea, Gottlied Schoenhardt of Germany, Milton and Irene Soares of Brazil, Giuseppe Taranto of Italy, Anthon H. Lund of Denmark, Masao and Hisako Watanabe of Japan, Ketan Patel of India, and Emmanuel Kissi of Ghana. Each of these international pioneers has a wonderful and inspiring story.

It is important for students of Church history to be familiar with these stories, just as converts in other countries come to know and love the American pioneers. Many people who have joined the Church in
foreign lands have “adopted” nineteenth-century Mormon pioneers as their own spiritual ancestors. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf had this to say about the pioneers:

I have no ancestors among the 19th-century pioneers. However, since the first days of my Church membership, I have felt a close kinship to those early pioneers who crossed the plains. They are my spiritual ancestry, as they are for each and every member of the Church, regardless of nationality, language, or culture. They have established not only a safe place in the West but also a spiritual foundation for the building of the kingdom of God in all the nations of the world.\(^{11}\)

In an article on the nineteenth-century pioneers, Eric Eliason has shown how receptivity of that story may be conditioned somewhat by local traditions. As he put it: “It may be that LDS people who live in cultures and regions that have their own sense of pioneer heritage are often more enthusiastic about the story of the LDS pioneers than LDS people in areas with no such tradition. For example, LDS Afrikaners already understand the pageantry of covered wagons and can relate both to the Great Trek and the Mormon trek.”\(^{12}\)

In some countries, Pioneer Day celebrations have been regularly held, even though they have no historical precedents. In Germany, for example, where my grandfather, father, and I all served, such celebrations occurred on schedule each July 24. Writing about this experience, Walter Krause, the patriarch assigned to Eastern Europe, explained, “Pioneer Day stirs us up so that we become pioneers ourselves.”\(^{13}\) Certainly, Walter Krause was a genuine pioneer.

Studying the growth of the international Church increases our understanding of the Prophet Joseph Smith. From the international vantage point, Joseph Smith is not just an American church leader. On the contrary, he was directly involved in the globalization of Mormonism. Joseph Smith impacted the globalization of Mormonism in at least three ways: first, he prophesied about the international Church; second, he sent missionaries to foreign lands; third, he served as a missionary himself in a foreign country, namely Canada.\(^{14}\)

As we teach a conventional Church history class, bringing in an international perspective enables us to help our students to be more tolerant. Recognizing that the gospel is for every nationality helps them to see that members may embrace many different political systems, social structures, and economic organizations. Furthermore, this perspective provides students with a deeper appreciation for the faith of modern pioneers and a greater understanding of Joseph Smith’s original vision of the international mission of the Church.
A New Approach to Teaching the Doctrine and Covenants

A greater understanding of the international nature of the Church should also lead to approaching a Doctrine and Covenants class from a different angle. Beginning with section 1, it is obvious that the revelations contain a universal message—they are for all mankind, not merely for members of a strictly American church. The Lord desires to speak to all of His children, no matter where they reside. In other words, the message of the gospel is universal and must be preached to every one of God’s children everywhere.

A study of the international Church helps us to understand the doctrine of gathering. This doctrine is taught in our revelations. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 29:1–2, 7–8, we read of the Lord’s desire to gather His children from all nations:

Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the Great I Am, whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins;

Who will gather his people even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, even as many as will hearken to my voice and humble themselves before me, and call upon me in mighty prayer. . . .

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts;

Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of the land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked.

Through the study of international Church history, we learn that the gathering for early converts meant leaving their native land, friends, and family and immigrating to America. This was a geographical gathering. There are wonderful stories of Latter-day Saint converts who traveled to Zion. In his comprehensive research, my colleague Fred E. Woods has documented the chronicles of gathering. For example, in his book Gathering to Nauvoo, Woods tells the story of such emigrants as Thomas Callister, Priscilla Staines, Robert Pixton, George Cannon, Robert Reid, Mary Ann Weston Maughan, and Ann Pitchforth. Let us consider the experience of Priscilla Staines:

I left the home of my birth to gather to Nauvoo. I was alone. It was a dreary winter day on which I went to Liverpool. The company with which I was to sail were all strangers to me. When I arrived at Liverpool and saw the ocean that would soon roll between me and all I loved, my heart almost failed me. But I had laid my idols all upon the altar. There was no turning back. I remembered the words of the Saviour: “He that leaveth not father and mother, brother and sister,
for my sake, is not worthy of me,” and I believed his promise to those who forsook all for his sake; so I thus alone set out for the reward of everlasting life, trusting in God.\(^16\)

Some who gathered sacrificed their very lives. Such was the case with Ann Quayle Cannon, who died and was buried at sea. She sacrificed all so her family might gather to Zion.\(^16\)

In the twentieth century, the doctrine of gathering remained in force, but the practice or application changed. I usually use the example of missionary service in our family to illustrate this point. When Quayle Cannon, my grandfather, served as a missionary in Germany in the late nineteenth century, he was still preaching the geographical gathering. However, when my father, Quayle Cannon Jr., served in Germany in the 1920s, he encouraged people to stay in their own country to build up the Church there. Then, when I served in Germany in the 1950s, we told people that they should not leave Germany and that they had a sacred responsibility to stay there and build God’s kingdom in that part of His vineyard.

This transition from a geographical gathering to a gathering in one’s own native land has been explained this way by my late colleague Spencer Palmer:

The global expansion of the Church in recent decades has brought changes to earlier conceptions of Zion as a limited geographical entity. Zion is no longer bound by territory, culture, or nationality. Though the United States has served as a “host” nation in the process of its development, from its inception Joseph Smith emphasized that the Church “is above the kingdoms of this world,” that it is not a political entity bound to any one nation, and that it insists upon no claim to political power or secular sway. (HC 5:536.) The Church bears the name of the Lord, and the only other designation in the Church’s name is dispensational and pertains to time, not to territory.\(^17\)

In an area conference held in Mexico City in 1972, Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the new concept of gathering in this manner: “The place of gathering for the Mexican Saints is in Mexico; the place of gathering for the Guatemalan Saints is in Guatemala; the place of gathering for the Brazilian, Brazil; and so it goes throughout the length and breadth of the whole earth. Japan is for the Japanese, Korea is for the Koreans; Australia is for the Australians; every nation is the gathering place for its own people.”\(^18\) Clearly, the perspective afforded by the worldwide Church helps our students understand this important principle of gathering taught in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Awareness of the events in the international history of the Church allows teachers in Doctrine and Covenants classes to use foreign illustra-
tions in place of domestic ones. As we teach about the establishment of stakes and their purpose in the Church, we can use the organization of the Berlin Stake in addition to the Salt Lake Stake. Also, while discussing temples and temple work, we can use examples of international temples along with temples in the United States.

An understanding of the international character of the Church is certainly useful in teaching about Official Declaration 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants. Being aware of problems related to the priesthood in Brazil, for example, can help teachers set the priesthood revelation of 1978 in a more proper historical perspective. 19

Missionary work is a major theme of the revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants. Again, a knowledge of the growth and scope of the international Church facilitates an understanding of missionary work. All the prophets of this dispensation have talked about the importance of our missionary effort. From the Prophet Joseph Smith to President Gordon B. Hinckley, these men have included the international character of the Church in their teaching.

In summary, studying about the international Church has many benefits for those who teach either Church history or Doctrine and Covenants. This focus helps us relate to members of the Church everywhere, understand that our church is truly a global church, and prepare us to participate in building up the kingdom of God across the globe.

Notes

2. Tullis, Mormonism, 15.
4. Condie, Proceedings, 4; emphasis in original.
8. See Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan, Unto Every Nation: Gospel Light Reaches Every Land (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), xxv.
10. See Van Orden, Smith, and Smith, Pioneers in Every Land.


Christ Teaching in the Temple, painting by James Tissot

Courtesy of Visual Resources
Transcultural Considerations in Teaching the Gospel

Roydon Olsen

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Jesus of Nazareth was the Master Teacher. His teachings were always fitted to His hearers, even if it meant masking the meaning in parables for those who were not ready to receive the deeper meaning of His teachings. He used examples that were readily understood by His audience because they were taken from the local culture, and yet they were remarkably universal so they could be effectively taught in all ages with simple explanations of their historical setting. Some of His sayings, given the perspective of history, are even more appropriate today. Consider His words about “whosoever looketh . . . to lust” (3 Nephi 12:28; Matthew 5:28) in light of today’s tsunami of Internet pornography.

At times the doctrine He taught was hard and the meanings only discernible through the Spirit by the honest and committed truth seeker. But these teachings were designed to weed out those who could not stay the course, as was the case shortly after Jesus fed the five thousand, when He spoke of Himself as the “living bread from heaven” and likened the Atonement to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Many said, “Who can hear it?” and “walked no more with Him” (John 6:51, 60, 66). The message was always fitted to the listeners.

In today’s classroom, differences of language, culture, ethnicity, and gender offer us new and challenging opportunities as religious educators to follow the great Exemplar and, guided by inspiration, to fit the message to the needs, understanding, and spiritual readiness of our audience.
Attitude

Fortunately, ethnic diversity is appreciated and well understood in Latter-day Saint culture, a fact due largely to the worldwide missionary program, the universality of the message, and an understanding of the gospel, which has been greatly enhanced by modern revelation. This new knowledge from heaven is, in its own way, cultural adaptation for our times. However, as the Church grows internationally and as classrooms fill with students of increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds, an even greater responsibility falls upon teachers to understand how and when to make allowances for differences in culture and when to adapt materials so that gospel principles might be better understood. We ought to consider the question, “Am I willing to pay the price to learn something new and vital to effective teaching?”

Cultural adaptation is not a new idea. Latter-day instruction relating to the Old and New Testaments has always been enriched by expositions of biblical times and customs, as well as by exegeses of the Master’s parables, the writings of Isaiah, and so on, all of which are methods of addressing cultural diversity by filling in gaps in our own knowledge and experience base. As mentioned, the Master was sensitive to His audience regarding ethnicity, geography, religious partisanship, politics, gender, profession, social standing, diet, and customs. And He tells us how we should proceed. The answer is deceptively simple: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:21, 27).

As the scope of cultural adaptation broadens in today’s classroom, gospel instructors ought to consider basic questions such as “What materials, examples, and concepts can I adapt so that they will be better understood by my audience?” “How and when do I do it?” and “What stories, principles, and ideas do I need to leave as is?” In these cases, we may have to provide elucidation to make doctrinal or historical teachings understood or to teach about our culture. After all, not everything needs to be adapted, and learners do need to know about the culture they now find themselves in. The Church itself provided a wonderful example of cultural adaptation in the inspired changes made in the temple endowment. Without changing the doctrine, the presentation was adapted to be understood by an increasingly international and multicultural membership.
Straightforward guidelines govern how we may address this diversity, which will be outlined in the following sections. As a prelude to the discussion of these issues, I will explain how the definition of cultural diversity has expanded in recent times.

