Lessons from the Lamb of God
Elder F. Enzio Busche

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ON THE COVER:
The Savior’s love for us is symbolized by Thorvaldsen’s Christus.

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Editor’s Note

We are excited about this issue of the Religious Educator, which includes Elder F. Enzio Busche’s thoughtful address from last year’s BYU Easter Conference. Everyone present on that occasion was moved by the depth of feeling he provided while discussing the most important days in world history—the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We follow with BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson’s insightful essay “Holy Habits and Righteous Routines,” based on a talk given at the BYU Marriott Center at a multistake conference. He provides timely counsel for us to strengthen our faith in the Savior and retrench against the adversary.

In 2008 members of the Church focus their attention on the Book of Mormon as the Gospel Doctrine course of study. Jared W. Ludlow, a member of the ancient scripture faculty at BYU, discusses what the Book of Mormon contributes to our understanding of the power of the Atonement.

We continue with a provocative and current teaching essay that raises questions about how we teach as Rob Eaton discusses why participation is important in many classroom settings.

Many decades ago the Richard L. Evans Chair was established at BYU. One of our former student employees at the RSC provides a history of the chair and some of its accomplishments. Specially endowed chairs at the university come about because of generous donors who divert some of their personal funds to help BYU do more. We are reminded again of the impact of donor contributions in this essay.

Next Roger K. Terry gives an opportunity to consider the nature and power of God’s in his essay, “The Love of God.”

During this presidential election year in the United States, we are fortunate to have Timothy G. Merrill provide us with a fascinating look at the U.S. Constitution and its religious implications in relation to the Second Coming of the Lord.

Jack L. Rushton, a Church Educational System teacher until a swimming accident left him paralyzed and on a respirator, reflects on his own missionary service in Central America to provide insights about what it means to heed a call to serve and the implications of such service in our lives.

Finally, we conclude with part 2 of a roundtable discussion on the Dead Sea Scrolls highlighting both their use and misuse by Latter-day Saints.

Enjoy!

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
Editor
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“When we love as the Savior did, we become partakers of the fruit of the divine tree, which is the most desirable above all things. It is then that we are able to answer the second question and fulfill the very purpose of our lives.”

Elder F. Enzio Busche
Lessons from the Lamb of God

Elder F. Enzio Busche

Elder F. Enzio Busche is an emeritus Seventy. This address was given at the BYU Easter Conference on April 7, 2007.

I feel honored and humbled to be invited to speak at this year’s BYU Easter Conference. I also feel overwhelmed in light of the inspiring and educational talks that we have heard this morning, and my heart is still filled with the words from the mouths of our beloved leaders at general conference last weekend.

For the entire Christian world, celebrating Easter means celebrating the victory of Jesus with His crowning triumph of life over death and His message of the “good news” and the Redemption of mankind. Because of my service in the First Quorum of the Seventy, I have been a witness to the unfolding of many recent achievements of the expanding Church. And my joy is growing because the Lord is willing to reveal unto us how to grow in our understanding of what it means to “behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:36).

In the last couple of years, I have had more time to better understand the importance of meditation and of pondering, not only about life but also about the many revelations that came with the Restoration of the gospel. I now understand that when we want to have a clearer understanding of the still, small voice with which the Lord talks to us, we need to take time for the process of communication. The result of this communication is an increase of joy in our soul, the joy that comes to us when we are under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord. When we grow in our personal state of enlightenment, the veil that separates us from God becomes thinner, and we feel more of His light and His love, which finally takes away our fears.
Since the time of my conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a question in my mind has never left me alone: why did it take two years for me to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ? I also wonder why it is so difficult for many in my own country and other countries of the world to open their hearts to the beautiful message that Jesus has for all of Heavenly Father’s children.

I have learned that the Master Teacher is always trying to move us to open our eyes to see Him standing at the front of our lives, trying to communicate with us. As we read in Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

One principle seems to be clear: Jesus has deep respect for our agency. He does not push us to open our eyes, but He knocks and waits patiently. It is our responsibility to understand that our life is built on our own decisions and that we basically have one choice: either to live in fear or to live under the influence of divine love. As the scriptures tell us, these two choices are polar and incompatible opposites. We cannot have fear and love at the same time. As we read in the Book of Mormon and in the New Testament, “Perfect love casteth out all fear” (Moroni 8:16), and “He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Jesus, the Master Teacher, always knocks at our door, and when we are wise we will sharpen our senses and open our eyes. We will learn that He always wants to communicate with us, that He always wants to give us suggestions to help us make better decisions. And as we follow His suggestions, we will be filled with joy and energy and ever more confidence.

The Influence of the Spirit

In the beginning years of my membership, I was a member of a tiny branch of the Church. After a short time, I was called to be the branch president. From my viewpoint today, I can see that I was a little naive, with not much understanding and maybe even some pride. I thought that because of my experiences in the business world and my educational background, it would be easy for me to change that small, struggling branch.

I put in many, many hours—sometimes every free minute outside my life in the business world—to activate many who were not active and to create the place for many conversions. Week after week I was disappointed when in sacrament meeting the few active members were the only ones participating and so many who had promised to come did not.
One Sunday when I was again deeply disappointed, as I sat ready to start our sacrament meeting something happened that became a turning point in my life. The missionaries had brought a young couple with their five-year-old boy, and they were sitting in the first row directly in front of me. Suddenly, the young boy, having the freshness of innocence that only a child has, spoke loudly enough that everyone in the room could hear it, “Mom, what is the man with that mean face doing up there?” He pointed at me. I was completely shocked.

With all my endeavors and all my hard, dedicated work, to this little boy I was only a man with a mean face. And I learned that I needed to evaluate what I was doing and that I would never succeed merely by trying to do anything just my way, using my capabilities according to my strategic plan. I had obviously forgotten that the most important element—wanting to convert a soul—has nothing to do with programs, organizations, and industrious busyness. We can do nothing unless we are under the influence of the Spirit, therefore radiating joy, light, and love in our countenance.

From then on, I concentrated on changing my attitude. I was not offended anymore by anyone’s failure to keep promises. My wife and our little children came to the understanding that the only thing that was important for us was to be filled with the Holy Ghost and to overcome our ego. As we did so, we were free to rejoice about each person who came.

Soon after that, people who had never shown up began suddenly to come back to our meetings. We had a period of revival with accelerated growth, and after a relatively short time we had all the numbers we needed to begin considering building our own chapel.

That little boy became a constant reminder in my life to know what matters most: to be under the influence of the Holy Ghost, always by subduing our lower self, or ego, under the higher, or divine, self and in so doing, connecting with the divine source.

**Self-Awareness and Honesty**

It is a constant surprise to me that in this dark, sinister, unpredictable world where dangers lurk in every corner, so few people seem to search or even yearn for a better understanding of life. With all the suffering, pain, agony, heartlessness, and fears in the history of mankind, many of our fellow citizens have lost their feelings for the reality that Jesus the Christ has been resurrected and is alive and that He is ready to reveal Himself to everyone who is open to listen, showing the way to a rewarding, exciting life.
After reviewing my own conversion, I have to confess that in spite of the missionaries’ plain, fearless caring and selfless love for me and for my family, it took a relatively long time to overcome my skepticism and to bring myself to the scary walk on the lonesome, less-traveled road toward self-awareness and honesty. Without self-honesty, it is not possible for truth to come through to us.

To give you a feeling for what I’m talking about, I want to share a letter I wrote for the mission newsletter four years after my baptism:

How little was I prepared for this message as I saw myself in comparison to the ultimate demands of this message. I could see myself too far away, with too many casual attitudes and bad habits. I accused myself of being too lazy to even read a book to the very end. There seemed to be an abyss over which no bridge could be built between my own life’s performance and the vision of the complex message of the missionaries. I began to pity these boys. I even warned them and told them that there is no hope; that they would waste their time, not only with me but with everyone else that I knew. The vision of a fight in me to get to the acceptable level was so much without hope that I did not even start.

I was blessed with missionaries who had patience with me. They were very effective because they did not teach with an air of superiority, but they taught with respect for my personal space and my opinions and with invitations to learn how to grow.

The missionaries had a natural capacity to cause the Holy Ghost to become my teacher by seeing only the good in me and by overlooking my many weaknesses and shortcomings. The missionary who finally baptized me was not shocked by my pride and arrogance, my constant nay-saying. When I finally told him that I never would be baptized in the Church, he jumped for joy, clapping his hands and shouted, “That is wonderful!”

I was so surprised by his reaction that I asked him what was so wonderful about my never becoming a member of the Church. He just laughed and said with an enthusiastic voice, “That is what everyone says before he is baptized.”

I could do nothing else but ask him, “What makes you so sure?”

He looked at me with a big grin on his face and said with strong conviction, “Because you are an honest man.”

The thought struck me: “Me, an honest man?” In that moment, the Holy Ghost became my teacher, and spiritual lightning of tremendous power pierced my soul, enlightening every cell of my body. I saw myself in my haughtiness, in my arrogance, and in my pride, and
I wished with all my soul that I would be worthy of the judgment of honesty from that missionary. Only by achieving true honesty would I be capable of receiving the courage and the self-assurance I had always felt I was missing. Thus, the missionary became the catalyst for my wife’s and my own conversion.

This experience instilled in me a desire to know more about the source of this message. I was guided to find more material about the Prophet Joseph Smith. I was stunned when I read some of his statements that showed me the grandeur and the truthfulness of his vision. I feel I should share some of his words that amazed me. I quote from the words of Joseph Smith: “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.” He added: “The only way to obtain truth and wisdom, is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer and obtain divine teaching.”

These statements from the Prophet Joseph Smith are so unique and so full of promise and light.

**Our Eternal Identity**

When I review the situation which mankind is in today and even when I look back to the time when I was investigating, I realize there are only three essential questions in the soul of each human being. These questions are so essential that a human being cannot fully function unless he has convincing answers to them.

The first question is, who am I? Answering this question convincingly breaks through to a long-hidden truth inside of us. We have always known it, but we never dared to think in that direction. Our Western culture has taught us that we are sinners in the hands of an angry God—fallen, unclean, and incompetent. What is the answer to this question, who am I? The answer is simple to Latter-day Saints because we have been taught this message from the beginning of our lives: we are all children of a loving God. For me, this is one of the key messages Jesus gave in all of His teachings, either directly or indirectly. When we finally understand this message, we feel to exclaim, “Behold the Lamb of God!”

When someone understands the full meaning of this reality, it is as if the arms of heaven have come to pull us out of the mire and the darkness of the world, and we begin to see light. Suddenly we cannot question ourselves anymore. God’s creations are perfect, and even when we are still young and not mature, all of us have the innate potential to become like God. It is good to know that we are children and
not hirelings. The deeper understanding of this reality will continue to
grow inside of us and will lead us to the security of belonging—not
only to the Creator but also to every other child of God.

It gives us knowledge of our many unused talents and capabilities
and an urge to closer to our divine origin. God wants to make sure that
in our urge to seek we will be able to find our way, and so God gives
us revelations, or ideas, about where to search. In the Doctrine and
Covenants section 50, verses 23 and 24, we learn what to expect from
God: “And that which does not edify is not of God, and is darkness.
That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continu-
eth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and
brighter until the perfect day.”

According to the New Testament, Jesus reminds His audience
what is written in their scripture: “Is it not written in your law, . . . Ye
are gods?” (John 10:34).

The Purpose of Life

When we have become enlightened by the awareness that we are
children of a loving God—one of the most important truths restored
by the Prophet Joseph Smith—we are in a position to find an answer
to the second most important question that every human being seems
to have: what is the purpose of life?

When we understand who we really are, we will not want to iden-
tify any longer with the lower part of our existence. According to the
prophets, “The natural man”—the ego, or the flesh—“is an enemy to
God” (Mosiah 3:19). With this understanding, we comprehend why
we were born on this planet—this planet is a planet of polarity. Only in
a situation of polarity are we capable of exercising agency. That is the
only way we can really learn.

The life and teachings of the Lamb of God show us the answer to
the second question, what is the purpose of life? The purpose, accord-
ing to Jesus, is found in His first and second commandments: “Thou
shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And
the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On
these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat-

Jesus obviously is teaching us that to keep these commandments is
not an option. It is the key for a successful life, independent of where
we are living and of whatever circumstances we may be in. These words
have been taught to us many times in our lives and in the history of
Christianity, but I think only when we are totally focused on fulfilling these two commandments do we have the key to overcoming all fear. Fear has been and will be the bane of our life until we have filled our soul with divine love.

Jesus the Christ, the Lamb of God, wants to make sure that we understand clearly what He means when He calls us to love. It is obviously not the love that the publicans had. Let me quote from Matthew 5, beginning with verse 38:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.
Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.
For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?
Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:38–48)

I have the conviction that Jesus wants us to look at love with more than romantic eyes, giving love only to the ones who love us. We have to remember that we live on the planet in which polarity still rules. We have been sent to this planet to learn. Learning and understanding go hand in hand with experiencing opposition. A big breakthrough will come when we have learned to embrace this commandment from Jesus to love as He did. Forgiveness is a form of love, and when we forgive it helps us to understand the meaning of the Atonement of the Lamb of God. We are able to say with greater reverence, “Behold the Lamb of God.”
When we open our door to Him, the Savior will perhaps whisper to us, “Until you can empty yourself completely of all negative and detrimental thoughts and feelings toward your fellowman, you cannot be refilled with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. When these qualities have been put in place, you will have no desire to be negative or critical, expressing unloving thoughts toward your fellowman.”

When we take seriously the invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to learn to love as He did, it will be a stretch to be filled with this love, maybe for all of us. But when we trust Jesus and see in Him the messenger of our Father to bring us the keys of the mysteries of godliness, we will be able to have the vision of how to bring peace on earth, goodwill toward all men, as the angels proclaimed when the Lamb of God was born. It would not surprise me if faith and trust in Christ are the same conditions required to temper the elements, thus calming the fear in the hearts of many.

The Lamb of God is inseparably linked to love, as Nephi learned: “And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:21–22).

When we love as the Savior did, we become partakers of the fruit of the divine tree, which is the most desirable above all things. It is then that we are able to answer the second question and fulfill the very purpose of our lives.

In my years of service, I have had the opportunity of meeting many members collectively and individually. I was always puzzled to find how many people were afraid of God instead of loving Him. The only answer I could find was that they really did not know God. When we know God, we are illuminated with love and light, and our soul is burning with the desire to shout and to praise His name.

In a recent talk to my own ward about this subject, I suddenly heard myself saying under the influence of the Spirit, “Do you know where fear comes from, how it can develop in people who have lived their whole lives full of goodness and wholesomeness?” I mentioned that in our premortal existence when we lived with God, we were created in perfection; we were pure, filled with joy, righteousness, and a desire for everything good. In our earthly experience, however, we became connected with the matter of this earth, and the natural man,
According to the prophets, is an enemy to God.

Becoming connected with this earthly matter—the earthly flesh and the divine spirit—is like pouring ink into clear water. Suddenly the clear water looks dark and ugly. We feel the darkness in our subconscious and react by feeling guilty. These feelings of guilt arise from our innate awareness that nothing unclean can come into the presence of God. This is one of the reasons the Lamb of God came to this earth—to wash us clean through His atoning sacrifice. When we see this, our gratitude for Him grows and we are filled with love for Him and for others.

When I was a young member in Germany, I was assigned as a home teacher to a woman who was recently baptized. I knew that she was baptized without her husband, who, I was informed, was an alcoholic. I was warned by the sister to come when her husband was not home because he could be very violent. As we visited her on a regular basis, she complained over and over about her husband. With all of our sympathy for her, we wanted her to grow and no longer be a victim but to become a master of her own destiny.

One day we asked her if she could think of something positive about her husband. At first she was upset. She tried to convince us there was nothing good about him, that he was a bad man and that she stayed with him only because of her financial dependence. We kept asking her, repeatedly, to think about him on a deeper level, and finally she smiled and told us something. We asked her to think of something else, and she was finally able to come up with ten good points.

I asked her when was the last time she told her husband that she loved him. She asked me how she could love a man like her husband! I said I did not ask her to love him, just when was the last time she had told him she did. She said it was fifteen years ago. I felt prompted to ask her another question, “Sister, could you do us a favor? The next time you are with your husband and he is sober, can you tell him at least one of the good things you think about him?” She again wanted to rebel but finally agreed to try.

The next Sunday I arrived early to Church and saw her walking up the stairs with a big smile on her face, radiating happiness, even bliss. She was wearing a new dress and looked at least ten years younger. When she saw me, she said:

Brother Busche, there is something I need to tell you. Last Friday evening he was home and sober. I came into the kitchen, and there he stood fixing himself a sandwich. As I looked at him, I saw his extremely
unhappy face. I saw how he had a hard time with his clumsy hands, and I felt compassion toward him. I felt inspired to praise him with one of the things I had written down on the paper. He reacted like he was hit by a whip. The fearful countenance turned toward me, and he saw in my eyes that I meant it.

Then the miracle happened. He began to cry like a little boy. He said that he didn’t deserve the accolade. He accused himself for all of the things I had earlier accused him for. He said he wasn’t good, he was terrible, and he was not worthy to be my husband. He fell on his knees in front of me and cried. Finally, he asked if I could forgive him and whether I would assist him with his commitment not to drink again so he could become the man I had married.

She said they embraced, both tearful and overcome by joy. They had the most beautiful evening together in a very long time. Yesterday he bought her a new dress and other things that he felt she needed. Above all, he had brought her to church and said he would pick her up when church was over, saving her at least two hours of traveling time.

You cannot imagine what joy came over me to see the kingdom grow. It did not necessarily occur because of programs and organizational acts of duty but because a heart changed under the influence of the Spirit from harshness to love. And it happened to a woman who came to understand what it means to be a daughter of God, learning of the divine core of her being. She continued on her way with a promise to be a creator of her destiny under the influence of the Spirit and the guidance of the Lord.

Our Eternal Reward

Nothing is impossible for those who believe in Jesus the Christ, for Christ came to take the veil of forgetfulness from our soul, to bring to our understanding a knowledge of who we are and what the purpose of our life is. When we know both, we truly behold the Lamb of God and find the answer to our third question: what happens to us after this life?

When we come to know we are children of a loving Heavenly Father and when we learn to live our life under the influence of the light and love of God, we will not need to wonder what will happen to us after our mortal life. The veil will be parted, and we will know that everything will be fine. In fact, as the Apostle Paul revealed, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).
I feel humbled and overwhelmed to speak with you about this sacred subject, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. I know that He lives. I am a living witness of His being alive in all my cells and in every fiber of my being. I feel the joy and the vibrancy of that knowledge.

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Notes


Holy Habits and Righteous Routines

President Cecil O. Samuelson

President Cecil O. Samuelson is president of BYU and a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. This talk was given at the priesthood session of the Utah Valley Multistake Conference on September 9, 2006.

In June 2006, at the Missionary Training Center during an evening dinner for the new mission presidents, Elder Dallin H. Oaks commented on an excellent talk he had heard given by a stake president in New York whose theme was “Holy Habits and Righteous Routines.” Elder Oaks did not recite any of the substance of the talk, nor have I seen a copy of it. I take on faith that it was as good as was reported.

Since that time, I have thought repeatedly about the notion of holy habits and righteous routines. I have made, and added to, my lists in each category. My purpose today is not to share my lists. Rather, it is to suggest to you the benefit and utility of constructing your own lists or agendas of holy habits and righteous routines. I believe you will find such an exercise beneficial, as have I, if you will then begin to practice what you believe more diligently. Particularly as priesthood leaders with the dual tasks of helping our people develop stronger and deeper faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and doing all we can to strengthen families, I believe it is quite easy to understand the positive benefits of holy habits and righteous routines.

