If you really believe in a progressive salvation, that means you have to constantly work at it... Becoming a Christian as Christ was requires a lifetime of progress.
ON THE COVER:
The lifelong process of becoming disciples of Christ is symbolized
by these giant sequoias in Yosemite National Park.

“The idea is to teach the students how to teach themselves in personal study,
how to ponder, how to gather information, how to get their spiritual eyes
open so they understand things more deeply.”

Elder Dale E. Miller
Welcome to volume 10 of the Religious Educator! At the beginning of our tenth year, I asked Robert L. Millet, a former dean, and Terry B. Ball, our current dean, to comment on this ten-year milestone.

Robert L. Millet: “For a number of years we as an administrative council in Religious Education counseled together on the need for a publishing outlet that would benefit gospel teachers and students, containing articles on Church history, doctrine, and teaching. We wanted to produce a journal that would better meet the needs of all who love gospel learning, that would reinforce solid doctrinal themes and inform readers of new historical insights or discoveries. BYU Studies had served a marvelous role through the years, but it seemed to be directed to a much broader audience with articles dealing with literature, the arts, and the sciences. We also felt the need for teachers throughout the Church to have available to them the fruits of new research conducted at BYU and elsewhere as well as proven teaching methods from fellow educators. Once the first issue of the Religious Educator was released, I felt that we were on to something important. Time and experience and outstanding editorial oversight have made this publishing venue an extremely valuable one.”

Terry B. Ball: “It is exciting to reflect on what the journal has accomplished during the past decade. From its inception under the leadership of Dean Millet in the spring of 2000, it has fulfilled well its inaugural purpose of publishing articles that provide insights for those involved in studying and teaching the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, whether in Institutes and Church school classrooms, in wards and branches throughout the Church, or in homes around the world. The hundreds of thoughtful, well-researched articles contributed to the Religious Educator by dedicated scholars, teachers, and leaders now constitute a remarkable library of pedagogical, doctrinal, and devotional resources to help educators as they strive to effectively teach of things that matter most. Much to our delight, the journal has grown into one of the most prestigious venues for researchers to publish their best faith-based scholarship and has done much to help Religious Education at Brigham Young University accomplish its overall mission of “building the kingdom of God by teaching and preserving the sacred doctrine and history of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” I wish to personally express my deep appreciation to our publication office in the Religious Studies Center who work so diligently to produce the journal. Their vision and labors have met and far exceeded all of our hopes for what the Religious Educator could be.”

We appreciate Robert L. Millet for his efforts to establish this publication and Terry B. Ball for his support of our efforts to provide another opportunity to consider important matters related to the glorious gospel we have received. It is all “good news”!

Best wishes!

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
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Gustafson: Elder Miller, during your final years as a General Authority, you served as the Executive Director of the Priesthood Department. Will you give us some macro perspective on current issues?

Miller: As your readers may not know, the ecclesiastical departments at Church headquarters, along with the Church Educational System, are focused on the Church purposes to bring all to Christ. As such, we, as the Executive Directors of those departments, interact continually to monitor and help improve the teaching and learning process of the Church.

That coordination gave rise to an informal interdepartmental committee being formed with representation from each department, including CES. We raised questions about how to improve the teaching manuals, teacher development, and classroom participation. The primary focus was on how to improve learning, testimony, and the prevailing sense by members that the spirit of truth is being taught. Early on, we invited Elder David A. Bednar to provide his perspective. He gave us some wonderful ideas that we had not thought of before. President Packer was also very helpful on this theme of teaching and learning.

An interesting perspective on learning is how it takes place in the temple. Without becoming too specific, the process is instructive. There is cognitive presentation, then demonstration, then practice. In effect, it is understanding doctrine, changing perspectives and instilling patterns of an eternal nature, and, importantly, the making and keeping
of covenants. This, in my mind, gets into the depths of the gospel in the sense that it becomes a seamless combination of intellect, spirit, and behavior all put together. Learning is enhanced through participation.

Our committee began to address the question of how to promote better classroom participation in the teaching and learning process. When President Packer spent two weeks in Chile during my assignment as Area President, we talked about this very topic. He had an interesting citation in Romans: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, doest thou steal?” (Romans 2:21). I think the point President Packer was making from that scripture was that if you’ve got your eyes open as you’re teaching, the Spirit personalizes truth to you. So the teacher is a learner, and the learner becomes a teacher.

**Gustafson:** Placing members in a teaching role can be challenging, particularly in an area composed primarily of converts.

**Miller:** You are correct, particularly when so many are first-generation members of the Church. The sixth-generation members are primarily from the Wasatch Front and the western United States. In the rest of the United States and around the world, a majority of the Saints are first-generation members. In fact, when I was the Area President over the United States East Area, I would ask in the adult session of Saturday night sessions at stake conferences, “How many of you are transplants from the West?” On average, 50 percent of the hands would go up. So if you were to take the western U.S. members out of the East, you have more of an international environment in terms of maturity in the Church and in study of the doctrines. Add to that the fact that much of our missionary work is among immigrants from around the world you have a wide mix of members in the average Church classroom setting. This holds true all over Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and increasingly in the United States.

So the issue is that our first-generation members need special attention as to how to learn the gospel. In some respects, many sixth-generation members could also be better taught how to learn. As I thought about it, much of our standard teaching to well-established members is more the reviewing, remembering, and recommitting type of teaching. That is, we cycle through the scriptures and cycle through the history of the Church. However, with first-generation members, it is different. Initially, they became accustomed to being taught one-on-one by the missionaries. Taking personal responsibility to attend class regularly—to learn by study and by faith and to build testimony—was not
in their background. Teachers need to help them along in this process. Many do not have strong learning habits or strong testimonies as yet.

New converts are thrown into a new environment in the classroom setting. With the missionaries they had one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, and learning help. Soon thereafter, they are grouped with other members, usually with those who have more maturity in gospel learning.

Reaching everyone in this “maturity mix” requires the teacher to go well beyond the “stand and deliver” concept of teaching. Part of teaching by the Spirit is to know the spiritual needs of various members, both before and during class time. It means knowing the hearts and minds of class members, both collectively and individually. I’m impressed by the way in which Book of Mormon prophets often would qualify what they say by the words “some of you.” The Spirit helped them to know the various states of understanding and righteousness of their audience. It is instructive to go back through the Book of Mormon and learn how to teach by reading how the prophets taught, how they came to understand their audience so thoroughly. They knew their people, which was one factor. Receiving inspiration was the other.

**Gustafson:** How do teachers work to that end? How do they know when they are teaching as the prophets taught?

**Miller:** I think the answer is found in Doctrine and Covenants section 50. I’m particularly fond of verses 21 and 22 of that section, where it tells us that when we teach by the Spirit of Truth, the learner and teacher come together and feel the Spirit; they rejoice together. To some degree, that’s a measure of a good class, when there is rejoicing. I interpret rejoicing in a number of ways. One is the intellectual experience where our minds are opened to see that which we could not see before. The Spirit has opened the eyes of our understanding, so to speak. In this case it is not necessarily an emotional experience, but it can be. In other cases, the rejoicing will be a more emotional experience. It is the Spirit of the Lord confirming that what is being said is of eternal truth. The rejoicing is often an internal feeling, not necessarily outwardly expressed. It may come from what is being said by the teacher, what is being read, or by the statements of truth and testimony from other class participants. A teacher would do well to encourage this exchange and acknowledge the presence of the Spirit.

That said, experiencing this rejoicing in the class doesn’t necessarily indicate that members are going to change after they leave the parking lot. Maybe the teacher’s epilogue for a good class is to pray that what was experienced in class will carry a lasting impact on the participants.
**Gustafson:** How can instructors know if they are being effective?

**Miller:** I don’t know if you knew this, but in 2002, I was assigned to help develop and produce the series of worldwide leadership training satellite broadcasts that replaced the area training meetings. As we were taping Elder Holland’s demonstration on how to teach a class in 2006, it occurred to me that despite great teaching, the teacher doesn’t have very good measures of his or her teaching effectiveness other than an attentive and participative audience. He or she can, if in tune with the Spirit, sense if the Spirit is there but not know what people will eventually do as a result. Even the prophets were not often given to know the outcome of their teaching. A teacher must be satisfied that the Spirit did testify and confirm that truth was taught and received, maybe not by all, but by some. Sometimes class participants will come forward afterwards and confirm that they were touched by the Spirit and were touched to change their thinking and their conduct. But that is not always the case and not a full measure of full class impact. Often, class members will be affected much later in ways that the teacher will never know. A good measure of how to know if you, as teacher, have been effective is by the measure the Lord will give you, through the Spirit; not by what class members say or do not say.
Measuring whether good learning is taking place in the Church is an important issue. To my knowledge, there is nothing yet formulated Churchwide to address this issue. We constantly review how to create better manuals, how to train leaders in the calling of good teachers, and how to improve teacher development, but not so much on the learning side of the equation. That is measured more by the Quarterly Member Progress Report. How someone is doing in their own salvation and eternal growth is an intensely personal matter.

Richard Anderson’s comment in *Understanding Paul* might be appropriate here. If heaven were truly like the Protestants say it is—paraphrasing—then all you have to do is just be good enough to become a spectator to God’s glory. But if you really believe in a progressive salvation, that means you have to constantly work at it. It is not saying you are “saved” and then going on maintenance mode. Becoming a Christian as Christ was requires a lifetime of progress. You stay on the path of purifying, sanctifying, and perfecting yourself. That is what is so different about our faith compared to other Christian doctrines. It is the issue of personal responsibility for eternal progression. Teachers are called to help this process by teaching and testifying by the Spirit of Truth as taught by the apostles and the prophets. We as teachers would do well to not only teach those truths but also to learn how to teach as the prophets taught.

**Gustafson:** Is it correct to say that if you want to become a more powerful, effective gospel teacher, you have to measure what you are doing, and you measure that by the level of spirituality you feel or closeness to the Spirit? Where would you go with that?

**Miller:** Somehow it has to get down to the teacher spiritually discerning what is happening, that calls for a heightened level of spirituality of teachers. The teachers who seem to be connecting with their students are able to discern both the Spirit and student needs. To pose your question differently, How does the Lord measure it? How does He measure the success of the interchange between teacher and student? Is the best test found in Doctrine and Covenants section 50?

One of the experiences that have broadened my thinking a bit about teaching by the Spirit was when we, as General Authorities, would give talks in general conference. When first preparing for a general conference talk, I asked myself, “Well, how do you gain the Spirit while you are reading off the teleprompter?” The answer for me was that the Spirit comes by praying and pondering over the topic, praying and pondering over how to put it together, and praying and pondering over the final draft until it truly is the final draft. Some have
wondered if the topics are assigned; they are not. Many times, we have all witnessed how general conference speakers will reawaken that same Spirit during delivery, despite the challenge of the teleprompter. I think members of the Church would be surprised at how many drafts General Authorities go through before they feel that they have it right. It is by study and by faith over a length of time. To some degree, that happens with good classroom preparation.

I have found that I could not go out on assignment to stake conferences and “wing it.” That is not the way to invite the Spirit. I remember once taking a long walk early on a Sunday morning in Kirtland, Ohio. I was there with President Hinckley, Elder Maxwell, and Elder Christofferson for the rededication of Kirtland. Each of us was to speak at the morning meeting. Not knowing what to speak on, I walked and pondered for an hour or so. Suddenly, the thought came to me, What if the Restoration had never occurred? What would the world be like without it? I went back to the motel and started a list of all the doctrines and other evidences of the Restoration that would not be with us today had the Restoration not happened; that was my talk. I know that it came from the Spirit. It was a thought that I never had considered beforehand. My recommendation to teachers is to prepare early and thoroughly but leave sufficient time to ponder and wait on the Spirit.

Here is another idea that is probably not well understood; the Holy Spirit teaches you things not to say as well as things to say. And I think for some reason that is why some teachers get off on tangents, talk too long, cannot seem to get into a discussion format—they don’t know when to let go. They don’t know when to stop, allowing students to ponder and participate. President Packer is a master at presenting short questions, letting his audience do some pondering before expounding on a point of doctrine. He will drop a one-line question or statement and then wait for reactions.

So, back to your question, I think we could probably define some of the variables that lead towards good learning. But in terms of measuring the effects of them, I think that really has to be something teachers have to find out on their own. Some will be happy when people come to them afterward and say, “That was a great class.” Some will make a phone call, saying, “That changed my life” or “That resolved a big issue that I had.”

For me, teaching by the Spirit is much like giving a blessing. It is teaching by extensive study and, by faith. Elder Bednar gave a CES broadcast called Seek Learning by Faith, in which he emphasized taking a step forward and believing the Holy Ghost will help you. The best
example I can give of that is giving a blessing. The process of giving a blessing and teaching should be similar. You discern the spirit of those to whom you bless (and teach). When you give a blessing, you lay your hands on somebody’s head and often wait for the Spirit to guide you. You may start to say something and then decide not to. In interviews with patriarchs, some tell me that they have had things revealed to them (about the person to whom a blessing is being given) but are instructed by the Spirit not to mention. It gives them context around which to give the blessing.

It’s also true that a teacher has to become tuned with the Spirit to know basically what to trim out and what not to say. It is a discipline that comes with practice. I think teaching by the Spirit is a developed ability. It takes time and spiritual energy. The Spirit can tell you what path to follow and what path not to follow. So you do all the preparation work, but then you are prepared to follow when the Spirit directs you.

Gustafson: It seems that, as teachers, oftentimes we get focused on our end of the equation, whether we are prepared, whether we know our stuff; but we aren’t as concerned or focused on the recipients and their progress or understanding.

Miller: Sometimes when you are speaking in a stake conference or a ward meeting, for whatever reason, a thought will enter your mind: There is someone in this audience who needs something different than everybody else here. The question is, do I then address that problem or concern? General Authorities have that experience many times in the course of stake conferences. Somebody will come in who is going through a real problem or going through a testimony challenge. Is it worth saving the one and reframing what you are saying? It’s back to reaching the one.

Many years ago, after being released as a bishop, I had the wonderful experience of teaching the priests in our ward. We began by posing the question, “What questions or concerns do you have about the gospel?” We made a list of about thirty questions. Many were minor points, but were important to one or more of the priests. We worked these questions into the coming lessons. Each priest was asked to select a question and prepare the answers for a later class. The attention span went up significantly. We were discussing their questions and concerns. That is just one way of knowing your audience and how to address their needs.

On another occasion, while at a Washington DC district conference, we gathered the youth together. We asked them to comment on the type of questions they were being asked about the Church by other
students in their schools. We then suggested ways of handling those questions. They were most attentive because we were dealing with real, day-to-day issues in trying to stay strong in the gospel and to defend the doctrines.

This gets us to another point about teaching the gospel in class, not becoming trapped trying to teach all that has been prepared or that is in the manual. It is more important that the class members are really with you. Assignments of the remaining material can be given, letting students teach themselves on personal time. Currently, I am assigned as one of the teachers in our ward Gospel Doctrine class. I know from experience that a teacher cannot possibly cover in depth all the material in a given lesson. The manuals were created to provide options. You have to select, hopefully by the Spirit, what is needed for that Sunday. On one occasion, I felt that the class members needed to understand the importance of using the Bible Dictionary. The Bible Dictionary in the LDS version is of major help to understanding the scriptures. It is not used sufficiently. There are important explanations that are not in the footnotes, nor in the scriptures, nor in the Topical Guide. You’ll find it nowhere else but in the Bible Dictionary.