**Diversity**

*Diversity* has become one of the important buzzwords of modern culture, generating buzz phrases such as, “We must all learn to embrace diversity” or “All diversity is good” or “Diversity teaches us tolerance.” On the surface, these phrases may seem innocent enough, although the utterance about *all* diversity being good may have sent up some red flags in many of our minds. But, good intentions aside, the discussion of diversity has for some eroded to the point that it fails to separate persons of diverse ethnic, racial, social, and religious backgrounds from the diversity of their behaviors. Moreover, what started out as a movement to encourage individuals of any majority to shed their biases about minorities and be more accepting of them as people has been adopted and embellished by minority groups who are radical in action and thought. The call, in subtle ways, is now more than ever before becoming “accept the sinner and the sin.” The old maxim that just because something is different does not necessarily mean it is bad is being morphed into “if something is different, it is good.” Not surprisingly, its converse, “Just because something is different, it does not mean it is right,” has been swept under the carpet. With such logic, a broad range of sinful behavior is rationalized because it is the product of diversity. As has been the case since time immemorial, “I can’t help it; God made me this way” is being applied liberally as an excuse for all kinds of maladaptive behavior that must be tolerated in the name of diversity. Or so say those who, ironically, have been the most stridently outspoken against religion and those who practice it. In the final analysis, we cannot lose sight of the fact that God does not “look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:31).

Even within the Church, the same kind of thinking allows some to justify abusive or other sinful behavior, often hiding behind the mask of cultural diversity. Elder Richard G. Scott boldly addressed this very issue in his memorable conference talk of April 1998, “Removing Barriers to Happiness.” Citing from scripture the examples of Abraham and King Lamoni, who had rejected false traditions in a dramatic way, Elder Scott asks: “Is yours a culture where the husband exerts a domineering, authoritarian role, making all the important decisions for the family? That pattern needs to be tempered so that both husband and wife act as equal partners, making decisions in unity for themselves and their family.
No family can long endure under fear and force; that leads to contention and rebellion. Love is the foundation of a happy family.”

The Precedence of Doctrine

The first principle of cultural adaptation is that the Savior’s teachings—the doctrines—override cultural considerations, as Elder Scott asserted, although we may use culturally adapted examples to teach those doctrines. In prior counsel, President Howard W. Hunter also affirmed: “I suggest that you place the highest priority on your membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. Measure whatever anyone else asks you to do, whether it be from your family, loved ones, your cultural heritage, or traditions you have inherited—measure everything against the teachings of the Savior. Where you find variance from those teachings, set the matter aside and do not pursue it. It will not bring you happiness.”

Not all differences are good, and not all need to be embraced. Nevertheless, it is good to know about cultural differences, even when they conflict with gospel principles, to understand why students think the way they do and what traditions may be binding them down. Working from this knowledge base, we will be better positioned to enlighten students, bring them from error to truth, and inspire them to abandon false traditions through offering a hand rather than tearing down ethnic, cultural, or national heritages that may contain many good and wholesome parts.

Many years ago I participated in a discussion of the problems of cultural adaptation in the translation of scripture. One of the participants cited an example in the translation of the New Testament into one of the languages of the Philippines. Regarding the parable of the Good Samaritan, he commented that in a particular Philippine culture, if a person were to assist an injured traveler, as the Samaritan had done, the person assisting would be bound for life with the obligation of continual servitude to the one who had been rescued. The presenter’s conclusion was that in this case, the parable would have to be changed so the Samaritan could avoid the cultural obligation. To invite discussion about the principle involved, I asked, “If there is a culture where smoking is the acceptable thing to do, should translators change section 89 of Doctrine and Covenants to read that tobacco is OK for inhaling?” He answered that that would be preposterous. And so it would also be to change the principles of one of the Savior’s parables. For people of the target culture to understand the principles of this parable, further commentary may be required, but tradition must always bow to correct principles.

Since doctrine trumps culture, when a conflict emerges, it is incumbent upon us as instructors not only to study the culture of scriptural times and
early Church history but also to study contemporary cultures—everything from national cultures to gang and drug cultures—to understand those conflicts so that effective presentations can be planned, that place gospel truths in a graspable context, meaningful to the audience.

Elder Scott further stated:

These are other traditions that should be set aside, any aspect of heritage:

- That would violate the Word of Wisdom.
- That is based on forcing others to comply by the power of station often determined by heredity.
- That encourages the establishment of caste systems.
- That breeds conflict with other cultures.

There is serious danger in placing cultural heritage in priority above membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. That zeal to defend one’s own culture may lead to excesses that are known to be wrong but justified because it’s “them” against “us.” Gangs, with all of their potential for destruction, are fostered in a culture of group identity over principles of right and wrong. It is a violation of God’s commandments for one culture to persecute another, whatever the reason.⁴

Cultural Differences

It is just as important to appreciate cultural differences that are not at odds with doctrine as it is to reject those cultural practices that do conflict. More than one latter-day prophet has issued the invitation to those of diverse backgrounds to hold on to the good things they have and to drink of the living water available in the restored Church. Remember, we have to give up only false traditions. We need not be in conflict with cultural differences that do not conflict with gospel principles. So, to follow the Savior, a Scotsman may have to be more selective about what he drinks but should be able to continue to wear his kilt and play the bagpipe without reproach from well-intended Church members. There are great lessons to be learned from most cultures.

Our own local cultures are not always compatible with the doctrines of salvation. In exaggerated attempts to show that we are kind and forgiving and have “unconditional love,” many Church members often coddle sinners and rob them of any motivation to repent. Some Latin cultures give greater emphasis to justice for the unrepentant and to the idea that the chances of repentance are greater when consequences are imposed. In contrast to the U.S. tendency to put elderly family members in care facilities at the least sign of inconvenience, Brazilians, as well as those of many other cultures, are legendary for bringing all kinds of family members under one roof. “We’ll just add another spoonful of beans
“to the pot” is a popular and most generally sincere expression used to downplay the inconvenience of having extra guests at home, and it is a manifestation not only of true charity but also of adherence to the principle that family assistance comes before that of church and state. In some cultures, Church members’ sensibilities are often offended by inappropriate public displays of affection. In India, Abrahamic hospitality extends beyond going the second mile. In other cultures, time spent listening to someone else’s heartaches is not a waste, another’s native dress is not ridiculed, children over twenty who live at home are not derided, and young singles are not insensitively hounded about why they are not married yet.

Some of us often forget that the Prophet Joseph Smith defined Zion as the Americas—North, South, and Central—and equate only the Wasatch Front with Zion. However, living in a predominantly Latter-day Saint area is no guarantee that all cultural traditions and actions are in harmony with the gospel. We often get lulled into a false sense of security, thinking all is well in Zion. Why, then, when President David O. McKay asked the brethren in general priesthood meeting not to leave before the final song and prayer to “beat the traffic” did hundreds walk out of each venue immediately after the final speaker and before the closing song and prayer? Drive around the state and see how many observed President Spencer W. Kimball’s plea to paint barns, repair fences, and beautify our properties. Straying from center in our Latter-day Saint culture is not uncommon and has required occasional course correction from the Brethren. Consider the overemphasis on going on a mission, going to the temple, and going to church, rather than on becoming and worshiping, as pointed out by Elder David A. Bednar in the October 2005 priesthood session of general conference. Yes, “we” are not always right, and “they” are not always wrong.

Cultural Adaptation

What does it mean to adapt for cultural differences? When I was a young, recently sustained bishop in Brazil before the block-plan era, the local mission president, who was from the United States, came to see me and share some advice. At the end of our meeting, he said, “Oh, and by the way, get them to hold Relief Society on Thursday night like back home.” What is wrong with this story? In the first place, the mission president had no stewardship for the stake and wards. Second, he was not aware that working husbands did not arrive home until 7:00 p.m. or thereabout; that in the local culture respectable women did not go out alone late at night; that it was dangerous to do so; that buses
stopped running at certain times; that few, if any, had their own cars; and that evening Relief Society had been attempted already with an average turnout of eight. Thus, we took seriously the counsel of the Brethren to adapt to local needs and held Relief Society on Sunday with the result that over fifty sisters were able to partake of the blessings of the program. Cultural adaptation is often common sense, but we have to be willing to at least try to understand the dynamics of the situation to allow inspiration to flow.

Doctrine and Covenants 90:15 encourages us to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues and people,” for “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18). As we learn about peoples and their customs, we can sharpen our intuition, supplemented by prayer, as to what actions, schedules, policies, stories, and examples are appropriate for a given audience.

Today, classrooms in the United States display a greater ethnic diversity than ever before. Many students are our Latino brothers and sisters, the remnant of Jacob, whom the Savior referred to throughout 3 Nephi 20, who would work side by side with others, also of the house of Israel, in building the New Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 21:22–23). Part of their legacy is rooted in the promises made to Father Lehi. In helping them sort out which traditions to hold on to and which to set aside in deference to the teachings of the Nazarene, we must not lose sight of the depth of their heritage as described in the Book of Mormon, which we can help them more fully understand. Knowledge of their culture, and those of others whom we teach, will help us resist the temptation of trying to impose our own culture on them in areas that do not compromise the principles of the gospel.

Gender is another variable that must guide the writing of lesson plans. The examples, reasoning, and approach we take must be relevant to both male and female students.

If we have students whose native language is not English, we cannot assume they really understand everything we say. We may have to slow down, use less slang and fewer idiomatic expressions, and ask more questions to assess if the message is getting through. One-on-one talks with each class member may take additional time out of our schedules, but this will give us a good indication of how well are understood. In extreme cases, we may have to put the resources of our local community to the test and see if there are individuals who speak the language of a struggling student who might be available to provide translation or tutoring.
Finally, even a rudimentary understanding of the cultural composition of a class and some common sense will enable us to tailor our presentations to have the most impact. We don’t have to be cultural experts. It is amazing how far a little insight can go if we have the right spirit and attitude. During my years in international business, people of the various countries I visited were grateful, complimentary, and eager to work with me because they perceived that I cared about them and their cultures. All I did was read in the encyclopedia about the countries and peoples. I asked a lot of questions of acquaintances who knew about the cultures and asked questions of the people themselves.

Years ago I was working as a simultaneous interpreter for a Church conference. One of my colleagues was translating from English to Portuguese for visiting Brazilian Saints when the speaker told a story about Babe Ruth. The Babe hit more home runs than anyone in his day but also struck out more than anyone. The point of the story was that we should not be deterred by failure. Unfortunately for the Brazilians, not only were there no Portuguese words for home run, strikeout, fly ball, and runs batted in, but also there was little or no concept of how the game was played and very little inclination at the time to want to learn it. (The translator became so frustrated with his inability to tell the story that he let a cussword escape his lips, which may have been the only entertaining and memorable part of the talk for the visitors.)

What do we do for those who have no understanding of baseball? Unlike elucidating a story from scripture, it would probably be asking too much for a group of Church members from diverse cultures to spend the time required to learn the nuances of the U.S. national pastime. The onus now falls to the teacher to learn enough about the hearers to find an example of more universal appeal. Perhaps soccer? Perhaps the story of some globally well-known person who suffered defeat before eventual triumph would be more effective? On the other hand, if the example comes from Church history, such as the story of the Martin handcart company, an explanation of the details of pioneer life and the events that led up to the migration across the plains would be well worth it for both those who have not had exposure to American history and those who have.

Cultural Application

Some teachers may ask, “I’m overwhelmed; how can I know all these things?” Without having to “know it all,” we can set about doing a few simple things that will have a great impact in the classroom. We can all be sensitive to the issues. We can all study a little more about the relevant cultures and languages, as is suggested in the Doctrine and Covenants
and some of the other foregoing examples. We need to understand who the students are. It’s easy; ask them. They can tell us about their cultures, their languages, what they understand and don’t understand, what interests them and what does not, what would help them understand, and what their current views are. With this information in hand, we can let go of unwarranted biases and rid our minds of cultural stereotypes rather than fall victim to cultural overgeneralization. Then, we can go to the Lord for inspiration on how to address the specific needs of the class with certainty that the answers will come.