Preparing a Faithful People

At the outset, I wish to commend you brethren for what you are and what you do. In the three and a half years I have lived among you, worked closely with several of you, and have been in more than a few of the stakes represented at this conference, I have been impressed with both your capacities and your devoted and superb service.
Like you, I have high regard for the heroes of the scriptures, and I firmly believe you are in the same class and rank as so many who have served with great devotion and effectiveness in past ages. One of my favorites is Captain Moroni. Although I did not fulfill my military duty during wartime as did President Thomas S. Monson, I was in uniform long enough to appreciate those officers and leaders who were able to inspire and lead with effectiveness. Moroni was one who clearly inspired and led effectively, and he was also an exemplary priesthood leader and teacher. In the midst of his comprehensive military efforts and his concentration on tactics and strategy, the scriptures record that he “had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God” (Alma 48:7). That sounds to me exactly like what you, in your various callings, have been assigned to do. We are charged to prepare “the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God.”

Likewise, I believe it would be fair to say that you brethren in the Marriott Center this morning largely merit the same compliments paid to Captain Moroni, and to Helaman, as they lived in very trying times the century before the mortal advent of Jesus Christ. Think of yourselves and of your associates as I read this assessment of Moroni and Helaman: “Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God. Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni” (Alma 48:17–19).

I am a witness that you brethren are serviceable to the people and to God, and I thank you for all you do so well. It is clear to me, as I read both the scriptural account and between the lines as it were, that these great men had both holy habits and righteous routines. May I suggest some potential applications for you to consider in your stewardships.

Preserving Order in God’s Kingdom

Some of you, because of your specific presiding positions, have received or will soon be receiving the new edition of *Book 1: Church Handbook of Instructions*. What will you do with it and why?

I know the Brethren hope that the answers to these questions will be obvious, and we will soon receive some vital training to make it so.
I will give you a sneak preview: it is perfectly all right for you to read, study, understand, and apply what is written. For many months now, this new edition has been written, reviewed, rewritten, prayed over, and edited. It is not that the doctrine has changed, for it has not. It is that some conditions or concerns have arisen or changed with the growth and increased complexity of a worldwide Church, and instruction needs to be made more current and reflective of the additional or modified policies and procedures that have been adopted since the last edition was published.

In the administration of the Church, there is the need for order and exactness in some procedures, processes, and policies. There is also the need for freedom and flexibility for leaders to adapt certain circumstances to their local conditions and perhaps even the preferences of inspired stake presidencies and bishoprics. The major challenge is to be clear in our minds about what is prescribed and what is not.

One of the things that occupies much of the time and energy of the First Presidency is dealing with the letters from stake presidents and other leaders who are pleading for ratification of actions they have taken that were either incorrect or not their prerogative to make. I hope it is not news to this group that a man must be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood before being sent to the temple to be endowed or that in certain disciplinary cases the permission of the First Presidency is required before any change in status can occur.

I am not suggesting that we do not or cannot make mistakes or that we cannot repent. I am sure there are many of you, like I, who are grateful for forgiveness and the opportunity to repent and do better. Let me tell you of a personal experience that has left an indelible mark on me and for which I am very grateful.

When I was a very young stake president, a bishop and I worked with a fine young man who had made a terrible mistake that cost him his membership in the Church. While embarrassed and chastened, he was completely obedient and followed every suggestion and direction explicitly. His wife had forgiven him, and we felt the marriage was on solid ground. After a few months, his wife, who was expecting a baby, made a tearful plea that we do all that we could to hasten his readmission to the Church so that they might again have the priesthood in their home. I was touched by their sincerity and desire. Understanding less then than I do now about the reasons we do and do not do some of the things outlined in our policies and procedures, I wrote a rather passionate, but I hope respectful, letter to the First Presidency in advocacy for the young man’s position.
In two or three weeks, I received an unexpected phone call at my office. As I took the call, I almost fainted. I immediately recognized the soft, gravelly, and powerful voice of President Spencer W. Kimball, the prophet at that time. He greeted me kindly, said that he had received my letter, and then asked if I had my scriptures handy. I was then working in a public institution and was grateful that I could open my desk drawer and place the sacred volumes on the desk before me. He asked me to open the scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants section 58. When I got there, in his kindly way, he asked me to read verse 42: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”

He said, “Isn’t that a wonderful promise? I hope you are teaching that to your people.” He then asked me to read verse 43: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.” President Kimball then said, “Isn’t it wonderful that your young man has confessed his sins? I wonder if you would feel all right if we give him a little more time to prove to himself that he has forsaken them?”

I, of course, immediately agreed that this was the approach to take. He then said, “That’s splendid. Thank you very much. Good-bye.” I learned a great deal that day, brethren, and continue to learn from it.

Unfortunately, in a way, the Church is much larger, more complex, and the pressures on the senior Brethren are much greater than ever before. They simply cannot pick up the phone and individually teach us what we need to know, although I am amazed at the level and intensity of their individual ministries. We owe it to them, the Church, and the people we serve to know and fully understand the policies and procedures of the kingdom so that our presiding leaders will not need to take the time and effort to teach us what we should have already known. A careful, regular, and thorough study of the handbooks that contain our policies and procedures will teach us clearly, in most cases, what it is we need to do and when it is we need to seek the direction and counsel of, or permission from, the First Presidency.

Watching Over the “Wanderers”

Amidst the unsurpassed blessings of living in Utah are some challenges reasonably unique to us and other areas where there is a strong concentration of Church members. As we all know, many of our young people have multiple options as to where they can attend and affiliate with the Church. Some are authorized options such as the geographical home ward where they live, singles wards and branches sponsored by a
stake or group of stakes, or university and college stakes and wards.

In addition we have those I term “vagabond” Saints. These are those who consider themselves to be faithful Church members but attend wherever the fancy strikes them on a particular Sunday. Just as the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, so are the young women more beautiful and the young men more handsome in someone else’s ward. We have more than a few with their records in the lost and unknown files. We applaud you clerks for keeping the records clean and current, but we would remind all of you that we are in the people-saving business and must find a way to teach all of our people, including ourselves, the principles of accountability. When we cause the records to be removed from the stewardship of concerned and devoted priesthood leaders, the risk of not retaining these folks is very great. Please make every effort to stay in touch and follow up so that new priesthood leaders will know to look for these more casual members.

At least two of you in attendance have mentioned to me the frustration that occurs when you have felt it necessary to deny a temple recommend to one of these young people only to see them a few weeks later in the temple with a recommend issued from another unit. This ought not to be. We know that you who work with this highly mobile group of young people carry a tremendous load. We also know, and hope you know as well, that we have policies and procedures established for our use that would not make such an unfortunate occurrence possible. Please make the necessary calls and follow the essential procedures to see that we avoid these kinds of errors.

**Retrenching against the Adversary**

We live in a time when the adversary is very active and is working very hard on our people in many ways previously not encountered. I do not believe there is a single stake in our midst where there are not those who are caught in the vicious jaws of pornography addiction. I hope none of you is in this situation, but if you are, I plead with you to work confidentially with your priesthood leader and get the help that can lead to repentance and healing. The Church has more resources than ever before to help in addressing this horrible epidemic, and this is also true in most of our communities.

Repentance and change, however, are still individual processes that must begin with an increased understanding of the Atonement and its power to save. We, like King Benjamin, “cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that [we] cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). We do plead
with you to stay close to your people and do all you can to help them with their struggles.

In addition to these many kinds of overt and serious sins creeping in among us, we also see some compelling evidence that casualness about some very important and sacred things is becoming more common as well. I'll mention just one example, but I am afraid there are many, and you will already be aware of them or can be if you watch carefully and prayerfully.

The proper wearing of the temple garment for those who have had the privilege of being endowed is very sacred and important for reasons that are clearly explained in the temple. It is very sad to see those who should know better dressing in clothing that requires the elimination or modification of the garment. Similarly, to see those in exercise apparel of various types doing their gardening, shopping, and other activities with apparent abandonment of the garment because they played tennis or jogged early in the morning is disappointing. We need to be sensitive to the feelings of the people, but we also need to be clear and courageous so as not to fail them because of our natural reticence to address these issues.

Let me share some scriptural insights that Jacob the brother of Nephi reported in dealing with some of the “wicked practices” he encountered in his ministry. I hope we can liken to ourselves what he says.

Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:17–19)

I do not know about you, but I am satisfied that I do not want to carry anyone else’s sins or shortcomings. I have enough of my own and to spare!

Assisting Young People

Lastly, brethren, I hope you will continue your very good work with our youth and our young single adults. Elder Bateman and your Area Seventies have been discussing and emphasizing the importance
holy habits and righteous routines
of this with you. We are grateful for the progress that is being made, but we are reminded that we still have much more to do as the forces of evil attack our wonderful young people with a viciousness that seems to be unprecedented.

As you know we still have many challenges in the transition process for our young women from the Young Women program to Relief Society. The Relief Society general president and the Young Women general president, with their counselors, boards, and priesthood advisers continue to provide support for you and your ward and stake leaders. Please be knowledgeable about the guidelines and directions given on this vital transition, and then within these bounds do all you can to reach and retain the young women in your stewardships. The minions of the adversary know that if they can detract or capture the next generation of mothers, these angels of darkness will have made their own jobs so much easier. Our local sister leaders, called under the inspiration received by you, are generally wise, thoughtful, in tune with the spirit, and effective. Please listen to them, counsel with them, and support and assist them as they go about this essential work of building and retaining our special young women of the Church.

We thank you so much for all you do for our young men. If all of the Church were as effective as this group of stakes in preparing young men and women for missionary service, we would have a much larger and more effective force. Thank you for what you are doing, and please do all you can to help every able young man put his life in order to qualify and succeed. We ask that you also give particular attention to our newly returned missionaries. While the vast majority is doing very well, we are having too many get into needless difficulty during their first year home.

Many of those with special challenges now are those that had worthiness issues prior to their missions. Almost all were able to clean up their lives, enter the mission field worthily, and return home honorably. The disappointments tend to recur when they come home and return to some of the same friends, habits, and problems that created heartbreak for them initially. Please stay close to all of our young men and returned missionaries. Help them understand that the patterns of obedience, prayer, scripture study, Church attendance, and service will bring the same joy and protection at home as they experienced as missionaries.

We must remember that they, like us, vitally require the same three things President Hinckley identified as needs of new members: friends, responsibility, and nourishment by the good word of God. They
deserve all three in an appropriate and supportive environment.

Please encourage our young people to be involved in the institute of religion if they are not attending a Church university. Please teach them the importance of accountability to their bishops as well as the accountability the bishops have for them. Please give them a meaningful Church calling. It is curious to me that we send our young men and women out into the world to serve missions and let them make decisions as to who is qualified to be admitted into the Church, and then when they are honorably released, full of testimony and enthusiasm, we often do not trust them to teach in the deacons quorum. And bishops, if your returned missionaries are not attending your ward, please stay in contact with their priesthood leaders in the student or singles unit.

As I stated at the outset, so many of you are doing all of these things, and much more, so very well. I am sure that the Church has never been in better hands than yours. Your testimonies are strong, your leadership is effective, and countless lives are blessed daily because of your faith and inspired service to those in your charge. I pray heaven’s blessings on you, your families, and those in your stewardship as you prepare their minds and hearts “to be faithful unto the Lord their God” (Alma 48:7).

I bear testimony of the reality of the Restoration, of your priesthood authority and callings, and of the inspired leadership of those presiding over us. NE
The Powers of the Atonement: Insights from the Book of Mormon

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The Book of Mormon includes the significant subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” As part of this further testament of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon stands as a vital witness of and source of information about the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is amazing how much the Book of Mormon teaches about the Atonement, and I believe there is no better book of scripture that helps us understand the doctrine, significance, and testimony of Christ’s Atonement. This paper focuses on a few Book of Mormon passages that teach us about the Atonement and especially its power.

Probably all of us have had the experience of standing near a cascading waterfall or a raging river. The sheer force, deafening noise, pounding strength, and massive volume testify to water’s great power. Through technology, the potential power of water can be transformed into electricity by giant generators in powerhouses. This electricity can be transmitted over miles until it reaches our homes. Within our homes, electrical power can perform many extremely helpful and needed functions such as providing light and heat and powering appliances. After we pay a monthly bill to the power company, we can access this power with the mere flip of a switch. This source of power has become so commonplace that it is usually only when we have a power outage or go camping that we remember to appreciate it.

I would like to compare this electrical power to the power of the Atonement. The original source of the atoning power, comparable to the mighty water, is God. The powerhouse that transforms and
transmits the electrical power is Jesus Christ, who was given the mission and ability from God to bring redemptive power to mankind. While it might not be as easy as flipping a switch, we can have access to this power in our homes or lives by paying the price of repentance and wisely using our agency to come unto Christ and be His disciples. Just as electrical power can do many things within our homes such as running appliances and machines, lighting up rooms, washing clothes, and giving heat, the power of the Atonement can perform many necessary functions within our lives. Yet we often take it for granted and do not fully appreciate its incredible blessings in our spiritual development.

Sometimes we reduce the Atonement to a few things, such as the power to forgive sins and the power to resurrect, when in reality the Atonement encompasses many other aspects of our Father’s plan. Perhaps then it would be helpful to use the term the powers of the Atonement. Then we might more fully appreciate how the Atonement can work by recognizing its effects in many different areas of our lives. Some of these effects include the Atonement’s power to withstand Satan, forgive sins, heal infirmities, satisfy justice, raise the dead, strengthen weakness, and change hearts. We may not be able to comprehend everything about the Atonement, but President Boyd K. Packer has stated, “It was through reading the scriptures, and listening, that I could understand, at least in part, the power of the Atonement. . . . You need not know everything before the power of the Atonement will work for you.”

President Packer also has pointed out, “For some reason we think the Atonement of Christ applies only at the end of mortal life to redemption from the Fall, from spiritual death. It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life.”

Before discussing specific examples of the powers of the Atonement, we must first understand how to become at one with Christ and thus receive these blessings of the Atonement. Helaman 5:11 explains that first Christ was given power from the Father to redeem mankind. This key passage then describes the vital role of repentance in gaining access to that redemption. “And he [Christ] hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance.” The second part of the verse further emphasizes repentance as the access point to the power of redemption: “Therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.”

Thus, one of the purposes of angels is to “declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance.” We usually associate the word tidings with
Christmas and the tidings of great joy the angels proclaimed at Christ’s birth. The 1828 definition of tidings includes “news; advice; information; intelligence; account of what has taken place, and was not before known.” Here in the Book of Mormon are more tidings of great joy, as the angels help give the news, information, and knowledge of the conditions for repentance, and how we can receive blessings from the plan of redemption. And it is through abiding by the conditions of repentance that we gain access to the redeeming power of Jesus Christ.

**Withstand Satan**

If we now follow this train of thought into the next verse, we see Helaman reminding his sons to build their foundation upon Christ: “It is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, . . . that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo” (v. 12) In other words, one of the powers of the Atonement is that as we repent, a key part of building our foundation on Christ, He can give us power to withstand Satan, to remain steadfast when the devil’s mighty storms beat upon us.

**Forgive Sins**

Besides the ability to withstand the devil, additional powers of the Atonement are described throughout the Book of Mormon. Alma 12:33–34 mentions God’s plan of redemption that He revealed to man: “If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son; therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.” This passage teaches us that we shall have a claim to mercy through Christ if we repent. As we come unto Christ, the atoning power can bring a remission of our sins. Many Book of Mormon passages describe the cleansing power of the Atonement with the paradox of our garments becoming pure and white through being washed in Christ’s blood (see Alma 5:21; Ether 13:10). According to Moroni 10:33, we can be sanctified, holy, and without spot “through the shedding of the blood of Christ.” What a tremendous blessing to transform the stain of sin into something clean, pure, and worthy to abide in God’s presence!
Heal Infirmites

Beyond forgiveness of sins, Alma taught the people of Gideon in Alma 7 that Jesus’s experiences as part of the Atonement would help Him know how to succor people’s infirmities. In verse 11 Alma says that Christ would suffer pains, afflictions, and temptations in order that He could take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of His people. He continues in verse 12: “He will take upon Him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” Christ had to experience certain feelings and afflictions during His mortal life so that He could fully understand what we feel, thereby giving Him power to heal our infirmities. These infirmities include sorrow, sickness, pain, loneliness, and injury.

The power of the Atonement is thus infinite in healing all types of infirmities for each individual circumstance. It is a comfort to have a Savior who knows our personal, intimate needs and who, through the experiences of His suffering, can share our burdens and relieve us with His mercy. He can also provide restitution and relief for victims when mortal restitution is impossible or undone. For example, though a parent may neglect a child and cannot make restitution for the emotional trauma of that child, yet Christ’s Atonement can provide a restitution of love, emotional strength, trust, and other blessings to the child, thereby bringing a healing power beyond mortal abilities. President Packer taught, “Sometimes we harm ourselves and seriously injure others in ways that we alone cannot repair. We break things that we alone cannot fix. It is then in our nature to feel guilt and humiliation and suffering, which we alone cannot cure. That is when the healing power of the Atonement will help.”

Satisfy Justice

Another power of the Atonement clearly described in the Book of Mormon is the power of mercy to satisfy the demands of justice. On the one hand, we are grateful for a just God who is unchanging and in whom we can have confidence to do right so that we can develop faith in Him. Yet the law of justice brings consequences for both right and wrong choices; if we bore the full brunt of justice’s demand for our sins, we would be unable to return to our Father in Heaven and be exalted. But because of the Atonement, mercy now becomes part of the equation, and it can satisfy, but not rob, the demands of justice (see Alma 42:25). Alma 42:14–15 captures the dilemma from which we as fallen
morts needed rescue: “And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence. And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.”

Because of His Atonement, Christ now stands between us and the demands of justice. Mosiah 15:8–9 teaches, “And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice” (emphasis added). Christ is the great intercessor because He pleads on our behalf before the Father; He stands as our advocate before justice, satisfying justice’s demands. We eternally would be left out of the presence of God because of justice’s demands were it not for the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

**Raise the Dead**

One of the most powerful and miraculous manifestations of the power of the Atonement is the Resurrection. Many Book of Mormon prophets taught that resurrection will occur as a result of Christ’s Atonement. Alma plainly taught his son Corianton that “the atonement bringeth to pass the Resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice” (Alma 42:23). Jacob invited his listeners to reconcile themselves to God “through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son” so that they may obtain “a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God” (Jacob 4:11). Abinadi declared, “If Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death . . . there could have been no resurrection. But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ” (Mosiah 16:7–8). Mormon specifically pointed out that Christ was risen from the dead “by the power of the Father, . . . whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up” (Mormon 7:5).
The Book of Mormon peoples in 3 Nephi became firsthand witnesses to Christ’s Resurrection when He appeared to them and allowed them to “see with their eyes” and “feel with their hands” the nail marks in His resurrected body (3 Nephi 11:15). This dramatic manifestation, coupled with the appearance and ministration of many resurrected Saints among the Nephites at the time of Jesus’s Resurrection (see 3 Nephi 23:9–10), provides powerful evidence of the reality of our resurrection through Jesus Christ. As the Life of the World, Jesus is able to bring life to each one of us, even after our death.