By the way, Elder Bednar introduced me to one of the best definitions on grace, which comes from the Bible Dictionary. He and I sat in his office and read together. That was a great help toward a more complete understanding of what grace is all about.

The idea is to teach the students how to teach themselves in personal study, how to ponder, how to gather information, how to get their spiritual eyes open so they understand things more deeply. So along with teaching content, we need to teach the learning process in a way that people can build better learning habits. We would like to bring about an awakening of the teacher to see that the process of both teaching and learning go along with the importance of the lessons’ content.

**Gustafson:** How do you define the responsibilities of a teacher to students, whether it is a seminary teacher or a Gospel Doctrine teacher? Is it just strictly those thirty-five minutes they are together? Or is there some kind of a bond that exists between, in a mentor-student relationship, as you do in science or other disciplines, where it is a mentoring role, not just a teaching role?

**Miller:** Oh, I think definitely there is a mentoring role to play. Teaching how to learn and learning how to teach are both mentoring roles. What great mentors we have in the scriptures and the living prophets!
**Gustafson:** Where have you learned about what you need to teach? That’s a broader question, but you seem to be very pensive, always churning ideas over in your mind. Where have you learned the answers to these questions? Has it been through the Spirit? Has it been through your own efforts? Has it been through professional training? Just experience?

**Miller:** I think all of the above, really. A lot of it has been pondering until the insight comes. Pondering is about asking yourself and the Lord questions that promote further study and prayer. There are questions that I’ve had for years that haven’t had a good answer until much later in life. Obviously, better answers have come after being exposed more to the counsels of the First Presidency, the Twelve, especially while traveling together on assignment. As teachers, we can all learn much from the teaching examples of our leaders, particularly those with years of experience.

I think extensive reading over the years has helped a great deal. President Thomas S. Monson has set a great example in his talks by continually referring to quotes from the classics as well as scripture and personal experience. That “mental library” is a rich reservoir from which the Spirit can draw, as the occasion requires. Teachers should be voracious learners.

**Gustafson:** But that really does bring it full circle. To be a good teacher, we must recognize we are not the source of all wisdom. To tap into that source of wisdom, we need to be willing to be taught.

**Miller:** You know, I think the Spirit often is giving teachers messages as to both the process and the content prior to and during a teaching situation. How is a teacher to really know the condition of each student in the class? Much knowledge can be gained during the teaching experience if we are sensitive. However, the real power of that discernment comes through the Spirit, particularly by study and by faith (that the inspiration and insight will come). That is the promise of the Lord. So, we return to the admonition of the Lord about teaching “by the Spirit of truth” (D&C 50:17) and create an atmosphere where the Spirit carries it into the heart of the hearer. Then “he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).
Nauvoo Temple
Often we may recognize direct divine guidance and intervention in our lives as a result of such things as prayer, fasting, and priesthood blessings. At other times in our lives, however, we may be directed by the Lord and not be aware of it. Such was likely the case with Israel Barlow, an early convert to the Church, during a critical time in his life and in Church history.

Israel Barlow was born on September 13, 1806, to Jonathon and Annis Barlow in Granville, Hampton County, Massachusetts. His father, Jonathon, passed away in 1820, when Israel was fourteen years old. With his mother, brothers, and sisters, he moved to western New York in the fall of 1822, and around 1824, the family eventually settled in Mendon, just fifteen miles southwest of Palmyra. After the gospel was restored and the Church organized in 1830, two missionaries of the Church brought the gospel message to Mendon, where many, including Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, eventually joined the Church.¹

At age twenty-four, Israel was authorized to preach for the Methodist Reformed Church. However, after hearing the gospel, he desired to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith. Late in 1831 or early 1832, Israel traveled two hundred miles to Hiram, Ohio, to meet him. “After he had talked with him two or three hours he said he knew he [Joseph] was a Prophet of God.”² Israel, at age twenty-six, returned to Mendon and was baptized by his boyhood friend and recent convert, Brigham Young, on May 16, 1832. At age fifty-one, Annis Barlow, Israel’s
mother, and six of her other children were also baptized members of the Church in Mendon within the same year. Family members included Jonathon Watson at age twenty-four, Anni at age eighteen, Truman at age fourteen, and Rhoda at age twelve. Also baptized were George and Julia Ann, two children by George Lockwood, to whom Israel’s mother was married in Massachusetts from 1821 to 1823. Another sister, Margaret Marie, who was married at the time to Charles Bunnell, later joined the Church.

Israel and his mother, brothers, and sisters moved from New York to Ohio late in 1832 or early 1833 to join with other Latter-day Saints gathering in the Kirtland area. Soon after in 1834, Israel was one of the 205 men who answered the call to join Zion’s Camp and made the seven-hundred-mile march to Missouri to confront those opposed to the Church in that area. Israel returned to Ohio and was in Kirtland with family members when the temple was dedicated on March 27, 1836. The Barlows moved again in late 1837 to Far West, Missouri, where Joseph Smith and many of the Saints had settled.

Several confrontations occurred between local citizens and members of the Church in Missouri in 1838. On October 25, 1838, there was a military encounter between Mormon men and a Missouri military unit in what has become known as the Battle of Crooked River near Far West. There were about sixty to seventy men on both sides, and Israel was present at the battle. Three members of the Mormon military unit were killed or mortally wounded, including David W. Patten, a military leader and an Apostle. Israel was one of the stretcher bearers who took Elder Patten back to Far West, where he died that night.

Two days later, on October 27, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued the infamous extermination order stating, among other things, that “the Mormons must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good.” On October 30, 1838, a mob of 240 men attacked a small settlement at Haun’s Mill, killing seventeen Saints, including fifteen men and two young boys, ages nine and ten. Several others, including women and children, were severely wounded. A combined mob and military unit of two thousand Missouri men arrived at Far West that same day to drive out the Mormons. The following day, October 31, the Prophet Joseph Smith and other Church leaders were taken prisoners and remained in jail for the next six months.

At this time he was among several thousand Saints who began the forced exodus from Far West and surrounding areas in Missouri and started the one-hundred-fifty-mile journey eastward toward Illinois.
Some went to other nearby geographical areas. It was unclear to both the exiled Saints and their leaders where they should go. There are no indications that a central place of gathering had been chosen as they began their flight from Missouri. Perhaps some wanted to return to their original homes in Ohio, New York, and Canada. Regardless of their destinations, their circumstances were dire. Many wondered if they would ever be able to live together again as a community of Saints.9

As late as March 25, 1839, while he was still imprisoned, Joseph Smith had no definite plan to suggest a destination for the Saints fleeing Missouri. On that date he wrote, “Now, brethren, concerning the places for the location of the Saints, we cannot counsel you as we could if we were present with you.”10 He also wrote that same day, “I would suggest . . . that our brethren scattered abroad, who understand the spirit of gathering, that they fall into the places of refuge of safety that God shall open unto them, between Kirtland and Far West. Those from the east and from the west, and from far countries, let them fall in somewhere between those two boundaries, in the most safe and quiet places they can find; and let this be the present understanding, until God shall open a more effectual door for us for further consideration.”11

Israel and thirty-two others left Far West late in 1838, “being counseled to do so by President Brigham Young,” and started their journey of exile, “searching for a suitable place to locate the persecuted, expelled 12,000 saints.”12 It is not presently known exactly when the rest of Israel’s family (mother, brothers, and sisters) left Far West, but they probably left in early 1839. They could have been with Brigham Young and his group, who left Far West on February 14, 1839.13 There is evidence that the Barlow family had recently arrived in Quincy, Illinois, just before April 14, 1839.14

There are at least two theories of how Israel eventually arrived in Commerce, Illinois. The first and often-quoted theory is the “lost refugee” theory. After they started their journey, Israel supposedly became separated from his group and started going in a northeastern direction.15 He was ill clad and cold; often his only source of food was parched corn.16 Early Church documents record, “When Elder Israel Barlow left Missouri in the fall of 1838, either by missing his way, or some other cause, he struck the Des Moines river some distance above its mouth. He was in a destitute situation.”17

The “lost refugee” theory suggests that in late 1838 Israel “wandered to” or arrived in Montrose, Iowa, twelve miles up the river from Keokuk where the Des Moines and Mississippi rivers come together. While in Montrose, Israel learned of the nearby abandoned barracks of Old Fort
Des Moines and that the property there was owned by Dr. Isaac Galland, who resided in Commerce, east across the Mississippi River.  

Israel would then have crossed the river and sought out the property holder. After they met, Dr. Galland indicated that he owned not only the property at Old Fort Des Moines in Iowa but also the property in the immediate vicinity of Commerce where he was residing. He offered property in both areas for sale to Israel Barlow as a place for the scattered members of the Church to gather. Evidently, property owned by other individuals in Commerce was also available.

There is a second theory, however, regarding how Israel arrived in Commerce, and that is the Kimball connection theory. When Israel and others left Far West in October 1838, they were “searching for a suitable place to locate the persecuted, expelled 12,000 saints.” Robert B. Flanders wrote about the founding of Nauvoo in his book *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*. He noted that Heber C. Kimball had three cousins: Hiram Kimball, Ethan Kimball and Phineas Kimball Jr., who were land agents for their father, Phineas Kimball Sr., from West Fairlee, Orange County, Vermont. He owned vast amounts of property in the Illinois Military District. During the 1830s the three sons of Phineas Kimball moved from Vermont and settled in Commerce, where they also had property for sale. None of the three brothers were Latter-day Saints at the time, but Hiram later joined the Church and moved to Utah.

Flanders states in the Kimball connection theory that before the Saints left Far West, Missouri, Heber C. Kimball may have suggested to Brigham Young, Edward Partridge, Israel Barlow, and others to contact his cousins—Hiram, Ethan, and Phineas Kimball in Commerce—and investigate the properties in Iowa and Illinois for future gathering places.

We know that the Kimball brothers were active property agents in Commerce. When Heber C. Kimball eventually moved there, his three cousins sold him the five acres of land on which he built his house. The Kimball brothers also entertained the Twelve Apostles at a Christmas party in Nauvoo in 1841 with attempts to sell property to them and other Church members. Flanders suggests in the Kimball connection theory that it may have been Hiram, Ethan, and Phineas who eventually introduced Israel to Dr. Galland.

This second theory seems possible because:

1. It seems highly unlikely that Israel, an adult, would become lost by himself and wander forty to fifty miles off the trail from Far West to Quincy.
2. Israel was baptized in Mendon, New York, in 1832 by another recent convert, Brigham Young. Heber C. Kimball had also joined the Church in Mendon, and the three new converts were good friends.

3. Israel left Far West in October 1838 in a group of thirty-two, which included Edward Partridge (Presiding Bishop of the Church), Hosea Stout, and others. It is recorded in family notes that Israel left with this group in late 1838 and started their journey of exile, “searching for a suitable place to locate the persecuted, expelled 12,000 saints.” In other words, this group of men had the objective to find a new place of gathering before the Saints left Far West. Another family member noted that Israel “went with Bishop Partridge to find location for saints from Far West.” In addition, on November 14, 1883, two weeks after Israel’s death (November 1, 1883), the Deseret Evening News contained a synopsis of Israel’s life. Among other things it noted his calling with Bishop Partridge to “find a resting place for the Church when they were driven from Far West.”

4. Israel would have been an appropriate Latter-day Saint exile to travel to Montrose, Iowa, and eventually to Commerce, Illinois, since he was thirty-two years old and still single. Other brethren traveling in the group likely had wives and children during the exile, which would have made it more difficult for them to leave the group and investigate property in Illinois and Iowa.

After their initial meeting, regardless of how they met, Israel left Dr. Galland at Commerce and headed for Quincy, fifty-three miles downriver, where many of the Saints had gathered. Soon after Israel arrived in Quincy, Dr. Galland wrote him a letter in early January 1839 and once again offered his properties near Montrose, Iowa, and Commerce, Illinois, for sale. Israel conveyed these offers to the local leaders of the Church.

On January 20, 1839, David Rogers and Israel returned upriver for nine days and visited sites in both Commerce and Old Fort Des Moines, near Montrose. They also met with Dr. Galland once again. On February 1, 1839, David Rogers wrote: “[Israel] Barlow and myself went on and were nine days in our exploration and found in the Towns of uper [upper] and lower Commerce about forty empty dwellings for which we made conditional arrangements.” The two men then crossed the Mississippi River and visited the abandoned barracks at Old Fort Des Moines. Rogers also wrote, “And after obtaining this information . . . and documents for showing what we had and could be done in that direction we returned to Quincy. And a Conference or meeting was called and we made our report.”
On February 26, 1839, Dr. Galland wrote to David Rogers with the same offer of his property in Iowa and Illinois that he had made a month earlier to him and Israel. It was decided at a subsequent conference that the documents derived on the nine-day trip and the two letters from Dr. Galland to Israel and David would be taken to the Prophet Joseph Smith and other Church leaders still imprisoned in Liberty Jail. Consequently, David delivered the documents to the Brethren in Missouri on March 17.

After receiving the papers, Joseph Smith apparently gave much thought to the property, particularly at Commerce, Illinois, and called for an immediate option on the land. On March 22, 1839, he wrote a letter from Liberty Jail to Dr. Galland and stated, “If Bishop Partridge, or if the church have not made a purchase of your land and if there is not anyone who feels a particular interest in making a purchase you will hold it in reserve for us; we will purchase it of you at the proposals that you made to Mr. Barlow. We think the church would be wise in making the contract, therefore, if it is not made before we are liberated [from jail] we will take it.” Dr. Galland accepted the offer.

On April 16, 1839, Joseph Smith and his fellow prisoners escaped (or were allowed to escape) from their imprisonment and immediately started for Quincy. After a difficult journey, they arrived on April 22 and three days later convened a conference regarding their future place of residence.

At the conference on April 25, it was resolved that the Prophet Joseph Smith and several of the Brethren, including Israel, immediately visit Commerce, Illinois, and the area near Montrose, Iowa, and locate property where the Saints could gather. Joseph Smith and the committee members left Quincy soon after and successfully purchased the property that had been offered. Joseph wrote on May 1, 1839, “I this day purchased, in connection with others of the committee, a farm [in Commerce] of Hugh White, consisting of one hundred and thirty-five acres, for the sum of five thousand dollars; also a farm of Dr. Isaac Galland, lying west of the White purchase, for the sum of nine thousand dollars.”

The terms offered by Dr. Galland were generous, at a reasonable rate, and on long-term credit so the Saints would not be distressed in paying immediately for the new property. Additional properties were also purchased in Iowa and other areas in Illinois where stakes of the Church were later organized. But it was Commerce that became the central gathering place of the Saints.
On May 10, 1839, Joseph Smith moved his family to a small log cabin in Commerce. The area, however, was not immediately inviting or impressive. A month later, on June 11, 1839, Joseph Smith recorded:

About this time Elder Theodore Turley raised the first house built by the Saints in this place [Commerce]; . . . When I made the purchase of White and Galland, there were one stone house, three frame houses, and two block houses, which constituted the whole city of Commerce. . . . The place was literally a wilderness. The land was mostly covered with trees and bushes, and much of it so wet that it was with the utmost difficulty a footman could get through, and totally impossible for teams. Commerce was so unhealthful, very few could live there; but believing that it might become a healthful place by the blessing of heaven to the Saints, and no more eligible place presenting itself, I considered it wisdom to make an attempt to build up a city.