Attitude is an important component in addressing diversity. If students sense that we have the Spirit, that we are not biased, and that we are accepting of the good in their cultures, genders, and ethnic backgrounds and are truly sincere and willing to learn through the Spirit, we can “speak the same language” and be of one mind.

Let’s look at an example from real life and contrast the good that can be gained from being willing to learn about culture versus prejudice. A mission mother from the U.S. was told in a health-orientation class to be careful of eating strawberries in certain parts of Latin America because of concerns about microorganisms that may be found on the fruit. She was assigned far from the area of concern to a region of South America where eating strawberries was safe, but she would not let go of her overgeneralized fear of eating strawberries. If they are dangerous in one place, they must be bad anywhere in Latin America. The issue took on such proportions that eventually many local members and missionaries were offended that she had characterized their part of the world as unsafe, unsanitary, and backward. Contrast this event with another situation in which a nonlocal mission president in another part of Latin America, perplexed by similar conflicting views regarding public health, went to the head of the local state health department and asked what precautions he should take for his missionaries, both native and foreign, regarding water, diet, and so on. He received accurate and valuable information pertaining to his specific situation and at the same time scored a huge public relations coup. Imagine a North American asking a local for advice! Imagine a gospel teacher asking his students for input!

Final Word

As teachers, we must all plan carefully and be guided by prayer and inspiration. More of that inspiration will flow if it is unhindered by cultural bias and is fortified by standing firm on principles of doctrine. We will know when to adapt for culture, change stories and examples,
and more effectively enlighten and motivate our students. We will be able to judge when the burden of explaining the meaning of existing material to someone of a different culture outweighs practicality or is totally foreign to his or her interests. At the same time, a level of cultural awareness will enable us to elucidate in clear language when it is important for the learner to understand a historical or doctrinal concept or to abandon a false tradition. Our obligation as teachers of religion is to learn about current cultures (often from the students themselves), as well as those of the past, and, above all, to follow the Savior’s example of fitting the message to the audience. By doing so, we will come closer to our objective of changing lives and bringing souls to Christ.

Notes

Whether we realize it or not, when we read scriptures and sing hymns, we often say Hebrew words. Our pronunciation may not be quite right, but this observation is true nonetheless. Why don’t some of us realize this? Because Hebrew words have successfully made their way into our modern religious terminology without our knowledge of the origin of these words or the process of their transmission. What difference does it make whether we know their origin? Because many of these words are religious terms and titles, knowing their meaning in their original language can instruct and remind us of important concepts every time we use them. But this can happen only if we know what they mean and how they were employed in the Hebrew Bible. We miss a complete dimension of understanding and spiritual reinforcement if we do not know the meaning of these terms. The Prophet Joseph Smith certainly shared this perspective when he commented on the value of studying the scriptures in their original language: “Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version.”

Certain Hebrew words made their way into English through a process called transliteration. A transliterated word is one in which the general sound of the letters (-literate) of a word in one language cross (trans-) into another language, creating a new word, so to speak, in the second language. This process contrasts with “translation,” through which a word in one language is replaced by a word with the same
meaning in another language but rarely sounds anything like the word in the original language. Biblical names are good examples of words that are routinely transliterated, not translated. For example, 1 Samuel 13:16 begins, “And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them. . . .” Saul is the transliterated form of the Hebrew name šā‘ûl (pronounced shah-OOL), which means “asked,” whereas Jonathan comes into English from yônātān, “Jehovah has given.” If these names had been translated, the verse would read, “And Asked, and Jehovah-has-given, his son, and the people that were present with them. . . .” This example sufficiently illustrates the occurrence of transliterated words (in this case names) in the Old Testament. It also shows that some Hebrew letters are not available in English (such as ‘aleph, the letter in the middle of šā‘ûl/Saul), so there is not always an exact match between the original form and its transliterated counterpart. Furthermore, there are no capital letters in Hebrew, and there is no “j” sound. The Hebrew “y” (yod) ended up being pronounced like a “j” in English because of the linguistic influence of French on Middle English (AD 1100–1500) in the centuries following the Norman invasion of Britain.

The following discussion of six biblical Hebrew words, including the name Jehovah, indicates what these words originally meant and demonstrates how they were employed by biblical authors. It also suggests how knowing the meaning and usage of these words can make our experience more meaningful when reading or speaking them, whatever their context.

**Amen**

The English word Amen (commonly pronounced ay-MEN) is transliterated from the Hebrew ʾămēn, and pronounced ah-MEN (or ah-MAIN). It means “surely” or “may it be so” and has the sense of confirming what has just been spoken or done. The Hebrew word ʾāmēn derives from the lexical root ʾMN, which conveys the sense “to be faithful, to be established, to believe, to be confirmed.” This explains why Amen is used even as a title for Jesus in Revelation 3:14: “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.”

The confirming nature of ʾāmēn/Amen is very evident when David, shortly before his death, gave orders to “cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule. . . . And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel. . . . For he shall be king in my stead. . . . And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: [may] the LORD God of my lord the king say so too. As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be
he with Solomon” (1 Kings 1:33–37). Not only did Benaiah verbalize his consent to David’s orders with his “Amen” but he also expressed his desire that the Lord ratify Solomon’s kingship. About three and a half centuries later, when the Lord instructed Jeremiah to remind his contemporaries about the Lord’s covenant promise to their ancestors, Jeremiah responded, “So be it [ ‘āmēn], O LORD” (Jeremiah 11:5). In both of these passages, ‘āmēn was spoken to show affirmation of and commitment to what had just been said.

Latter-day Saints regularly conclude their prayers, teachings, and testimonies with the word Amen. When this occurs in a public context, the class or congregation responds, “Amen,” in unison. This practice has its antecedent as early as Mosaic times, as illustrated in several passages in the Old Testament. For example, Moses instructed the Israelites to have a covenant-renewal ceremony in Shechem after entering the land of Canaan. As part of that occasion, the Levites would “say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice. . . . Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. . . . Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen” (Deuteronomy 27:14–26).

Similarly, when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, he delivered a psalm of praise and thanksgiving as part of the public festivities (see 1 Chronicles 16:7–36). When he concluded, “all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD” (v. 36; see also Nehemiah 5:13; 8:6; Jeremiah 28:6). Several psalms also preserve the liturgical use of this word. Psalm 106 concludes with the line, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD” (v. 48; see also Psalms 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). These passages illustrate how the public pronouncement of ‘āmēn/Amen was an important part of Israelite worship involving all who were present as they witnessed their acceptance of what was said or done.

Thus, when a Latter-day Saint utters the word Amen after an ordinance or at the conclusion of a prayer or testimony, the person declares to the Lord and to others (when uttered in a public setting) his or her approval and acceptance of the preceding action, teaching, or prayed request: “May it be so—or, I am convinced that it is so—just as I have said (or done).” The individual thereby declares personal responsibility for what has been requested, taught, or done in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus. And when other Latter-day Saints respond to a public
testimony or prayer by collectively declaring “Amen”—just as ancient Israelites did—they indicate that they are witnesses to and accepting of what has been said: “So be it” or “Let it be so.” As such, they become participants in the proceedings, praying the same prayer, testifying of the same truths, renewing the same covenant. Obviously, Amen should not be uttered thoughtlessly.

**Hallelujah**

The expression *Hallelujah* is always translated, not transliterated, in the KJV Old Testament, so it does not appear therein. But the Hebrew from which it derives, יַלְלָיְהָ/halēlū-yāḥ, occurs two dozen times in the Bible, always in the book of Psalms.

Hallelujah (halēlū-yāḥ) consists of the plural imperative form (halēlū) of the verb HLL, “to praise,” plus an abbreviated form of the divine name Jehovah (yāḥ). As noted above, the “j” sound in English is not present in Hebrew. Furthermore, ancient Israelites pronounced the name of God more like “Yahweh” than “Jehovah” (see discussion below). Thus, yāḥ, at the end of halēlū-yāḥ, represents Yah, a short form of the name of the God of Israel. This form of the divine name occurs independently about twenty times in the Hebrew Bible but only once in the KJV, in Psalm 68:4, where it is spelled with a “j” and rendered in all capitals: “Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him . . . by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.” Elsewhere, it is rendered “the L ORD.”

*Hallelujah* thus means “praise Yah/Jehovah.” It is translated in the KJV as “praise (ye) the L ORD” because English Bibles substitute “the L ORD” for the name Jehovah/Yahweh. For example, Psalm 106:48 (quoted above) reads: “And let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the L ORD [halēlū-yāḥ].” The Hebrew title of the book of Psalms, sefer tēhīlīm, also derives from the lexical root HLL, “to praise,” and literally means “book of praises.” Psalm 150:6, the last verse of the last psalm in the book of Psalms, reads, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the L ORD [tēhālēl yāḥ]. Praise ye the L ORD [halēlū-yāḥ].” This phrase, halēlū-yāḥ, is therefore an ancient and well-attested expression of worship, communicating praise to and for the Lord.

Throughout history, various psalms have been referred to as “Hallel psalms” because they are particularly expressive of praise (HLL) to Jehovah for His saving acts and for His continued blessings (see Psalms 111–18; 146–50). Psalm 136 is often called the “Great Hallel.” This psalm proclaims thanks and praise to Jehovah, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” the phrase with which all twenty-six verses conclude. By Jesus’s
day, the singing of Hallel psalms was a standard part of the celebration of several Jewish holidays, including Passover. For this reason, it is often assumed that the hymn Jesus and His eleven Apostles sang together at the end of their Passover meal was a Hallel psalm (see Matthew 26:30).

The Hebrew phrase halēḻ-yāh was transliterated into Greek as hallēlonia, the form in which it occurs four times in the Greek New Testament (see Revelation 19:1–6). However, in the Greek alphabet, there is no letter equivalent to ḥ; rather, the “h” sound is indicated by a “rough breathing” mark that is not represented in the Roman alphabet. Therefore, the Greek-to-English form of the Hebrew halēlū-yāh is Alleluia. So Revelation 19:4 reads: “And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.” Just as in the Hebrew Bible, Alleluia occurs here in the context of worship.

The expression halēlû-yāh/Hallelujah/Alleluia contains the name of the Lord Jehovah and has functioned as a joyful yet reverent expression of praise for His goodness and mercy for thousands of years. When modern disciples of Christ encounter either form of this phrase—“Hallelujah” or “Alleluia”—in scripture or in hymns or employ it in some other form of worship, it can only be hoped that they will appreciate the full extent of its meaning, thereby giving heartfelt expression to their gratitude and joy by saying, “Praise the L ORD.”

Sabbath

The English word Sabbath is transliterated from the Hebrew noun ṣabbāt (shabbat or shabbath), which occurs over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. It is related to a verb from the lexical root ŠBT, which means “to cease labor, rest.” The concept of resting from one’s weekday labors on the seventh day of the week is first introduced in scripture when the Lord rested after six periods of creative activity: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested [wayyišbor] on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested [šabat] from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2–3). The seventh day is not specifically called the Sabbath in this passage, but the verb indicating the cessation of God’s labor [šabat] is the basis for the day’s name, which provides an apt description of one purpose of the day—resting from regular productivity. Genesis 2:2–3, therefore, provides a practical model for humans (resting after six days of work), based on divine example (God’s resting), and teaches the nature of the day—it was “sanctified,” making it literally a holy day.
These features are reiterated in the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth . . . and rested [wayyānāh] the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11). Interestingly, the Israelites were practicing this pattern even before the revelation at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 20) because the manna the Lord provided for them was not given on the seventh day of the week (see Exodus 16:22–30). When Moses recounted the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, he provided an additional reason for the Israelites’ Sabbath observance: their families, slaves, and livestock were to rest in remembrance of God’s giving them rest by delivering them from their servitude in Egypt (see vv. 12–15). Sabbath observance is thus connected in these two renditions of the Ten Commandments with the significant acts of creation and redemption by Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ.