**Strengthen Weakness**

A few Book of Mormon passages describe an initially perplexing interaction between us and Christ that ultimately leads to great strength and power through grace. Ether 12:27 contains the Lord’s promise that if we come unto Him, He will show us our weakness. I do not believe God gives us weakness. Rather, our weakness is our imperfect mortal condition, in which many weaknesses are inherent (biological and genetic failures, limited physical and spiritual abilities, the veil of forgetfulness). While initially it may not seem like a blessing to see our weakness, the Lord knows His purpose in doing this. Just as a doctor tells us about our medical problems that need treatment, Christ shows us our spiritual weakness so we know what needs improvement. This process humbles us and helps us realize that we must rely on Christ in order to overcome our weak mortal frailties. We come to know that His grace, which ultimately flows from the Atonement, is sufficient to compensate for our weakness. And through His grace and condescension, we will have power to do great things, and He will make weak things become strong.

If we look at the example of Moroni, who feared that his weakness in writing would cause the Gentiles to reject the Book of Mormon, we see how the Lord has indeed made this weak thing strong (see Ether 12:23–28). How many millions of people have felt the power of Moroni’s testimony and been changed by following Moroni’s challenge in Moroni 10:3–5? Despite Moroni’s feelings of inadequacy in expressing his thoughts into writing, his testimony and conviction come through and have a tremendous effect on the pure in heart. The same blessing of being made strong through grace can be ours if we humble ourselves and have faith in Christ.
Change Hearts

Another way that the power of the Atonement can affect us is bringing about a change of heart. The Book of Mormon is replete with examples of individuals who experienced a mighty change of heart and became strong disciples of Jesus Christ through repentance. Alma the Younger recounted his powerful transformation to his son Helaman in Alma 36. As he was in spiritual anguish remembering all his sins and his leading away many members of the Church (vv. 12–16), he remembered his father’s teachings about “the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (v. 17). He then cried to Jesus, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (v. 18). And in that moment, the change of heart, the change of feelings, the change of discipleship occurred: “And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (vv. 19–20). From that moment to the end of his ministry on earth, Alma had a changed heart and labored without ceasing to bring other souls to repentance so that, in his words, “I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (v. 24). His change of heart and the change in the direction of his life were brought about because he called upon Christ, demonstrated faith in Him, and received His grace and strength. Alma could not do it alone.

Another dramatic Book of Mormon change of heart occurred in the people listening to King Benjamin’s speech. As he taught them about the future Christ and His atoning role, they realized their carnal state and cried out for mercy: “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 4:2). After their heartfelt prayer, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come” (Mosiah 4:3). A little later they testified to the truthfulness of King Benjamin’s words because of the mighty change that the Spirit of the Lord had wrought, a change so powerful that
they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). And they recognized that, as it is in all cases, the change came about because of their faith in Jesus Christ and in His atoning mission (see Mosiah 5:4), and they became children of Christ because He had spiritually begotten them (see Mosiah 5:7).

Conclusion

As we can see from just a few passages and experiences, the Book of Mormon is a valuable witness to the doctrine, reality, and power of the Atonement. The sweet, gentle, yet powerful Atonement is available to bring about a mighty change of heart and to keep that spiritual change alive continually. We can turn to the Book of Mormon to learn more about the Atonement because the Book of Mormon truly is another witness of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. It even contains Jesus’s own witness of the Atonement which He told to the Nephites: “I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11).

All the Book of Mormon prophets invite us to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of the Atonement. Jacob invited his listeners to reconcile themselves to the will of God and to remember that “it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (2 Nephi 10:24). And then he pled, “Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 10:25). King Benjamin counseled that we can only overcome the natural man and become a saint “through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Moroni warned us not to deny the power of God, “for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men” (Moroni 10:7). Moroni’s conclusion to the Book of Mormon invites: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:32–33).
The invitation has been extended to us throughout the Book of Mormon to take full advantage of the powers of the Atonement through coming unto Christ. Sister Sheri L. Dew has described our part in our salvation:

Our responsibility is to learn to draw upon the power of the Atonement. Otherwise we walk through mortality relying solely on our own strength. And to do that is to invite the frustration of failure and to refuse the most resplendent gift in time or eternity. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed . . . and he receive not the gift?” (D&C 88:33). . . . The Lord is our advocate, and He “knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1). In other words, He knows how to succor all of us. But we activate the power of the Atonement in our lives. We do this by first believing in Him, by repenting, by obeying His commandments, by partaking of sacred ordinances and keeping covenants, and by seeking after Him in fasting and prayer, in the scriptures, and in the temple.⁶

We thus gain access to the powers of the Atonement as we pay the price of repentance and demonstrate our faith in Christ. And just as electrical power can be used to do many things within our homes, the powers of the Atonement can affect so many aspects of our life. It can help us withstand the powers of Satan, cleanse us from our sins, heal our personal infirmities, satisfy the demands of justice, raise the dead, strengthen weakness, and bring about a mighty change of heart. I am eternally grateful for our Savior, who partook of the bitter cup on our behalf and provided a way for us to endure through our mortal experience to salvation, and I am grateful for the Book of Mormon, which helps us draw closer to Him. Christ’s Atonement reaches into so many facets of our life because of His infinite nature and His perfect love for us. He has been given all power to accomplish all His works on our behalf (see 1 Nephi 9:6). ⁸⁸

Notes

3. Noah Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* shows what the word *tidings* meant around the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon.
Increasing student participation leads to greater retention, richer diversity of insights, better student preparation, and improved communication skills.
The Case for Student Participation

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In recent years, Church leaders have repeatedly reminded gospel teachers of the importance of drawing students into the learning process more actively.

• Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gave a remarkable demonstration as part of the worldwide leadership training on February 10, 2007, showing gospel teachers how to involve students in our lessons. Among other things, he emphasized it is “better to take just a few good ideas and get good discussion—and good learning—than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual.”¹

• During the February 2006 address to religious educators, Elder David A. Bednar reminded us that particularly when it comes to learning by faith, “we primarily are to act and not only to be acted upon—especially as we seek to obtain and apply spiritual knowledge.”² Although his focus was on gospel learners, the implication of Elder Bednar’s teachings for gospel instructors is clear: we must provide opportunities for our students to act, rather than simply acting upon them.

• In his 2005 address to religious educators, Elder Richard G. Scott gave a role-playing example of his own of how to help students glean principles from scriptures. He was downright emphatic in pushing participation: “Never, and I mean never, give a lecture where there is no student participation. A talking head is the weakest form of class instruction.”³
The CES Teaching Emphasis has invited seminary and institute teachers to, among other things, “help students learn how to explain, share, and testify of the doctrines and principles of the restored gospel. We are to give them opportunities to do so with each other in class.”

The upshot of this collective counsel is clear: the more opportunities we give students to actively participate in the process of gaining insights, the more our students will retain those insights.

While this counsel is hardly new, it represents a dramatic change from the national norm. One survey concludes that 73 to 83 percent of college professors “spend almost the entire hour lecturing to a passive student audience.” Sadly, an informal survey of BYU–Idaho students shows that despite the emphasis on greater student participation in our classes, my colleagues and I still have a long way to go in implementing the teaching approach we have been invited to adopt. Anecdotal evidence suggests this may be true for other religious educators as well, although many have made great strides in recent years.

Although many religious educators have embraced the idea of increasing student participation, some continue to question whether greater student participation is truly desirable and possible in their classrooms. While recognizing that lecturing is an important element in any college classroom, my aim in this article is to review the benefits of greater student participation and address some of the common concerns about doing so.

Benefits of Student Participation

There are many potential benefits to greater student participation in the classroom, but I focus here on three that have been most significant in my experience and most applicable in the university setting: greater retention, richer diversity of insights, and better student preparation.

Greater retention. President Harold B. Lee once expressed his “deep concern about the fact that some [students] could go through Primary, Sunday School, Mutual, priesthood quorums, and seminary and come out the other end without testimonies.” His explanation for why this was happening was simple: “Because our young people have grown up spectators.” His concerns in the spiritual context echo those of Derek Bok in an academic context. The former Harvard president wrote that what students retain is “likely to be determined less by which courses they take than by how they are taught and how well
they are taught.” In particular, Bok notes, “Most professors teach as they traditionally have, [continuing to] ignore the accumulating body of experimental work suggesting that forms of teaching that engage students actively in the learning process do significantly better than conventional methods in achieving goals, such as critical thinking and problem-solving.”

During a question-and-answer session at BYU–Idaho, Elder Bednar articulated this principle in a powerful fashion when a student asked for a scripture reference Elder Bednar used in his remarks. “If I tell you, you’ll never remember,” Elder Bednar replied. “If you discover it for yourself, you’ll never forget.” Similarly, in his February 2006 address to religious educators, Elder Bednar noted: “The most important learnings of life are caught, not taught.” One of my students put it this way: “I seem to remember those points the most that I verbalize in class.”

Research bears out what intuition predicts: students retain far more knowledge in classrooms with active student participation than in lecture halls where they passively ingest professors’ insights. In his inaugural address at Harvard nearly 150 years ago, Charles W. Eliot similarly observed, “The lecturer pumps laboriously into sieves. The water may be wholesome, but it runs through. A mind must work to grow.” Of course, minds can work and grow when reading, taking notes, and listening attentively, but students’ minds are stretched in a distinctive way when they are invited to verbalize their newfound knowledge. As we give students more opportunities to express their thoughts in class, we help them assume the burden of learning and discovering insights for themselves.

The Lord has emphasized the fact that teaching something helps us better understand the very principles we teach: “Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly” (D&C 88:78–79; emphasis added). Perhaps because teaching principles is one of the best ways to learn them, the Lord directs us, at least in a gospel setting, to “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).

Diversity of insights. When the teacher alone speaks in class, the database of knowledge, experience, and insights is limited to one person. But when teachers allow students to share their insights, the database increases dramatically. For example, during a class covering 1
Nephi 16, I invited students to share some insight they had about the story of Nephi and his broken bow. One amateur archer noted that Nephi had to fashion not only a new bow, but a new arrow—even though the text mentions only his bow being broken (see 1 Nephi 16:18–23). The student explained that different types of bows require different types of arrows. Because Nephi made his new bow from wood rather than steel, this student observed, it made perfect sense that he would also have to fashion a new arrow.\

The student’s insight was just one of many things I have learned from the impressive pool of my students’ collective knowledge. Much of that knowledge comes from our students’ experience: being an avid archer, having divorced parents, being a racial minority, having to choose between being in a successful rock band and serving a mission, living in Saudi Arabia as an American citizen, having joined the Church over the objections of parents, and having raised sheep—to name just a few of the many experiences students bring to the discussion. Providing opportunities for students to incorporate their experiences into their learning can enrich the learning experience for students and faculty alike. On more than one occasion, President Bednar declared that “any faculty member at BYU–Idaho who does not believe that he or she can learn something from a student does not deserve to be a faculty member at BYU–Idaho.”

**Greater motivation for preparation.** My law school experience taught me that where teachers expect and even require students to participate in classroom discussion regularly, student preparation improves dramatically. Students who know they can skate through a lecture without any risk of being called upon are less likely to prepare for class as intensively as those students who know their teachers might call upon them. Just as most of us learn more from preparing for a Gospel Doctrine class we teach than one in which we are students, students tend to learn more when they prepare for classes in which they know they will be actively involved. Admittedly, those of us who have the luxury of giving grades have an advantage in this regard, but even without any grades at stake, students tend to prepare for class more when teachers expect them to participate.

I was reminded vividly of this principle last year at a BYU–Idaho faculty meeting at which a colleague, Rhonda Seamons, used a novel technique to facilitate participation in a large group. Before the workshop began, she circulated among the participants, inviting those willing to answer a question during the seminar to write their names on the paper and place them in a jar. I decided to be a good sport and
entered my name. When the meeting began, however, I got quite a jolt when Rhonda mentioned in passing the reading we were supposed to have done in preparation for the workshop. Having forgotten that reading had been assigned, I immediately regretted putting my name in the jar. But I was stuck, so I paid rapt attention to the speakers and discussion, quickly formulating an answer in my mind to each question that was asked. My name was not drawn until one of the very last questions, keeping me mentally alert throughout the entire meeting. The prospect of participating had sharpened my focus markedly, yielding insights not just from the question I was eventually called on to answer but from every question for which I had formulated an answer.

**Concerns Regarding Increased Participation**

Notwithstanding these benefits, some faculty harbor genuine concerns about talking less and encouraging students to talk more. I will briefly address some of the concerns I have heard most frequently.

1. *It’s hard for me to see how my students will learn if I’m not teaching.* If our students are going to gather new information and master new concepts, doesn’t the teacher need to be the one doing most of the talking and teaching?

   *Room for teaching by explanation.* No one calling for more student participation is suggesting there should be *no* lecturing in the classroom. Most teachers committed to drawing students into the learning process through participation still spend some percentage of their class time explaining things. The question is simply how much of any given hour teachers should spend explaining things.

   *Learning by participating.* Student participation is a means, not an end. Thus, the fact that students are talking does not guarantee that they are learning—or learning anything worthwhile. But with some student preparation, a bit of explanation by a teacher, and above all, some thoughtful questions from the guide, students can learn in the very process of discussing things they did not previously understand or only recently learned.

   For me personally, the most vivid example of learning through participation was my experience at Stanford Law School. The professors were clearly more knowledgeable and more intelligent than the students, yet the heart of almost all their courses were student discussions fueled by great questions. Professors used brief explanatory lectures to introduce topics, clarify principles, and sum up discussions, but almost never as their sole or dominant mode of teaching. My classmates and I were certainly not experts, but because our professors expected it, we
had read the assigned cases and were thoroughly prepared to discuss their implications. With insightful questions, our professors gave us opportunities to articulate principles we had just learned. They also helped us promptly reexamine our newfound conclusions by asking probing questions that challenged our assumptions. In the process, we almost always gained insights we had not yet even considered. This is the very essence of the Socratic method at its best: to lead students to discover new insights through a series of thought-provoking questions.

Sometimes I try this in my classes with a single question or two:

- What insights do you gain from these verses by circling the connecting word for? “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17; emphasis added).
- Why was Moroni a particularly good mentor for Joseph Smith?
- How is it possible that someone could give away all their goods to the poor and yet still not have charity? Wouldn’t they be the epitome of charity if they did that?
- How is it fair for the Lord to command us to forgive people who have wronged us and not repented? How have you been able to forgive people in such circumstances?

On other occasions, I might try to help students arrive at a certain destination through a more elaborate series of questions. For example, rather than announce a wonderful insight I read in an *Ensign* article about the plagues the Lord inflicted upon the Egyptians, I might ask these questions:

- Why might the Lord have used plagues to free the Israelites? Why not simply strike Pharaoh dead or cause a deep sleep to come upon all the Egyptians? What advantages do you see to using plagues?
- After my students speculate about that question for I bit, I ask them a second question: What can you tell me about the Egyptians’ religious beliefs? Although none of them are Egyptologists, my students usually establish that Egyptians believed in multiple gods, with each god having responsibility for certain elements or activities.
- I will often follow this question up with another, such as, How might the Egyptians’ religious beliefs have affected the Israelites, who had lived among them for 400 years?
I then have students read Exodus 12:12, in which the Lord declares, “Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.”

Finally, I might ask, How do the plagues God inflicted on the Egyptians discredit the Egyptians’ gods? After my students begin making the connections, I show a slide lining up each of the plagues with an Egyptian god discredited by the affliction.

Eventually, my students come to the same conclusion that Renee Vorhaus did: “Through the plagues, God showed his power over all the principal gods that were worshipped in the Nile valley, discrediting them and their presumed power.” The students realize that the Lord may have needed not only to get Israel out of Egypt, but to get Egypt out of Israel. But when I help them discover this insight for themselves, I sometimes hear a sound that I never hear when I simply announce or explain such insights to my students without inviting them along on the journey: the sigh or moan of epiphany. Few sounds are more rewarding for a teacher to hear.

2. Doesn’t student participation inevitably come at the cost of covering material? Each minute students spend participating in class is one less minute I have to teach.

Student teaching. I have felt this concern at times myself, worrying that time spent in student participation was time sacrificed on the altar of pedagogical inefficiency. Over time, however, I have realized that rather than merely tread water, great classroom discussions actually cover ground. Guided by skilled teachers, good discussions cover much or most of the material teachers otherwise would have covered themselves. In the end, they arrive at the same destination as they would have if they had lectured, but students have done much of the driving.

One Harvard physics professor conducted an experiment with his students demonstrating that students were capable of learning even more when he talked less. In class, he would briefly explain a physics principle and then give a test question about the principle. After all his students had noted their answers, he gave them a few minutes, working in small groups, to try to change each other’s minds. While watching these small groups in action, the physics professor repeatedly saw that those students who had answered the question correctly were often better at intuitively understanding why some of their classmates had gotten the answer wrong—and at helping correct the misunderstanding. Students taught in this way “made twice as much progress in
grasping the underlying physics as well as substantially outperforming their classmates in solving the quantitative problems common to most introductory physics courses.”

In short, students learned more in the classes where the professor actually talked less.

Once again, it is worth noting that as with this professor’s approach, even active guides will need to precede and connect some discussions by explaining certain concepts themselves. Efficiently combining lecture and discussion methods can minimize the trade-off between greater student participation and covering material. For example, a New Testament teacher might share some factual background about Paul’s life without inviting any participation. But after a brief lecture on the subject—or perhaps at the outset—the teacher might ask students how Paul’s background prepared him for his mission. As students answer, they will invariably make many or even most of the points the teacher would have made if she had simply lectured on the same question herself. She can then fill in any missing thoughts by concluding with additional insights of her own.

Covering material versus mastering material. While wise teachers may use discussion to cover much of the same material as lecturers, they may ultimately cover less material than someone who simply lectures. That would be a problem if simply covering material were the goal. Elder Richard G. Scott reminds us that it is better for students to understand a few significant principles well than a potpourri of principles poorly: “Remember, your highest priority is not to get through all the material if that means it cannot be properly absorbed. Do what you’re able to do with understanding. . . . Determine . . . what is of highest priority.”

Elder Holland reiterated this point even more bluntly during the February 2007 worldwide leadership training:

In discussing preparation, may I also encourage you to avoid a temptation that faces almost every teacher in the Church; at least it has certainly been my experience. That is the temptation to cover too much material, the temptation to stuff more into the hour—or more into the students—than they can possibly hold! Remember two things in this regard: first of all, we are teaching people, not subject matter per se; and second, every lesson outline that I have ever seen will inevitably have more in it than we can possibly cover in the allotted time.

So stop worrying about that. It is better to take just a few good ideas and get good discussion—and good learning—than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual.

Ultimately, those who teach solely by lecturing so that they can cover more material win a Pyrrhic victory at best: they may cover more
material, but their students actually understand less.

3. It would be great to try this style of teaching with Harvard Business School students, but doing it with my students is a whole different challenge. I’m not sure it can really be done with seminary students or even undergraduate students.

To be sure, the more motivated and capable the students, the better this approach works. Still, we have plenty of evidence that students rise to the call when given the chance, not just at the collegiate level but even among high school seminary students. Indeed, as a former institute and seminary teacher, I cannot help but see some irony in this objection. Before President Clark’s arrival at BYU–Idaho, some raised the concern that student participation might be fine for seminary students but really wasn’t scholarly enough for college-level students. When this former dean of the Harvard Business School arrived on the scene and called for “much less lecturing, . . . maybe 20 percent of the time in lecture,” however, it was difficult for professors to dismiss this method as something best suited for teenagers. Instead, the opposite argument soon emerged: perhaps our students weren’t sharp enough to succeed with this method.

Yet when given the chance, BYU–Idaho students in my classes have risen to the occasion and have consistently made meaningful contributions. Moreover, I have witnessed seminary classes in which high school freshmen regularly and thoughtfully participated when given the chance. Indeed, as Elder Bednar declared should happen, I have been able to learn from the insights my students have shared. Almost as rewarding as hearing a student’s sigh of epiphany is having one of my own, courtesy of an insight shared by a student.