Even though the property purchased in Commerce initially had little appeal, as the Prophet noted, it was located in beautiful geographical surroundings. It was built on a picturesque bend on the Mississippi River, which surrounded half the community. From the river’s edge there was a gradual rise of the property for at least a mile where it reached the common level of a prairie, once covered by luxuriant growth of natural grasses, wild flowers, and patches of timber. Directly opposite of Commerce, on the west bank of the Mississippi River in Iowa, were bluffs that rose almost from the water’s edge and were covered with a fine growth of timber. Nestled at the foot of one of the highest bluffs was the little village of Montrose, where Israel had previously visited. At the back of these bluffs were both woodland and prairie. Between Commerce and Montrose, in the middle of the Mississippi River, there was also an island about a mile long and fifty to one hundred yards in width, stretching north and south.

Perhaps for these and other reasons, the following year in April 1840, Joseph Smith changed the name of the community from Commerce to Nauvoo, a Hebrew word meaning “a beautiful location . . . and the idea of rest.” He undoubtedly had the prophetic capacity to view both property and people for their potential rather than their present condition.

By the end of 1840, there were 250 houses built in Nauvoo by the Saints who fled from Missouri, and the Saints were still arriving in large numbers. Two years later, in 1842, there were approximately six to eight thousand Saints in Nauvoo. By 1846 Nauvoo would become a beautiful city with an estimated population of twelve to
fifteen thousand, one of the largest cities in Illinois and the center for gathering the Saints.\textsuperscript{41}

On January 8, 1841, the First Presidency in Nauvoo wrote of Dr. Galland, “He is the honored instrument the Lord used to prepare a home for us, when we were driven from our inheritances, having given him control of vast bodies of land, and prepared his heart to make the use of it the Lord intended he should.”\textsuperscript{42}

From the manner in which the property of Nauvoo was located and eventually obtained, we can gain important insights for contemporary living: (1) we may not always be aware of the Lord’s involvement and direction in our lives; (2) we can be an instrument of the Lord in doing His work and not know it at the time; (3) the divine guidance and intervention we are often unaware of in our lives can occur during trials, tribulations, and times of discouragement; and finally, (4) we each may underestimate our own contributions to the building of the kingdom of God, however insignificant they may seem at the time.

When Israel first met Dr. Galland in late 1838, he had no way of knowing that his meeting with the property owner would be “a providential introduction of the Church to Commerce . . . and its vicinity.”\textsuperscript{43} Perhaps we can remember that the city of Nauvoo was built on property owned by Dr. Galland, “the honored instrument of the Lord,” used to provide a gathering place for the scattered Saints, and that he was first met by Israel Barlow, a Mormon refugee, for the providential introduction. Of that meeting it has been written: “This great event is very important . . . in the life of Israel Barlow. Perhaps one can also safely say that the founding of Nauvoo did more than any other one action at the most propitious hour of the Saint’s suffering and persecutions in Missouri, to revive the whole pattern of gathering and let the Church, through that gathering, establish itself in strength in one place. It enabled the members to build another temple and show the world by deeds what they could do as a united people of God.”\textsuperscript{44}

Like many other individuals in the early days of the Church, Israel was an ordinary member the Lord used in an extraordinary way. For his involvement in locating the property on which the city of Nauvoo was eventually built, we, his descendants, are proud and grateful.
Notes

1. The Israel Barlow Family Association currently estimates there are one hundred thousand descendants of Israel Barlow. Their Web site is www.israelbarlow.org. Ora H. Barlow, The Israel Barlow Story and Mormon Mores (Salt Lake City: The Israel Barlow Family Association, 1968), 70–94.
2. Barlow, Israel Barlow Story, 98.
7. Smith, History of the Church, 3:326.
15. George and Sylva Givens, *Nauvoo Fact Book: Questions and Answers for Nauvoo Enthusiasts* (Lynchburg, VA: Parley Street Publishers, 2000), 98, which states that the area of Commerce, Illinois, was located by a “lost refugee,” Israel Barlow, who was fleeing from Missouri.
34. See Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 2:9–11.
41. R. Scott Lloyd, “Nauvoo: City on Banks of the Mississippi River Was Forged from Fire of Adversity,” *Church News*, May 20, 1989, 8. The article also notes: “Israel Barlow, an elder of the Church making his way from Missouri, ended up in Iowa near the mouth of the Des Moines River. The people there made him acquainted with Dr. Isaac Galland, who owned considerable property at Commerce, Illinois.”
We often think of literature rather narrowly, as strictly a form of storytelling—a fictional work created by the human mind that relates the story of people and the various events, settings, and thoughts that make up their lives. Sometimes, though, we speak of literature in very broad terms, referring basically to anything in a written form. I prefer a definition that is broad enough to allow us to see patterns among texts but not so general that everything written can be classified as literature. Leland Ryken, a literary scholar who publishes extensively on the Bible as literature, writes that a “working definition of literature . . . is that it is an interpretive presentation of experience in an artistic form. This means that there are two criteria that must be insisted on if we are to distinguish between the literary and nonliterary parts of the Bible: (1) literature is experiential rather than abstract, and (2) literature is artistic, manifesting elements of artistic form.”

With this definition, literature does not have to be fictional, nor does it have to be solely of human creation, opening the door to the understanding of scripture as sacred literature.

Applying this understanding to the Doctrine and Covenants, we can find a wide variety of literary elements. “Although truly a unique religious text,” literary scholar Steven C. Walker notes, “the Doctrine and Covenants contains more than 2,000 close parallels to biblical passages, and the literary manner of the book is similar to the Bible in subject matter. Like earlier scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants

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offers a rainbow of literary genres. The collection of revelations ranges from forms as transcendent as visions (sections 3, 76, 110), angelic annunciations (sections 2, 13, 27), and prophecies (sections 87, 121); through such ecclesiastical proclamations as prayers (sections 109, 121), epistles (sections 127, 128), scriptural explanations (sections 74, 77, 86), commandments (section 19), and official declarations; to down-to-earth instructions (sections 130, 131) and minutes of meetings (section 102).” Others have identified in the Doctrine and Covenants such literary devices as simile, metaphor, personification, and extensive use of imagery as well as such genres as narrative, short story, saga, biography, parable, proverbs, apocalypse, tragedy, and poetry.

It is not enough to recognize the literary qualities of the Doctrine and Covenants, however. We also need to recognize that these qualities are not tangential but central to the Doctrine and Covenants. The literary elements of this book of scripture help convey the teachings and principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. What the great literary critic Northrop Frye had to say about symbols applies to other literary elements as well: “Originally, a symbol was a token or counter, like the stub of a theater ticket which is not the performance, but will take us to where the performance is. It still retains the sense of something that may be of limited interest or value in itself, but points in the direction of something that can be approached directly only with its help.” Symbols do not serve the role of adorning language, rather they communicate meaning; in fact, they often communicate meaning that would be lost without the symbol. Similarly, as we select a limited number of literary elements in the Doctrine and Covenants and study them closely, we see that these elements help us understand the meaning of the principles taught and have a profound experience with them. The language helps the gospel in the Doctrine and Covenants become a part of us.

Epistles

Two epistles by the Prophet Joseph are included in the Doctrine and Covenants, and both present a fascinating combination of the need to conduct rather mundane business with inspired, lofty language discoursing on the eternities. In the first epistle, section 127, the first verse could have been written as a simple statement: “I will be gone for a while, but my business concerns will be taken care of by others in my absence.” Instead, we read a bold statement about his having received a revelation that his enemies were pursuing him. He writes poetically and persuasively. “Inasmuch as they pursue me without a cause, and have not the least shadow or coloring of justice or right on their side
in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest dye, I have thought it expedient and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season.” Within this one sentence we find imagery of light (“shadow,” “coloring,” “blackest dye”) and time (“short season”). Joseph writes of his persecution and troubles in the next three verses, acknowledging his tribulations while also glorying in them as a part of his sacrifice to God. He also makes a poignant observation with a metaphor: “deep water is what I am wont to swim in” (D&C 127:2). Most of us know what it means to swim in deep water, and though it may be necessary to swim in such water at times, we also feel less safe than in shallow water. To be the Prophet of the Restoration is not for the timid or cowardly.

In the same verse, however, the Prophet writes in a formal, almost mechanical, tone: “I have left my affairs with agents and clerks who will transact all business in a prompt and proper manner, and will see that all my debts are cancelled in due time, by turning out property, or otherwise, as the case may require, or as the circumstances may admit of” (D&C 127:1). The next order of business is to discuss the process of making a record of when someone is baptized for the dead and where to archive those records. He then closes the epistle as “[our] servant in the Lord, prophet and seer of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 127:12).

Joseph’s second, much longer epistle, written just five days later, continues this pattern of combining what might be considered mundane with the sublime. He writes of the need to have both local and general recorders, requiring that the ward recorder be “well qualified for taking accurate minutes” and be “very particular and precise in taking the whole proceedings, certifying in his record that he saw with his eyes, and heard with his ears, giving the date, and names, and so forth, and the history of the whole transaction” (D&C 128:3). The Prophet continues by explaining the duties of the general recorder, who must “enter the record on the general church book, with the certificates and all the attending witnesses, with his own statement that he verily believes the above statement and records to be true” (D&C 128:4).

From these particulars, Joseph moves into the much more spiritual realm of the doctrine of baptism itself, explicating scripture in Revelation, Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and Malachi, even noting about the last scripture that he “might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit [his] purpose as it stands” (D&C 128:18). For these several verses, the Prophet carefully discusses the doctrine and
makes clear that the living and dead need one another to be saved. We can repeatedly sense his personal testimony of this doctrine and practice.

The epistle concludes, however, with neither the technical instructions of the first part nor the doctrinal exposition of the second, but introduces almost a hymn of praise and exultation. The prophet writes metaphorically of a voice: “Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy” (D&C 128:19). He encourages the reader, as though calling a people to battle: “Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!” (D&C 128:22). He personifies nature, calling upon the earth herself to praise the Lord in a way that “is not only remarkable prose but sheer poetry”: “Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy!” (D&C 128:23). As we read the poetry in this epistle, we not only learn of the Prophet’s commitment to the restored gospel and his enthusiasm for the work of the Lord but also experience it. And this experience helps us to feel more committed and more enthusiastic. The language the Prophet uses does not just inform us—it changes us.

**Archetypes**

An archetype is a symbol that recurs throughout literature, having a consistent pattern of meaning. For example, the image of a lamb can be used as an archetype representing innocence; we do not find a lamb in literature representing evil or violence. Archetypes are “universal symbols.” As Frye explains, archetypes are “images of things common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited.” These symbols are not confined to secular literature and can be found in scripture as well. Just as Ryken writes about how being “sensitive to archetypes is one of the most fruitful literary approaches we can take to the Bible,” we can benefit from studying the archetypes in the Doctrine and Covenants as well.

Joseph Smith uses a number of archetypes throughout the Doctrine and Covenants. For example, we can see such archetypes as rock (D&C 6:34; 10:69; 33:13), fire (D&C 29:12, 21, 28; 43:32–33; 63:17, 34, 54; 97:7, 26), water (D&C 5:16; 10:66), and the sword (D&C 1:13; 6:2; 14:2; 87:6) carefully and effectively used in the Doctrine and Cov-
By closely studying one particular archetype, the veil, we can see how such a literary element can convey doctrine. The Lord speaks of how “the veil of darkness shall soon be rent” (D&C 38:8), “the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am” (D&C 67:10), and “the veil of the covering of my temple, in my tabernacle, which hideth the earth, shall be taken off, and all flesh shall see me together” (D&C 101:23); Joseph writes that the “veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened” (D&C 110:1). A veil is a fairly well-known item; we recognize it as a piece of material that covers something. Women may use veils to cover their faces in some cultures, and we see a connection to this practice when looking at a wedding dress that includes a veil. However, this veil imagery is not simply verbal adornment—it teaches an important doctrine of the gospel. We are not meant to know or see all things in this life. There are things in the spiritual dimension that are generally hidden from us in mortality. Yet, these sacred things do not need to be permanently hidden from our view. By using veil imagery rather than an image of a wall, for example, the Lord conveys to us that what we are not to see for a time may be shown us in the future. Even if the veil is of such thin material that one can see through it to a large extent, one is still not seeing what can be seen when the veil is removed. A veil does not cover a face all of the time; it is meant to be eventually parted or removed. Likewise, we are meant to know these sacred things covered by this archetypal veil when we are ready and in the Lord’s own time.

**Metaphors and Similes**

While there are metaphors used throughout the Doctrine and Covenants, section 121 presents an interesting study in how one specific image is used in differing ways. There are three instances of water in this section that are not symbolic in nature, but merely refer to the sea as a part of the earth: “O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven, earth, and seas, and of all things that in them are” (D&C 121:4); in describing those who claim that the Prophet has fallen into transgression, it “had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks, and they drowned in the depth of the sea” (D&C 121:22); and “if there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars” (D&C 121:30). The first use of water as simile in this section is when the Lord tells Joseph that they “who do charge thee with transgression, their hope shall be blasted, and their prospects shall melt away as the hoar frost melteth before the burning rays of the rising sun” (D&C 121:11). According
to Webster’s 1828 dictionary (the best dictionary to turn to in trying to understand the meaning of American English words at Joseph Smith’s time), “hoar frost” is the “white particles of ice formed by the conge- lation of dew or watery vapors.” This image of congealed, white ice particles is not inviting, reminding us of early, cold mornings in which we would rather be inside by a warm fire than outside surrounded by the frost. Frost can harm crops and signals that the season of planting and growth is coming to an end. The sun, on the other hand, is a very positive image; we welcome the sun and its warmth on such cold mornings. This imagery shows how the future of those who accuse the Prophet of transgression will not amount to much, disappearing once light is shed on their accusations. We associate the frost with their unfounded accusations and the light of the sun with truth. The sun also points to the Son—the source of all light and knowledge that, like the sun, gives us life. As with the sun and the frost, the Savior triumphed over those who attacked Joseph Smith.

The next symbolic use of water imagery occurs when the Lord asks a key question: “How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints” (D&C 121:33). Water imagery is used three times in this verse. First, the “rolling waters” that will not “remain impure” is a metaphor for the inevitability of God’s will coming to pass. Just as rolling water cannot remain impure indefinitely (before the intervention of modern pollution, that is), no power can stop the heavens; the Lord’s will shall conquer all opposition. Second, water imagery is used to strengthen this idea of the inevitability of God’s will when the Lord proclaims that trying to make it difficult for Him to reveal divine knowledge to the Latter-day Saints is as foolish as a man trying to stop the Missouri River from its course—or even trying to make the river flow upstream. The word hinder is significant here: while the word can mean to stop, it can also mean to impede or slow down. In other words, it is impossible to prevent God from giving knowledge to His people. Preventing His will from coming to pass is simply impossible.