By virtue of being “sanctified,” or “hallowed,” by the Lord, the Sabbath takes on greater significance than just a day of rest. Exodus 31 is an important indicator of the Lord’s view of the Sabbath:

> And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 
> Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths [šabbātōy] ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you . . . that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. 
> Ye shall keep the sabbath [šabbāt] therefore; for it is holy unto you. . . . Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest [šabbat šabbātôn], holy to the LORD. . . . Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath [šabbāt] . . . for a perpetual covenant. 
> It is a sign between me and [them] . . . for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested [šābat], and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:12–17)

The Lord indicates in this instructive passage that Sabbath observance is a sign of His covenant relationship with His people and that Sabbath observance demonstrates recognition that it is He, Jehovah, who sanctifies His people.

These scriptures outline the following sequence: (1) Jehovah rested on and sanctified, or made holy, the seventh day (see Genesis 2:3); (2) He has commanded His disciples to keep the Sabbath holy (see Exodus 20:14)—it comes to us already holy, and we are charged to maintain its holy status; and (3) our Sabbath observance—maintaining the sanctity of the day—is both a sign of our commitment to the Lord and a reminder
to us that it is He, and only He, who has the power to sanctify us (see Exodus 31:13). This means true Sabbath observance is not just resting from labor but is a major means through which we enter into the “rest of the Lord,” which is a “state of peace . . . [and] spiritual enjoyment resulting from the power or presence of the Lord. Ultimately, it is the fulness of God’s glory (D&C 84:24).”

Moving beyond worldly rest to divine rest on and through yôm haššabbāt, “the day of Sabbath,” brings the blessings of heaven in various and powerful ways, as promised by the Lord in Isaiah 58:13–14 and elsewhere.

After Jesus’s Resurrection and Ascension to heaven, members of Christ’s Church transitioned to observing the first day of the week, the Lord’s day, as holy. Our weekly observance of the Sabbath is thus a combination of celebration and worship. As we call the Sabbath “a delight” (Isaiah 58:13), we rest from our weekday labors, we gather to worship and renew covenants, we commemorate the mighty acts of God (in the lives of our ancestors as well as our own), especially Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and Resurrection, and we participate with the Lord in the rest and sanctification of our souls (see D&C 59:8–13).

Sabaoth

Not to be confused with the word Sabbath, which looks somewhat similar in English, סַבָּאֹת/Sabaoth is a plural Hebrew noun meaning “hosts, armies.” It occurs only twice in the KJV in its transliterated form, both in the New Testament: Romans 9:29 (“the Lord of Sabaoth”) and James 5:4 (“the Lord of sabaoth”). But סַבָּאֹת/Sabaoth and the collective singular form סַבָּא/šāḇāʿ occur about five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.

Sometimes “host(s)” refers collectively to the inanimate creations of the Lord, such as the stars and planets, as in Moses’s warning to the Israelites about false worship: “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; . . . lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven [סַבָּא הַשָּׁמַיִם], shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them” (Deuteronomy 4:15, 19).

More often, “host(s)” refers to large numbers of people (see Exodus 12:41), particularly an army, as in David’s statement to Solomon: “Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts [סִיבּוֹר] of Israel . . . whom he slew” (1 Kings 2:5). The concept of a nonmortal, heavenly host fighting for and with Israel is also attested to in the Old Testament. For example, the being who appeared to Joshua shortly before the Israelite attack on Jericho
said, “As captain of the host [šēḇā] of the L ORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship. . . . And the captain of the L ORD’s host [šēḇā] said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy” (Joshua 5:13–15). Such passages clearly demonstrate the use of the singular šēḇā and the plural šēḇāʾōt/Sabaoth to designate human and heavenly armies. Such usage is not surprising because the Lord, Jehovah, is depicted as a warrior several times in the Bible, such as in Exodus 15:3–4: “The L ORD is a man of war: the L ORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host [hēl, ‘army, strength’] hath he cast into the sea.”

The Lord’s heavenly host is not just composed of fighters but of all the holy beings who surround Him and do His will: “The L ORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens. . . . Bless the L ORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments. . . . Bless ye the L ORD, all ye his hosts [šēḇāʾāyvw]; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure” (Psalm 103:19–21). Likewise: “Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts [šēḇā’ô]” (Psalm 148:2). This is perhaps the main connotation of yhwh šēḇāʾōt, “the L ORD of Sabaoth,” a phrase that occurs almost 250 times in the Hebrew Bible, most commonly in prophetic texts. Jehovah as King of heaven is Lord of all the many heavenly beings and spirits, as well as of people on earth.

Although the specific sense of “hosts” in the designation yhwh šēḇāʾōt is not certain in every biblical passage (divine beings in general, heavenly fighters, stars, some combination of these), it is evident that the expression “the L ORD of hosts”—“Lord of Sabaoth”—is meant to encapsulate and convey Jehovah’s exalted status in the midst of other heavenly beings and His power to accomplish all His purposes in heaven and on earth. It is, therefore, not surprising that this phrase occurs a few times in uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture.

The transliterated word Sabaoth is attested four times in the Doctrine and Covenants (see 87:7; 88:2; 95:7; 98:2), always in relation to a prayer that has or will “come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” For example, Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 emphasizes the Lord’s creative power: “Call your solemn assembly, that your fastings and your mourning might come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, which is by interpretation, the creator of the first day, the beginning and the end.” The phrase “by interpretation” here does not indicate that the word Sabaoth literally translates to “creator of the first day,” but rather it correlates the concepts of creation and hosts. This, of course, makes good scriptural sense, based on Genesis 2:1 (“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them [šēḇāʾām]”) and Doctrine
and Covenants 45:1 (“give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth, who made the heavens and all the hosts thereof”).” Doctrine and Covenants 87:7 correlates with the military sense of many of the occurrences of יֹהָוָה שֶׁבַּךְיָּהוֹת in the Hebrew Bible: “That the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies.” These attestations of “Lord of Sabaoth” (from יֹהָוָה שֶׁבַּךְיָּהוֹת) in the Doctrine and Covenants provide a demonstrable link between modern revelation and an age-old concept and tradition of scripture language, although in this case represented in the KJV Old Testament only in translation—“the LORD of hosts”—not transliteration.

The phrase “Lord of Sabaoth” expresses the majesty and dominion of the Lord, who reigns over all. Our use of this phrase expresses our conviction of the Lord’s supremacy and conveys worship and confidence. The Lord and His righteous host, both in heaven and on earth, will not be defeated.

Satan

The name-title Satan is the transliterated form of the Hebrew common noun שָטָן (pronounced sah-TAHN), which means “adversary, slanderer.” The related Hebrew verb from the lexical root סֹטָנָא means “to accuse, slander, be an adversary.”

Perhaps surprisingly, the Hebrew noun שָטָן occurs in the following passages to designate humans who were adversaries to someone else: David (see 1 Samuel 29:4); Abishai and his brothers (see 2 Samuel 19:22); and the collective enemies of Solomon, from whom the Lord had given him rest (see 1 Kings 5:4; v. 18 in the Hebrew Bible). Specific enemies of Solomon who harassed him later in his reign are also labeled שָטָן/“adversary”: “Then the Lord raised up an adversary [שָטָן] against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. . . . God raised up another adversary [שָטָן] against Solomon, Rezon son of Eliadah. . . . He was an adversary [שָטָן] of Israel all the days of Solomon, making trouble as Hadad did” (1 Kings 11:14, 23, 25; New Revised Standard Version; hereafter cited as NRSV). Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, שָטָן is sometimes used in reference to human “satans,” enemies who posed a political or military threat to the well-being of a person or nation.

The Hebrew noun שָטָן also refers to nonhuman adversaries in the Bible. In such cases, it occurs three times without the definite article (see Numbers 22:22, 32; 1 Chronicles 21:1) and twenty-three times with the definite article (הָּוָא): הָּאוּשָּּטָן, literally, “the satan” (see Job 1; 2; Zechariah 3:1–2). Demonstrating the wide-ranging use of this com-
mon noun, even an “angel of the LORD” acted as a šāṭān: “And God’s anger was kindled [against Balaam] because he went [with Balak’s messengers]: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary [lēšāṭān] against him. . . . And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee [lēšāṭān], because thy way is perverse before me” (Numbers 22:22, 32; the NRSV reads, “I have come out as an adversary,” in v. 32).

Only 1 Chronicles 21:1 contains the noun šāṭān without the definite article in what can be considered a proper name-title for the demonic Satan, the adversary of God and His people: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel” (NRSV). This, of course, is the way the term šāṭān is usually used in post–Old Testament Jewish and Christian literature. Latter-day Saints generally understand haššāṭān (“the adversary”) in Job 1 and 2 and Zechariah 3 to also be “the Adversary,” Satan, the one who slandered Job’s integrity and acted as an adversary to that righteous man. The KJV and most modern translations render haššāṭān as “Satan” in these passages, ignoring the definite article.

The name-title Satan occurs numerous times in the New Testament and in Restoration scripture as a designation for the adversary of the Lord. When Latter-day Saints use the term Satan to refer to the devil, they will hopefully recall that, even more than human adversaries, this being is an eternal enemy. He rebelled against God, is “the father of all lies,” and seeks “to deceive and to blind” people “to lead them captive at his will” if they choose not to follow the Lord (see Moses 4:4). No wonder he is labeled “adversary.”

Jehovah

Surprisingly, the name Jehovah occurs only four times in the King James translation of the Old Testament. It is printed in capital letters, as in Psalm 83:18: “That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth” (see also Exodus 6:3; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). It also occurs three times as a component of altar or place names: “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi” (Exodus 17:15; see also Genesis 22:14; Judges 6:24). The name Jehovah does not appear in the KJV New Testament at all. Despite this minimal indication, the Hebrew form of this name, יהוה/yhwh, occurs about sixty-five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible! It is important for students of scripture to understand the cause of this great disparity.
Jehovah does not appear more often in the King James Version and other translations of the Bible because the translators were influenced by a Jewish custom, developed sometime after 500 BC, of not pronouncing the divine name $yhw$ out of respect for its sacred nature. This necessitated substituting a title in its place when the biblical text was read (the consonants $yhw$ were still written when biblical texts were copied). This development contributed to the eventual loss of the pronunciation of $yhw$. The substitute title most often used was, and still is, 'adōnāy, “lord” (literally, “my lords,” but conventionally translated “Lord” or “my Lord”; the independent form is 'ādōn, “lord”; 'ādōnî is “my lord”). Copies of the Hebrew Bible print the letters of the divine name, $yhw$, but usually place the vocalization “points,” or vowel indicators, for the word 'ādōnāy around these four letters to remind readers to substitute the title Lord for the divine name $yhw$. This substitution is exhibited in English translations every time the divine name $yhw$ is printed as “the LORD.” Printing “LORD” in all capitals allows readers of the English translation to distinguish between the occurrences of $yhw$ in the Hebrew text, which would be read 'ādōnāy, and actual occurrences of the noun 'ādōn, “lord.” The latter term sometimes refers to God and is printed “Lord” in translation and sometimes refers to human rulers and is printed “lord” (except at the beginning of sentences, when the “l” is always capitalized and context must indicate who the Lord is). This practice is evident in many passages, such as 1 Kings 1:36 (“And Benaiah . . . answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD [yhw] God of my lord [âdōnî] the king say so too”) and Exodus 4:13–14 (“And [Moses said to God], O my Lord [âdōnî], . . . and the anger of the LORD [yhw] was kindled against Moses”).