“Why did Jesus weep?” I asked my New Testament class one day when discussing the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11. “He appears to know that he is going to be able to raise Lazarus. Why would he weep? The timing seems odd.” I am embarrassed to admit that despite pondering and researching this question during my lesson preparation, I had found no satisfactory answer.

A young woman on the front row raised her hand and shared an insight that seems obvious in retrospect, but it had escaped me: “Maybe He was crying because He loved Martha and Mary so much that He grieved for the suffering these sisters had to endure. Their brother was dead and their grief was real. By waiting three days, He was able to perform a miracle that would help convert many people,” she explained, “but it came at the cost of Mary and Martha’s very real heartache for those three days. Maybe that’s why He cried.”
4. What about students who think they know more than they do—and in the process simply confuse things? It seems inappropriate for teachers to abdicate control of the classroom to the most vocal students.

Master teachers invite student participation, but they never cede control of the classroom. Increasing student participation does not require teachers to approve of every comment. Indeed, student comments can do more harm than good if teachers do not correct any misunderstandings created by mistaken student statements. Providing such correction creates tactical challenges for teachers, given the fact that “learning occurs best in an atmosphere of trust and safety.” But just as bishops remain responsible for the doctrinal content of sacrament meetings, teachers who invite participation in classrooms can and should ensure that students are not left with any doctrinal or theoretical confusion.

5. I’ve seen teachers who do this well, but I’m not one of them. It’s just not my style. We should all teach to our strengths, and my strength is lecturing.

Facilitating student participation can be difficult, and some teachers may do it more effectively than others. Yet for all the reasons discussed above, this is a change worth making. For many, the change will not be easy. Even more patience and dedication may be required for those who naturally prefer to lecture, but even a small adjustment can benefit our students. In fact, as Derek Bok notes, “the experience of many professional schools shows that it is possible for entire faculties to alter their teaching methods to help their students learn to think critically” by using the discussion method.

6. To argue that student participation is preferable to lecturing seems a stretch, when we see more sermons than seminars in the scriptures and in general conference.

While the teachings of prophets and the Savior include both lectures and discussions, I concede that the scriptural record we have documents far more lectures than discussions. But before building a tower to give our next lecture like King Benjamin, we should note some reasons for caution in wholly emulating the teaching styles we see in general conference and the Sermon on the Mount.

First, different circumstances warrant different teaching styles. Given the translation challenges alone, for example, it is not surprising that general conference addresses are sermons written in advance. Logistically, the kind of teaching described in this article simply is not feasible in many of the teaching settings we witness or see involving prophets. (And the trend in recent training sessions seems to be to
include discussions in addition to talks.) The different approaches we take in sacrament meeting and Sunday School also suggest that there is a time and a place for talks as well as for more interactive learning.

Second, in addition to logistical differences, our circumstances as religious educators are ecclesiastically different than those of prophets and the Savior. Although we can certainly gain great insights from their teaching styles, we must also remember that they are in a unique position to declare doctrine and call sinners to repentance. Thus, while the Savior Himself provided unparalleled sermons, among believers in our day He provided for the appointment of teachers who would preside over discussions in which all would have a chance to participate (see D&C 88:122).

Finally, when confronted with a host of scriptural teachings or statements by Church leaders that could be read to support competing points of view, there is always safety in giving greater weight to the most recent and prevalent line of thinking. Teaching, No Greater Call, perhaps the definitive statement on teaching in the Church today, notes the following under the heading “Don’t Talk Too Much”:

Teachers who lecture most of the time or answer every question themselves tend to discourage learners from participating. You should be careful not to talk more than necessary or to express your opinion too often. . . . Think of yourself as a guide on a journey of learning who inserts appropriate comments to keep those you teach on the correct path.

Your main concern should be helping others learn the gospel, not making an impressive presentation. This includes providing opportunities for learners to teach one another.

Clearly, the emphasis on helping students discover insights themselves rather than simply sharing those we have gained is much more than a passing fad or the personal opinion of a single Church leader.

7. Great style can never compensate for bad content. Isn’t it more important that I teach true doctrine, with the rest being frosting on the cake?

There is no question that we would all be better off teaching true doctrine poorly than teaching false doctrine or even “fried froth” well. Bells and whistles and fancy Powerpoint presentations can never compensate for a lack of knowledge on the teacher’s part. Nor can the most animated student discussion make up for a failure to convey sound doctrine. Thus, as we strive to improve our teaching style, our aim must always be to help our students understand doctrines and principles, not to entertain or please them.
Yet if our goal is to help our students understand the material, we cannot be content with simply mastering the material ourselves. Teaching truth is not enough to discharge our duties; we must also teach it effectively. Getting the content right is necessary but not sufficient; we must also teach our content well if our students are to succeed in learning. While we must guard against emphasizing style over substance, we must also guard against the other extreme: invoking the importance of substantive expertise to excuse ourselves from making stylistic improvements.

Conclusion

Virginia H. Pearce has wisely suggested that as gospel teachers we ask ourselves, “How will I help my students discover what they need to know?” instead of “What will I teach today?” Elder Bednar spoke along similar lines when instructed: “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.”

Most of us will have our students in class for a relatively short period of time. If all they glean from our classes are insights we have shared as instructors, our impact will be rather limited. We will have fed them for a day, as it were. But if we create opportunities for them to learn how to learn directly from the Spirit—if we help them discover and articulate insights—we will help them feed themselves for life.

Notes

4. “When a teacher takes the spotlight, becomes the star of the show, does all the talking, and otherwise takes over all of the activity, it is almost certain that he is interfering with the learning of the class members” (Asahel D. Woodruff, *Teaching the Gospel*, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1961], 37, quoted in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994], 14).
5. Robert T. Blackburn, Glen R. Pollino, Alice Boberg, and Colman

6. An informal survey of BYU–Idaho students indicates that they believe professors spend 78.8 percent of class time speaking themselves. Of the 278 students e-mailed, 117 responded. However, with 183 of the students queried coming from Book of Mormon classes, the sample may have been skewed toward underclassmen, who probably encounter more lecturing in larger classes than do juniors and seniors. Furthermore, because all the students surveyed were currently enrolled in one of my classes, the experience of this sample of students may be somewhat skewed. Finally, students’ perceptions of participation levels are not necessarily accurate; one colleague who asked students to estimate what percentage of the time he spent talking in their class found that their estimates ranged from 0 to 90 percent. Still, student perceptions may be the most useful measurement we currently have of actual levels of lecturing and participation.

7. Yet other teachers may desire to increase the level of student participation in their classes but may lack the knowledge of how to best to do so. While important, such tactical concerns are beyond the scope of this article. Mark Beecher and I discuss these broader questions at length in *Becoming a Great Gospel Teacher: Bringing the Gospel Classroom to Life* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2007).

8. Student participation could fall into several categories, including many that describe activities occurring outside the classroom. However, the scope of this article is limited to that subset of student participation activities that occur when students participate in some way inside the classroom.


13. See Wilber J. McKeachie, *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips*, 11th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mufflin, 2002), 31; Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 123. Logistical constraints make student participation in the form of comments more difficult in some settings (as in classes with several hundred students) and impossible in others (as in general conference and sacrament meeting talks). Even in these settings, however, we tend to glean more as students when we use techniques that engage us more actively—such as taking notes or looking for personal applications—than when we are more passive listeners.

14. Quoted in Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 123; emphasis added.

15. My student wasn’t the first to notice this detail (see John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* [Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992], 41–43).


18. Mark Beecher and I discuss the importance of actively managing classroom discussion, as well as some tactical considerations for doing so, in *Becoming a Great Gospel Teacher*, 149–60.

20. Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 133. For a fascinating example of how one teacher used a Socratic series of questions to teach binary arithmetic to elementary school students, see Rick Garlikov’s “The Socratic Method: Teaching by Asking Instead of by Telling” at http://www.garlikov.com/Soc_Meth.html.


23. Kim B. Clark, “Meeting President Clark—An Interview,” *Perspectives*, Autumn 2005, 30. In other settings, I have heard President Clark acknowledge that the desired target rate may need to be different for different disciplines, recognizing that some subjects lend themselves better than others to this style of teaching.


26. Although He gave sermons, the Savior also used questions extensively. Elder Walter F. González taught, “The Savior used memory questions, reasoning questions, and questions for the heart. We can use them also” (“Teaching as the Savior Taught,” *Ensign*, September 2004, 28).

27. President Clark notes that the Savior’s teaching with parables undoubtedly inspired discussions among the disciples that the scriptures do not record.


Dr. Robert L. Millet invites me into his office and offers me a plush chair across from his big desk; the room is like most professors’ offices I have been in: books and files dominate here. Behind me are wall-to-wall shelves containing hundreds of volumes. Behind him is a long row of filing cabinets, each jam-packed with the records of a life’s work. Part of that life’s work is the fruit of holding the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding from 2000 to 2004. He shows me an impressive stack of tomes: “Books to be finished within the next few months,” he says. All of them are books about current thinking in the evangelical world. For Dr. Millet, staying current with the wider religious community is a big part of what “religious understanding” entails. Though he was released from the chair over two years ago, the work he did in that capacity still commands much of his attention. As Dr. David Paulsen, another past holder of the chair, explained to me: “That’s one of the problems with having a chair that lasts three or four years—you can’t just suddenly turn it all off. The challenge comes when you get back in a regular teaching position with a regular load, and you just can’t let these things drop.”

By “these things,” Dr. Paulsen was referring in part to the extensive writing he has done both while holding the chair and since. His vita is crammed with articles published in high-profile journals on various Mormon topics. The dates show that many were done long after his time in the chair was finished. A list of projects completed or still in progress since his last sabbatical reveals a huge emphasis in dialoguing
with those of other faiths—he has six upcoming articles designated for publication in non–Latter-day Saint academic journals, each involving Joseph Smith.

But Dr. Paulsen was also referring to the friendships he cultivated in the Evans Chair, friendships that didn’t just end when his time was up. Over the past thirty-five years, Dr. Millet, Dr. Paulsen, and the six other men who have held the Evans Chair have promoted religious understanding by working tirelessly in their fields, following the example set by the chair’s namesake, Elder Richard L. Evans. But more important, in their traveling, publishing, speaking, researching, and other activities, each has found that friendship—real, enduring, personal friendship with the very people one is trying to understand—is the natural result of that work.

History of the Chair

Elder Richard L. Evans, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve from 1953 to 1971, was best known as the writer, announcer, and producer of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s weekly broadcast, *Music and the Spoken Word*. Beginning in June 1930 and continuing for more than forty years, Elder Evans’s voice reached across the nation each Sunday morning, filling the homes of listeners of all faiths with simple, eloquent messages of peace and hope.¹ His short sermons spoke of good living and practical virtue, themes applicable to all people, not just to Latter-day Saints. His tone was encouraging; his voice, wise. In one broadcast he said:

> Sometimes we feel wronged. Sometimes we know we have wronged others. We all say things we wish we hadn’t said, and do things we wish we hadn’t done, yet often let stubbornness and pride keep us from apologizing, from clearing misunderstandings—and can’t quite seem to humble ourselves to face the facts, to clear the air from feelings of offense. And we sometimes rationalize—blaming others, absolving ourselves—frequently forgetting, or not admitting, that there are two sides to most misunderstandings. . . . There must be forgiving. There must be forgetting. There must be honest effort to make amends—not just a gesture, but attitudes and actions that prove we are sincere. Let children and parents come closer, and friends and neighbors, and let life be lived, not with quick tempers and lingering resentments, but with the understanding that knows there are two sides to most subjects.²

Though his words had the power to touch the soul, it was Elder Evans’s actions that bound him in friendship to others. Lowell Berry, a California businessman, first heard Elder Evans on *Music and the*
Spoken Word in 1954. As Elder Evans’s brother David explained, “On then becoming a fan of Richard, Lowell reportedly wrote to him to express appreciation, enclosing a money donation which Richard returned with a courteous ‘thanks but no thanks.’ Lowell next sent gifts of fruit and other perishables that he figured Richard couldn’t return. No one knows how long that continued, but one day . . . Lowell walked unannounced into Richard’s office in Salt Lake City and said to the secretary, ‘I’m Lowell Berry, and I want to meet the preacher who won’t take money.’” Berry continued in his own words:

I found that he was indeed a friendly and fine person. We visited for some time in his office, and we found that we had much in common. For instance, our Rotary friendship—I had been president of the Oakland Rotary Club and he, of the Salt Lake Club, and there seemed to be a kindred fellowship in this.

I think maybe he took a special favor for me. Perhaps it was because I was a fertilizer man. That was my business. I do not know whether that amused him a little or not to start with, but we grew to be the dearest of friends, in spite of the fact that we were miles apart in our homes and in our businesses and I was not of his church. But we were Christians, both of us, and I have never met, nor do I ever expect to meet, a man who has touched my heart so warmly.

This friendship with Berry in part led to Elder Evans’s election as president of Rotary International in 1966. During his one-year term heading the worldwide service club of then nearly 600,000 people, he and his wife, Alice, visited sixty countries, six Canadian provinces, and twenty-five U.S. states, participating in “press conferences, luncheons, interviews, meetings, receptions, and banquets” all along the way. In addition to speaking at club functions and administering the needs of Rotary, Elder Evans was visited by “mayors, presidents, prime ministers, governors, chancellors, kings,” and of course Church leaders, for during all his travels he still made time to fulfill his duties as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and to announce Music and the Spoken Word each Sunday.

In all this work, Elder Evans was making friends and building bridges for the Church. In a report to President David O. McKay, who had first encouraged Elder Evans to accept leadership positions in Rotary, he said, “In almost every Rotary function I have been in worldwide, I have been introduced as a member of the Council of the Twelve, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in almost every press clipping, in every one of 133 countries worldwide where notices have been published, the word ‘Mormon’ or the name
of the Church has appeared.” Elder Evans was an example of how understanding and friendship go hand in hand. The *Improvement Era* reported, “Without compromising the religious principles or practices for which his Church stands, Brother Evans seems able, in an unusual way, to win the confidence of men of all faiths and walks of life and return friendship and understanding in kind.” Elder Marion D. Hanks later said of him: “In many nations, men proudly call Richards Evans friend. . . . He was a bridge of strongest stature across the streams of differences and understanding.”

The establishment of the Richard L. Evans Chair of Christian Understanding occurred one year after Elder Evans’s death in 1971 and was a direct result of the many friendships he had cultivated during his life of service. Lowell Berry first proposed the chair, calling Elder Evans “one of the great Christian philosophers of our time” and made a generous donation to fund the endowment. His initial donation was matched by others who had also been inspired by Elder Evans’s life, and on November 1, 1972, the chair was formally established at Brigham Young University for the “promotion of understanding among people of different religious faiths through teachings and other activities centered in Jesus Christ and his teachings.” Truman G. Madsen was its first recipient.

**Truman G. Madsen**

Like the chair’s namesake, Dr. Madsen kept a rigorous schedule, filled multiple roles, and was an emissary for the Church wherever he went. For over two decades, he set the tone for the chair’s future use as he promoted building bridges of understanding.

Though Dr. Madsen was already widely recognized for his writing and speaking on religious topics, the Evans Chair provided him the means to reach more and more varied audiences. Holding the chair meant a reduction in his teaching load at BYU, and it also provided funds for things such as travel, research, and hosting visiting scholars at the school. He made good use of these opportunities, visiting sixty college campuses within the first year of holding the chair. As his work continued, Dr. Madsen “sponsored programs in colleges and civic organizations, underwriting symposia, interfaith conferences, seminars, and workshops.” He brought world-renowned scholars to the BYU campus for lectures and discussions, and he even served as a “guest professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California; at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts; and at Haifa University in Israel.” His work took him to almost all fifty states and to
the European continent, and he made forty-five trips to Jerusalem for travel-study programs. In addition to holding the chair, he spent time as director of Judeo-Christian Studies for the Religious Studies Center at BYU, director of the Institute of Mormon Studies, and, for the last three years of his time in the chair, director of the BYU Jerusalem Center. Amid all this activity, he still found time to write articles, publish books, and edit various periodicals and compilations.

One quality that allowed Dr. Madsen to excel in his work of outreach was his amazing ability to reach his audience on a level they could respond to. He was “a teacher of uncommon clarity and vitality for layman and scholar alike.” Dr. Dillon Inouye, a one-time student and later colleague of Dr. Madsen, described his teaching skills this way: “Because he had an unusual ability to understand what was happening inside his students’ heads, he knew what to do to make his lectures clear and interesting.” As his student, Dr. Inouye learned that “although Truman’s technical gifts were well deployed, . . . they were mere accompaniments to a deep mastery of his subject matter and the testimony of the Spirit that made his lessons vital and life changing.” That “deep mastery of his subject matter” also allowed Dr. Madsen to interact with experts in his field. Dr. Inouye told this story of seeing him speak in his role as Evans Chair in Stanford Memorial Chapel at Stanford University:

There, he engaged our Dean of the Chapel, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, and other campus divines in a discussion of “images of God.” As one might imagine, the discussion proceeded at a high level of sophistication, with each speaker in turn offering up a different image of God. When it was Truman’s turn to speak, he acknowledged the several contributions of the panelists and then began to teach the Mormon doctrine of deity to those on the panel and those assembled in their own theologico-philosophical tongue. When he finished, I thought I could see on the faces of those assembled the respect they had for Professor Madsen, for his cogent comments, and for the Mormon religion he represented.

Thus, in addition to being a fine educator, Truman Madsen utilized his skills as a fine scholar to bring “the University’s and the Church’s world view into closer communication with the American intellectual community.”

To Dr. Madsen, the work of fostering understanding between people of different religious backgrounds did not merely mean speaking at venues around the world. It also meant inviting scholars to speak at BYU in an effort to help students and teachers there better understand
others’ perspectives, and it meant gathering great minds together in conversation one with another. In the published results of one symposium, Dr. Madsen praised the participants for their “goodwill,” for being “friendly to each other—and to the idea,” and for having “a willingness to do the hard work of studying . . . the Mormon ethos.” He identified two results of the meeting, things in perfect keeping with the mission of the chair: “first, a deepening of self-understanding within the Mormon community; second, a wider and deeper scholarly interest in Mormon studies.”

In a letter to Dr. Madsen in honor of his seventieth birthday, Hugh Nibley wryly praised Dr. Madsen’s ability to bring together scholars in understanding: “Who else could have brought a dozen world-famous Jewish and gentile scholars to Provo, corralled them into a snowbound cabin and make them talk, without a knife, gun, or glowing cigarette? May I remind you that these guys were Number One, top-drawer in their fields.”

But beyond all the conferences and publications, the work of the Evans Chair was still the work of building friendships. It was a work at which Truman Madsen excelled. By truly understanding his students, his colleagues, and his fellow Latter-day Saints, he bound them in friendship to himself. He is still in high demand as a speaker, and many of his writings are perennial classics among the Saints. A glance at the list of contributors to Revelation, Reason, and Faith, a Festschrift published in 2002 honoring Dr. Madsen, reveals that he has friends as far-flung as Oslo and Jerusalem, as well as all over the United States. But of course no list can represent the reality of friendships forged over years of common experience and understanding.

A Change in the Chair

Dr. Madsen became a professor emeritus in 1994, vacating the Richard L. Evans Chair after more than twenty years of service. “Truman established a wonderful cadre of friends for the church,” said Robert Millet, who was dean of Religious Education at the time, “but it began to occur to us that many of those friends were growing older or dying and that we needed a new group of friends for the church.” With the approval of the university administration and the Board of Trustees, a number of changes were made to the chair to help facilitate the continuing of its mission. The first was that the name of the chair was changed to the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding, reflecting the hope that holders would, as Dr. Madsen had done, extend the hand of friendship to all people, not just Christians. The next was that the chair became a professorship of limited duration.
rather than a lifetime appointment. Each professor chosen to occupy the chair would do so for four or five years before being released. Lastly, it became standard for two professors at a time to hold the chair, doubling the number of hands available to do the work of outreach.