Water imagery is used once again in speaking of the Almighty “pouring down” knowledge upon the Saints. This phrase makes us think of a powerful rain, a downpour that saturates the ground, coming down upon everyone and everything. Just as such a life-giving rain is prayed for and welcomed after a long drought, so is the Lord’s pouring
knowledge upon His people a great, miraculous blessing after centuries of living in the darkness of the apostasy.

We see water imagery used one more time in this section. When speaking of the blessings of being filled with charity and letting “virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly,” the Lord promises that “the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven” (D&C 121:45). Distillation is a process that requires two fundamental steps: an evaporation in which some component (such as pure water) of a liquid is extracted, and a condensation in which this extracted, purified component returns from the vapor and can be utilized. At the time of this revelation, the Prophet Joseph was a prisoner in Liberty Jail. He had been through yet another “distillation” of his soul, experiencing the heat of trials and challenges that extracted his spirit from the world and purified it, making the Prophet even more refined as a servant of the Lord.

Unlike the hoar frost mentioned earlier in the section, the “dews from heaven” present a much more favorable impression to our minds and hearts. Dew is gentle, peaceful, and life-giving, associated with spring (a new life in Christ) rather than with the coming of winter (the end of life). There is also a certain element of pleasant surprise with the dew—when we retire in the evening, there is no dew on the ground or on the flowers, but we awaken to find its presence. Similarly, the doctrine of the priesthood will not fall upon our souls like a heavy burden from the sky, but rather come quietly, gradually, peacefully. We may come to know some eternal truths without fully being aware of the process involved.

Parables

One of the most literary elements in scripture is the parable. Ryken observes that the “parables of Jesus are at once thoroughly literary and thoroughly laden with religious meaning. As for their literary dimension, they are the indisputable example of fiction in the Bible. They incarnate their meaning in story or metaphor in such a way that we cannot possibly ignore their literary nature. Yet they are a didactic genre that Jesus used to teach basic Christian doctrine and morality.”

Parables are the perfect bridge between the literary and the religious: stories that convey eternal truths. Unlike the Book of Mormon, which does not contain any parables, the Doctrine and Covenants includes a number of parables: the parable of the twelve sons (D&C 38:26–27); the Lord’s explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares (D&C 86:1–7); the parable of the man who sent his servants into his field
(D&C 88:51–61); the parable of the nobleman and the tower (D&C 101:43–62); and the parable of the woman and the unjust judge (D&C 101:81–91). The Lord also refers to the parable of the fig tree (D&C 35:16) and the parable of the ten virgins (D&C 45:56–57).

Ryken proposes a four-step process in studying parables that involves narrative analysis, interpretation of allegorical and symbolic elements, determination of the theme, and application of the theme. As we apply this process to the longest of the parables in the Doctrine and Covenants, the parable of the nobleman and the tower, we can see how this literary story conveys doctrine.

A nobleman had some very choice land. He told his servants to plant twelve olive trees on the land and set watchmen around the land to protect the trees. Essential to his instructions was the requirement to build a tower so that “one may overlook the land round about” (D&C 101:45) and see enemies in the distance. The servants plant the twelve olive trees, build a hedge around them, set watchmen, and even begin to build a tower, but during the work of laying the tower’s foundation they begin to question the necessity of the tower. They “consulted for a long time, saying among themselves: What need hath my lord of this tower, seeing this is a time of peace? Might not this money be given to the exchangers? For there is no need of these things” (D&C 101:48–49). While they are discussing this issue, they become lazy and do not complete what the nobleman had instructed them to do. During the night, the enemy comes and breaks down the hedge. The servants wake up and, frightened, run away, leaving the olive trees unguarded. The enemy breaks down the trees.

The nobleman calls upon his servants and chastises them for not completely following his instructions. He points out that “the watchman upon the tower would have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off; and then ye could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer” (D&C 101:54). The nobleman tells one of his servants to gather together many of his other servants and redeem his vineyard by breaking down the walls of his enemies that they have built on his land, throwing down their tower and scattering their watchmen. “And inasmuch as they gather together against you,” he tells his servant, “avenge me of mine enemies, that by and by I may come with the residue of mine house and possess the land” (D&C 101:58). His servant asks him when he will come and possess the land, and the nobleman replies that it will happen when he decides it will happen. The nobleman promises to bless the servant as a faithful and wise stew-
ard in his house and a ruler in his kingdom. The servant then does all that he was commanded to do, and “after many days all things were fulfilled” (D&C 101:62).

When we interpret the individual elements of this parable, we can see its allegorical nature. For example, the nobleman is the Savior; the vineyard is the earth; the choice piece of land is Jackson County, Missouri; the servants are the Church members; the olive trees represent the settlements of the Saints; the watchmen are the officers in the Church; the tower represents the temple; and the servant is Joseph Smith. In fact, the Lord Himself identifies one element of the parable when He says that “my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., is the man to whom I likened the servant to whom the Lord of the vineyard spake in the parable which I have given unto you” (D&C 103:21). This reference indicates that the Lord had specific historical details in mind when relating the parable. While such an awareness of the historical details of the time this revelation was received leads to an interpretation that is instructive and appropriate in many ways, it is also limiting. Though this is a parable with an important historical context, it is still a parable with meanings at different levels. To look at the parable only in terms of the events in Jackson County would be like interpreting the parable of the prodigal son to refer only to a particular wayward person at the time of the Savior who had finally repented; the parable may shed light on that individual’s circumstances, but it certainly is not limited to them.

If we take this more literary approach to the parable, we see that it is the story of the Lord asking something of His people and their deciding, using their own logic and experience, that what they are being instructed to do is not necessary or worthwhile. Because they are disobedient, they suffer. If they had only done as instructed, they would not have fallen prey to their enemy. The parable ends with hope, however, because the Lord of the vineyard tells His servant how to regain what was lost. The servant is obedient, and what was lost is now recovered.

The major theme of this parable, of course, is the importance of obeying the Lord. There is safety and wisdom in doing what the Lord asks of us. However, there are other important themes as well. The foolishness of relying on the “arm of the flesh,” for instance, is conveyed by the way the servants talk themselves out of the need to build the tower. Similarly, the dangers of not being truly unified can be seen in the fact that their contention makes them lazy. “And while they were at variance one with another they became slothful, and they hearkened not unto the commandments of their lord” (D&C 101:50). This is a
very important point: it is not that the servants decided not to obey their Lord, but it is that their lack of unity and their wasting effort in discussing something that should have already been decided made them lazy and careless. As far as we can tell from the parable, the servants were not openly rebellious; they simply did not get around to obeying because they were so busy disagreeing. Another theme is quite different from the others: forgiveness. Though the servants greatly erred, the lord showed them the way the situation could be corrected and gave them the chance to make things right. One other theme is that of the blessings that come through obedience to the Lord. The servant whom the lord chose to lead the others to reclaim his land receives a "seal and blessing" to be "a faithful and wise steward in the midst of [the Lord’s] house, a ruler in [the Lord's] kingdom" (D&C 101:61).

In describing application, the last step of the literary analysis of parables, Ryken points out that it can have two levels: how the hearers of the parable could apply it at the time the Lord spoke it and how readers can apply it now.16 The Saints in Joseph’s time could understand the parable to mean that they had been slothful in keeping all of the commandments, particularly in building the temple, and that they were to return to Jackson County and reclaim the land.17 In our day, we can find multiple applications of this parable, from the need to obey the Lord’s commandments to the importance of not giving up on those we lead but patiently helping them learn and correct their mistakes.

If the literary form of the parable had not been used in D&C 101 and if the Lord had only told the people that they should have been more diligent in keeping His commandments and now needed to return to Missouri and get their land back, then many of the themes and applications would have been lost. It is by using the form of the parable that the meaning is broadened and deepened and the application becomes universal.

Conclusion

Though the Doctrine and Covenants is unique among our books of scripture in that it is predominantly a collection of revelations rather than a narrative account of the people’s lives and their interactions with the Lord, it is still a book of sacred literature. These revelations utilize a variety of literary devices and conform to a number of literary genres that strengthen the message of the book, helping to deliver it deeper into our hearts and minds in order to change our souls. The Doctrine and Covenants is full of masterful language that helps us as readers experience the word of God as we read.
Notes


6. Steven C. Walker, “The Voice of the Prophet,” *BYU Studies* 10 (Autumn 1969): 103n1. Walker continues discussing this passage by writing that the “poem, it will be observed, resolves itself into triadic form on the basis of both synonymity of content and parallelism of grammatical structure so that three sets of independent clauses form the three stanzas of the work, the internal pattern reflecting the total form. Careful cadences and subtle syntactic rhythms imbue the passage with the richness of poetic flavor as does the pervasively metaphorical nature of the verses. The passage is, moreover, highly lyrical; it could be set to music.”


10. Only a few references are cited.

11. Steven Walker briefly identified the use of water imagery in his article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* which has already been cited (“Doctrine and Covenants as Literature,” 1:427).


15. Leaun G. Otten and C. Max Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 2:189. Modern editions of the Doctrine and Covenants explain that pseudonyms were used to protect many identities. Originally the servant (Joseph Smith) was identified as “Baurak Ale.”


17. This determination to reclaim their land in Jackson County was the original, expressed purpose of Zion’s Camp.
Stuart P. Heimdal, *Abraham in Pharaoh’s Court*
Encircling Astronomy and the Egyptians: An Approach to Abraham 3

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I have long held the view that the universe is built upon symbols, whereby one thing bespeaks another; the lesser testifying of the greater, lifting our thoughts from man to God, from earth to heaven, from time to eternity. . . . God teaches with symbols; it is his favorite method of teaching.—Orson F. Whitney

Abraham 3 is one of the most enigmatic sections of the Pearl of Great Price. Teacher and student together sense there is something more to the text than the meaning they are drawing out of it. Each thorough exploration gently nudges another layer of understanding from the text, but we always feel we have unraveled only the smallest portion of what it has to offer. Though I do not pretend to have a great key to unlock this revelation, I believe there are some apperceptive principles that cast light on Abraham’s night vision.

Certainly teachers can take a variety of approaches when teaching Abraham 3. Most students will be curious about the exotic names provided in verses 3 and 13, and it is worth time to address these questions. Investigations into the Egyptians’ astronomical abilities and how Abraham may have contributed to these abilities are also worthwhile. Undoubtedly, the Egyptians of Abraham’s day conceived of a geocentric cosmos with particular emphasis on that “which the sun encircles (šnnt itn),” denoting the earth. In many aspects, Abraham’s vision appears to be geocentric. Yet Abraham also gains a “Kolob-centric” view of the universe. However, some aspects of Egyptian astronomical thought are not “centric” at all. It is even possible that the vision
fits no known astronomic approach because the Lord may have shown Abraham a model not yet understood by modern astronomers. However, I think we stumble when we attempt to understand Abraham’s vision in terms of astronomic paradigms. It is quite likely that the Lord was describing astronomy and the heavens allegorically in order to teach doctrinal, not astronomical, principles. While attempting to understand astronomical principles has merit (though inconclusive attempts have certainly been used against us), and while there may be an understandable cosmic paradigm to be teased out of the narrative, it seems that the allegorical teachings are the weightier matters as far as the gospel classroom is concerned.

Abraham was no beginner in astronomy. He tells us he has the records of the fathers and these records contain “a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers”; Abraham continues by making it clear that the information he records is “for the benefit of [his] posterity” (Abraham 1:31). As such, we must not only ask ourselves what the knowledge provided in Abraham 3 meant to those in Abraham’s time, but also what he meant for us, his latter-day posterity, to derive from it. This requires both an intensive investigation into Abraham’s era and into the ramifications of the vision for our day.

It is interesting to note that Abraham appears to have two distinct visions, one via the Urim and Thummim and recorded in the first part of chapter 3, and the second as he speaks with the Lord face to face, beginning somewhere between verses 10 and 12 (it is unclear when Abraham goes from hearing the Lord via the Urim and Thummim to talking with Him face to face). In fact, the first part of the chapter may not have been a vision but may have consisted of Abraham viewing the stars with his naked eye and conversing with the Lord about what he saw by means of the Urim and Thummim. The second part is surely a vision. In each of these visions, Abraham sees something of the cosmic system, which the Lord then uses apperceptively to teach doctrinal principles. In both visions, the principles taught are similar, but the first vision seems to discuss these principles on a more general level, and the second on a more specific level. To elucidate the lessons the Lord is teaching Abraham—and teaching us through Abraham—we must first ask some questions.

**Purposes of Astronomy**

To understand the symbols the Lord is using in this revelation to Abraham, we must ask ourselves, why is the Lord talking to Abraham
about the stars? While the Lord often teaches His prophets about the heavens, He does not always teach the same thing in each encounter. For example, when Moses learns of God’s many creations, it is to help him understand the vastness of God’s great work and mankind’s centrality to that work (see Moses 1:32–39). While we do not know what Joseph Smith learned about the heavens from God, it is clear he learned something that helped him understand the degrees of glory to which mankind is headed (see D&C 76:70–71, 96–98). But why was Abraham shown a vision of the stars and planets? What was the point?

The Lord Himself partially answers this question: “Abraham, I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words” (Abraham 3:15). What words did the Lord want Abraham to declare? If the Lord is referring to the words He uses to describe the rotations of Kolob, the earth, the moon, and other celestial bodies, it is possible the Lord simply wanted Abraham to teach the Egyptians astronomy. The Genesis account of Abraham’s visit to Egypt emphasizes that Abraham was enriched there (see Genesis 13:2). Perhaps the Lord used Abraham’s astronomic awareness to introduce him to Pharaoh’s court, where he would be made wealthy and thus return to the promised land in a position of power. However, the phrase “all these words” indicates that Abraham was to teach not only astronomy but also gospel principles the Lord explained through astronomic means.

**Egyptian Symbols**

If this is the case, why did the Lord choose astronomy as the symbolic medium of His message? Why subscribe to this set of symbols? Of course, the Lord has not given us a direct answer to this question, yet there are some things we can reason out with a certain degree of confidence. While this is not the place for a detailed investigation into Egyptian astronomy, some ideas are worth highlighting so we may understand the magnitude of the symbolic language Abraham was to employ in Egypt.

It is indisputable that the Egyptians set significance to the movements and domains of celestial bodies. For instance, after the annual disappearance of Sirius (Sopdet), the Egyptians knew that the rerising of the Dog Star generally coincided with the annual flood of the Nile. The flood of the Nile was a type of rebirth, and thus the rebirth of the star was a harbinger of the rebirth that Egypt experienced each year. Sirius was also believed to serve as a guide to the deceased as they journeyed through the stars.10
The Egyptians designated Sirius as one of thirty-six stars known as *decans* because of the heliacal role they played in a complex calendar system in which one decan replaced another every ten days. Our knowledge of this system stems from astronomic paintings on a series of coffins from just before Abraham’s time. These paintings make it clear that in Abraham’s day the Egyptians placed significance on the movement of the stars.11 This is further reflected in one of the long-standing titles of the head priest of Heliopolis (biblical On), who was known as the chief observer.