The consonants in the name “Jehovah” are transliterated from the four Hebrew letters of the divine name $yhw$ (again, the Hebrew “y” is represented in English as “j”). And the vowels in “Jehovah” are derived from the vowels in the substitute title 'ādōnāy, with a slight variation in the first vowel. Thus, the name “Jehovah,” which is very familiar to us, is a hybrid form that was written as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century but is not well attested in English until the early sixteenth century. It was never actually pronounced “Jehovah” in antiquity. Based on evidence such as the shortened forms of $yhw$ that appear in Israelite personal names and in the Hebrew Bible (for example, Yah/JAH in Psalm 68:4, and the last portion of the expression $bâlèlù-yâh$, discussed above), scholars postulate that the divine name was originally pronounced “Yahweh” or something similar.
The name *Yahweh/Jehovah* seems related to the Hebrew verb “to be” and is usually translated “he is” or “he causes to be.” Those who favor the meaning “he is” correlate it with the form of the name *Jehovah* that Moses was taught at the burning bush: “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Understood this way, the name *Yahweh/Jehovah* does not mean “He is . . . (something, like love or mercy),” but rather “He exists,” which conveys the duration of the Lord’s power, superiority, and eternal dominion—Yahweh/Jehovah just *is*. This is the reason Church-related publications sometimes translate “Jehovah” as “Unchangeable One” or “Self-existent One.” But based on the preserved vocalization of short forms of the divine name, many scholars translate “Yahweh” as a causative, “he causes to be/exist.” This emphasizes Yahweh/Jehovah’s ongoing power to create and uphold all things. The last clause in Doctrine and Covenants 88:41 nicely captures the sense of the divine name when understood this way: “all things are by him.”

The tradition of rendering Hebrew *yhwh* as “the L ORD” has produced some unusual combinations, such as “the Lord G OD,” a phrase that occurs about three hundred times in the KJV. One well-known example is “Surely the Lord G OD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). In such cases, the Hebrew reads *’ādonyā yhwh*, literally “(my) Lord, Yahweh/Jehovah.” But because the translators were rendering *yhwh* as “the L ORD” and not as *Yahweh/Jehovah* and because they wanted to avoid the odd-looking “Lord L ORD,” the name *yhwh* in these passages was rendered as “G OD.” Printing it in all capitals indicates that the underlying Hebrew word is the divine name *yhwh*. This phrase, “Lord G OD,” should not be confused with the well-attested phrase “the L ORD God,” which renders the Hebrew words *yhwh ṭūbīm*, as found in Genesis 2:4 (“the L ORD God made the earth and the heavens”), Psalm 106:48 (“Blessed be the L ORD God of Israel [*yhwh ṭūbī yisrā’ēl*]”), and hundreds of other passages.

The name *Jehovah* is not limited to the Bible. It occurs twice in the Book of Mormon, six times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and twice in the book of Abraham. It often occurs in Latter-day Saint prophetic statements, hymns, and other Church contexts, including the temple. Even though Jehovah is a nonancient, hybrid version of the name of God the Son, Latter-day Saints and the Lord continue to use it because it represents the form of His name in our Restoration religious heritage. Similarly, English speakers do not use the original pronunciations of *John* (Yohanan/yôhănən), or *Jesus* (Yeshua/yéši‘a’), or the names of any other ancient Saints whose names have come to us
in transliteration, impacted to a lesser or greater degree by their transition to English.

As Keith H. Meservy has observed, “We can find Jesus Christ in the Old Testament by substituting Jehovah for LORD whenever it appears. Then something wonderful happens. Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, appears from beginning to end of this great book as the God of the Old Testament.” Additionally, the meaning of Jehovah can remind us of the enduring nature of His love, His plans, and His creative and saving power. When ancient Saints “called on the name of the LORD [yhwh]” (Genesis 13:4) and when the Aaronic priests “put my name upon the children of Israel” (Numbers 6:27), they employed yhwh, Yahweh/Jehovah, the one of whom it is rightly said there is no other name under heaven by which salvation comes (see Acts 4:12; Mosiah 3:17).

Conclusion

Biblical names, terms, and titles that have been transliterated into English all have meaning in their original Hebrew form. Our scripture study is much richer and more productive when we know how these words are used in scripture so we can reflect on their meanings. This discussion of terms that have been transliterated from biblical Hebrew to English has sought to demonstrate this premise. Thoughtful consideration of transliterated terms employed in our worship of Jehovah (Hallelujah, Sabbath), that express faithful involvement with and commitment to Him and His teachings (Amen), and that convey His power and superiority over all opposition (Sabaoth), including the Adversary (Satan), can be instructive and edifying to Latter-day Saints, whether we encounter these terms in scripture, hymns, or preaching. The importance of understanding the meaning and significance of Jehovah, a name of our Redeemer, cannot be overstated. Other Hebrew terms that appear in transliterated form in scripture and in our religious language that could have been discussed here include hosanna (hōša‘-nā‘), cherubim (kērūbīm), seraphim (ṣērāpīm), Sheol (šē’ōl), and Messiah (māšiāh). But these must await your own study, a future article, or both.

Notes

I express thanks to my colleagues Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift, and to my wife, Jane Allis-Pike, for reading and commenting on drafts of this article.

Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 290–91 (commenting on the “images of beasts” in Daniel 7 versus actual beasts mentioned in the book of Revelation). Consider also this comment from Joseph Smith in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:396: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original [Hebrew], and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages, until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough.”

2. Note, for example, that the Hebrew letter א (šin) is represented by ñ in transliteration and has the sound “sh.” Occasionally, this “sh” sound is carried through the transliteration process into English, as in the name Shelemiah/šelemyäh, but oftentimes (for various reasons) it becomes “s,” as in Sabbath (from šabbāt) and Saul (from šâ‘ûl). Transliteration schemes, including the one used in this article, often require extra symbols to indicate sounds not natively available in the alphabet into which the original word is transliterated.

3. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “J,” http://dictionary.oed.com/ (accessed April 19, 2006), provides an informative overview of the history of the pronunciation and shape of the letter J. Originally, j was an i with a tail on it. This can be see in a number of English publications, including the 1611 edition of the KJV in which, for example, the number eight is printed in lowercase Roman type as viij rather than viii. I thank Royal Skousen and Don Chapman, both in BYU’s Department of Linguistics and English Language, for sharing their insights on this matter. See further discussion of this issue below, in connection with the name Jehovah.

4. See, for example, Exodus 15:2; 17:16; Isaiah 38:11.

5. The Hebrew title תֵּבִילִים was translated into Greek as psalmoi, “songs of praise.” This was transliterated into Latin as Psalmorum, which was eventually transliterated into English as Psalms.


7. A number of hymns in the Latter-day Saint hymnal contain one or more forms of Hallelujah/Alleluia/“Praise the Lord.” Classic examples include Hymns 72 and 200.

8. That Latter-day Saints believe Jehovah is Jesus is well attested in both canonical scripture and latter-day prophetic statements. For example: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself . . . to be lifted up . . . to be crucified. . . . The God of nature suffers; . . . they crucify the God of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:10, 12–13); “the Lord, . . . even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:2–4); “we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago. . . . He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New” (“The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, April 2000, 2). See also LDS Guide to the Scriptures (www. lds.org), s.v., “Jehovah” and “Jehovah is Christ.”

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11. Latter-day prophets have repeatedly emphasized the importance of appropriate Sabbath observance and worship. See, for example, the First Presidency letter on “Sabbath Day Observance,” dated September 28, 1992, which was to be read in Church sacrament meetings.

12. The s with a dot under it, š, represents the Hebrew letter šade, an emphatic s. It is sometimes transliterated as “ts,” and has a sound similar to the two zs in pizza.

13. Most modern translations, such as the NRSV, render “Sabaoth” in these verses as “hosts.”

14. Readers will notice that in this example the spelling is a little different. This is due to the particular grammatical construction of the word in relation to other words in the sentence. Other passages in which “host(s)” refers to a human army include Judges 4:2, 7; 8:6; 2 Kings 5:1; and Psalm 60:10.

15. 2 Kings 6:16–17 recounts the appearance of the heavenly host/army, but this passage does not contain the word host.

16. Some other examples of this concept include Exodus 14:14; Judges 5:4; 2 Samuel 5:23–24; Psalm 68:7; Habakkuk 3:9–12.

17. See also Nehemiah 9:6; Doctrine and Covenants 38:1. For comments on Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 see Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, Revelations of the Restoration (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 691; and Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 3:209. I strongly disagree with the suggestion of Robinson and Garrett that “Sabaoth” in Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 is not a transliteration of šeβâ’ôt, but of šabbât, Sabbath, and with their conclusion that “creator of the first day” indicates that Jehovah is Lord of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday and the Christian Sabbath on the first day of the week. He is the Lord of both those days, but that is not the point in Doctrine and Covenants 95:7.

18. The other two common name-titles for Satan—devil and Lucifer—have their own interesting etymological histories. In brief, the word devil is an anglicized, transliterated form of the Greek term diabolos, which means “accuser, slanderer,” thus having a similar range of meaning as “satan,” and can be seen as a translation of Hebrew šātān. Lucifer was transliterated into English from Latin (lux + ferre, “light-bringer”). It is a translation of the Hebrew in Isaiah 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [hêlêl (“bright/shiny one”)], son of the morning [ben-ṣāhər]!”


20. Textually, this is a complicated situation because other nouns, such as elohim (elohim; God), sometimes occur with the definite article, hâ elohîm, as in Job 1:6, similar to haâšātân. The definite article is not translated in these cases when it is understood that elohim refers to God, not “the gods,” as it sometimes does in the Hebrew Bible (see, for example, Exodus 12:12; Joshua 24:15; Judges 10:6).

21. This raises a tricky issue. Given the paucity and late date of most attesta-
tions of the concept of a demonic Satan in the Hebrew Bible, we can more easily understand why some scholars, without the benefit of a Restoration view, accept a developmental or evolutionary approach to the human invention of Satan. Linguistically, it is clear that English Satan is a transliteration from Hebrew šāṭān. But it may not be clear to everyone what should be made of the fact that the “fallen one” is called “Satan” in premortal (see Moses 4:3–4) and early mortal (see Moses 5:13, 18) contexts. Presumably, this usage indicates that šāṭān was part of the vocabulary of the Israelites from at least Moses’s day onward. Because it is not certain what the link between the Adamic language and Hebrew is, occurrences of Satan in Moses 4 and 5 should not be taken as evidence that Satan was called “Satan” in the language(s) of heaven or Adam.

22. There are no capital (uppercase) letters in Hebrew. The practice of rendering JEHOVAH in all capitals represents a decision on the part of the translators and printers to show respect for the divine name.

23. It seems that the divine name yhwh was pronounced until after the Babylonian Exile and building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 515 BC. According to the traditional explanation, in the following centuries the full form of the name was pronounced only by the Aaronic high priest when he was alone in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), so it eventually became lost to all. (As a point of interest, Yom Kippur is transliterated from Hebrew yôm kippûrîm and translates as “Day of Atonement.”) The divine name yhwh is sometimes called the Tetragrammaton, a Greek term that means “four letters.”

24. This (‘ādōnāy) is the most common form of ‘ādōn used in relation to deity in the Hebrew Bible. The use of this grammatical plural (“my lords”) is generally thought to convey majesty.