The Chair Today

Since the time of the change, seven professors have held the chair: David Paulsen, Darwin L. Thomas, Larry C. Porter, Robert L. Millet, Roger R. Keller, Fred E. Woods, and Paul Y. Hoskisson. Each has followed Elder Evans’s example by reaching out in understanding to others regardless of their beliefs. Each has followed the model established by Dr. Madsen by publishing in reputable journals, participating in conferences, sponsoring symposia, visiting campuses, and hosting visiting scholars at BYU. But each has made his own mark on the chair by bringing unique interests and talents to the work.

As I spoke personally with many holders of the chair in the past few months, I noticed two things common to each one. First, they each had a clear understanding of what the chair was for. Although they said it in their own words, I quickly got a sense that these men regarded the chair as a responsibility to reach out both to the world and to the Saints. Second, all the professors I interviewed got visibly excited when the conversation turned toward their own interests. Their eyes lit up when they began to explain to me how their area of expertise coincided with the work of outreach. They began to open drawers and find files, flip through books, and point out facts. They each exhibited a show-and-tell excitement for sharing what was important to them—surely a trait necessary for any Evans professor.

Fred E. Woods, a current holder of the chair, joyfully explained to me the story of Kalaupapa, a leprosy settlement on the Hawaiian island of Molokai where ecclesiastical leaders, volunteers, and nurses of different cultures and religions served patients from the Latter-day Saint, Catholic, Protestant, and Japanese Buddhist religious traditions. Not only was charity rendered by a host of people who were drawn from the outside to render service at Kalaupapa, but also great love and service were given by the patients to each other. For example, many patients helped with the construction of places of worship for each other. Professor Woods noted that he was moved by the fact that when a new Latter-day Saint chapel was erected at Kalaupapa in 1965, patients who were of other faiths actually contributed more hours than the Latter-day Saints.
He has turned the story into a presentation on religious understanding. “I’m using these things as a model,” he said, “as a teaching story in a historical context, of how we can get along better now and find common ground instead of battle ground, which divides us, to make the world a better place.” It isn’t a story that only urges Catholics to work with Latter-day Saints or Protestants to understand Catholics. It espouses understanding and cooperation all around, by all parties.

Dr. Woods first presented the Kalaupapa story of interfaith collaboration for a joint jubilee commemoration at both Chaminade University of Honolulu and BYU–Hawaii in 2005. Since that time he has given this presentation at many universities, including Georgetown University, MIT, Purdue University Calumet, George Washington University, St. Mary’s University, Lourdes College, the University of Utah, the University of Texas, and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Professor Woods is also coproducing a documentary to tell this inspiring story that he hopes to have aired on PBS.

All the Evans professors have this same sentiment—that outreach and understanding in any direction inspires more outreach and more understanding. Perhaps no one understands this better than Roger R. Keller, who held the chair from 1998 to 2005. Before joining the Church in 1986, Dr. Keller was an ordained Presbyterian minister with a doctorate in biblical studies and twentieth-century Christian theology, and he was known for his work trying to “bridge the gap of misunderstanding that existed between the LDS and non-LDS community.”23 His appointment as an Evans professor seemed meant to be long before it happened: while serving as senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Mesa, Arizona, he published a book entitled Reformed Christians and Mormon Christians: Let’s Talk!24 Knowing his background makes the following statement by Dr. Keller in the seventh annual Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture at BYU all the more meaningful:

Not only is it important to encounter the religions of the world for the purpose of being good world citizens, but it is equally important that we study them to deepen our understanding of our own faith. It is amazing what can be seen in Latter-day Saint theology and traditions when we view that heritage through the glasses tinted with perceptions and questions from other people’s religious heritages. It is not that we learn things that have not already been revealed by God through the prophets, but rather that we see elements present in our own religious traditions that have been overlooked or deemphasized in the face of other ideas. For me the study of world religions has deepened the tapestry of my own faith, moving me beyond superficial commandments...
to the profundity of the theology that is inherent in the religious experience found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.25

Dr. Keller’s study of world religions has blessed the lives of others as he has shared his knowledge in more places than just his religion classes at BYU. He and Dr. Millet, who held the chair at the same time, often received invitations to speak to groups of Latter-day Saints on topics such as “Am I a Saved Christian?”—topics that reflect a need to understand the perspective of those around us. They still receive such invitations, in fact, owing to their expertise in the area of understanding. While Dr. Keller’s work primarily involves world religions, Dr. Millet’s focuses mostly on evangelical Christianity. As a result, Dr. Millet is often invited to address missionaries serving in the Midwest and the Bible Belt to help them understand the kinds of questions and perspectives they might encounter in their work.

And even though each holder of the Evans chair has affected wide audiences through writing and speaking, each has still affected—and has been affected by—the friends they’ve made.

When I met Darwin L. Thomas recently, a retired professor of sociology and family sciences who held the chair from 1996 to 1999, he was clutching two books, each with a scrap of paper sticking out, marking some important passage. I asked him about his work in the chair, his vision for its use, and the successes he saw as its holder—he answered each question politely and articulately, touching on the themes illustrated above. But when I asked him about the personal friendships he’d developed during his time in the chair, his eyes lit up, and out came the bookmarked volumes. He explained that for him, developing those friendships opened his eyes to the “profound spiritual experiences” occurring in the lives of scientists the world over, experiences that he often had a part in bringing about. He read me Dr. Candace Pert’s account of a personal experience she had when visiting BYU for a conference, and he recalled how Dr. Gerald Schroeder had told him repeatedly that “BYU is a very important set of experiences in [my] own life.”26

Building Friendships

Dr. Millet explained to me how these friendships expand and begin to touch other lives, remarking that “once understanding exists, then great things begin to happen.” He told me about how several times a year he’ll get a call from a graduate student whose research touches on a doctrine or practice of the Church. The student will explain that his or her faculty adviser recommended he or she call Dr. Millet for
details. Dr. Millet, sitting behind his desk stacked with books and papers, smiled at me: “Now that sounds like a little thing, but that’s a big thing. That means they’re going to the source; they’re going to somebody who knows something about this.”

I asked why it’s him they call, and he answered off-handedly: “Oh, their professor is a good friend of mine. I’ve gone out to see him; he’s come to see me. And so, the exchanges like that are not just so you can have friends. It’s to build better understanding—in this case, among the students.”

Any Evans professor could tell a number of stories demonstrating the same thing: that friendship begets understanding, which begets more friendships. And all this understanding, all this outreach, can do nothing but be a blessing in the lives of those who experience it. Dr. Millet also told me this story which demonstrates how understanding can be more than a superficial respect and how friendship can open doors for individuals, for BYU, and for the Church:

I remember an episode where our group of evangelicals and our group of Latter-day Saints—we get together twice a year to have discussions—came together, and I had sent copies of the book I had done on the prodigal son to all of these evangelical friends. Well, they were complimenting me and telling me why they enjoyed it, and one of them said, “Bob, I was just stunned by the number of non-LDS sources you used in this Deseret Book publication.”

I said, “Yeah, I used quite a few.”

“Do you know how many you used?”

I said no, and he said, “Well I counted them. You used exactly 50 percent non-LDS and 50 percent LDS.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. That’s a great accomplishment, and it’s a great tribute that you think that we have something to say.”

Everybody agreed, and then I turned to him and said, “And at what point do you suppose you’ll start quoting us?” Well, there’s this long pause and he said, “It could be a while.”

One week ago I got an e-mail from that professor saying: “Your words have haunted me now for five years. I have a book coming out, and it covers the period of time from Acts to Revelation, and I want you to know that I’ve quoted seventeen times from David Paulsen in philosophy, from Andy Skinner and Kelly Ogden in Religious Education, and from you. So there.”

Dr. Millet ended his story with another sly smile: “Again, you say that’s not a big thing—it’s a very big thing. That means they think we have something to say.”
Conclusion

As I sit in Dr. Millet’s office, listening to him tell stories, it is clear that he loves this. He loves talking with people, telling his stories, hearing theirs, commiserating, connecting. All the Evans professors do. It is the basis of their understanding, the foundation of the friendships to which Dr. Paulsen was referring when he lamented about not being able to just drop them. He was being sarcastic, of course—I saw it in his eyes as he spoke of his colleagues as dear friends.

These men know that understanding is not about seeing eye to eye on every issue or about compromising personal beliefs. Dr. Woods was quick to clear that up for me by quoting Saint Augustine: “In the essentials, unity; in the nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.”

They also know that understanding isn’t always about proselytizing either; it’s about people. Dr. Millet and I sit surrounded by his work—shelves, books, files, and papers—but still he looks me in the eye and says: “While we’ll always take the great commission of the Savior to take the gospel to all the world very seriously, there are other reasons to build friendships. It isn’t just to do missionary work. It’s that it really does enrich your life. I have wonderful friendships with many fine Christian gentlemen and ladies across the country and across the world that have just simply made me a better person.” As he speaks, it’s easy to see that he means it.

Notes

11. Wilkinson, Brigham Young University, 4:197.
12. Dillon K. Inouye, “Truman Madsen, Valued Teacher,” in Revelation,


16. CES speech biographical information.


19. Wilkinson, Brigham Young University, 4:197.


24. In the preface to his book, Roger Keller writes: “Dr. Truman G. Madsen, holder of the Chair of Christian Understanding at Brigham Young University, deserves special thanks for his willingness to read and re-read the manuscript, offering comments for consideration and resources to be consulted” (Reformed Christians and Mormon Christians: Let’s Talk! [United States: Pryor Pettengill, 1986], xii).


26. Dr. Candace Pert is a world-renowned pharmacologist with a PhD from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The story shared by Dr. Thomas is found in her book, Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 313–14. Dr. Gerald Schroeder is a nuclear physicist and planetary scientist. He earned his PhD at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then taught there before moving to Jerusalem in 1971. He has published three books dealing with the intersection of science and religion: Genesis and the Big Bang (1990), The Science of God (1997), and The Hidden Face of God (2002).
The Love of God

Roger K. Terry

After the Ensign published “Divine Love” by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in February 2003, some Church members were disconcerted over his primary thesis, namely, that while God’s love may be divine, perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it is not unconditional. Some, perhaps insecure in their own individual worth, worried that if God’s love is not unconditional, if it is given only as we keep the commandments, then certainly “He can’t love me, because I’m so imperfect.” Others felt that this limitation on God’s love was somehow a limitation on His eternal nature, His very Godhood. Still others expressed concern that this declaration, right or wrong, would simply give Church critics more ammunition to use against us.

These reactions and others may well indicate that many Church members have misunderstood not only Elder Nelson’s message but also the nature of God and the nature of love itself. If we correctly understand what love is, what God’s perfection entails, how He perceives us from His eternal viewpoint, and how grace can make us more capable of receiving His love, I believe we will not only agree with Elder Nelson’s thesis but also feel grateful for this wonderful insight into our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

What Is Love?

Perhaps the greatest misconception about love is the notion that it is merely a feeling, an emotion that someone else feels toward us
or that we feel for others. But the assumption that love is primarily a warm, fuzzy emotion misses the mark entirely. This is actually a romantic notion that shares little common ground with reality. Let me illustrate with a couple of everyday examples.

Does my wife really care whether or not I have a constant warm, starry-eyed feeling toward her? We’ve been happily married for over twenty-three years now, and based on that fairly substantial experience I would have to answer no. What is she really concerned about? Let me suggest that an affirmative answer to the following questions would tell my wife more about my love for her than any emotions I might be experiencing. Do I help her around the house? Do I treat her with kindness and respect? Do I make it obvious that I enjoy her company? Do I rescue her from cooking dinner at least once a week? Do I help her with the kids? Are we united in our ongoing attempt to live the gospel? Do I support her in her Church calling? Am I committed to her happiness and well-being? Do I sacrifice my own desires and convenience to make her life more pleasant?

By the same token, do my children really care whether or not I have a constant warm, sweet feeling toward them? Based on nearly twenty years’ experience, I would again have to answer, probably not. So what are they interested in? Perhaps these questions hit nearer the mark: Do I spend time with them? Do I try to control the urge to criticize or belittle them? Do I treat their mother well? Do I provide a house, food, transportation, and a little entertainment for them? Do I take an interest in their activities, their concerns, their friends? Do I attend their basketball and soccer games and their tennis matches? Do I wait up for them when they are out late? Am I there for them when they need me? Am I consistent in my expectations, the rules I establish, and the consequences I enforce when they break those rules?

Several writers and speakers have pointed out that love is not just a noun. In fact, in every significant way we generally view it, love is very much a verb. “If ye love me,” the Savior said, “keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If we don’t obey him, He can be quite sure that we don’t love Him.

But what about the Savior’s love for us? How do we view His love? Are we really concerned about whether or not Jesus Christ has a warm, fuzzy feeling about us? Not at all, I would argue. Oh, we assume it’s there somewhere in the background. But what is in the foreground? When we talk about His love, we speak of His willingness to condescend from His throne on high to rescue us. We speak of the Garden of Gethsemane, the cross, the people He healed, the way of life He taught
and exemplified, His modern-day appearance to Joseph Smith, His forgiveness, and the grace He offers us. We are more concerned about what the Savior did and what He does than about how He feels.

The parable of the two sons addresses this very issue. The father asked both to go work in his vineyard. The first said he wouldn’t go but repented and went. The second said he would go but didn’t. The Savior then asks, “Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” The lesson is obvious. The one who did the will of his father was the one who loved him more; and the greater reward, He explained, goes to those who do their Father’s will: “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you [chief priests and elders]” (Matthew 21:31; see also vv. 28–32). In this sense, Elder Nelson’s emphasis on God’s blessings and how they are always conditioned upon our obedience is very appropriate as an example of how He manifests His love for us.

If we want to consider love as a noun, we should probably think of it more as a commitment than as an emotion. If you love your spouse, you are committed to his or her happiness and well-being. If you love your children, you are committed to their physical and spiritual health and their well-being. If you love God, you are committed to do His will. Love is a commitment. And we keep commitments through actions, not through emotions.

**Does God’s Love Have Limits?**

If God’s love is unconditional, then it has no limits and makes no distinction between the various persons or things He might love. But distinctions are necessary. As Lehi pointed out, “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death. . . . Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; . . . Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God” (2 Nephi 2:11–12).

Lehi is trying to explain to Jacob that opposites must exist. If there are no opposites, there is no existence. If there is no darkness, light is a meaningless concept. If there is no evil, then good cannot exist either. Opposites define each other and give each other meaning. And because these opposites exist, intelligent beings can have an existence filled with
meaning and agency. By understanding the difference between good and evil, we are able to choose between the two. We learn to love goodness and hate evil.

If God’s love is unconditional, however, then He cannot make any such distinction. He must love evil as much as He loves goodness. He must love Lucifer as much as He loves His Beloved Son. I doubt that even those of us who insist that God’s love is unconditional would wish to place this restriction upon Him. Thus, perfect love is not without limits. Perfect love must exist within certain bounds. Our Father, being perfectly pure, cannot love evil. And since “Satan is evil: totally and always,” God cannot love him at all.

Were God’s love unconditional, He would have to love evil. But the scriptures teach that God doesn’t love everything or everyone equally. Indeed, God even hates some things and some people. “I have hated the congregation of evil doers” (Psalm 26:5), He says through the Psalmist. “Six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him” (Proverbs 6:16), and the scripture then lists seven sins. “Hate the evil, and love the good” (Amos 5:15). “I loved Jacob,” the Lord exclaims, “And I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:2–3).

It can be argued that if God’s love were unconditional, then that love would not be perfect, and neither would He. A God who loves evil cannot be perfect, especially if we consider love an act or a commitment rather than just an emotion. Likewise, those who argue that it is possible to love the sinner but hate the sin try to separate what people do from what they are. But this is very difficult, if not impossible. What we are is, to a large degree, a consequence of what we do; and what we do is, in turn, a fruit of what we are. This may seem like circular logic, a vicious circle, and so it is. There is only so much a person can change through self-improvement. Fortunately, the Lord offers a different program. He offers to change us through the Atonement, to give us a new heart, a new birth, to make us more lovable, if you will, more capable of receiving the visible effects of His love, His blessings.

And this is the focus of God’s love. It is not just a warm feeling toward His children. It is a commitment—a commitment to save them, to exalt them if possible. If there is even a speck of goodness in us, even just a desire to be good, that is enough for God to extend His love toward us, to be committed to our improvement, our salvation, and, if possible, our exaltation. He will change us if we accept His proffered grace. Only when we have completely turned our backs on Him and His love are His hands tied. Then He can do nothing for us, as He can do nothing for Lucifer.
But as we accept His love, as we become more like Him through His grace, this new godly nature within us then bears fruit in our behavior. “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20) is a foolproof formula. What we do is a manifestation of what we are. If God cannot love what we do, He certainly cannot love what we are. “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:17, 19).

In short, if we embrace evil, God cannot love us as He can if we embrace good. And of course He cannot bless us as He desires to bless us if we do evil. If there is any good in us, He will love and bless that goodness and do everything He can to nurture it and help it grow, but He will not infringe upon our agency.

Eternal Love

Sometimes we project our mortal limitations upon God. We assume His existence and His perception of His surroundings are similar to ours. We think of Him as being much like we are, only glorified and perfect. But God is eternal, and that is a significant difference that affects how He loves.

God’s love is infinite and eternal. “It is infinite,” says Elder Nelson, “because the Atonement was an act of love for all who ever lived, who now live, and who will ever live.” But God’s love is also eternal. Eternal, we understand from scripture, is a quality of God’s existence, not merely an endless duration of time. “Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made; the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes” (D&C 38:1–2; emphasis added). He and His Father see the end from the beginning—they have seen our end condition from the beginning—which certainly must define the bounds of Their eternal love for us.

We can’t comprehend God’s feelings for us because He isn’t viewing us only in this instant. He views us as eternal beings. He sees our beginning and our end and everything in between. His feelings, then, must be constant and eternal, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn’t love me more now, less tomorrow when I yell at my kids, then more next week when I visit the widow and the fatherless. His feelings don’t fluctuate depending on what I’m doing at the moment, because all moments are there before His eyes. He sees me as an eternal
being. I submit that it is impossible for us to understand His feelings for us because we cannot see the eternal panorama He views. He is eternal. Perhaps this is why John declared that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). It is one of His constant, eternal, defining attributes.

But what we are really interested in when we talk about God’s love are His blessings, His acts of love toward us, just as Elder Nelson suggests in his article. Those blessings are predicated upon our obedience to His commandments. Blessings are the manifestation of His love, of Himself. And those blessings, as we struggle here in mortality, are tied not to how God sees us with His eternal perspective but to our individual acts of righteousness in the here and now. Our obedience does indeed bring forth blessings (see D&C 130:20–21). Thus, even if God sees that in the long run I am headed for the telestial kingdom because of sins I will someday commit and not repent of, He will still bless me now for paying tithing and being honest, and serving diligently as a ward clerk or a Primary teacher. Not only is He bound by eternal law to bless those who do good and keep His commandments, but He loves to bless those who obey Him.

The Real Question

After Lehi tells his family about his dream of the tree of life, his son Nephi wants to see the things his father has seen. Nephi is soon “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord . . . into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1). There he is shown “the things which [his] father saw” (v. 3). But after Nephi sees the tree of life, he wants to know more. He wants to know “the interpretation thereof” (v. 11). Consequently, he is shown another vision, this time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

After he has seen this, the angel asks him, “Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?” (v. 21). And he answers, “Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (v. 22).