Many planets and stars played a particularly important role in Egyptian culture. Their gods were believed to have left the earth to reside in the sky;12 the moon was associated with the god Thoth, the sun with Ra, and Orion with the god Osiris. Of particular import to the king, who was associated with Horus, were the planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, which were also associated with Horus. Moreover the king would have paid particular attention to what Abraham had to say about the “greater light which is set to rule the day” (Abraham 3:6) because the king was integrally tied to Ra, the sun, and its journey.13

Information about the stars was also important to the king. Stars such as Gemini and Deneb were seen as significant markers in the known course of the sun through the stars. One of the most prolific of early kingship images was the belief that the king was destined to become one of the circumpolar stars (the *ỉhmw-sk*, the stars “that did not know destruction” because they did not disappear).14 In the afterlife the king could also become Sirius.15 Additionally, Sirius was seen as his sister,16 which may be explained by references in which Sirius is also identified with Isis17 (whereas the dead king is Osiris). Furthermore, Sirius was associated with the king’s daughter18 and the king’s father.19 Orion was described both as the king20 and as the king’s brother,21 and Venus as his daughter22 and his guide.23 Amenemhet III, a likely contemporary of Abraham, wrote on the top of his pyramid that he was “higher than the heights of Orion.”24

These few references amply illustrate the point: the Egyptian king and his court were aware of and keenly interested in the movements of the sun, moon, planets, and stars. In our era of large cities and electric lights, it is hard to picture how much these celestial bodies were part of Egyptian life. Most students do not regularly see starry nights because of light pollution. The natural nocturnal luminaries were particularly striking in Egypt, where most nights were cloudless and very clear. The lustrous bodies of the night sky were overlarge; they dominated the night landscape and forced their way into the minds and visions of every
Egyptian soul. They were a much greater and pressing presence for these ancient inhabitants than most of us would naturally assume. Because of this powerful, intrusive sight, the stars spoke loudly to the Egyptians, whether they wanted them to or not. Their movements and power were an inescapable noise raining upon the eyes of our ancient counterparts.

In my estimation, this is why Abraham would find the language of the stars to be a meaningful mode of communication with the Egyptians. In modern missionary parlance, astronomy enabled Abraham to build on common ground, and his expertise in this area helped him build a relationship of trust. If the Lord wanted to find ground that was both common and persuasive as a vehicle for teaching Pharaoh and his people about the gospel, astronomy was an effective choice not only because the Egyptians would be interested, nor solely because they were accustomed to celestial bodies carrying symbolic teachings, but also because the movements and principles of the stars and planets lend themselves to a powerful message.

Essentially the Lord was teaching Abraham and the Egyptians by symbolism as He so often does. As we recognize and understand these symbols, we not only unlock information regarding this specific revelation to Abraham, but we also become more familiar with the language of symbolism. Working through these symbols equips our students to work through others on their own; it should help students develop both scriptural abilities and confidence in those abilities.

There is another lesson to be learned. When we see the pains to which the Lord goes to help one of His greatest prophets be prepared to share the gospel among a strange people, we realize how important this is to Him. In recording this experience for his posterity, Abraham emphasizes to us how much the Lord wants him to be prepared to keep the charge within the Abrahamic covenant to make the Lord’s name known throughout the earth. Here we see Abraham going through the Lord’s missionary training center; he is motivated to share the gospel, and he is equipped with both a message and tools (such as building on common ground) as he shares that message.

Governing Points of the Universe

To elucidate the principles taught by this astronomical message, I have created concentric circle models as visual aids (though we do not know if the Egyptians employed the idea of concentric circles at this time). Creating these models forces one to ask whether the governing body should be drawn at the center or as the outermost sphere. A good case can be made for both models. As noted, astronomy at the
time was viewed geocentrically. This would put the earth at the center of the model with the greater bodies in the outer orbits. This model would have been particularly meaningful to the Egyptians. With our modern astronomical viewpoint, we tend to think of the center as the point of control or governance. The sun is the center of our solar system, governing the system by its gravitational pull. The sun is revolving around a central gravitational point in our galaxy (likely a black hole), and even the galaxies are revolving around a central gravitational pull in our supercluster of galaxies. And yet, in the Lord’s analogy given to the Egyptians through Abraham, if the earth is at the center, then it is not the central point that governs, but the outermost point that encircles all else. This is aligned with Egyptian thinking in many respects, though it seems contrary to a geocentric point of view. For the Egyptians, encircling something was a powerful symbol of controlling or ruling over it, often including an element of protecting what was encircled. Power over creation was shown by Ra, who encircled the earth. The deceased wished to have such power by “going about (ābn) the two heavens, encircling (phr) the two lands.” The deceased king is pictured as more powerful than even the gods by describing him as one who has “encircled (sn.n=k) every god in your arms, their lands and all their possessions. O King, you are great, you are wrapped around (ābn) like the circle which encircles (phr) the great rulers.” In Egyptian thought, it is that which encircles that controls, not that which is in the center. Thus in a geocentric model, the vision given Abraham places God at the outer orbits.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that we would do best to draw Kolob, or the governing point, at the center of our model. Michael Rhodes has suggested an etymology for Kolob as coming from the “Semitic root QLB, which has the basic meaning of ‘heart, center, middle.’” This is corroborated by Joseph Smith’s explanation of the center figure of the hypocephalus in facsimile 2 as Kolob. These ideas indicate a model with Kolob at the center. The central point of any model is completely a matter of perspective. The earth orbits the sun, but from our perspective it appears that the sun circles the earth.

Because Pharaoh already conceived of the sun circling the earth and other significant bodies moving in cyclical journeys around the earth and sun, he would have easily understood the concept that heavenly orbs revolved around each other in concentric circles. Thus the information given to Abraham in verses 3 through 7 would have made perfect sense. For each known orb there was another above it until the
governing body was reached. Pharaoh could easily picture a cosmos which looked thus:

![Fig. 1. Pharaoh’s concept of cosmos](image1)

In the end, we cannot know which way Abraham or the Egyptians would have drawn their models, with the governing point at the center or as the body which encircles all else. I have chosen to make my illustrations with the governing point at the center because it is the most intuitive model. For us, saying that God is at the center means He is the focal, governing point, and pedagogically this is preferable. Thus, for our purposes, the cosmos Abraham was explaining could look like this:

![Fig. 2. Abraham’s concept of cosmos](image2)
This picture of the cosmos helps us visualize what Abraham was teaching Pharaoh. The crucial information came in verses 8 and 9: “And where these two facts exist, there shall be another fact above them, that is, there shall be another planet whose reckoning of time shall be longer still; and thus there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob, which Kolob is after the reckoning of the Lord’s time; which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” Here the concept of orbiting planets and their governing times was used as apperception to explain that a being—not a planet—was the governing source. This would give the glorious Egyptian king something to think about.

He would have clearly understood that there were many rulers upon the earth and that they possessed differing magnitudes of power. For example, the Egyptians knew of a Canaanite ruler in Jerusalem but considered him subservient to Egypt, and thus he would have been considered to be on one of the lesser orbits of rulers. Pharaoh probably also knew of Mesopotamian kings, perhaps King Ur-Nammu of the city of Ur. This leader would likely have been viewed as occupying an orbit closer to the Egyptian ruler. The Nubian kingdom of Kush had become powerful by this time, but again the Egyptians dominated this group. The probability is great that the Egyptian king considered himself to be the body that governed the orbits of leadership, the great centrifugal power controlling earthly leaders.
What would have been startling, yet logical, was the reasoning that if there were two facts, one was higher than another and there must be yet another higher still (see v. 8). Thus, if Pharaoh was above the king of Kush, it stood to reason that someone was above Pharaoh. Abraham’s assertion would have been that this series of successions continued, not merely until Pharaoh was reached but until God was reached. The paradigm presented to Pharaoh was that he was not the most high ruler after all.

The teaching of astronomy would have gotten the king’s attention. The principles of government apperceptively taught would have made sense. This allowed Abraham to teach that mankind must fear God, not man (even a man considered semidivine). But the lesson did not necessarily stop there. These concentric circles of governance and order could also be used to teach of the organization of the kingdom of God on earth, which in Abraham’s day operated under the patriarchal order. Thus Abraham, Pharaoh, we, and our students understand that we follow the orbits of governance from ourselves to our parents, grandparents, and so forth, until the person who reports to God is reached, and thus we again find God as the focal, governing point.
Incidentally, this can be used to teach about current Church government as well, demonstrating that the symbolism in Abraham 3 speaks not only to Abraham’s generation but to ours as well.

This God-centered view of the universe teaches Abraham, the Egyptians, and us another powerful message. Even within a gospel context it is easy to focus on various principles without tying them in to the great center, God. For example, it is easy to teach modesty, honesty, the Word of Wisdom, or the law of tithing without connecting them to the center of the gospel: God, His Son, and the Atonement.
Even such edifying principles as these can be distracting if they are dis-associated from that central focus. President Boyd K. Packer described the Atonement as being “the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.”

As Thomas B. Griffith said in a BYU devotional, “If you cannot figure out the link between the topic you are to teach and the Atonement of Christ, you have either not thought about it enough or you shouldn’t be talking about it at church.”

When properly understood, the God-centered vision that Abraham 3 presents us should help us to remember that every aspect of the gospel is governed by its great center: God, His Son, and the Atonement.

The analogies Abraham is able to draw from the heavens increase because God seems to immediately show him an expanded vision of His creations: “And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof” (Abraham 3:12). Not only did Abraham see more in the vision, but God also taught him more.

**God’s Relationship with Abraham and with Us**

For example, God expounded on the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. It is difficult to know how much of the covenant had been established with Abraham at this point. In Genesis 12, just before going to Egypt, Abraham is told that the Lord will make of him a great nation and that the Lord will bless those that bless Abraham and curse those that curse Abraham (see Genesis 12:2–3). These are two of the most important aspects of the Abrahamic covenant.

It is tempting to consider the vision that is recorded as Abraham 3 as an extended record of when the Lord brought Abraham “forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Genesis 15:5), except that in the Genesis account this takes place after the trip to Egypt. Perhaps there is a problem with the chronology of the Genesis account. During this same incident, Abraham makes sacrifices, divides the portions into halves, and walks before them in what is almost certainly symbolic of “cutting a covenant”—a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase—with God. As the sacrifice is accepted, the Lord covenants that Abraham will have a land of promise (see Genesis 15:9–21), another important
aspect of the covenant. Yet only later is Abraham told, “I will make my covenant between me and thee,” and then has other aspects of the covenant confirmed and his name changed (Genesis 17:2–8).

It is difficult to tell if the covenant was established in stages—as it seems to be with us, who enter the covenant at baptism but more fully partake of it in the marriage covenant—or if it was given wholly at once and then reconfirmed in various ways at various times or if there is a problem with the Genesis text as we have received it. Thus, we cannot be certain at what stage of the covenant Abraham was when he received the vision recorded in Abraham 3, but he at least knew something of it. He also had the covenant’s aspect of progeny reconfirmed when, in the midst of supernaturally seeing the stars, God told him, “I will multiply thee, and thy seed after thee, like unto these; and if thou canst count the number of sands, so shall be the number of thy seeds” (Abraham 3:14). It is interesting that in the midst of seeing a vision designed to instruct him as to what he should teach the Egyptians, Abraham is reminded of how the heavens tie into God’s covenant with him.

The apperception analogies that God employs in this fuller vision take a step beyond those He had employed in the first. In those explanations God had focused on nondescript entities with God at the center, allowing for organizational and institutional comparisons. In the second vision God applies the same principles to the individual. After showing Abraham the vastness of His creations, He again speaks of the orbiting bodies, that Kolob is the greatest of the stars—significantly, again because it is nearest to Him—and that the moon, the earth, and all the stars coexist with celestial bodies both above and below them in the order of orbits (see Abraham 3:16–17). Yet immediately this is followed by a comparison to spirits, or intelligences, which God makes clear have always existed and always will exist (see Abraham 3:18). Each individual being, like the stars, will find that there is a being less intelligent than they and a being more intelligent than they. The exception is God: “There are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all” (Abraham 3:19). This point is similar to that made after Abraham’s first vision, except that it focuses more on the universality and simultaneous individuality of the application.

Almost as if to demonstrate this clearly, after this declaration the Lord makes an immediate transition. The very next thing He says is, “The Lord thy God sent his angel to deliver thee from the hands of the priest of Elkenah” (Abraham 3:20). How curious this insertion is! On the face of it there is no connection between this statement and the
grand principles God had just been elaborating. Yet it proves exactly the point of the individuality God is emphasizing. God has just made His greatness clear. Not only is He the Creator of the vast expanse and numberless bodies Abraham has just seen—and not seen, for he “could not see the end thereof” (Abraham 3:12)—but He is all-powerful, for “there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it” (Abraham 3:17). Finally He emphasized that He is greater than everything else.

I would imagine that seeing the Lord face to face and beholding these vast creations (seemingly more than Moses initially saw in Moses 1) must have been overwhelming and humbling, and I suppose God intended that effect to some degree. Yet God did not leave Abraham at that point. Immediately after helping Abraham realize how small he is, and how immense God is, God also reminds Abraham of their relationship with each other; after all, it was this glorious God who had cared so much about Abraham that He had reached out and saved him. The reminder of the covenant in verse 14 must have done something similar. Abraham is in the midst of seeing the greatness of God’s creations, and God reminds him that He intends to make Abraham just as great a creator in the realm of progeny. Abraham here encounters a God that overwhelms him with His magnitude and then reminds him how personal their relationship is and how much God cares for Abraham, demonstrated both in what He has done and what He will do. We must understand that as it was with Abraham, so it is with us. We are dealing with a magnificent yet magnanimous and personal God who will help deliver us from our own difficulties.

Abraham has learned much about God and his relationship with God, but he has also learned about the relationship of every individual with God.

However, there is more. In the model of orbiting spheres, each being is affected by those above it, and in turn affects those below it. While we are ultimately dependent upon God, we are also indubitably intertwined with each other in our approach to God. We cannot come unto God irrespective of our relationships with others. As the Lord said, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23–24).
Intelligence in God’s Eyes

As we look at God’s description of our interrelationships and the clear declaration that some beings are more intelligent than others, students often feel some discomfort. The wording and appreceptive comparison establishes something akin to the Great Chain of Being. Clearly a hierarchy is a part of this description of the universe. The natural question that arises from our egalitarian-oriented societies is, why are some beings more intelligent than others? This question lends itself to a discussion of what seems to be God’s next topic in His revelation to Abraham. As we entertain this concept, we must be cognizant of two scriptural definitions of intelligence: (1) the uncreated identity of each individual and (2) “light and truth.” I am not convinced that the two definitions are completely separate and unrelated. We must also keep in mind that the principles we are about to discuss concerning intelligences are connected to the astronomical principles we have just reviewed. Both are designed to help us understand our nature and our position in relation to God. It is God who makes the transition within the revelation, and as we follow His reasoning, we will come to further understand what he is trying to teach Abraham and us—Abraham’s posterity—about our intelligences and our standing with God.

Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants is most illustrative in our attempts to answer the question of why some beings are more intelligent than others. It first helps us define intelligence. We are told, “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29), and, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). This indicates that the degree of intelligence depends upon the amount of light and truth we have received.