25. Actually, only the first and last of the three vowels are usually indicated in print. The Hebrew alphabet consists only of consonants. Vowel sounds are part of the language but were not originally indicated in written texts because there were no vowel letters. Systems were developed in the second half of the first millennium AD to indicate vowel sounds when dots and other small marks were placed in relation to the consonantal letters.

26. The word the in the phrase “the LORD” is not in the Hebrew text but is added to make sense in English because the name is replaced by a title. Technically, the “L” in “LORD” is capitalized and the “ORD” are printed as small capitals: LORD.

27. Because the Hebrew letter waw (ו) is pronounced vav in modern times (and because the pronunciation of “w” and “v” alternates in other languages as well; for example, “w” in German is pronounced “v”), the four letters of the divine name are variously written as YHWH, YHVH, JHVH, and so on. Whatever the variations in English, the Hebrew letters are always the same: hvhy.

28. The first vowel in English is different because the first vowel in ’ādōnāy is a shortened sound that would normally be represented by a short “eh.” But because ’ādōnāy begins with the letter ’aleph, what would be a short “eh” is pronounced as a short “ah.”

29. The Hebrew yhwh went into Latin as IHVH, the form by which it transferred into English and other European languages. The letter J “is, in its origin, a comparatively late modification of the letter I. In the ancient Roman alphabet, I, besides its vowel value [in certain words] had the kindred consonantal value of modern English Y” (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “J”; accessed April 19, 2006).
On the historical relationship between the letters u and v, see the discussion in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “U” and “V.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that “Jehovah,” spelled “Iehouah,” appeared in William Tyndale’s translation of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, in 1530. This form, sometimes with minor variations, is how it was commonly spelled in other attestations at that time. In the first edition of the KJV (1611), the block Roman print of the divine name in Exodus 6:3 is “IEHOVAH,” whereas the blackletter script of the rest of the biblical text utilizes a capital J, (an I with a tail), illustrating the ongoing process that eventually culminated in the distinction between these two letters.

It is often claimed that the English word *Iehouah/Jehovah* was first used in the early 1500s; however, it has been observed that “the writers of the sixteenth century, Catholic and Protestant (e.g. Cajetan and Théodore de Bèze), are perfectly familiar with the word [Iehouah].” Galatinus himself (Areana cathol. veritatis, I, Bari, 1516, a, p. 77) represents the form as known and received in his time [early 1500s]. Besides, Drusius (loc. cit., 351) discovered it in Porchetus, a theologian of the fourteenth century. Finally, the word is found even in the *Pugio fidei* of Raymund Martin, a work written about 1270 (ed. Paris, 1651, pt. III, dist. ii, cap. iii, p. 448, and Note, p. 745). Probably the introduction of the name *Jehovah* antedates even R. Martin” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Jehovah (Yahweh),” www.newadvent.org/cathen/08329a.htm [accessed April 19, 2006]; I thank Stan Thayne for this reference). Similarly, Henry O. Thompson “Yahweh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1011–12, claims, without providing support, that “this confused usage [the hybrid *Iehouah/Jehovah*] may, however, have begun as early as 1100 A.D.” For other remarks on this issue, see Kent P. Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 6, 15–16.

30. A very brief description of this is contained in the LDS Bible Dictionary, “Names of persons,” 737. See also Dana M. Pike, “Names, Theophoric,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:1018–19.


32. Hebrew *yhwh* is related to *yihyeh*, the *Qal* third masculine singular imperfect form of the verb “to be.” Exodus 3:14 contains the *Qal* first singular imperfect form of this verb, *’ehyeh*. The imperfect aspect, or tense, in Hebrew conveys present, ongoing, and future action. So “I AM” is a translation, not a transliteration, of the Hebrew.

33. See LDS Bible Dictionary, “Jehovah,” 710; see also James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 36. Talmage’s rendition “Self-existent One” is probably the basis for all later uses of this in other Church-related publications.

34. See, for example, Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis*, 7; and Thompson, “Yahweh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1011–12.

35. Rendering *’adônây yhwh* as “the Lord GOD” is based on the practice of scribes who copied the Hebrew Bible, who in these cases placed the vocalization of the word *’elôhîm*, “God,” in conjunction with *yhwh*, rather than the vowels of *’adônây*, to remind readers to say this substitute for the divine name. Combinations that are more rare than “Lord GOD” in the KJV include “LORD GOD” (in Isaiah 3:15 and Zechariah 9:14; the rendering of Hebrew *’adônây yhwh*, which is “Lord God” else-
where in the KJV); “LORD JEHOVAH” (the KJV rendition of Hebrew \textit{yhw} \textit{yhw}, the short and full form of the divine name, in Isaiah 2:12; 26:4); and “\textit{God the Lord}” (Psalms 109:21; 141:8; the Hebrew here is \textit{yhw} \textit{n̄m}, literally “Yahweh, Lord,” or “\textit{Lord, Lord}”).

36. See 2 Nephi 22:2 (where it is rendered in all capitals as in the KJV of Isaiah 12:2); Moroni 10:34; D&C 109:34, 42, 56, 68; 110:3; 128:9; Abraham 1:16; 2:8. It is presently impossible to know how many times \textit{yhw}/\textit{Yahweh} may have been written in Nephite scripture prior to its translation into English.


38. These terms can be further researched by consulting the LDS Bible Dictionary and other more in-depth resources such as \textit{The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary} (1996), \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible} (2000), and \textit{Anchor Bible Dictionary} (1992), as well as a good concordance. Some are also discussed in \textit{Book of Mormon Reference Companion}.
On a beautiful, warm Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1844, the Prophet Joseph Smith delivered the King Follett discourse. Many consider that April 7 general conference address, the last Joseph would give before his martyrdom less than three months later, to be his greatest. The sermon was given in “the groves” surrounding the Nauvoo Temple. Thousands heard the Prophet of the Restoration declare: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.”

“If men do not comprehend the character of God,” he explained, “they do not comprehend themselves.” They cannot “comprehend anything, either that which is past or that which is to come.” They do not understand their own relationship to God. “Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us.”

The insight offered in those few sentences is profound, and the implications are myriad. Within those succinctly stated truths is found one of the most important keys to successful relationships—comprehending the character of God. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how our comprehension of the character of God facilitates the understanding of our own character, influences our personal relationship with God, and opens the door to better husband-wife relationships.
Our Personal Relationship with God

“If men do not comprehend the character of God they do not comprehend themselves.”

What is the character of God? In the Lectures on Faith, Joseph Smith taught that God is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, unchangeable, no respecter of persons, loving, a God of truth (He cannot lie), long-suffering, and forgiving. “Such is the weakness of human nature,” he further explained, “and so great the frailties and imperfections of men, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist.” We would be overcome by doubt and fear and give up all hope of salvation. Thus, it is true that “life eternal” is to know God the Father and Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

How does comprehending the character of God help us comprehend our own character? Only when we comprehend the character of God, and who He is, can we really understand who we are and what our character should become. The Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.” Our divine nature is comprised of “the same capabilities, powers and faculties” possessed by our heavenly parents, “although in an infantile state.” Through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, we can develop those embryonic attributes to maturity, become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4; emphasis added), and have the image of God engraven upon our countenances (see Alma 5:19). It is our divine destiny to be heirs of eternal life, to become “priests and kings . . . [and] gods, even the sons of God . . . [and to] dwell in the presence of God . . . forever and ever” (D&C 76:56, 58, 62).

What is our relationship to God? “You are His child,” declared President Gordon B. Hinckley. “You are His child all the time, not just when you are good. You are His child when you are bad. You have within you . . . a portion of divinity that is real and tremendous and marvelous and wonderful.” “What could inspire one to purity and worthiness more,” asked Elder Boyd K. Packer, “than to possess a spiritual confirmation that we are the children of God? What could inspire a more lofty regard for oneself, or engender more love for mankind?” That assurance, noted Elder Dallin H. Oaks, can act as a “potent antidepressant. It can strengthen each of us to make righteous choices and to seek the best that
is within us. . . . [It can give us the] self respect and motivation to move against the problems of life.”

It allows us “to face trouble with courage, disappointment with cheerfulness, and triumph with humility. . . . We cannot sincerely hold this conviction without experiencing a profound new sense of strength and power, even the strength to live the commandments of God, the power to resist the temptations of Satan.”

Jacob, the great Book of Mormon prophet, said, “The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13). In truth, we really are the literal spirit offspring of Deity, and we really do have a divine nature and the potential to become like God. Yet it is also “the truth,” when we are born into mortality, that we inherit a fallen nature. We are “cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of [God]” (Alma 42:7). We are subject to all the effects of the Fall, including disease, suffering, and death. The more we comprehend the character of God and come to a “knowledge of [His] goodness,” the more we are “awakened . . . to a sense of [our own] nothingness, and [to our] worthless and fallen state” (Mosiah 4:5). To the degree we yield to temptation, we “become carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Alma 42:10), and enemies to God (see Mosiah 3:19). When we comprehend that reality, we understand more clearly what our relationship to God must be and what we must do to become like our Heavenly Father and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

Salvation is to be gained only on the terms God has set. The plan of the Father, accepted by each one of us in premortality, must once again be embraced in mortality. We must “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32), “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19). “Please remember this one thing,” said President Howard W. Hunter, “If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and His restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and His teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.”

The more we comprehend the character of God and seek to emulate that character, the more we love God, the more we know He loves us, and the more we love others. “We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:19–20). “In order for us to love God,” taught President Harold B. Lee, “we have to learn how to . . . love our brothers and our sisters.” Is that also true of having love for ourselves? Are we liars if we say we love God and hate ourselves? Satan, “a liar from
the beginning” (D&C 93:25) and “the father of all lies” (2 Nephi 2:18), “delights to have us put ourselves down,” said Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “Self-contempt is of Satan; there is none of it in heaven.”14 Some people confuse self-hatred with humility. But “humility,” said Elder Maxwell, “is not the disavowal of our worth; rather, it is the sober realization of how much we are valued by God.”15 Self-criticism and self-hatred may also, at times, be subtle forms of pride. If our motive for self-contempt is to make sure others do not see us as prideful, but to ensure that we are seen as humble, we are guilty of doing things to be “seen of men” (3 Nephi 13:5). We want others to be as proud of our humility as we are.

All of us do have occasions when we are disappointed with ourselves and feel a sense of personal failure. Even Nephi lamented, “Notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclameth: O wretched man that I am!” (2 Nephi 4:17). It is important, at such times, that we learn to “distinguish more clearly between divine discontent and the devil’s dissonance, between dissatisfaction with self and disdain for self. We need the first and must shun the second. . . . We can contemplate how far we have already come in the climb along the pathway to perfection; it is usually much further than we acknowledge. . . . [And] we can make quiet but more honest inventories of our strengths. Most of us are dishonest bookkeepers and need confirming ‘outside auditors.’”16 When we comprehend the character of God, we know we can approach our Heavenly Father and find a loving and true Friend who recognizes and appreciates, more than anyone else, our strengths and how far we have come. From a voice familiar, we hear the whispered reaffirmation that we are his beloved sons and daughters. We are reminded, even when we struggle to see our own worth, that in the “sight of God” (D&C 18:10) we possess such redeeming value that the Savior, the “greatest of all” (D&C 19:18), was willing to give His life for us. “What greater witness can [we] have than from God?” (D&C 6:23).