We can learn much from Nephi’s answer. First, the Savior is a literal representation of God’s love for us. In a very real way He is God’s love, which was given for all of His children. Second, this love, symbolized by the tree of life, is available for all to partake of. But it is not easy. A central message of Lehi’s dream seems to be that reaching the tree takes great effort, and many obstacles can prevent us from reaching it. We have to pay a price to partake of God’s love.

Lehi also learns that even though partaking of God’s love (the fruit of the tree) brings great joy, some apparently don’t appreciate the
fruit. They partake, then become “ashamed, because of those that [are] scoffing at them; and they [fall] away into forbidden paths and [are] lost” (1 Nephi 8:28). We could ask why they turn away from the tree, but that is another topic. The important point is that the tree and its fruit are made equally available to all. If they are willing to put forth the effort and cling to the iron rod, all of God’s children can partake of His love. Some, like Nephi and Sam and Sariah, come and partake. Others, like Laman and Lemuel, refuse. The reason they do not receive of God’s love is not because they are not invited or because the path to the tree is blocked, but because they refuse to pay the price.

When we quibble over whether God’s love is or is not conditional, I fear we miss the point entirely. The real question is not whether God loves us unconditionally. That question is actually irrelevant. The fact is, God’s love is equally available to everyone. It is not available to only some of His children. He offers it to all. God is love. He is a fountain of love. The question isn’t whether or not He loves us. The only question we need to worry about is whether we will receive His love, whether we will come to the fountain and drink. It is our choice. We can have as much of His love, as many of His blessings, as we are willing to accept—or as little.

Notes

“I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth,” proclaimed Joseph Smith, and so it may be said of the Church he restored.
The Lord speaks persistently of the Second Coming in the Doctrine and Covenants as though the subject were never far from His mind. Shortly after the Restoration, the Lord commanded His servants to warn the world of “the desolation of abomination in the last days” and “to teach them of a judgment which is to come” (D&C 84:117, 87). The Lord also instructed missionaries to declare, “Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (D&C 33:10). It is not coincidental that this precise message was relayed prior to His first coming by John the Baptist, Alma the Younger, and Samuel the Lamanite (see Matthew 3:2–3; Alma 7:9; Helaman 14:9).

To prepare the earth for His return, the Lord is “bringing to pass the restoration of all things” in the last days (D&C 27:6). It is significant that the restoration of all things includes things both spiritual and temporal, for the Lord “will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (D&C 27:13). As part of this process, the Lord has restored inspired government to the earth through the instrumentality of the Constitution of the United States of America. It is readily acknowledged that the Constitution played a key role in preparing the earth for the Restoration of the Church by ensuring religious freedom in the United States. Less noted, but equally important, is the Constitution’s role in preparing the earth for the Second Coming. As its principles spread across the earth, the Constitution acts as an Elias, or forerunner, by preparing the way of the Lord in two
important ways. First, the principles of liberty contained in the Constitution allow men to act “according to [their] moral agency,” making them “accountable for [their] own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78). Second, the Constitution serves as a forerunner to the Lord’s government by creating a provisional system of government that prepares the world for the more perfect rule of Christ and His kingdom (see D&C 38:22).

Agency Necessary

In a rare moment of divine disclosure, the Savior told the Prophet Joseph Smith why He established the Constitution: “That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78). This remarkable passage reveals the importance of self-government in the principle of individual accountability. Elder Dallin H. Oaks discussed the relationship between freedom and accountability in a talk commemorating the bicentennial anniversary of the Constitution: “The most desirable condition for the effective exercise of God-given moral agency is a condition of maximum freedom and responsibility. In this condition men are accountable for their own sins and cannot blame their political conditions on their bondage to a king or tyrant. This condition is achieved when the people are sovereign, as they are under the Constitution God established.”

When people are free to act according to their moral agency, “they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads” (D&C 88:82) rather than on the head of a king. It follows, therefore, that when Christ “shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work” (D&C 1:10), His judgments will be wholly just. Naturally, then, constitutional principles must cover the earth before the earth can be burned (see D&C 64:23).

President Ezra Taft Benson noted that “in the Book of Mormon we find a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming.” The Lord’s coming was preceded by a dramatic shift from kings to self-government. This system of judges following the death of King Mosiah II lasted approximately 120 years. One of the principal benefits of the change, as Mosiah explained, was that the people’s sins would thereafter “be answered upon their own heads. For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings” (Mosiah 29:30–31). In a way we do not fully understand, a king stands
between the Lord and the people, thereby getting some of the credit for the people’s righteousness but also part of the blame for their iniquity. For the Nephites, the advantages of self-government were so great that they gladly accepted the burden of increased accountability, “and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins” (Mosiah 29:38). While the Nephite system of judges did not apparently operate with a separation of powers like that contained in the Constitution, both governments were inspired by God and vouchsafed the principles of liberty, equality, and accountability.4

The kinds of government the Lord established in ancient and modern America demonstrate His respect for individual and collective freedom. The Book of Mormon teaches that “the Spirit of God . . . is also the spirit of freedom” (Alma 61:15). That being the case, it is no wonder that “the Spirit of the Lord is grieved” when men or governments attempt “to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness” (D&C 121:37). A correct understanding of agency and accountability, therefore, provides the key for judging all government proposals, projects, programs, and policies. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “[God] has always condemned that which takes away man’s free agency. This is His way. You may judge every proposal for human government by this principle.”5 Thus the principles of freedom, agency, and accountability act as an unfailing compass in the storm of political debate.

Freedom is closely related to agency, but they are not the same thing. Elder Oaks taught that no one can strip us of our agency, but “what can be taken away or reduced by the conditions of mortality is our freedom, the power to act upon our choices. Free agency is absolute, but in the circumstances of mortality freedom is always qualified.”6 The essential characteristic of agency is the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Agency is not based upon general knowledge, but rather upon the specific knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve, for example, did not partake of the tree of knowledge; they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:9; emphasis added; Moses 3:9; Abraham 5:9). The Lord highlighted the heart of agency when He told Adam, “And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:56). Because agency allows us to discern right from wrong, it is wholly dependent upon the Light of Christ, which “is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16). In other words, agency as we know it cannot exist in the absence of the Light of Christ.
Attacks on Agency

Since the beginning, Satan has “sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3). While we may not fully understand how Satan intended to destroy our agency, some feel that Satan’s plan would have forced us to be righteous. On the other hand, Lehi taught that if we were forced to do good, it would not be counted as righteousness, for without Christ there is no law (see 2 Nephi 2:11–13). In addition, did Satan have the power to compel our hearts and desires? No, for intelligence must stand independent and act for itself, “otherwise there is no existence” (D&C 93:30). Even if our actions could be controlled, good deeds performed without real intent would still be evil (see Moroni 7:6). Rather, if Satan wanted to destroy agency, he would have needed to somehow abolish the Light of Christ itself (see D&C 88:13). Thus the Lord recalls, “[Lucifer] rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power.” As impossible as that seems, Satan must have presented an argument strong enough to seduce “a third part of the hosts of heaven” (D&C 29:36).

This contest that began in our first estate continues into the second. President Benson observed, “The War in Heaven is raging on earth today.” Unsuccessful in his attempt to supplant the Savior, Satan’s strategy on earth is to reduce our ability to discern right from wrong, thereby crippling our innate Light of Christ. Satan’s temporary success was seen by Enoch, who “beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced” (Moses 7:26). The Savior described the dire condition of mankind to the early Saints: “And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me” (D&C 84:49–50).

Governments that prevent people from coming unto Christ are furthering the work of the devil, whereas those that protect freedom of conscience and worship are countenanced with divine approval. Mormon’s counsel is particularly apropos in a general view of political officers, laws, and governments: “Wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore you may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil” (Moroni 7:16–17).
Inspired Document

The Constitution is “a glorious standard,” but that does not mean it is perfect. The document was written by the voice of wisdom rather than of revelation; it was inspired rather than revealed. President Clark said, “It is not my belief nor is it the doctrine of my Church that the Constitution is a fully grown document. On the contrary, we believe it must grow and develop to meet the changing needs of an advancing world.” The constitutional canon created by the Founders adapts to the times and reflects the character of the people. Elder Neal A. Maxwell testified, “The raising up of that constellation of ‘wise’ Founding Fathers to produce America’s remarkable Constitution, whose rights and protection belong to ‘every man,’ was not a random thing either. One historian called our Founding Fathers ‘the most remarkable generation of public men in the history of the United States or perhaps of any other nation.’”

The Founders spent four months in heated debate working out the details of the document we now revere—an experience Benjamin Franklin described as “groping as it were in the dark to find political truth.” Yet many of the delegates believed, as Latter-day Saints know, that the Lord was directing them. Franklin confessed to the candidates after a long, divisive debate, “I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men.” George Washington and James Madison also felt the providence of God in their proceedings, calling the coming forth of the Constitution “a miracle.” President Wilford Woodruff attested to the framers’ genius; he described the Constitution as “the best human form of government that was ever given to the human family.”

Though the Constitution is imperfect, the Lord has endorsed the “just and holy principles” (D&C 101:77) embodied therein. It is critical, therefore, to extract the principles from the text. They become apparent when viewing the Constitution in the context of the Lord’s intent; that is, through the bifocals of agency and accountability. Those principles are eternal because they promote spiritual growth and progression. President David O. McKay taught that “there are some fundamental principles of this republic which, like eternal truths, never get out of date, and which are applicable at all times to liberty-loving peoples. Such are the underlying principles of the Constitution.” We learn from the Doctrine and Covenants that a righteous, peaceful government should hold “inviolate” (1) “the free exercise of conscience,”
Universal Principles

Constitutional principles are not only for Americans. The Lord declared they belong “to all mankind” (D&C 98:5) and are intended to bless “all flesh” (D&C 101:77). President Gordon B. Hinckley reminded us in general conference, “The Constitution under which we live, and which has not only blessed us but has become a model for other constitutions, is our God-inspired national safeguard ensuring freedom and liberty, justice and equality before the law.”

The Church has an important charge to spread these principles throughout the world. President John Taylor declared, “Besides the preaching of the Gospel, we have another mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man.” In order for the Church to fulfill its mission to “proclaim liberty” (Isaiah 61:1) to people who live in spiritual and temporal bondage, the Saints must adhere to President Benson’s counsel to “learn for [them]selves the principles laid down in the Constitution.” If the Saints fail in this important responsibility, the advance of the gospel to all the world may be hindered. “I believe the Lord can do anything he sets his mind to do,” President Spencer W. Kimball said, “But I can see no good reason why the Lord would open doors that we are not prepared to enter. Why should he break down the Iron Curtain or the Bamboo Curtain or any other curtain if we are still unprepared to enter?”

History demonstrates that religious freedom precedes the preaching of the gospel and that constitutional principles pave the way for the Lord’s messengers. President McKay said, “As thrones topple and monarchies crumble, you will see that the people who are given their free agency will begin to appreciate the principles of self-government, preparatory to their accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the perfect law of liberty. I can see in all this a step toward a truer brotherhood—a preparation for the millennium.”

An important part of missionary work, then, is to spread the principles of the Constitution among all people so they may receive the blessings of the gospel.

The Lord desires all of His children to enjoy the freedoms and protections of the constitutional government that are had in America. The Lord promised that the American continent “shall be a land of liberty” and that “unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever,” as long as its inhabitants serve Him (2 Nephi 1:7). It is important to remember that

(2) “the right and control of property,” and (3) “the protection of life” (D&C 134:2).
the land is choice, not necessarily its people. Only the righteous “shall be blessed upon the face of this land” (2 Nephi 1:9), while unto the wicked it shall be “cursed” (2 Nephi 1:7). The Lord is no respecter of persons; Nephi clearly taught that “the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35).

Unfortunately, some people feel that because America is choice, somehow being American is too. Gratitude for one’s country, for example, can sometimes turn into nationalism, vanity, and a feeling of superiority. The prophets have frequently criticized this prideful attitude. President Hinckley taught, “The true gospel of Jesus Christ never led to bigotry. It never led to self-righteousness. It never led to arrogance. The true gospel of Jesus Christ leads to brotherhood, to friendship, to appreciation of others, to respect and kindness and love.”

Patriotism should never serve as a cloak for pride, especially when “all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). President Boyd K. Packer cautioned, “A virtue when pressed to the extreme may turn into a vice.” So it is that a healthy sense of patriotism may be pressed into nationalism, which may sometimes lead to racism. The gospel ties the entire human family together in Christ, as Elder Charles Didier taught: “There is in reality only one nation or one culture: the nation of God and the gospel culture.” That is why personal righteousness is more important than citizenship, for the Lord has promised, “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20).

**Fate of the Constitution**

It is critical to distinguish between the Constitution and the United States of America, since each has a unique role and fate. Modern revelation informs us that God will make “a full end of all nations” in due time (D&C 87:6), and ultimately all worldly governments will bow to the kingdom of Christ (see D&C 65:5–6). Latter-day prophets have suffered severe persecution for preaching this unpopular doctrine. President Taylor, for example, while serving as a missionary in France, prophesied that the kingdom of God would overthrow the French regime, and he was expelled from the country for saying so. Joseph Smith was charged with treason and martyred, in part, because he declared that the Church was “as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands” (D&C 65:2) that would overthrow all other governments (see Daniel 2:44–45).

The Prophet Joseph foresaw the day when the Lord would be the rightful ruler of the earth during the Millennium: “The world has had a fair trial for six thousand years; the Lord will try the seventh thousand
Himself; ‘He whose right it is, will possess the kingdom, and reign until He has put all things under His feet.’”

The Savior promised His Saints that they would no longer live under man-made laws when He returns, but rather “you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws when I come, for I am your lawgiver” (D&C 38:22). President Taylor, anticipating the glorious day when the Saints will live the Lord’s perfect law, called the Constitution “a preliminary step for the introduction of more correct principles.” Thus the Constitution is a stepping-stone toward Zion, for the earth must have “milk” before “meat” (Hebrews 5:13–14).

It is evident from latter-day revelation that the United States will not escape the dark fate of “all nations” (D&C 87:6). In 1843, following the persecutions in Missouri, Joseph Smith told Stephen A. Douglas, then a Supreme Court judge, “I prophesy in the name of the Lord God of Israel, . . . that in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted, and there will not be so much as a potsherd left.”

President Woodruff delivered a similar message in 1880, “I ask myself the question, can the American nation escape? The answer comes, No; its destruction, as well as the destruction of the world, is sure.” Although President Woodruff predicted the destruction of the country, he foresaw a very different future for the principles of the Constitution: “Though the nation itself might go to pieces, yet it is beyond the power of man to destroy the principles of the constitution. They may destroy one another, yet the principles contained in that instrument will live, and the God of heaven will maintain them until Jesus Christ comes in the clouds of heaven to set up His throne.”

Many modern-day prophets have taught the Saints’ role in preserving the Constitution’s principles. Elder Orson Hyde, for example, told the Saints, “It is said that brother Joseph in his lifetime declared that the Elders of this Church should step forth at a particular time when the Constitution should be in danger, and rescue it, and save it. This may be so; but I do not recollect that he said exactly so. I believe he said something like this—that the time would come when the Constitution and the country would be in danger of an overthrow; and said he, If the Constitution be saved at all, it will be by the Elders of this Church. I believe this is about the language, as nearly as I can recollect it.”

The conditional nature of Joseph’s prophecy was highlighted by President Benson, who worried that the elders of the Church would not be prepared to fulfill their charge: “Part of the reason we may not have sufficient priesthood bearers to save the Constitution is because unlike Moroni, I fear, our souls do not joy in keeping our country
free, and we are not firm in the faith of Christ, nor have we sworn with an oath to defend our rights and the liberty of our country.”

The Church, however, is prepared to sacrifice dearly in defense of the Constitution, as Brigham Young pledged, “We will cling to the Constitution of our country, . . . and, if necessary, pour out our best blood for the defence of every good and righteous principle.”

At some future day, the principles of the Constitution will thrive in Zion while the rest of the world will largely abandon them, and war will cover the whole earth (see D&C 45:66–71). The Constitution will have an honored place among the Saints at that millennial day. Brigham Young prophesied, “When the day comes in which the Kingdom of God will bear rule, the flag of the United States will proudly flutter unsullied on the flag staff of liberty and equal rights, without a spot to sully its fair surface; the glorious flag our fathers have bequeathed to us will then be unfurled to the breeze by those who have power to hoist it aloft and defend its sanctity.” President Benson later repeated this theme, “We, the blessed beneficiaries [of the Constitution], face difficult days in this beloved land. . . . It may also cost us blood before we are through. It is my conviction, however, that when the Lord comes, the Stars and Stripes will be floating on the breeze over this people.” It is clear that the principles and ideals for which America stands will endure in Zion.

**Conclusion**

“I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth,” proclaimed Joseph Smith, and so it may be said of the Church he restored. Latter-day Saints have been counseled to study, understand, defend, and promulgate the principles of the Constitution to all people. As liberty spreads across the earth, the gospel message follows close behind. Only when the principles of constitutional government have reached around the globe will the Church be able to go “into all the world . . . that the testimony may go from you into all the world unto every creature” (D&C 84:62). Then these “just and holy principles” (D&C 101:77), coupled with the message of the restored gospel, will ready the world for the coming of the Lord: for “every man [will] act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him,” and “every man [will] be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78). With rejoicing after the Second Coming, the Saints will live the perfect law of Christ and sustain Him as their king. In that glorious day the principles of freedom and liberty will finally ripen to maturity.
Come, O thou King of Kings!
We've waited long for thee,
With healing in thy wings
To set thy people free.
Come, thou desire of nations, come;
Let Israel now be gathered home. 

Notes


4. In Helaman 4:22, Mormon states explicitly that the Lord commanded Mosiah to change the government.


Church members are the seed of Abraham and have a covenant duty to share the gospel.

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“Arise and Shine Forth”: Heeding the Call to Serve

Jack L. Rushton

Elder David A. Bednar taught that Church members are the seed of Abraham and have a covenant duty to share the gospel with the world. As sons and daughters of Abraham, it is our foreordained mission to “arise and shine forth” (D&C 115:5), preaching the gospel to the nations of the earth.

Hoping to inspire a rising generation of missionaries, I will share a few experiences from my mission to Central America. Serving the Lord as a missionary was the watershed event in my life. In the mission field, I discovered the power of the word of God as contained in the scriptures. Beginning then, and continuing throughout my life, the scriptures have truly been an iron rod connecting me to the love of God as manifested through His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The greatest desire of my heart is that my posterity will accept their call to serve when it comes and to arise and shine forth, reaping the same benefits and blessings that have been mine.

Growth and Challenges

I was blessed to serve a mission in Central America when it was very much a pioneering effort. While I served in Central America, the missionaries were the branch presidents and district presidents and they even did work with the auxiliary organizations. Our goal was to baptize men, confer the priesthood upon them, and train them to become leaders as quickly as possible. Incredible as it may seem, every branch
I worked in (each with less than a hundred members then) is now a stake of Zion.

In the year 1959, my first full year as a missionary, only about three hundred people were baptized in all of Central America. However, in 1960 over one thousand converts were baptized, the beginning of a volcanic eruption of conversion. From then on, the growth of the Church in Central America began to accelerate rapidly, almost unbelievably so.

The mission leaders had not yet developed appropriate medical practices, and sickness was a serious problem faced by most missionaries. Yellow jaundice, parasites, and seemingly unending bouts with dysentery were some of the health problems many elders and sisters experienced during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Living conditions for the most part were primitive, and overall it was a unique, challenging, and interesting time to serve a mission in Central America.