The section also illustrates how to receive light and truth. It describes this process for the Savior, saying, “He received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; and he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:12–13). The example set by Christ is then applied to us: “And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. . . . All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also” (D&C 93:27–28, 30). Knowing all things, or obtaining knowledge, is important. As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge for if
he does not get knowledge he will be brought into Captivity by some evil power in the other world as evil spirits will have more knowledge & Consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs Revelation to assist us & give us knowledge of the things of God.”

The passages in section 93 suggest that the amount of intelligence we receive depends directly on what we do with the light and truth already given. When we obey the light and truth we have, we receive more. When we disobey or ignore it, we lose that which we have (see 2 Nephi 28:30). It has been my experience that as we discuss this principle in a teaching setting, if we take a moment to quietly ask the Lord which principles of light and truth we currently possess but are not obeying, the Spirit will answer the question.

All this information about the need to obey light and truth as it is given to us is echoed in Abraham’s visions: “We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25). His visions also teach the principles that if we obey the truth we have been given, we will be given more until we are full of light and truth, and if we don’t obey what we have, we will lose what light and truth we have thus far been given: “They who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abraham 3:26).

We may ask, Why would God want to prove us herewith? And why would he give to those who receive and take away from those who do not? The principle that answers these questions is lucidly illustrated by Elder Dallin H. Oaks:

In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something.

Many Bible and modern scriptures speak of a final judgment at which all persons will be rewarded according to their deeds or works or the desires of their hearts. But other scriptures enlarge upon this by referring to our being judged by the condition we have achieved. . . .

From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some
heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.36

Coupling Elder Oaks’s teachings with those found in section 93, we are led to conclude that the amount of light and truth we obey determines the amount of light and truth with which we will be filled. Our prospects at the judgment bar will largely be determined by the type of being we have become and whether we have become a being of light—full of light and truth. Of course, the amount of light and truth we receive is affected both by our obedience and by our reception of grace in these efforts (see D&C 93:12–13, 20). In many ways, the reception of grace is akin to God rescuing Abraham while he is on the altar. In the midst of our gaining light and truth and our efforts for progress, we must never forget what God wants to do for us, nor His ability to enact His desires.37 After all “there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it” (Abraham 3:17).

These principles seem to be the culminating doctrines of Abraham’s vision. The Abrahamic analogy of astronomic principles ably illustrates that there is an order to things and that there are levels of progress to be made within that order. The central principle it teaches is that the goal of that progress converges on one point, God. We may ask, What did God want Abraham to learn when He showed him this vision? What did He want Abraham to teach the Egyptians? And what did He want Abraham to teach us by making record of this vision? Among many things, the most salient principles include that God wanted to teach Abraham, the Egyptians, and us about our relationship with Him, on a variety of levels. God is the focal point of everything; He is the Creator of and driving force behind all things in the universe. Finally, the culminating point appears to be that even though God is above us, our progression is toward Him. Simply put, Abraham chapter 3 masterfully teaches us about our relationship with God.  

Notes
3. Sinuhe B 212–13, as in Friedrich Vogelsang and Alan H. Gardiner, Literarische Texte des Mittleren Reiches (Leipzig, Germany: H.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), table 7a. This text originates in the Abrahamic era.


10. Pyramid Text, 442.


12. Pyramid Text, 519.

13. Pyramid Text, 214, 570.


15. Pyramid Text, 412, 504.


17. Pyramid Text, 366, 609.

18. Pyramid Text, 477.


20. Pyramid Text, 412, 442.

21. Pyramid Text, 691.

22. Pyramid Text, 473, 609.

23. Pyramid Text, 509.


27. Pyramid Text, 454.


32. The eighth article of faith (as well as the very existence of the Joseph Smith Translation) makes it clear that there are some problems with the Bible as we have received it. This is why Joseph Smith said, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors” (*Discourses of Joseph Smith*, comp. Alma P. Burton [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977], 245). Of course, many of those who collected and redacted the sacred texts had good intentions (see 2 Nephi 29:4–5).

33. While the imagery of verse 12, wherein the Lord “put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes,” indicates this is above and beyond that which mankind can see on his own, in verse 14 Abraham makes the point that it was nighttime when he saw these things, almost as if they could be seen because he was out looking around at night. Still, the nature of the vision combined with the language of verse 12 seems to indicate a seerlike vision.


Elements of Sacrifice in Abraham’s Time and Our Own

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Abraham’s test to offer Isaac as a sacrifice is one of the most poignant stories in the Old Testament, yet it is told with astonishing economy, occupying a mere nineteen verses. Nevertheless, it stands as one of the most detailed narratives of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Herein God commands aged Abraham to travel a three-day, uphill journey from Beersheba to Mount Moriah, where he must bind Isaac, slay him with a knife, and burn his remains as a sacrifice to God. Ultimately, Isaac is spared when the angel of the Lord intervenes and God provides a ram to be sacrificed in his place.

I believe this story serves as a template for making acceptable sacrifices to God. In this light, I have identified five elements of righteous sacrifice from Genesis 22. These five elements are not comprehensive—the story of Abraham binding Isaac for sacrifice is a rich digest of imagery and content relative to sacrifice. Nevertheless, the following elements of sacrifice seem essential: (1) sacrifice as a medium of testing our true intentions, (2) the significance of place (holy ground designated by God for the receipt of offerings), (3) the significance of altars, (4) the significance of rapport between sacrificer and sacrifice, and (5) the significance of sacrifices as a type or shadow of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this article is to use Genesis 22 as a pattern from which to examine these five elements in latter-day sacrifice. This exploration will lead to a clearer conception of sacrifice and will provide a practical construct through which to teach the doctrine of sacrifice.
using Genesis 22 as a template. Ultimately, we conclude that there is a connection between sacrificial offerings today and sacrificial practices in the days of Abraham.

**Sacrifice as a Medium of Testing Intent**

In the opening lines of Genesis 22, God reveals His design in commanding Abraham to offer up Isaac: “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham. . . . And he said, Take now thy son. . . . and offer him there for a burnt offering” (vv. 1–2). The footnote of verse 1 in the Latter-day Saint edition indicates the word tempt is a translation from Hebrew meaning to test or prove. What was God looking to assess through the testing of Abraham? Lexicographers Jenni and Westermann note that the Hebrew word from which tempt is translated suggests a test to determine Abraham’s true intentions.1 This is clearly evident in the acceptance of Abraham’s offering: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (v. 12). It is reasonable to conclude that in Abraham’s day a major purpose of sacrifice was to test the intentions and true desires of the sacrificer. As explained in Abraham’s own writings, God wanted to “prove [his children] herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25). Without question, the herewith of this passage includes sacrifice.2

This element of sacrifice is evident in latter-day scripture. For example, the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in July 1843: “For I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father. Behold, I have seen your sacrifices, and will forgive all your sins; I have seen your sacrifices in obedience to that which I have told you. Go, therefore, and I make a way for your escape, as I accepted the offering of Abraham of his son Isaac” (D&C 132:49–50). It is evident from these verses that Joseph Smith was sealed up to exaltation not because he was perfect in his execution or performance of all that God commanded him to sacrifice, but that, like Abraham, his intentions were wholly focused on the will of God. Therefore, like Abraham, Joseph Smith received exaltation through Jesus Christ, who filled in any gaps between his intentions and his performances.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks clarified how this aspect of the Atonement is employed in our lives:
Our Father in Heaven will receive a truly righteous desire as a substitute for actions that are genuinely impossible. . . . This is the principle that blessed Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. The Lord stopped him at the last instant (see Genesis 22:11–12), but his willingness to follow the Lord’s command “was accounted unto him for righteousness” (D&C 132:36). This principle means that when we have done all that we can, our desires will carry us the rest of the way. It also means that if our desires are right, we can be forgiven for the unintended errors or mistakes we will inevitably make as we try to carry those desires into effect. What a comfort for our feelings of inadequacy!

Joseph Smith explained that our desires must be earnest, sincere, and wholehearted, like Abraham’s, for such grace to be extended. He explained, “The sacrifice required of Abraham in the offering up of Isaac, shows that if a man would attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life; he must sacrifice all things.” He further taught that “you will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God, and . . . God will feel after you, and He will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God.”

This wrenching was evident in preparing certain men to be called into the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Quorum of the Seventy in the last days. The majority of the Twelve and many of the Seventy were called from the ranks of those who participated in Zion’s Camp—the harrowing journey from Ohio to Missouri to defend and bring aid to persecuted Saints in 1834. Because of poverty, illness, and mortal danger, participation in Zion’s Camp was a sacrifice of monumental proportions. According to Joseph Smith, the sacrifice was designed to test the intentions and desires of future leaders of God’s Church. Shortly after the journey was completed, Joseph explained:

Brethren, some of you are angry with me, because you did not fight in Missouri; but let me tell you, God did not want you to fight. He could not organize His kingdom with twelve men to open the Gospel door to the nations of the earth, and with seventy men under their direction to follow in their tracks, unless He took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham. Now the Lord has got His Twelve and His Seventy, and there will be other quorums of Seventies called, who will make the sacrifice, and those who have not made their sacrifices and their offerings now, will make them hereafter.
Genesis 22 teaches that sacrifice is a medium of testing true intent. If the intentions of the sacrificer harmonize with God’s will, the offering will be acceptable to Him. If intentions are not in line with God’s will, the sacrifice lacks efficacy. This fundamental element of sacrifice was clearly in place as Abraham bound Isaac and laid him upon the altar, and remains in place today as time, talents, money, and other oblations are offered as latter-day sacrifices.

Significance of Place

Given the brevity of the Genesis 22 account, it is significant that we have five references to the prescribed place where the sacrifice must be carried out (see vv. 2, 3, 4, 9, 14). The repeated identification of a specific site for the offering suggests significance. Indeed, the significance of place is a fundamental element of sacrifice.

The Lord commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac “upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (v. 2). Thereafter, this mountain is referred to as “the place” or “that place” (see vv. 3–4, 9, 14). Location was so significant to the efficacy of the sacrifice that Abraham apparently had no alternative; he had to travel to the prescribed location. This begs the question, why a mountaintop? Throughout history, temples and mountaintops have shared a common heritage (see Exodus 4:27; 1 Kings 19:11; Isaiah 27:13; Matthew 17:1–9; 2 Peter 1:18; 1 Nephi 18:3; Ether 3:1). In fact, temples are frequently referred to as the mountain of the Lord (see Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Psalm 48:1). Tradition holds that during the Creation, the first peak or primordial mound that rose above the chaos of the waters came to represent the site of God’s initial contact with the earth. Figuratively, this mountain was the site from which He ordered the rest of the Creation.

This traditional view is borne out in the biblical narrative as mountains frequently serve as sacred space that link heaven and earth. This is particularly true of the first temple complex—the Garden of Eden—wherein a spring of water gushed forth. This spring watered Eden and then divided into four river heads that went out (flowed down) from Eden and watered the four corners of the world (see Genesis 2:10–14; Moses 3:10–14; Abraham 5:10). The flow of water away from Eden in four different directions suggests a higher elevation than surrounding lands. The increased altitude also suggests that the water source must be a spring and not another river flowing through Eden. Not surprisingly then, Ezekiel refers to the Garden of Eden as “the holy mountain of God” (Ezekiel 28:14). Whether literally or figuratively, the mountain of the Lord suggests a rise above the fallen and imperfect world.
and beckons those who wish to draw closer to God to climb above corruption and come to the “place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord” (Deuteronomy 12:11).

Climbing up and out of the world to a chosen place of worship is illustrated through the “Songs of Degrees” or “Psalms of Ascent” (Psalms 120–34). These fifteen songs depict a journey from the proverbial lowlands of worldliness to the mountain of the Lord—the place where worldliness is eclipsed by peace. Before construction of the temple at Jerusalem, these fifteen psalms were possibly sung as worshippers climbed the hills leading to Gibeon, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept before it was moved to the City of David. Centuries later, it is possible that these psalms were sung while ascending the steps of the second temple at Jerusalem that led to the inner court. Apparently, there were fifteen steps leading to this court (see Ezekiel 40:26, 31), which some believe were designed to match the “Songs of Degrees.”

Singing or reciting the words of the Songs ensured that the worshipper acknowledged his or her ascent to the most holy place on earth—the mountain of the Lord.

Visually, the facades of some Latter-day Saint temples (for example, Salt Lake, Nauvoo, and Mount Timpanogos) illustrate this climb out of the world with a series of carefully crafted stones. On the Salt Lake Temple, earth stones surround the foundation of the temple, moon stones encompass the temple structure at approximately one-quarter of its height, sun stones may be seen at a level approximately three-quarters, and star stones surround the structure near the pinnacle of the building. Hence, the temple facade depicts the journey undertaken within the temple that begins on earth and ascends up beyond the moon, sun, and stars to reach God’s celestial realm.

As these examples suggest, temples re-create this primordial mound and the journey up and out of the fallen world. Donald W. Parry noted that “every Near Eastern temple symbolically recalls a mountain.” The connection between certain mountaintops and holy ground helps to explain God’s design in commanding Abraham (who was over one hundred years old as the story unfolds) to hike three days and climb the mountain God had prescribed. If any mountain would do, certainly God would not require His aged servant Abraham to travel for three days to Moriah. Simply, the ideal place to offer sacrifice is at the place designated by God, such as a mountaintop (see Deuteronomy 12).
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The site-specific nature of sacrifice consistently appears in latter-day scripture. In July 1831, Joseph Smith arrived in Jackson County, Missouri, from Kirtland, Ohio. Here he received a revelation identifying Jackson County as the location of Zion and the center place to which the Saints should gather. The Lord also identified the place where the temple should be built. He revealed: “And thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse. Wherefore, it is wisdom that the land should be purchased by the saints, and also every tract lying westward, even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile” (D&C 57:3–4; emphasis added). Later, the Lord revealed: “Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the temple, which temple shall be reared in this generation. . . . Therefore, as I said concerning the sons of Moses—for the sons of Moses and also the sons of Aaron shall offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord, which house shall be built unto the Lord in this generation, upon the consecrated spot as I have appointed” (D&C 84:4, 31; emphasis added). The phrases “the center place,” “a spot,” “this place,” “the place,” “the consecrated spot,” and “I have appointed” in these verses indicate that as it was with Abraham, so it was with the Latter-day Saints: the Lord consecrated the place for the temple in Zion where He would commune with them and receive their sacrifices.

The site-specific nature of temples in the latter days survived the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. His successors have made the selection of a temple site a matter of the utmost urgency always anxious to receive the confirmation of the Lord that the selected site was the place wherein the Lord desired a temple to be built. The selection of building sites for the Salt Lake Temple and Denver Colorado Temple will serve to illustrate.