Self-esteem is important to relationships. Our choice of companions can be a reflection of how we feel about ourselves and how we think God feels about us. The desire and willingness to draw near to others and to allow them to get close to us is often determined by our feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Some people fall short of the mark of self-esteem (see Jacob 4:14). They succumb to self-hatred and relentless self-criticism and find it increasingly difficult to love their fellowmen or to receive love, praise, or appreciation from them. Other people go beyond the mark of self-esteem and are puffed up with prideful arrogance. They “elevate [themselves] above others and
diminish them.” They are guilty of “faultfinding, gossiping, backbiting, murmuring, living beyond [their] means, envying, coveting, withholding gratitude and praise that might lift another, and being unforgiving and jealous.” They become selfish and contentious, “are easily offended and hold grudges.” They “do not receive counsel or correction easily” and tend to “justify and rationalize their frailties and failures.”

To establish healthy relationships, we must identify and reach the mark of self-esteem. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Since self-esteem controls ultimately our ability to love God, to love others, and to love life, nothing is more central than our need to build justifiable self-esteem.”

Justifiable self-esteem is the mark we should strive for. What constitutes justifiable self-esteem? President Benson once taught, “If we love God, do His will, and fear His judgment more than men’s, we will have self-esteem.” Those three keys, I believe, are the seeds of justifiable self-esteem. Each one finds its roots in our relationship with God and is nourished by our comprehension of His character. Let’s consider each key.

**Love God**

How do we demonstrate our love of God? “Obedience is the most genuine way,” declared President Howard W. Hunter. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . If [ye] love me . . . keep my words” (John 14:15, 23). Disobedience “pulls a man down into despondency and despair,” said President Ezra Taft Benson. “While a man may take some temporary pleasure in sin, the end result is unhappiness. . . . Sin creates disharmony with God and is depressing to the spirit.” Service is another way we show our love of God. “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26–28). “The only measure of true greatness,” taught President Benson “is how close a man can become like Jesus . . . and those who love Him most will be most like Him.”

“[The Savior] demonstrated that man, through the love of God and through kindness and charity to His fellows, could achieve His highest potential.” “Do you want to be happy?” asked President Gordon B. Hinckley. Then “forget yourself and get lost in this great cause. Lend your efforts to helping people. . . . You will come to know a happiness that you have never known before if you will do that.”

In December 1831, Newel K. Whitney was called to be the second bishop of the Church when Bishop Edward Partridge was asked
to go to Missouri and preside over the Saints there. Newel was over-whelmed by the call. All he could see was his lack of experience and ability. He felt inadequate to answer the Prophet’s call. He expressed his concerns to Joseph Smith, saying, “I cannot see a bishop in myself, Brother Joseph; but if you say it’s the Lord’s will, I’ll try.” The Prophet responded: “You need not take my word alone. . . . Go and ask Father for yourself.” He knew if Newel would take the focus off his inadequacies and weaknesses, placing it instead on the Lord’s adequacies and strengths, he would learn for himself that God makes up the difference for those who are obedient and serve Him with their “heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34). Brother Whitney did just as the Prophet counseled. He took his problem to the Lord. As he knelt in prayer, he heard a voice from heaven, saying: “Thy strength is in me.” He went to Joseph Smith and told him he was willing and ready to accept the call. He was an exemplary bishop. His faithfulness endeared him to the Prophet, who referred to him as “chearfull and patient and a true Brother.” Years later, he said of Brother Whitney, “Thou art a faithful friend in whom the afflicted sons of men can confide, with the most perfect safety. . . . Thou knowest not how strong those ties are that bind my soul and heart to thee.”

If we “love God with all [our] might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient” (Moroni 10:32) and we will have justifiable self-esteem. “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28).

Do the Will of God

The more we comprehend the character of God, the easier it is to know the will of God. In turn, the more we do His will, the better we know Him. “For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13). How else can we know the will of the Lord?

We can know the will of the Lord by looking to the prophet. One of the purposes of a prophet is to seek the will of the Lord for his people (see Amos 3:7; D&C 68:4). President Hinckley testified: “I am satisfied that the peace and the progress and the prosperity of this people lie in doing the will of the Lord as that will is articulated by him who is the servant of the Lord—the President of the Church.”

We can know the will of the Lord by personal revelation from the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 32:5). “Inspiration,” said Elder Richard G. Scott “is to know the will of the Lord. Power is the capability to
accomplish that inspired will.\textsuperscript{30} Prayer is a key to personal revelation. Elder Boyd K. Packer said, “Prayer is so essential a part of revelation that without it the veil may remain closed to you. . . . Prayer is your personal key to heaven. The lock is on your side of the veil.”\textsuperscript{31} “Answers to prayer,” taught President Benson, “come most often by a still voice and are discerned by your deepest, innermost feelings. I tell you that you can know the will of God concerning yourselves if you will take the time to pray and to listen.”\textsuperscript{32}

We can know the will of the Lord by prayer, and we can know by the callings that come through priesthood channels. Elder Packer taught: “The willingness of Latter-day Saints to respond to calls to serve is a representation of their desire to do the will of the Lord. . . . Our baptism is a call to lifelong service to Christ. . . . But the response to calls, to positions, is only a small part of the service given by members of the Church. I see two kinds of service: one, the service we render when we are called to serve in the Church; the other, the service we willingly give to those around us because we are taught to care.”\textsuperscript{33}

We can know the will of the Lord by being temple worthy. Whether we have already been through the temple or are preparing to do so in the future, “temple worthiness,” said President Howard W. Hunter, “ensures that our lives are in harmony with the will of the Lord, and we are attuned to receive His guidance in our lives.”\textsuperscript{34}

Knowing the will of God and doing it require faith and submissiveness. Elder Richard G. Scott said: “Our earnest prayers are answered when they conform to the will of the Lord. Since we cannot perfectly understand His will, we must walk with faith. He is all knowing, and His decisions are perfect. The fact that our finite capacity does not let us understand all of His dealings with man does not limit Him from blessing us. His will is our best choice in life, whether or not we fully understand it.”\textsuperscript{35} We must let our will be swallowed up in the will of the Lord. “Pride,” said President Benson, “is characterized by ‘What do I want out of life?’ rather than by ‘What would God have me do with my life?’ It is self-will as opposed to God’s will.”\textsuperscript{36}

William Smith, the younger brother of the Prophet Joseph, was known to have a willful and contentious spirit. It plagued him all his life. Still, he was a man of great capacity. He was ordained an Apostle on February 15, 1835. Often quick-tempered, William exploded during a council meeting when it was suggested that his actions were out of line. Over the next several days, his bitter feelings festered, and he again erupted in anger toward Joseph and Hyrum. The brothers meekly tried to calm him down, but the irate William stormed out of
the house saying he wanted nothing more to do with them or with the Church. For four days Joseph prayed for William. The Lord spoke to the Prophet, saying that if William would humble himself and repent, “I will yet make him a polished shaft in my quiver, in bringing down the wickedness and abominations of men and their [sic] shall be none mightier than he in his day and generation.”

Joseph continued to reach out forgivingly to William. Nearly six weeks later, William wrote to Joseph, feeling too ashamed to face him in person. He said he felt unworthy even to be called his brother and suggested it would be best for him to resign from the apostleship. He said: “You know my passions and the danger of falling from so high a station.” The Prophet replied: “God requires the will of his creatures, to be swallowed up in his will.” He told William it was not the will of the Lord that he resign from the Twelve and pleaded with his brother to make “one tremendous effort . . . [to] overcome your passions, and please God.” Forsaking his apostleship, he explained, was to be unwilling “to make that sacrifice that God requires at your hands and is to incur his displeasure.” Sadly, William did not respond to the pleadings of the Prophet. Unwilling to do the will of the Lord, he was eventually dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve and was excommunicated from the Church.

President Harold B. Lee said, “All that is contrary to the will of God is as poison to your spiritual life” and to your self-esteem. But “he that endureth in faith and doeth my will . . . [and] keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life” (D&C 63:20, 23). If we do the will of God, we will have justifiable self-esteem.

Fear the Judgment of God More Than the Judgments of Men

Many today seek for self-esteem in physical beauty, popularity, youthfulness, money, possessions, power, or positions. Their pursuit of such things is often endless because no matter how much they acquire, or regardless of the amount of worldly acceptance or praise they receive, it is insufficient to satisfy their insatiable appetites. As someone once said, “You can never get enough of what you don’t need, because what you don’t need won’t satisfy you.” Jacob admonished the people of his day to “not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy” (2 Nephi 9:51). President Ezra Taft Benson said: “The proud stand more in fear of men’s judgment than of God’s judgment. . . . ‘What will men think of me?’ weighs heavier than ‘What will God think of me?’ . . . Fear of men’s judgment manifests itself in competition for men’s approval. The proud love ‘the
praise of men more than the praise of God.’ (John 12:42–43.) Our motives for the things we do are where the sin is manifest. Jesus said He did ‘always those things’ that pleased God. (John 8:29.) Would we not do well to have the pleasing of God as our motive?”

Following the loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon, the Lord chastised the Prophet Joseph saying, “And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. . . . You should not have feared man more than God. . . . If thou are not aware thou wilt fall” (D&C 3:6–7, 9). Just over two years later, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, David Whitmer, received a similar rebuke: “Behold, I say unto you, David, that you have feared man and have not relied on me for strength as you ought. But your mind has been on the things of the earth more than on the things of me, your Maker, and the ministry whereunto you have been called; and you have not given heed unto my Spirit, and to those who were set over you, but have been persuaded by those whom I have not commanded” (D&C 30:1–2). Some of the early missionaries who were sent to tell the world of the Restoration and of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon would “not open their mouths . . . because of the fear of man.” The Lord told them he was “not well pleased” and that his “anger [was] kindled against them.” If not more faithful, he warned, even that which they had would be “taken away” (D&C 60:2–3).

President Hinckley once told of an Asian convert who exemplified what it means to fear the judgment of God more than the judgments of men. He said:

Mine has been the opportunity to meet many wonderful men and women in various parts of the world. A few of them have left an indelible impression upon me. One such person was a naval officer from Asia, a brilliant young man who had been brought to the United States for advanced training. Some of his associates in the United States Navy, whose behavior had attracted him, shared with him at his request their religious beliefs. He was not a Christian, but he was interested. They told him of the Savior of the world, of Jesus born in Bethlehem, who gave his life for all mankind. They told him of the appearance of God, the Eternal Father, and the resurrected Lord to the boy Joseph Smith. They spoke of modern prophets. They taught him the gospel of the Master. The Spirit touched his heart, and he was baptized.

He was introduced to me just before he was to return to his native land. We spoke of these things, and then I said, “Your people are not Christians. You come from a land where Christians have had a difficult time. What will happen when you return home a Christian and, more particularly, a Mormon Christian?”
His face clouded, and he replied, “My family will be disappointed. I suppose they will cast me out. They will regard me as dead. As for my future and my career, I assume that all opportunity will be foreclosed against me.”

I asked, “Are you willing to pay so great a price for the gospel?”

His dark eyes, moistened by tears, shone from his handsome brown face as he answered, “It’s true, isn’t it?”

Ashamed at having asked the question, I responded, “Yes, it’s true.”

To this he replied, “Then what else matters?”

If we fear the judgment of God more than the judgments of men and desire to please God more than we desire to please men, we will have justifiable self-esteem. “I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory” (D&C 76:5–6).

Husband-Wife Relationships

“There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come.”

“The things of God,” the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out.” President Spencer W. Kimball said:

One cannot know God nor understand his works or plans unless he follows the laws which govern. The spiritual realm, which is just as absolute as is the physical, cannot be understood by the laws of the physical. You do not learn to make electric generators in a seminary. Neither do you learn certain truths about spiritual things in a physics laboratory. You must go to the spiritual laboratory, use the facilities available there, and comply with the governing rules. Then you may know of these truths just as surely, or more surely, than the scientist knows the metals, or the acids, or other elements. It matters little whether one is a plumber, or a banker, or a farmer, for these occupations are secondary; what is most important is what one knows and believes concerning his past and his future and what he does about it.