When Elder Harold B. Lee and his wife came to the mission in 1960, he said that if somebody were to ask him whether he enjoyed his trip to Central America, he would say no. However, if they were to ask him if it had been an exciting, challenging, and spiritually rewarding experience, he would answer with an emphatic yes.

A Golden Contact

One unforgettable contact was Gloria de Alvarado of Guatemala City, Guatemala. My companion, Elder Lynn Jensen, along with another young elder he was working with that significant day, had found Gloria and her family as they were knocking on doors in Zone 9 in Guatemala City.

When I was new in the country and unable to speak Spanish, Elder Jensen took me to the Alvarado home the next day so the family could be taught. Forty-six years later I can still remember the smile and shining face of this twenty-five-year-old wife and mother as she was standing in front of her home waiting for the elders to arrive.

She and the man she was living with had four little children, and all four children were under the age of eight. The oldest girl had suffered from polio and was not physically very strong, but the other three children were strong and healthy. We taught the entire family, and it was evident after the first discussion that Gloria wanted to be baptized immediately. The man she was living with was not quite as receptive but soon agreed to go with us and Gloria to a government building in downtown Guatemala City to be married. Without their marriage there could be no baptism. They were married November 27, 1960,
with Elder Jensen and I serving as witnesses. Gloria was baptized the next evening, and her husband was baptized several months later. By that time, Elder Jensen and I had both left the city.

During the next month, Gloria was responsible for bringing twenty-two of her friends and neighbors into the Church. I had some contact with Sister Alvarado for the next few months until my mission was completed and I flew home to the United States. I then had no contact with the Alvarado family for almost thirty years, although I thought of them often and wondered what had become of them.

**Countless Generations Blessed**

Many years later my youngest son, John, was called to serve a mission in Guatemala. During his mission he was called to serve in the ward where the Alvarado family lived. They were as thrilled to meet my son as my son was to meet a family his father had baptized so many years ago. Gloria and her husband now had eight children, six of them had served full-time missions, and five or six had been married in the temple. Her son Eduardo, then a two-year-old boy I used to carry to church in my arms, was now serving as a bishop in Guatemala City. As a young man he was called on a full-time mission to teach the Mayans in their native tongue in the highlands of Guatemala.

Eduardo and I have been writing letters and e-mails to one another for some time now. He has served in a stake presidency and is currently serving his third term as bishop. He owns his own business and is very successful in life. Brother Alvarado, the father, passed away last year as did Eduardo’s beloved younger brother, Abinadi. I have lost count of the number of Gloria’s grandsons who have served missions, but the number is large.

Eduardo calls me several times each year from Guatemala City. It is very humbling to talk to him because he feels he owes me such a debt of gratitude for bringing his mom and dad into the Church so many years ago. Truthfully, any elder who happened to stumble upon Gloria de Alvarado would have baptized her, but I will be forever grateful that Elder Jensen and I had the incredible opportunity of teaching this special woman and her family.

Eduardo sent the following e-mail, which tells about Gloria as a seventy-four-year-old woman:

April 3, 2006
Guatemala City
Dear Elder Rushton,

I cordially greet you, hoping to find you and your beloved wife
very well. We are all well here. Yesterday we enjoyed the conferences of the Church and also the sessions on Saturday. I am a little tired but appreciate greatly what the prophets taught us. I must tell you that my mother never gets tired of doing missionary work. She is always inviting people to come to Church, taking advantage of every opportunity such as stake conferences, ward conferences, or general conferences, to bring some invited nonmember with her. My mother is untiring in speaking to anybody she encounters in her path about the Church. She has no fear speaking about the Church with anybody. She is always teaching someone, even the doctors, every time she goes to the hospital.

Some months ago a doctor who had treated her knee prohibited her from walking much and told her it would be better if she did not leave the house. She told him that every week she went to the temple and had to walk in order to do so. The doctor then told her that it was not worth the pain it was causing her to continue doing this. However, she continues attending the temple two times each week, and her knee feels very good as she does so.

A few days ago a brother in the Church by the name of Domingo Miguel López passed away. He was an evangelical pastor from 1971 to 1972. During these two years he was our neighbor. One day my mother decided to invite him to a “Mormon night” in our home. He accepted the invitation and in twenty days, more or less, he left his Church and was baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This brother had eight children who were also baptized, but only two of them served missions. However, he has had ten grandsons who have served missions; it is a very big family. Very soon another nephew, the son of my oldest brother, will be serving a mission in El Salvador—the El Salvador East Mission.

As I think of Gloria de Alvarado, I am quite embarrassed as I realize that she has undoubtedly been a better missionary than I have over the past forty-six years. On the other hand, I think of the hundreds of people who have now come into the Church because two elders had enough faith to accept a mission call and then go knocking on doors in a strange city, not even knowing how to speak the people’s language. Of course, the story will go on forever. Eduardo is an avid genealogist and has done great work in identifying his ancestors and making sure their work has been done in the Guatemala City Temple.

A Defining Experience

I returned from my missionary labors in May of 1961. My mission was the defining experience of my life. Because of it, I would never be the same person again. I entered the mission field as a naive boy from a little mining town in Nevada. I didn’t know the scriptures, the gospel, or the Lord, but thankfully I did have sufficient faith to accept the call.
In the mission field, my faith in Heavenly Father and Christ began to grow and deepen. I returned home with an expanded vision of life and its possibilities as well as the knowledge that I was capable of doing things I had previously thought impossible.

Because of my mission, I pursued a career as a seminary and institute teacher. I brought home with me such a desire to search the scriptures and teach others, especially the youth, that no other career could have satisfied that fire that continues to burn in my soul.

In an eternal sense, what is the worth of a soul? I’m not sure we can comprehend that with our finite and mortal minds. The Lord said in Doctrine and Covenants 18:15, “And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!” I believe these words apply to me personally. I know for a fact that one of the souls I brought unto Christ as a result of crying repentance to the people of Central America was mine. How great is my joy as a result of my mission experience!

Note

The discovery of the Temple Scroll (11Q19) in 1956 attracted a great deal of attention among Latter-day Saints. We should realize, however, that its contents have a Mosaic temple focus, depending heavily on Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. It therefore does not contain information about modern temple practices.
The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Roundtable Discussion Celebrating the Sixtieth Anniversary of Their Discovery, Part 2

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Exploring Latter-day Saint Interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls

In our first installment of this roundtable discussion, we discussed the history and importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls.1 We now turn our attention to the meaning of the scrolls among Latter-day Saints.

We are currently in the midst of our study of the Book of Mormon in Sunday School classes throughout the Church in 2008. Because this sacred record literally came forth from the ground (see Isaiah 29:4; 2 Nephi 26:16), Latter-day Saints have been open to new archaeological discoveries that have the potential of opening the ancient world to us. Even after the Church was organized in 1830, revelations and translations of ancient records continued to amaze the Saints (see Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, Doctrine and Covenants 7, and the book of Abraham).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the discovery of the Dead Sea
Scrolls captured the attention of many members of the Church. The story of “buried records” resonated with Latter-day Saints. Newspaper articles in the *Church News*, *Deseret News*, and articles in Church periodicals, including the *Improvement Era* and the *Instructor* (the magazine of the Sunday School program), kept interest in the scrolls alive among members who anxiously waited for the next startling news about the Dead Sea Scrolls as the story emerged.

Thinking back over the past sixty years since the discovery of the first texts at the Dead Sea in 1947, we have learned a lot about the dating, origin, and content of the scrolls. Certainly new discoveries and continued scholarly activity on the Dead Sea Scrolls will provide us new insights about this pivotal period in Jewish history and these texts produced during this time. However, much of the general picture is well known even though scholars have not arrived at a consensus on every point of interpretation and context.

We will now continue our roundtable discussion with Donald W. Parry, Dana M. Pike, and David R. Seely as we turn our attention to the scrolls and their relationship to Latter-day Saints. The third, and final, article in this series on the Dead Sea Scrolls will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Religious Educator*. The article will discuss the great value and significance of the biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**Holzapfel:** Why have Latter-day Saints been interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls? Has the interest changed over time? Why should we still be interested?

**Seely:** Latter-day Saint interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls was largely sparked by Hugh Nibley, who pointed out all kinds of things in the scrolls that reminded us of our beliefs. Many people did not understand the parameters of his conclusions, and so began a long period of sensationalizing the scrolls. Now we have to refocus the discussions and make sure we are on solid ground. I think Latter-day Saints are interested in the scrolls because we are interested in antiquity, Judaism, and the Old and New Testament. But in the end, the doctrinal comparisons between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Latter-day Saint beliefs are probably less significant than many Latter-day Saints realize. For example, much has been made of the fact that the Qumran community had an organization directed by a group of twelve men and that they practiced a form of ritual immersion like the Christians. Yet the leaders of the community were not Apostles, nor did they do things that the early Apostles did. Likewise, the washings attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls are really much more similar to the ritual washings attested in
Judaism than to the baptism for repentance that was practiced by John the Baptist nearby in the Jordan River.

**Holzapfel:** Do you think there has been a maturing among members of the Church regarding their understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls?

**Seely:** Some of the members of the Church have matured, but sensationalism is still a problem. In my view, a really interesting thing is happening. While Latter-day Saint scholars are trying to take a mature and balanced view, simply the emphasis they put on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Latter-day Saint culture sometimes sends people the wrong message. We think our presentation of the scrolls is mature, but we still hear lots of speculation about some points that probably are not that important in terms of Latter-day Saint doctrine. Some speculate, for example, that there are books found at Qumran that should be considered as canonical. It is significant for Latter-day Saints that the books of Enoch and Melchizedek are attested at Qumran, yet a perusal of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments of Enoch and Melchizedek only highlights the much more complete versions of these stories found in the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and in the Book of Mormon. And there is much in these traditions at Qumran that does not necessarily “ring true” by other scriptural standards. As Dana noted in his significant article titled “Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” the texts from Qumran do not demonstrate any understanding of key points of the plan of salvation such as the Fall, the Atonement, universal physical resurrection, and priesthood ordinances.

**Holzapfel:** At one time I thought that maybe the sensationalism was generational. I thought that the first generation, which was enamored with the Dead Sea Scrolls, had died out and that now the next generation was reading the more thoughtful, conservative, cautious scholars. However, my belief was dashed recently in Cleveland when I spoke about the scrolls. After I had given my talk, several teenagers came up to me, simply horrified, and asked, “You mean, there isn’t baptism for the dead and sacrament prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” From that experience I realized that I had misperceived what was happening in the Church. This new generation still has access to the old tapes and the old stories.

**Pike:** Whenever anybody asks me, “Why are Latter-day Saints so interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” my first thought is that many Latter-day Saints really are not particularly interested in the scrolls. My second thought, as I have said tongue-in-cheek on a number of occasions, is that a lot of Latter-day Saints are interested in the scrolls because they have never read them. They do not really know what the
scrolls contain. They just know what they have heard about them. I think there are some Latter-day Saints who want external justification for their beliefs. They feel their beliefs are somehow reinforced if the scrolls say this or if the Essenes believe that. Unfortunately this is the wrong way to approach the scrolls and the wrong way to approach personal faith.

I think we are making slow progress in helping those Latter-day Saints who are interested in the scrolls to appreciate the contents and value of the scrolls in a more balanced manner. We have already highlighted the scrolls’ contribution to our knowledge of early Judaism in part one of this discussion. Because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have more knowledge about the world in which John the Baptist, Jesus, and other Jews lived; about Jewish beliefs and practices at that time; about Hebrew and Aramaic; about ancient scribal practices; and about the transmission of biblical texts. However, the scrolls do not represent early Mormonism down by the Dead Sea. The sooner we get away from that assumption, the better.

Parry: Stephen D. Ricks and I authored a booklet to temper Latter-day Saints who had taken their understanding too far from what the scrolls represent and what they teach. In this ninety-three-page booklet, we tried to set the record straight on a number of items. In my own presentations, I have also tried to set the record straight among the Latter-day Saints: I emphasize that the most important aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls are the books from the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament), because the books from the Hebrew Bible are part of our scriptural canon and contain the words of Christ-centered prophets. I often talk about how the law of Moses and Isaiah’s words are centered on Christ. I usually conclude a talk on the scrolls with Isaiah 53, an Atonement-centered text. I think the most important scrolls that we should be looking at are those that are scriptural, because they pertain to Jesus Christ; we should spend most of our time reading such texts.

Dispelling Rumors about the Dead Sea Scrolls

Holzapfel: How did many of the false rumors about the Dead Sea Scrolls start?

Parry: Two or three decades ago there were publications on the Dead Sea Scrolls that perhaps were less than responsible in content and that attempted to show that the people in the Qumran community were early Latter-day Saints. The articles suggested that the people in the Qumran community were similar to or had practices similar to those of the Latter-day Saints.
Some individuals also gave firesides and produced audiotapes. The outlandish statements from some fireside speakers have damaged the Church’s reputation with the scholarly community. All three of us—that is, Dana, David, and myself—have spent the last fifteen years trying to get past such irresponsible approaches and teach audiences what the scrolls are. I always try to emphasize the biblical scrolls because they are part of our scriptural canon, and they hold authority for us.

Pike: After a presentation I gave about five years ago, someone said to me, “It is too bad you had to spend much of your presentation correcting misunderstandings about the scrolls and what they contain.” This included emphasizing that the Temple Scroll [11QTemplea or 11Q19] does not contain the Latter-day Saint temple endowment ceremony but is a reworking of passages in the Pentateuch and has an Aaronic Priesthood orientation. I also had to emphasize that the sacrament prayers are not in the scrolls.

Parry: Joseph Smith’s name is not in the scrolls as some have mistakenly claimed; Zenos and Zenock are not mentioned, and so forth.

Pike: We have been talking a lot about what the Dead Sea Scrolls are not. To actually read the Dead Sea Scrolls in English, even part of them, is to know what they are, what they contain. It is an ongoing struggle to get people to see beyond the seeming exotic and mystical nature of the scrolls and actually read some of them.

Reading the Dead Sea Scrolls in English

Holzapfel: How is reading English translations of the scrolls important for understanding them?

Pike: Somebody only reading what others have written about the scrolls and not reading the scrolls themselves is like someone only reading what others have written about the scriptures but not actually reading the scriptures. It is backwards. All the nonbiblical scrolls are available in good English translations [see the reading suggestions at the end of this article]. If people are really interested, we hope they will go to the library or bookstore and read at least a few pages of the scrolls in translation. But a word of caution is in order: there is a whole range of publications about the scrolls, from pure nonsense to informed reliable discussions.

Parry: The biblical scrolls have also been published. Now that the Dead Sea Scrolls have all been published and translated into English and other languages and all of them are before us, we can begin to really study them contextually and intertextually. So the three of us here together with others are helping to prepare the next generation of
Latter-day Saints to study the primary texts and to inform both scholarly and popular audiences of what they say.

Holzapfel: We can create an analogy: Joseph Smith had to translate the Book of Mormon into English so the next generation could compare it to the Bible. It took Robert J. Matthews to get us comfortable with the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible so the next generation can ask, what are the implications? Once we identify the text, we can start doing something with it.

Pike: Yes, that is true. But that only happens when people study the texts for what they have to tell us.

Holzapfel: The book LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls certainly studies the text for what it has to tell us. Are you talking about that book?

Pike: That volume is now ten years old. But the contents still provide a good illustration for Latter-day Saints of how we, because of the Restoration, can appreciate and understand many of the passages and truths in the Scrolls. At the same time we can appreciate the limitations of the scrolls, and we can understand that they sometimes contain what we consider to be false doctrine.

Seely: One current problem with finding good information about the Dead Sea Scrolls is that the Internet is used for instant information, but people have no sense of where this information is coming from. To study the scrolls you should know who you are reading.

Pike: Interested Church members have to use discernment while seeking out credible publications. Readers should have some sense about who the author is and what his or her credentials are.

Parry: That’s one of the problems. Lay audiences do not always know who is responsible or competent.

Understanding the Scrolls as Latter-day Saints

Holzapfel: Would you say that in each nonbiblical passage, for every one thing that resonates with Latter-day Saints, a reader would find two or three things that do not resonate?

Pike: I do not know about the statistics. About some teachings Latter-day Saints would say, “That’s just totally false.” The scrolls also contain some corrupted echoes—things that sound similar to our beliefs but that are not completely right. You can see in those echoes how the doctrine went out of the Lord’s mouth through the prophets, and after an apostasy it came back into the scrolls less than perfect. One example from the scrolls is the idea that God created the spirit of every person. However, these spirits are never described as His “children,”
and it is stated quite clearly in a few passages that God determined ahead of time—predestined—their lives before they were born [see, for example, 1QH 9.7–10]. The scrolls also contain some doctrines that are good and correct: repent, have faith in God, God loves you, God is merciful, God will help you if you come to Him. There are good doctrines and principles in the scrolls, but these are in the Bible already. Sadly some people have found and enjoyed such teachings in the Dead Sea Scrolls without realizing that most, if not all, of these are in the earlier Hebrew Bible (Old Testament).

**Seely:** I think we should study the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls just like we study other religions that are not our own. If we go to them for added perspective and appreciation for the truth that we already have, we will gain greater insights. For example, one of the scrolls I worked on discussed the circumcised heart, that is, the fact that we do not have the power to be righteous without the grace of God. Just as Dana said, this concept is actually already in the Bible. It is in Deuteronomy, it is in Paul’s writings, it is everywhere. Somehow it was fun to read about the circumcised heart in the Dead Sea Scrolls, too. But if we go to the scrolls to prove the Church is true, we won’t be satisfied. On the other hand, if we study the scrolls in the same manner we study Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or even Buddhism and Hinduism, then we can find greater perspective and added appreciation for the truth we do have.

To understand the scrolls, we need to remember that the scroll writers were people who found themselves in a crisis, with apostasy all around them. They sought a meaningful relationship with God, and they found something. What they found was not the fulness of the gospel, yet it is still worth studying from their perspective. But if we want to look just for parallels, then we would be better off just reading the scriptures.

**Pike:** Well said. When we go looking for parallels to “prove” the Church, we do injustice to both the restored gospel and the scrolls.

**Holzapfel:** I think we are maturing to the point that we can reach out beyond ourselves, and as Krister Stendahl proposes, look at other traditions with “holy envy.” We can look at another faith’s tradition and say, “Wow, I like how Jews read the scriptures. The Torah is really important to them.” Or, “I like how they keep the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day is really important to them.” In that sense now Latter-day Saints can look back at the Dead Sea Scrolls and appreciate that they were written by a people who were, as David said, trying to approach God, to find a relationship with Him, in a really hostile world. Their world was caving in around them, economically and politically, yet they were trying as best they could to hold...
out. And I think if we approach the scrolls with that attitude, our study could take us on a really remarkable journey. We should get away from trying to prove the Church is true with the scrolls.

Pike: Amen. And for those who are really interested in what the scrolls have to say, there is much to appreciate.

Parry: Elder Dallin H. Oaks significantly mentioned the Dead Sea Scrolls in the April 2006 conference: “The Lord will eventually cause the inspired teachings He has given to His children in various nations to be brought forth for the benefit of all people. This will include accounts of the visit of the resurrected Lord to what we call the lost tribes of Israel and His revelations to all the seed of Abraham. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows one way this can occur.” That gives us another way to look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, not at their text and not at what their compositions say, but at their discovery.

Holzapfel: Are you suggesting that some of the records containing “inspired teachings” might be discovered by scholars then?

Parry: It would be both interesting and significant to hear more of this topic from Elder Oaks.