From the teachings of Brigham Young, we know that the site of the Salt Lake Temple was appointed by God. Once the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, Brigham Young immediately turned his attention to building a temple. On April 6, 1853, President Young spoke from the Tabernacle, saying, “This I do know—there should be a temple built here. . . . I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions, but suffice it to say, five years ago last July I was here, and saw in the spirit the temple not ten feet from where we have laid the chief cornerstone. I have not inquired what kind of a temple we should
build. Why? Because it was represented before me. I have never looked upon that ground, but the vision of it was there. I see it as plainly as if it was in reality before me.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley voiced similar feelings in conjunction with selecting a building site for the Denver Colorado Temple:

When it was announced that we would build a temple in that city and had selected a site on which it should stand, opposition rose against us. We gave up that site and tried another. Again we were thwarted. But we were determined to go forward, putting our trust in the Lord that He would guide us in accomplishing His purposes. Two other possible sites were selected. At the time, President Kimball and President Romney were both ill, and mine was a serious responsibility. I asked President Benson, then President of the Council of the Twelve, if we might go to Denver together, and there with Elder Russell Taylor we looked over these sites. I give you my testimony that we were guided by the Spirit in choosing the ground on which that beautiful new structure now stands.

Anciently, Abraham was commanded to ascend to a specific site, a holy mountain prescribed by God, to commune through sacrifice. No less is required of Latter-day Saints. Through His prophets the Lord designates sacred ground upon which temples are constructed. When we ascend to the temple and worship through the sacrifice of a willing heart, we may anticipate blessings similar to those bestowed upon Abraham.

Significance of Altars

If the temple is the mountain of the Lord, the altar may serve as its figurative peaks. In fact, the Lord commanded horns to be built on the four corners of certain altars (see Exodus 27:2; Leviticus 4:7). These horns represented power, strength, fullness, and abundance. They were also associated with an increase of height, suggesting the loftiest point where man and God meet. Furthermore, the altar is traditionally designated to be a conduit connecting heaven and earth, God and man. Altars of the true and living God serve at least three purposes. They are (1) a place for sacrifice; (2) a place for covenant making and covenant renewal; and (3) a place where the divine presence of God may be manifest. Abraham’s experience with Isaac at Moriah reflect these purposes.

Sacrifice. In Genesis 22 we learn that it was not enough for Abraham and Isaac to merely arrive at the place of sacrifice. Once there, Abraham was commanded to build an altar as prescribed by a millennia-old pattern that was established by God in the days of Adam
and Eve, who, following their expulsion from Eden, were commanded to construct an altar and sacrifice “the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). Initially, the purpose of this ritual was not entirely clear to them. However, “after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me. And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:6–8).

From this we learn that sacrifice at altars was instituted at the onset of mortality. The principal purpose and practice of sacrifice had not changed as Abraham built an altar on Moriah and lifted his knife to sacrifice Isaac. Therefore, the purposes of Adam’s sacrifices as well as Abraham’s sacrifices were the same—to teach that the Father would eventually sacrifice His Only Begotten Son to redeem mankind from temporal and spiritual death. Furthermore, Skinner notes that the Hebrew word for altar, mizbeach, is rooted in the word zebah, which means “sacrifice.” Therefore, the word altar really means “the place of sacrificing.” It is interesting that another name for Jerusalem is Ariel (see Isaiah 29:1–2; Ezekiel 43:15), which means “hearth of God” or “altar of God.” The hearth of the altar is where the priest stood as he slew the sacrifice, and the altar is where the sacrifice is presented to God and is consumed. Since all sacrifices point to the great and last sacrifice, Jesus Christ, it is not happenstance that another name for the city where He would “suffer, bleed and die for us” is the “altar of God.”

Covenant making and covenant renewal. Sacrifice and entering into covenants (or renewing covenants) are mutually inclusive. You cannot have one without the other. The word covenant is a translation from the Hebrew word berith. The etymology of berith is not completely clear; however, it has been suggested that berith is related to two Akkadian terms: barnu, which means “to look for and make a fixed choice,” and biritu, which means “to clasp, fetter, bond, or fasten.” In short, berith is associated with rendering clear favor toward or choosing one from many to take for your own by having it bound to you. The result of this binding selection is the creation of something more beautiful and desirable than was had in an earlier form.

Before the test on Moriah, God entered into a covenant with Abraham, giving him a new name, the promise of a land inheritance, and assurance of a great posterity (see Genesis 13:14–16; Genesis
17:1–22). This covenant was renewed in conjunction with the sacrifice of the ram at the altar on Moriah. At that moment the Lord said, “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16–18). We see in this episode the covenant pattern. Abraham was shown favor, was selected by God, and was bound to Him in a way that would eternally improve the prophet’s standing. These events indicate that a fundamental purpose of altars is for making and renewing covenants.

*Divine presence.* God’s presence is associated with sacrifice and covenant making at altars. As alluded to earlier, altars serve as a conduit of sorts, connecting the earth and God’s realm. God promises to manifest Himself at the altar. Moses was instructed, “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name *I will come unto thee*, and I will bless thee” (Exodus 20:24; emphasis added). Furthermore, the prophets Ezekiel and Malachi refer to the altar as the table of the Lord (see Ezekiel 41:22; Malachi 1:7, 12), suggesting that God comes personally to the altar to accept and consume the sacrifice the way we approach a table to partake of a meal. Allusions to sacrifice as “God’s food” abound in ancient scripture (see Leviticus 3:11; 21:21–22; Numbers 28:2; 2 Chronicles 7:1; 1 Kings 18:38). Again, the connotation is that God’s presence at altars of sacrifice is not only anticipated but also expected.

Abraham experienced the intimacy of the altar at Moriah. While he did not have to sacrifice Isaac, he did sacrifice the ram caught in the thicket. As we should expect, Abraham encountered God at the altar and named the place Jehovah-jireh, meaning “the Lord shall be manifest (seen)” (Genesis 22:14, footnote b). The connotation of this title suggests that God was nearby or present at the altar of sacrifice as the entire drama unfolded.

In the days of Abraham, sacrificing an animal denoted totality—holding nothing back from God. And in that totality was something of the heart of the sacrificer. As will be seen in the next section, this connection between the sacrifice and sacrificer is essential. Keil and Delitzsch note that “in the sacrificial flame the essence of the animal was resolved into vapour; so that when man presented a sacrifice in his own stead, his
inmost being, his spirit, and his heart ascended to God in the vapour,
and the sacrifice brought the feeling of his heart before God.”

Following His Atonement, Jesus commanded that the sacrifice
of animals cease. Instead, He commanded that a broken heart and a
contrite spirit should be offered to God as a sacrifice instead (see 3
Nephi 9:19–20). The covenant to sacrifice everything for the kingdom
of God is made at an altar. Obedience to the covenant will be enacted
away from the altar in daily life by offering sacrifices of time, talents,
tithes, and being faithful to any command that God may give. These
oblations and deep reverence for God’s will are an extension of the
covenant made at the altar itself and serve as barometers to determine
if one actually possesses a broken heart and a contrite spirit. The Lord
revealed in July 1833: “Verily I say unto you, all among them who know
their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite,
and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice
which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me” (D&C
97:8; emphasis added). Figuratively, the heart is often the seat of our
deepest emotions and intentions. A broken heart suggests susceptibil-
ity and openness to God’s designs. Similarly, the word contrite means
broken. A contrite spirit is not self-willed but willing to conform to the
commands of God. Taken together, the language of this verse suggests
that the acceptability of any sacrifice is determined by the intent and
will of the individual offering it.

The centrality of these ideas to Latter-day Saint theology is
expressed by Joseph Smith:

Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the
sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith
necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the
faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be
obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this
sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy
eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly
things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are
well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all
that he has for truth’s sake, not even withholding his life, and believing
before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he
seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and
will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not
seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the
faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.

Both before the Atonement (with animal sacrifice) and after the
Atonement (with offerings such as time, talents, tithes, and so forth),
we see the aforementioned intimacy of sacrifice at altars. Similarly, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

> It is quite evident, then, that these glorious blessings of eternal inheritance, by which we become sons of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, possessing “all that the father hath,” do not come except through willingness to keep the commandments and even to suffer with Christ if need be. In other words, candidates for eternal life—the greatest gift of God—are expected to place all that they have on the altar, should it be required, for even then, and should they be required to lay down their lives for his cause, they could never pay him for the abundant blessings which are received and promised based on obedience to his laws and commandments.  

Likewise, Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the ‘sacrifice unto the Lord . . . of a broken heart and a contrite spirit,’ (D&C 59:8) . . . for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him.”

Sacrifice at altars is intended to point worshippers to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, give them opportunities to make and renew covenants, and bring them into the divine presence of God. In the days of Abraham, sacrifice at altars involved the offering of an animal. Today, we offer our hearts, might, mind, and strength. From the story of Abraham’s test at Moriah, we learn that the principal elements of sacrifice at altars are still in place today.

**Rapport between Sacrificer and Sacrifice**

There must be a distinct tie between life and livelihood of the sacrifice and the sacrificer in a greater context of faith in Jesus Christ. Kurtz refers to this relationship as “biotic rapport.” He explains that “it was not sufficient that the sacrifice should be merely the property of the person offering it; on the contrary, it was requisite that it should stand in a close, inward, essential relation, a psychical rapport, to the person of the worshiper.” In this light, Abraham was commanded: “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22:2).

The intimate relationship between Abraham and Isaac is the defining component of the story that makes this command exceptionally difficult and without parallel among mortals. Isaac was a child of promise who was long sought for, cherished, guarded, and raised up
by Abraham and Sarah, who conveyed to Isaac all the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual energy at their disposal. Isaac was their most prized possession. Furthermore, Abraham’s vested interest was long term. According to Josephus, Isaac was twenty-five years old at the time of the binding and had “endeared himself to his parents still more, by the exercise of every virtue, and adhering to his duty to his parents, and being zealous in the worship of God.”

Similarly, Philo described Isaac at the time of the binding as “a beloved and only son, very beautiful in his person, and very excellent in his disposition. For he was already beginning to display the more perfect exercises of his age, so that his father felt a most strong and vehement affection for him, not only from the impulse of natural regard, but also from the influence of deliberate opinion, from being, as it were, a judge of his character.”

The element of giving of oneself is clearly seen in latter-day scripture as well as the teachings of latter-day prophets. Speaking of Sabbath observance, the Lord commanded, “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; for verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times; but remember that on this, the Lord’s day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord” (D&C 59:9–12; emphasis added). An oblation is a sacrifice offered to God in sacred service, particularly a sacrifice of time, talents, or means. A sacrament is “a solemn religious ceremony enjoined by Christ, the head of the christian church, to be observed by his followers, by which their special relation to him is created, or their oblations to him renewed and ratified.”

Though sacrifice today does not involve the slaughter of an animal or the offering of harvested crops, sacrifice is inherent in giving time and talents through serving selflessly in callings and by the payment of tithes and offerings. Furthermore, the sacrifice must be offered from a foundation of faith in the true and living God. In the modern era, time, talents, and means constitute the fruits of our labors and represent the essence of our existence. When offered with real intent, all the blessings associated with ancient sacrifice stand available to the sacrificer today.

Elder Russell M. Nelson describes the fruits of such latter-day sacrifices. He wrote: “Our highest sense of sacrifice is achieved as we make ourselves more sacred or holy. This we do by obedience to the commandments of God. Thus the laws of obedience and sacrifice are
indelibly intertwined. Consider the commandment to obey the Word of Wisdom, to keep the Sabbath day holy, to pay an honest tithe. As we comply with these and other commandments, something wonderful happens to us. We become disciplined! We become disciples! We become sacred and holy—more like our Lord!”

Elder Nelson then provides the following example:

For a short time during the first year of our marriage, Sister Nelson maintained two jobs while I was in medical school. Before her paychecks had arrived, we found ourselves owing more than our funds could defray, so we took advantage of an option then available to sell blood at twenty-five dollars a pint. In an interval between her daytime job as a schoolteacher and her evening work as a clerk in a music store, we went to the hospital and each sold a pint of blood. As the needle was withdrawn from her arm, she said to me, “Don’t forget to pay tithing on my blood money.” . . . Such obedience was a tremendous lesson to me. Sister Nelson’s commitment to tithe became my commitment too.34

In this example, Sister Nelson’s “blood money” was truly part of her, and the biotic link between her life and her tithing is obvious. Her faith in Jesus Christ and His command to pay tithes is also evident. Income is usually earned through labors that extract “the sweat of thy face” (Moses 4:25), and the tithing paid on money earned is part of us too. Similarly, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

Over the past years it has been my responsibility to extend calls to scores of men, their wives, and their families to leave all behind and go into the mission field. Those with whom we shall speak in coming months will respond in the same way that those in the past have responded. They will, in effect, say, “Of course, I am ready to go whenever and wherever the Lord calls.” . . . I confess that at times I feel reluctant to ask people to do things in the Church because I know they will respond without hesitation. And I know also that those responses will entail great sacrifice. . . . Someone occasionally says that there was so much of sacrifice in the early days of the Church, but there is no sacrifice today. The observer goes on to say that in pioneer days people were willing to lay their fortunes and even their lives on the altar. “What has happened to the spirit of consecration?” some of these ask. I should like to say with great emphasis that this spirit is still very much among us. I have discovered that no sacrifice is too great for faithful Latter-day Saints.35

This example illustrates the tendency of many to minimize the significance of a latter-day sacrifice that does not include the privations endured by our pioneer ancestors. In reality, the response to a call and faithful service as a mission president, deacons quorum adviser, counselor in the Relief Society presidency, or nursery leader makes the
attending sacrifice of time, talent, and resources acceptable to the Lord so long as it is offered with real intent.

Sacrifice as a Type of the Atonement

Abraham’s binding of Isaac on the altar at Moriah is one of the clearest examples in all scripture that sacrifice is a type that points to the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Jacob 4:5). A type is a figurative representation of an actual thing or event. For example, a shadow cast by a tree is a type, or is typical, of the actual tree. By examining the shadow or type, the observer may learn many things about the tree itself, such as height, width of trunk, type and density of foliage, and so forth. All sacrifice should be a type or a shadow of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior (see Moses 5:5–9). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

By faith in this atonement or plan of redemption, Abel offered to God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he could not do it in faith, he could have no faith, or could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for man; for this was the plan of redemption; and without the shedding of blood was no remission; and as the sacrifice was instituted for a type, by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared; to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, because redemption was not purchased in that way, nor the power of atonement instituted after that order. . . . Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself; and this performance done with an eye looking forward in faith on the power of that great Sacrifice for a remission of sins.  

Similarly, the Apostle Paul explained that “by faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure [or type]” (Hebrews 11:17–19). Of the many types that point to the Atonement of Jesus Christ in Genesis 22 (the altar, blood, fire, wood, and so forth), Abraham, Isaac, and the ram are most significant.

In the binding narrative, Abraham serves as a type of the Father. Through Abraham we see the active role that the Father played in the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son. The text of Genesis 22 makes it clear that Abraham, and by association, the Father, was willing to offer this ultimate sacrifice: “And it came to pass after these things, that
God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am” (Genesis 22:1; emphasis added). The key to seeing Abraham’s and the Father’s willingness is found in the phrase “here I am,” which is echoed as “here am I” in verses 7 and 11. The phrase stands as a declaration and communicates a readiness to both listen and obey. Hence, while Jesus Christ was willing to be sacrificed, it is equally important that the Father was willing to make the sacrifice.