When we comprehend the “things of God,” including His divine character and plan of happiness, we are able to understand what has been revealed about our premortal past and our postmortal future. Further, and perhaps more important in terms of relationships, we are able to understand our mortal relationship past and our potential mortal relationship future. That understanding brings a change in perspective.
As we look to the past, we recognize more fully the guiding, protecting, magnifying hand of the Lord and are filled with gratitude for the goodness of God. We see purpose in the challenges and experiences of the present and humbly acknowledge our dependence upon the Lord. We look to the future with faith and hope and optimism, confident that the blessings, the powers, and the revelations of heaven will be unfolded to us. The more we come to know the character of God, the more we trust God, the more we desire to do His will, and the less unsettled we are about things we do not yet fully comprehend.

Thirty years after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem, Nephi recorded some key events that transpired between 600 and 570 BC. As he began his record of the past, he noted that he had “seen many afflictions” yet had been “highly favored of the Lord” (1 Nephi 1:1). Many of the afflictions he detailed came from within the family unit. But it was also within those same challenging, often disappointing, relationship experiences that Nephi recognized and most appreciated the favor of the Lord. His deepened comprehension of the character of God shaped his perspective of those memories. Nephi saw the opportunity in his difficulties. Laman and Lemuel saw the difficulty in their opportunities. Nephi desired to “see,” “hear,” and “know” the things of God, knowing they are made known to anyone who will “diligently seek” them (1 Nephi 10:17). Laman and Lemuel refused even to inquire of the Lord, saying, “The Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (1 Nephi 15:9). Nephi “remembered the words of the Lord” (1 Nephi 4:14) and the great things God had done for their fathers. Laman and Lemuel repeatedly forgot them (see 1 Nephi 7:10–12). When commanded to return to Jerusalem to get the brass plates, Laman and Lemuel, who failed to comprehend the character of God, murmured, “It is a hard thing. . . . How is it possible?” (1 Nephi 3:5, 31). Nephi, on the other hand, knew the character of God and said, “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them” (1 Nephi 3:7), “wherefore can ye doubt?” (1 Nephi 4:3). The more Nephi comprehended the character of God, the greater became his faith in God. He obeyed the Lord’s command with a “go and do” (1 Nephi 3:7) attitude, was “led by the Spirit” (1 Nephi 4:6), “received much strength of the Lord” (1 Nephi 4:31), and obtained the plates of brass.

The contrast between Laman and Lemuel and Nephi was evident again when the commandment came to build a ship. Laman and Lemuel, who did not believe it could be done, murmured and complained. They called Nephi a “fool” (1 Nephi 17:17), said he was “lacking in judgment” (1 Nephi 17:19), and expressed doubt that Nephi had been
or could be “instructed of the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:18). Nephi reminded them of past miracles wrought among their ancestors—freedom from four hundred years of bondage, the parting of the Red Sea, deliverance from the armies of Pharaoh, manna from heaven, and water from a rock. They were led by day and given light by night (see 1 Nephi 17:23–30)—all seemingly impossible occurrences. “And now,” he asked his disbelieving brothers, “if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?” (1 Nephi 17:51; emphasis added). Nephi, who knew the Lord “loveth those who will have him to be their God” (1 Nephi 17:40), worked hard and did “pray oft,” and the Lord “showed unto [him] great things” (1 Nephi 18:3) whereby he could complete the ship and safely cross the sea.

As Nephi recounted those and other events, his comprehension of the character of God enabled him to see more than a past filled with an unceasing succession of problems and afflictions. Rather, Nephi became a witness of the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God while in the midst of those ordeals. His desire in preserving the memory of those experiences was to “show” future readers of the Book of Mormon “that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith” (1 Nephi 1:20; emphasis added) and that “he inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him. . . . All are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33; emphasis added).

Nephi recorded a tender interchange that occurred between Lehi and Sariah while the sons were in Jerusalem seeking the plates. Sariah was overcome by worry and feared that her sons had perished. Her mourning gave way to murmuring. She complained against Lehi. Lehi responded with words of consolation and reassurance, as he spoke of the past and the future. He said: “If I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren. . . . I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and [will] bring them down again unto us in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:4–5; emphasis added). Lehi’s testimony and words of comfort deepened Sariah’s understanding of the past and strengthened her faith to meet the challenges of the future. She testified: “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them” (1 Nephi 5:8).
The faithful of Lehi’s family did not naively believe the Lord would magically transport them directly to the promised land, allowing them to bypass the wilderness experience. Their understanding of the character of God was deep enough to prevent such a misreading of the divine plan. Still, they had faith that if they were righteous, a loving, merciful, gracious God could lead them into “the more fertile parts of the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:16) and would, “in process of time” (Moses 7:21), lead them to their promised destination. So it is with each one of us. Mortality is a high-adventure wilderness experience—a time of testing and proving. It is not the promised land. As we make our way through that wilderness as families, we can all be assured that we will encounter many trials and afflictions—some of them the result of family life itself. Many of those challenges will leave us wondering and perhaps wandering to find the nearest exit. Our earthly experiences have the potential to draw us nearer to God and to one another in families or to drive us apart.

Comprehending the character of God makes it easier to have faith in Him and to recognize our absolute dependence upon Him. It also enables us to understand our marriage past and to have hope in our marriage future. As we glance backward, our thoughts and conversations focus more upon the fertile parts of the wilderness than they do upon the wilderness; more upon the good in our partners and in our marriage than the bad; more upon the many ways in which we have been highly favored of the Lord than they do upon the many afflictions we have had to suffer. We see blessings and miracles and one manifestation after another of the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God. Stirred by the pleasant remembrances of the past, we look forward to the future with faith and hope and optimism. We believe the best is yet to come, not that it has already come to pass. “The basis of all righteous hope,” affirmed Elder John H. Groberg, “is the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Him all hope has its existence. Without Him there is no hope. But because He was and is and ever will be, there was, is, and ever will be hope. . . . In Christ who lives and loves and works miracles now, there is always hope.” Those who comprehend the character of God know that to be true.

Brigham Young testified: “If the Latter-day Saints will wake up to their privileges, and exercise faith in the name of Jesus Christ, and live in the enjoyment of the fulness of the Holy Ghost . . . there is nothing on the face of the earth that they could ask for, that would not be given to them. The Lord is waiting to be very gracious unto this people, and to pour out upon them [blessings].” “The Lord, better than anyone,”
said Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “knows our past and what deprivations we may have experienced, but he also knows our possibilities; he will not let the past hold the future hostage. But we must trust him and ‘try the experiment’ of his gospel’s goodness. A mere ‘desire to believe’ is a ‘square one.’ But he will meet us even there!”

“By small and simple things [all we can do] are great things [what the Lord will do] brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).

Sometimes we fail to live up to our privileges in marriage because of fear. Fear, the enemy of faith, leads to doubt, pessimism, and even despair. Fear causes us to lose the faith to hang on or the faith to let go of an offense, hurt, or betrayal. Fear can paralyze us with the belief we can never measure up to all that is expected of us—never please or make our spouses happy. In some marriages, fear creates doubt and a loss of all hope that things could ever change and get better. “Hope cometh of faith” (Ether 12:4). Faith enables us to hope for things we have not seen (see Ether 12:6) and is the catalyst of miracles (see Ether 12:16, 18), including the miracle of making weak things (weak spouses or weak marriages) strong (see Ether 12:27). A recent national study found that 86 percent of the couples surveyed who reported being unhappy in their marriages but were determined not to give up and divorce described their marriages five years later as either “very happy” or “quite happy.”

“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23).

Some fail to live up to their privileges in marriage because they lack vision and understanding of what those privileges are or what is required to access them. “Such members,” noted Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “move out a few hundred yards from the entrance to the straight and narrow path and repose on the first little rise, thinking, ‘Well, this is all there is to it; and they end up living far below their possibilities.”

Even when they believe they are living after the “manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27) and are partaking of the fruit that is supposed to “make one happy” (1 Nephi 8:10) and be “sweet, above all” (1 Nephi 8:11), they are disappointed by the blandness of it all. Disillusioned, they may become “weary in well-doing” (D&C 64:33) or may conclude that the joy supposedly available “in this life” (Moses 5:10) must, in reality, be meant for another time, for another place, or for some other couple. Feeling trapped, or even victimized by their circumstances, they slip into a survival mode, believing all they can do is try to make the best of a tough situation.

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the
path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.” If we pursue that path of happiness, hungering and thirsting for that which is “most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:22) and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:23), it is our privilege, as sons and daughters of God and as husbands and wives to be happy, to experience joy, even “joy unspeakable” (1 Peter 1:8) in this life. We cannot come to know true joy without also experiencing misery (see 2 Nephi 2:23). “To suffer some anxiety, some depression, some disappointment, even some failure is normal,” said President Boyd K. Packer. But we must help our members understand, he said, that “if they have a good, miserable day once in a while, or several in a row, to stand steady and face them. Things will straighten out.”

To “lay hold upon every good thing” (Moroni 7:19) in marriage or in relationships, we must be willing to let go of the bad and negative things that cause us to disbelieve and lose hope. “You can’t, you don’t, build out of pessimism or cynicism,” said President Gordon B. Hinckley. “You look with optimism, work with faith, and things happen.”

Personal repentance may be necessary to do that. Sin (of commission or omission) causes our hearts to become “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45), our ears to become “dull of hearing,” and our eyes to be unable to “see afar off” (Moses 6:27). Each step we take to repent and come unto Christ restores us to our senses. “In Christ [comes] every good thing” (Moroni 7:22), including “exceeding joy” to the “truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness” (Alma 27:18). President Harold B. Lee promised husbands and wives that if they would “resolve . . . [to] do everything in their power to please each other in things that are right, even to the sacrifice of their own pleasures, their own appetites, their own desires,” they would find great happiness in marriage. Often, the “mighty change” of heart (Alma 5:14) most needed in marriage is the willingness to place the happiness of a spouse ahead of our own.

Comprehending the character of God is a key to happiness in marriage. When we are like God—merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, unchangeable (constant), loving, truthful, long-suffering, and forgiving—we are happy and desire to bring happiness to others. The more we partake of the divine nature, the more we develop the mind of Christ and the greater becomes our desire to do the works of Christ. Although no one but the Savior can atone for the sins of another, we can, in a sense, “participate in an atonement,” said Elder Packer. “When we are willing to restore to others that which we have not taken, or heal wounds that we did not inflict, or pay a debt
that we did not incur, we are emulating His part in the Atonement.”

The Savior felt the weight not only of our sins but also of our pains, afflictions, sicknesses, and infirmities. He experienced those things, in the flesh, so that “his bowels may be filled with mercy” and so that He would know how to “succor his people” (Alma 7:11–12). To succor is to run to. In times of pain, affliction, sickness, and infirmity, the Savior runs to us—to comfort, to heal, and to lift. That is His character, and if it becomes ours, there will be “joy and rejoicing” (D&C 124:101) in time and throughout all eternity.

Notes

2. Smith, Teachings, 343, 350.
5. Smith, Lectures on Faith, 42 (3:20).
15. Neal A. Maxwell, All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 127.
22. Ezra Taft Benson, The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson (Salt Lake City:
38. Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 111.
44. Smith, *Teachings*, 137.
47. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:114.
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