Pike: Because we are missing significant gospel information in the Dead Sea Scrolls and because some of the doctrine that is there is false from our perspective as Latter-day Saints, we cannot approach the Dead Sea Scrolls as pure teachings from the Lord. The scrolls are not going to teach us anything about the gospel that we do not already know. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was not the Lord trying to bring forth more scripture. Instead the scrolls, especially the ones that are copies of biblical books, are a form of truth from “out of the earth,” as mentioned in Moses 7:62, but they are not a complete package of pure, unadulterated restored doctrine.

I gave a Sperry Symposium presentation a while ago on the modern recovery of the world of the Bible as part of the restoration of all things. In it I posited that the Lord’s influence is manifest in the modern rediscovery and translation of ancient Near Eastern texts and antiquities—events that began to occur at the same time as the Restoration of the gospel. But people do not study Babylonian creation myths to learn the doctrine of the Creation. Likewise, even though they are closer to the biblical tradition, we would not study the scrolls to learn about things that have already been more fully and accurately revealed through latter-day prophets. The Lord told us to study history, geography, people, and languages; learn about the world, He said, past and present (see D&C 88:78–79). Our studies should start from that perspective—not the perspective of proving something or
finding something juicy that we can use to convert our neighbors.

**Holzapfel:** The enthusiasm for ancient texts is contagious, and there is something remarkable about antiquities discovered. It is a remarkable moment when something that has been preserved is found, and there is some excitement about seeing something and touching something from the time of Jesus.

**Pike:** All three of us would agree that it is exciting to sit down with ancient texts and feel a connection with people from two thousand years ago. It is exciting to be able to read the texts and enjoy them. That’s why we do what we do. Our only caution here is not to elevate the Dead Sea Scrolls beyond what they are and what they can contribute to our understanding.

**Seely:** I concur with all of that. It needs to be said that Latter-day Saints have an enthusiasm for this because we base our doctrine on voices from the dust, previously unknown texts that came forth from out of the ground. To our credit we are trained to be thrilled about ancient texts because we have the Book of Mormon, and we have Joseph Smith and his interest in Egyptian things. This enthusiasm is understandable, and if correctly applied it can be fruitful.

### Applying Doctrine and Covenants 91 to the Dead Sea Scrolls

**Holzapfel:** The Lord revealed Doctrine and Covenants 91 in response to Joseph Smith’s question about translating the Apocrypha. Since then many Latter-day Saint scholars have applied the section to almost every discovery: Nag Hammadi, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and others. What do you think? Should we apply Doctrine and Covenants 91 to the Dead Sea Scrolls?

**Parry:** We seek truth wherever we may find it. I have personally applied parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls to my life: some of the pseudepigraphical, some of the apocryphal, and some of the sectarian texts. I have also used Doctrine and Covenants 91 to help other Latter-day Saints have the proper perspective with regard to the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls. In section 91 the Lord says, “Concerning the Apocrypha—There are many things contained therein that are true; . . . there are many things contained therein that are not true” (D&C 91:1–2). That’s exactly the case with the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls. You may find a truth in one of them, and then you may find something that is contrary to our understanding of the gospel in another. With those contrary things you must say, “These are uninspired thoughts or interpolations of humans.”
Seely: Doctrine and Covenants 91 distinguishes between what is canonical and what is not to us. Since none of the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls are canonical, we must at least recognize the distinction and apply the Lord’s guidance about noncanonical material. We can also perhaps apply the idea of searching for truth in noncanonical material prescribed by Doctrine and Covenants 91 to science, literature, and art. It is a big concept we have here.

Pike: Since you are asking us, Richard, what do you think?

Holzapfel: Some members of the Church recall the Book of Mormon passage, “many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the [Bible]” (1 Nephi 13:29), and assume that we might find those “plain and precious things” in new textual discoveries, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. I am much more cautious today and have often considered another passage to help me put this in context. In the book of Moses, the Lord promises Moses, “I will raise up another like unto thee; and [my words] shall be had again among the children of men” (Moses 1:41). I have come to believe that the “plain and precious” truths will be restored through a prophet, not a scholar. That additional truths—historical and contextual—could come forth through scholarship is a given, but I think the “saving truths” will come through someone raised up by the Lord and called and anointed as a prophet. In that light, I think some caution is necessary before we apply section 91, a revelation dealing with a specific set of books that in Joseph Smith’s day had been marginalized by the Protestants, to any and all textual discoveries. The recently discovered Gospel of Judas, a Gnostic text discovered in Egypt and recently popularized by National Geographic, is a good example. I do not think section 91 has anything to say about this text.

Nevertheless, I would not want to apply section 91 only to the Apocrypha; certainly there should be some broader application of the passage when reading other ancient texts such as the scrolls because they contain Biblical material, “whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom” (D&C 91:5).

Pike: Agreed. But the principle that is articulated in section 91 is helpful and valuable when reading texts, like the scrolls, that are not part of our canon of scripture but are somehow connected to the biblical tradition. I mean, we should expect to find some truths in these texts!

Parry: Doctrine and Covenants 91 helps us, as members of the Church, remain grounded so that we do not get too carried away with parabiblical texts, that is, big texts that are biblical in nature and form and yet are not part of the canon. In that way, section 91 is a great blessing to the Church because it reminds us to be cautious when we
approach texts such as the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls.

Seely: This approach in section 91, “whoso readeth it, let him understand” (D&C 91:4), could be used by two different people for two different ends. One could see it as a warning, and the other could see it as an invitation. So we must be careful about this. Some people read section 91 as an invitation to seek truth everywhere, and they end up sensationalizing things.

Holzapfel: Certainly we can all agree with David on this point—there have been many sensationalized talks, tapes, and books that have hurt us. I remember an experience in southern California when I was a stake mission president. The full-time missionaries had been teaching a promising family, but their progress suddenly plateaued. As we discussed what steps we might take to move the family forward one of the missionaries said, “I think it’s time for the ‘DSS’ discussion!” I was unfamiliar with this acronym for a particular missionary discussion, though I knew what DSS stood for in an academic setting—the Dead Sea Scrolls. When I pressed the missionary, he said they had a special discussion regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls that proved the Church was true. I was shocked and amazed. I asked him how the Dead Sea Scrolls could prove the Church was true. I was disturbed by his response; he had actually gotten almost everything wrong about them. I took some time to help this well-meaning and devoted missionary understand the historical context and content of the scrolls. I concluded our discussion by gently informing him that the scrolls could not “prove the Church is true” since those that wrote them and those that collected them were not proto-Mormons; they were not even Christians. I could discern the disappointment in his countenance. I was dashing a false testimony about the value of the scrolls. At the end of our conversation, I asked him where he had gotten these ideas, and he told me about a set of tapes on the subject that had been popular among some missionaries.

I did some research about these tapes and discovered rather quickly that the speaker did not have any academic training that would have made him capable of translating or placing the scrolls into context. He was a popular fireside speaker who was apparently well known for his Dead Sea Scrolls presentations. In them he made outlandish claims about the scrolls and their relationship to the Restoration. It seems the more incredible the claims, the more popular he had become.

A short time after this experience, I went to hear John C. Trever speak on the scrolls at the University of California–Irvine. Trever, as a young scholar working at the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR) Center in Jerusalem, was shown the Isaiah Scroll and produced the first color photographs of the complete text in 1948. After examining it, Trever
concluded that the scroll was the oldest Hebrew manuscript yet discovered and that the text was of significant importance to the study of the Bible. He was well known among scroll scholars.

The talk was informative and interesting because he was there at the beginning. At the end of his presentation, I was literally stunned when he said that some churches misused the scrolls for their own purpose and then specifically mentioned The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His criticism was direct and pointed. Following the lecture, I made my way to the front to talk with him. I had met him before, so I reintroduced myself and then asked him about his comments about the Church. He informed me that he had a set of tapes in his possession by a Latter-day Saint scholar who taught at BYU, and from these tapes he had made his assessments about Mormons and the scrolls. It was the very speaker that I had learned about from the young missionary. Apparently some missionaries had given the set of tapes to an investigator in an effort to convert him. The investigator passed them along to Trever for his evaluation. To say the least, after Trever listen to the tapes he reported back to the investigator that the tapes were full of ridiculous statements, some of which were sheer fabrication. The investigator stopped visiting with the missionaries, whom he no longer trusted.

I attempted to correct his impression about the Church. I told him that the man was not a recognized Latter-day Saint scholar and that he was not an employee at BYU. I mentioned that there were an increasing number of competent Latter-day Saint scholars; in particular I told him about the work of S. Kent Brown and C. Wilfred Griggs. I had recently completed a graduate class on the scrolls at BYU under the direction of S. Kent Brown and knew that good work was being done on the scrolls by members of the Church. In the end, I am not sure I changed his mind about the Church, but hopefully he understood that one lay fireside speaker does not represent informed attitudes about the scrolls by Latter-day Saint scholars.

In the years that followed, through my continued graduate studies at Hebrew Union College and at the University of California–Irvine, I learned a lot about the world of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I discovered that some of the early assertions about the scrolls were unwarranted and that some of the dogmatic statements about the people of the scrolls and what they believed were surely wrong. In the process I also discovered that some Latter-day Saints had been too willing to find “Mormonism” in the spaces between letters and lines in the scrolls. Often unsupported and unfounded assertions about similarities in practice, organization, and beliefs between those who wrote and collected the Dead Sea Scrolls and those in the Church were not only in error but were also wrongheaded.
Teaching the Dead Sea Scrolls in Seminary and Institute

_Holzapfel:_ If you had a child studying the Old Testament or the New Testament in seminary or institute, what one thing would you want your child’s teacher to know about the Dead Sea Scrolls? In fact, what one thing about the Dead Sea Scrolls should all seminary and institute teachers know?

_Parry:_ In our discussions here about the scrolls, we have scarcely mentioned the most significant scrolls—those that comprise the Hebrew Bible. Of the 900 plus compositions that make up the Dead Sea Scrolls, approximately 225 are from books from the Old Testament, such as Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, and so forth. These biblical scrolls represent the world’s oldest copies of the books of the Hebrew Bible (although most of the scrolls are fragmented), dating to more than a thousand years older than the Aleppo Codex, the Leningrad Codex, or any other Masoretic-type texts. This fact is of considerable importance because of what we are learning about the great care that the Jews took in copying and transmitting these scriptures. A Book of Mormon passage recognizes their great labors and diligence (see 2 Nephi 29:4). Furthermore, the Dead Sea Scrolls’ biblical and parabiblical texts shed much light on the formation of the canon. Many scholars from various religions are now more open to the idea that perhaps there were other scriptural books (with full religious authority) than those published in what we now call the Old Testament. These scholars continue to discuss the implications of an “open canon” in both formal and informal settings. There is much, much more that can be said about the biblical scrolls—variants that shed light on specific readings in Isaiah, Samuel, Psalms and other books, missing psalms, the meaning of specific Hebrew words, and so on.

_Seeley:_ There are some similarities between doctrine in the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls and latter-day doctrine, but some of the similarities are superficial. We should always remember that the scroll writers were not Latter-day Saints—they were a religious sect of Judaism. So they have a lot to teach us about spirituality, our relationship with God, and familiar religious ideas. But they cannot teach us Latter-day Saint doctrine.

_Pike:_ I would hope that all CES teachers have at least a basic idea of what is in the scrolls—what they can teach us, and what they cannot teach us. What do they have to offer? I think one of the greatest things about the scrolls is the example of the community that created them. As David mentioned, these were very devout Jewish people who were
doing the best they could with what they knew and what they understood. Some of the people in the Qumran community sacrificed much, seriously cutting themselves off from Jerusalem temple practices to pursue their spiritual ideals. The text says that the community wanted to be holy enough for the angels of God to reside among them.

But again, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, Qumran was not a community authorized by God with legitimate prophets who were speaking on behalf of the Lord with legitimate priesthood keys and authority. And so what similarities there are between Latter-day Saint beliefs and the Qumran community’s beliefs exist because we both have connections to the stream of biblical, Old Testament tradition. The connections are real and interesting but are often quite superficial. For example one scroll indicates that community governance included a council of “twelve laymen and three priests schooled to perfection in all that has been revealed of the entire Law” (1QS8). Some Latter-day Saints say, “Oh, that sounds like the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.” Well, in a way it does, but there are two important considerations to keep in mind. One is that twelve was an important number in ancient Israel. There were twelve tribes of Israel, each of which, at least sometimes, had a tribal leader (see Numbers 1:1–18), and that is probably why there were twelve Apostles in Jesus’s day and why there are twelve Apostles now. More importantly, the Qumran council was presided over by three Aaronic priests and included twelve laymen. There is a sense of presiding priesthood, but their version of presiding authority is certainly not what is represented in the New Testament nor accepted by Latter-day Saints in this dispensation.

They did not have legitimate Aaronic Priesthood keys. In my mind the community at Qumran is conceptually similar to Christian Protestants in the 1500s. The Qumran community was protesting some of the religious practices of their day. However, that did not make them completely legitimate in the eyes of the Lord, anymore than did the early Christian Protestants’ actions, even though they were headed in a good direction as best they could. Qumran was not a Restoration community.

**Holzapfel:** What cautions would you give to Church teachers about the Dead Sea Scrolls?

**Pike:** As with many topics, I think it is better to say nothing about the Dead Sea Scrolls than to provide students with inaccurate and incomplete information about them. If teachers want to spend some time learning about these texts from responsible sources and if they feel
that including occasional comments about them in class is beneficial to what they are trying to teach, then great. The scrolls are certainly important and fascinating, but the nonbiblical portion is not essential for most CES courses.

**Parry:** At the end of a talk about the Dead Sea Scrolls, my concluding words often are, “Read the Book of Mormon: it teaches of Jesus. Read the Old Testament and the New Testament and other scriptures: they are Christ-centered texts; they teach us about Jesus. If you have a few other moments, then you can read other texts, but spend most of your time in the scriptures.”

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**Notes**


**Further Reading on the Dead Sea Scrolls**


To purchase the following publications, visit www.byubookstore.com, click on book title or search ISBN; or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

**Moral Foundations: Standing Firm in a World of Shifting Values**

“The Gospel: The Foundation for a Professional Career” symposium was held on BYU campus in March 2007. It was cosponsored by Religious Education and the Ira A. Fulton College of Engineering and Technology. The purpose of the symposium was to emphasize how important it is for graduates of BYU to live the highest standards of morality and integrity as they leave campus and assume residency and employment in the world community. It was an opportunity to make principles taught by the Latter-day Saint faith find practical application in the lives of graduates. This volume contains the presentations from this symposium.

*ISBN: 978-0-8425-2686-9, Retail: $21.95*
“Behold the Lamb of God”: An Easter Celebration

Followers of Jesus Christ since the beginning have referred to their Savior as the Lamb of God. While down by the river Jordan, John the Baptist was baptizing those who desired to follow the Savior. When the Savior approached the Baptist, John declared, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). After John baptized Jesus, he bore record “that he had baptized the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 10:10). The next day, when John and two of his disciples saw Jesus, the Baptist again proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). This volume celebrates the life and sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2693-7, Retail: $25.95

Modern Perspectives on Nauvoo and the Mormons: Interviews with Long-Term Residents

After the announcement of the intent to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple, there was much discussion in Nauvoo about why The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would want to build such a large building in such a small place and what impact it might have on the town. Questions were raised about the vast potential increase in the number of visitors to Nauvoo, as well as whether large numbers of Church members would come to settle in Nauvoo permanently, significantly affecting the political and cultural environment. Additional interest focused on the whole history of the Mormons in Nauvoo. Those ideas, attitudes, and feelings of residents were captured in this collection of interviews. Twenty-six Nauvoo residents were interviewed and their answers recorded in this volume. (Original printing: January 2003. Second printing: October 2007.)

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2526-8, Retail: $29.95
Living the Book of Mormon: “Abiding by Its Precepts”

The 36th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

“I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” Joseph Smith’s statement rings true 166 years later. The Book of Mormon clarifies precepts taught in the Bible and invites us to live more Christlike lives. Topics of the 2007 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium include redemption through Christ, the “three Rs” of the Book of Mormon, and the divine precept of charity. Presenters include Elder Joe J. Christensen, Terry B. Ball, Richard O. Cowan, and Robert L. Millet.

ISBN: 978-1-59038-799-3, Retail: $25.95

The Tabernacle: “An Old and Wonderful Friend”

As the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City’s Temple Square was renovated in 2007, historian Scott C. Esplin releases this in-depth review of the Tabernacle’s construction. Featuring beautiful and historic photos, much of the book consists of a newly edited version of Stewart L. Grow’s thesis on the building of the Tabernacle. Grow was the grandson of Henry Grow, the bridge builder who built the roof of the historic Tabernacle. The author has provided a new introduction, placing the thesis in historical context.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2675-3, Retail: $24.95

A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews

This collection of essays offers tribute to Robert J. Matthews for his eightieth birthday. The wide-ranging essays are a reflection of his varied interests and academic loves. Written by Matthews’s colleagues, topics range from biblical studies to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2676-0, Retail: $24.95
Past Conferences

“Come unto Me”: The 2008 BYU Easter Conference

Easter was in March this year, so the Easter Conference was held Saturday, March 22, 2008, in the Joseph Smith Building. “Behold the Lamb of God”: An Easter Celebration is now available. It contains the proceedings from last year’s presentations.

The Tenth Annual BYU Religious Education Student Symposium

This year’s presentations took place in the Wilkinson Student Center on Friday, February 22, 2008. The purpose of the student symposium is to provide a forum for students to research, write, and present papers about religious subjects from a faithful perspective.

Upcoming Conferences

John Taylor Historical Conference

Now being held annually, this year’s Church history conference will honor John Taylor. It will be held October 10, 2008, in the Wilkinson Student Center. Last year the focus was Wilford Woodruff, and in 2006 it was Oliver Cowdery.

The Thirty-Seventh Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

Scheduled for October 24–25, 2008, this Sperry Symposium focuses on “The Doctrine and Covenants: Text, Context, and Modern Fulfillment.” The keynote speaker, Elder C. Max Caldwell, released member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy, will present in the Joseph Smith Building, Friday, October 24.
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Jolene Edmunds Rockwood lives in Batesville, Indiana, with her husband, Fred. They have six children and ten grandchildren. Jolene earned a BA from the University of Utah, an MTS from the Harvard Divinity School, and is a contributing author to three books on theological issues. She has been teaching early-morning seminary for twenty years. As an avid supporter of the arts, Jolene founded an arts council and started arts-in-education programs in southeastern Indiana, which have won her state and local recognition. She has written numerous grants and is presently raising funds for a performing arts center.

RSC Director

Dr. Terry B. Ball is a professor of ancient scripture and dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. He joined the BYU faculty in 1992 after spending twelve years as an institute and seminary teacher. He received his PhD from BYU in archaeobotany with emphasis on the Ancient Near East. Brother Ball’s recent ancient scripture research has focused primarily on the prophet Isaiah. In addition to teaching and researching in ancient scripture, Brother Ball is an active researcher in the field of archaeobotany and is currently involved with research in Israel, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Oman. He is married to the former DeAnna Hill. They have six children.

Student Editorial Intern

Rachel Ann Grover is a graduate student in art history at BYU. For her undergraduate degree she studied English and humanities and wrote an honors thesis on Resurrection motifs in World War I art. She has worked at the RSC for three and a half years and enjoys editing. Rachel loves to travel, go to museums, and study sacred architecture. She served a mission in Poland and likes to eat pierogi. In the summer of 2008 she will be living in Jordan with her husband, Andrew, as he studies Arabic and she works on her master’s thesis on Byzantine church mosaics.
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