Abraham bound Isaac “and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham. . . . Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him” (Genesis 22:9–12). Up to this point in the narrative, Isaac had served as a type of Jesus Christ. He fully yielded to the will of his father, he journeyed to the prescribed place of sacrifice, and he allowed himself to be bound and prepared for death by slaughter. At this juncture, Isaac is untied and raised off the altar by his father. This is a type of how Christ will be raised up in the Resurrection by His Father (see Acts 13:30, 37; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Galatians 1:1). In his release, Isaac is also a type of all the children of God who are “bound” by certain temporal and spiritual deaths due to the Fall of Adam and sinfulness unless a mediator intervened as a substitute (see 2 Nephi 9:6–9). Isaac’s escape from the binding at the altar is typical of our escape, made possible by Christ, from the “awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (2 Nephi 9:10).

Nevertheless, the “ram caught in a thicket” (Genesis 22:13) becomes the premier type in this sacrificial saga. Like the Savior, the ram was provided miraculously by God (see Isaiah 7:14; 1 Nephi 11:15–18; Alma 7:10). Like the Savior, there was only one ram in the thicket available as a sacrifice. The Atonement of Jesus Christ was infinite and eternal, with no possibility of a backup should Christ fail (see 2 Nephi 9:7; D&C 76:1).

Of course, a critically important element of sacrifice is that the sacrifice, the sacrificer, and the ritual all point to Jesus Christ. As with the other four elements, this too is found in latter-day scripture and the teachings of modern prophets and apostles. For example, President Joseph F. Smith beheld in a vision all the Saints of God from Adam to Jesus Christ who had died and were waiting in the world of spirits to be taught by the Savior following His death. These spirits formed an innumerable host (see D&C 138:12) and “were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their
deliverance was at hand” (D&C 138:15). Furthermore, “all these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ” (D&C 138:14). Finally, throughout their lives they had all “offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name” (D&C 138:13; emphasis added). President Smith then provides a partial list of prophets who had offered sacrifice in similitude of the Son of God. The list includes Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Elias, Malachi, Elijah, “and many more” (D&C 138:38–49). From this we learn that starting with Adam, sacrifice has always been, and continues to be, intended as a similitude of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

> It follows that if we had sufficient insight, we would see in every gospel ordinance, in every rite that is part of revealed religion, in every performance commanded of God, in all things Deity gives his people, something that typifies the eternal ministry of the Eternal Christ. . . . Sacrifice is a similitude. It is performed to typify the . . . sacrifice of the Son of God. . . . After the final great sacrifice on the cross, the use for the similitude that looked forward to our Lord’s death ceased. Blood sacrifices became a thing of the past. New symbolisms, found in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, were adopted so that the saints might look back with reverence and worship upon his atoning ordeal. . . . Symbolisms change but the principles are always the same.39

Elder Bruce C. Hafen explained how one’s sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit is a type of Christ’s atoning sacrifice:

> To lay claim to the Savior’s sacrifice, we, like Adam and Eve, must also obey and sacrifice. We must bring an offering that in some way approximates his own suffering—the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. . . . Elder James E. Talmage believed that the physiological cause of Christ’s death was, literally, a broken heart. This element in our Lord’s sacrifice suggests two differences between animal sacrifices and the sacrifice of a broken heart. First is the difference between offering one of our possessions, such as an animal, and offering our own hearts. Second, one who offers an unblemished animal, the firstling of a flock, acts in similitude of the Father’s sacrifice of his unblemished, firstborn Son. By contrast, one who offers his own broken heart acts in similitude of the Son’s terribly personal sacrifice of himself. Thus, the figurative breaking of our own hearts, represented by our repentance and our faithful endurance of the mortal crucible—our own taste of a bitter cup—is a self-sacrifice that mirrors the Savior’s own self-sacrifice.40
The test of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 22, including the sacrifice of the ram caught in the thicket, serves as a type of the great and last sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All sacrifice should follow this model of pointing toward God, and drawing worshippers nearer to Him. God designed sacrifice to be a type, shadow, and similitude of the Father’s great and last sacrifice of His Son and the infinite self-sacrifice offered by the Savior. In this light, true sacrifice will always yield deeper devotion to the Father and the Son because they are the true focal points of worship through sacrifice.

Notes

2. Other biblical figures whose intentions were tested include Adam, Eve, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Balaam, Job, and Hosea, to name a few.
5. This statement is John Taylor’s recollection of instruction given by Joseph Smith (John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* [Liverpool: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1966], 24:197).
9. David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 69. The Psalms of Ascent were not limited to the tabernacle or temple. Certainly earnest believers in many time periods rehearsed or sang the lyrics of these psalms as they traveled to Jerusalem (a physical climb from any direction) for feasts and holy days. To be sure, the ascent may not have included a physical journey of any kind. One could ascend to the high places of the mind and spirit by rehearsing these passages to one’s self in a spirit of contemplation.
13. Not enough information is contained in the text of Genesis 22 to identify the exact location of Mount Moriah. However, long-standing traditions locate Moriah in Jerusalem and identify it with the mount upon which Solomon eventually constructed a temple. For a more detailed treatment of the location and significance of Moriah, including details regarding Abraham’s three-day journey from Beersheba, see Galbraith, Ogden, and Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City*, 27–33. Not all biblical scholars agree that the location of Abraham’s Moriah is the same as the mountaintop on which Solomon’s temple was eventually built. For a treatment of alternative viewpoints, see Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Moriah.”


29. Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices, and Worship*, 60; emphasis in original.


36. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 58. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland commented, “As the Prophet Joseph taught us, we can rest assured that God was not interested in the death of innocent little animals—*unless* the meaning of those altars truly alters the nature of our lives” (“I Stand All Amazed,” *Ensign*, August 1986, 70).


Missionary preparation is more important than ever.
On December 11, 2002, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued a remarkable statement on missionary work. At the time, most Church members did not realize how that statement and the subsequent changes in missionary efforts that resulted from it would revolutionize the latter-day work of proclaiming the gospel. The phrase *raising the bar* soon became common among members of the Church in describing the increased expectations for missionaries. Upon hearing the phrase, I, like most members of the Church, thought primarily of higher standards of moral worthiness to serve as a full-time missionary. Qualifications were certainly a significant part of the statement on missionary work. Moral worthiness and physical, mental, and emotional stability are certainly part of raising the bar. However, there are other aspects that are just as vital but are often overlooked and underemphasized. I came to view raising the bar much differently than I previously had and in a much more comprehensive manner when I was called to serve as a mission president. That responsibility and the total immersion in missionary matters—from the constant need for teaching, training, and motivating missionaries to assisting Church leaders and members in fulfilling their gospel-sharing responsibilities—caused me to look upon missionary preparation with new eyes.

For over thirty years I have been a religious educator—ten years with seminaries and institutes as a released-time seminary teacher and institute instructor and twenty years on the Religious Education faculty
at Brigham Young University. I have always felt it an incredible privilege and sacred responsibility to teach the young men and women in my classes. Like you, I want my students to be stretched intellectually and strengthened spiritually. I want their knowledge of the scriptures and doctrines of the gospel expanded, their devotion to the Lord and His Church intensified, their testimonies fortified, and their lives, love, and service empowered. I must admit, however, that I have not always thought as deeply and specifically as I should have concerning the impact of my teaching in preparing them to be effective missionaries—both as full-time missionaries and as lifelong member missionaries.

With the new eyes acquired through my mission experience, I now see more clearly that all of my students are not only prospective full-time missionaries but are already missionaries and will be throughout their lives. And knowing that, I now see that each class I am teaching—whether it be Book of Mormon, New Testament, Doctrine and Covenants, teachings of the living prophets, Church history, LDS marriage and family, or any of our wide array of courses—must be more directed to preparing what Elder M. Russell Ballard called “the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church.”¹ After discussing what is required of young men and women today to become that greatest generation of missionaries, Elder Ballard spoke specifically to fathers: “If we are ‘raising the bar’ for your sons [and daughters] to serve as missionaries, that means we are also ‘raising the bar’ for you. If we expect more of them, that means we expect more of you.”² I believe this principle applies not only to parents and Church leaders but also to us as religious educators. “This isn’t a time for spiritual weaklings,” Elder Ballard declared.³ That applies to us as well. This isn’t a time for “weak sauce” religious educators (a term my missionaries often used to describe something tentative, feeble, or lacking boldness and power). The bar has been raised for all of us.

“I Wish I Would Have”

Hundreds of times in my interviews with the missionaries, I heard sentiments expressed that began with the phrase “I wish I would have.” Perhaps the most common expression was, “I wish I would have known how difficult a mission is.” But there were many other similar expressions—“I wish I had studied the Book of Mormon more,” “I wish I had paid more attention in seminary,” “I wish I knew the scriptures better,” “I wish I had formed better study habits,” “I wish I understood the gospel more,” “I wish my testimony was stronger.” Upon arriving in the mission field, I observed some missionaries
who struggled mightily with the transition from being a teenager to a full-time missionary. Yet others hit the ground running and almost immediately became confident, competent, and powerful teachers of the gospel. What is the difference? Why are some so well prepared and others not? Of course, there are a myriad of factors—almost as many as missionaries themselves. Yet there are some specific things I observed and experienced as a mission president that have caused me to rethink my teaching philosophy and retool my teaching methods.

Most of the several hundred young men and women who served in our mission had attended seminary. Fewer, but still a substantial number, had participated in institute classes. Even fewer had been enrolled in religion classes at the respective BYU campuses. I mention that fact to demonstrate that the primary religious educational experience of full-time missionaries in the Church today is found in seminary classes throughout the world—whether it be released-time, early-morning, or home-study. When I came to that realization, it gave me pause. I found myself expressing the “I wish I would have” sentiments I had so often heard from my missionaries. I wish I would have taught my seminary students more specifically and effectively those things that would have enabled them to become effective missionaries. I wish I would have seen more clearly that every student in my class is not just a prospective full-time missionary but is already a missionary and will be a missionary all his or her life.

With my release as mission president, I returned to my teaching responsibilities at BYU. Although the courses I teach are the same as those I taught before my mission, I am different. With the new eyes acquired from the mission experience, I saw many things differently. For example, the standard works are the same, but what I see in them is different. Likewise, the students sitting in my classes look much the same today as four years ago (except they seem younger than they used to), but now I see them in a new light. As I envision them wearing black name badges and white shirts and ties or being confronted with missionary opportunities in the form of questions or challenges (as they all will inevitably be) two questions come into my mind now: (1) If this young man or young woman sitting before me were called to serve in my mission, what would I want him or her to know? (2) How can my teaching help them to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” with more confidence, competence, and conviction? (Mosiah 18:9). My mind races when I think of all the things I would want them to know and attributes I would desire them to possess. Yet, for me, it seems to boil down to three main things I
want my students—all my students, whether they are preparing to serve full-time missions or just striving to be good member missionaries—to know. Now, more fervently and urgently than ever before in my religious education career, I want my students to know: (1) the truthfulness of the gospel, (2) the doctrines of the gospel, and (3) how to share the gospel.

Know the Gospel Is True

“Your own personal testimony,” President James E. Faust counseled missionaries, “is the strongest arrow in your quiver.” Because of that, all of our teaching must be to that end. “Begin with the end in mind,” is a familiar saying that is particularly relevant, even vital, for religious educators. One of the missionary skills that we continually stressed to our missionaries was what we called “teaching to the commitment.” That means that all we teach—every doctrine and every principle—must lead to extending a commitment to the investigators to become “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Every principle taught has a desired outcome or action that we desire those whom we teach to do and experience in their lives. It is not enough for missionaries to merely teach about the truths of the gospel. In fact, if that is all they do, they have lost (or never had) sight of what the Lord called them to do. Effective missionaries want those they teach to know and live those truths and experience the blessings that always come when they do so. In teaching about the Apostasy and Restoration, missionaries will invite investigators to read Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision or the introduction to the Book of Mormon and selected passages, ponder on that, and pray specifically to gain a testimony of the truthfulness of those events. They teach them specifically what it means to gain a testimony, how they can obtain one, and why that testimony will change their lives forever. It should be the same for religious educators. While we need not teach to the commitment exactly like a missionary does by extending invitations to action with every concept taught, we can, nonetheless, “teach for conversion” with every lesson, every discussion, and every assignment. How can we more effectively teach for conversion? I don’t have all the answers, but here are a few things I learned as a mission president that I have tried to transfer to my teaching as a religious educator.
Important versus Interesting

If you are like me, you have far more lesson material than you have class time to adequately cover. As a result, we all have to make hard decisions—hopefully with good judgment and inspiration—as to what would be most important to spend valuable class time teaching and discussing. My desire to teach for conversion now causes me to regularly ask, “Will this strengthen testimony?” and “Does this contribute to conversion?”

Sometimes my missionaries would complain that a member with whom they were teaching investigators would teach peripheral things like polygamy, a mother in heaven, archaeological evidences for the Book of Mormon, becoming like God, “eternal increase,” or any number of other things that the member personally found fascinating. It may have been interesting (and that is not always a good description) but rarely, if ever, was it helpful. Never once did I hear of someone being converted by such discussions. Instead of conviction, the investigator was usually left with confusion.

As irritating as that was to me as mission president, I must sadly admit that perhaps I have been guilty of much the same thing in my own teaching. Sometimes I may have focused more attention in my teaching on facts than faith—demonstrating how much I know—than on ensuring that my students know the right things—the salvationally significant things. “All knowledge is not of equal significance,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell declared. “There is no democracy of facts! They are not of equal importance. Something might be factual but unimportant. . . . For instance, today I wear a dark blue suit. That is true, but it is unimportant. . . . As we brush against truth, we sense that it has a hierarchy of importance. . . . Some truths are salvationally significant, and others are not.”

Perhaps at times in my seminary or institute classes or my religion classes at BYU, I have placed more emphasis on student interest than student conversion. I think I understand better now what Elder William R. Bradford meant when he said, “Some things are interesting while other things are important.” None of us has time to teach everything that we know, that we personally find fascinating, or that would keep the sleepy, back-row early-morning seminary students on the edge of their seat. What we can do, however, is strive a little harder to ensure that the interesting never crowds out or confuses the important, even the imperative.
Don’t Assume They Know

Assumptions often get us into trouble. We probably have all had an experience where what we assumed to be so was not. As a mission president, I quickly realized that I could not assume that all arriving missionaries were worthy to be there. Once in a while there were some sad surprises. It was essential that I carefully interview every missionary, not only when they arrived but regularly thereafter. Likewise, I learned that I could not assume that all of my missionaries had burning testimonies of the gospel, either at their arrival or at the conclusion of their missions. Sometimes I was surprised to learn that an elder or sister who bore powerful testimony that first night in the mission home later doubted their testimony when encountering difficult questions, challenges, or persecution. I learned that, as with investigators, you cannot assume that missionaries know what a testimony is, what you must do to gain (and retain) one, or how you know when you really know. These concepts are basic but are often taken for granted. They need to be taught, retaught, and retaught because missionaries, like investigators, need to gain and retain their testimonies every day as they encounter new challenges, new questions, and new circumstances.

In a similar manner, we cannot assume that our students—whether they are fourteen or forty—have testimonies of the gospel. And we certainly must not assume that they all know how to acquire a testimony or that they know how they will know when they have one. Likewise, we cannot assume that having a general testimony (an “I love the gospel” testimony) is the same as a specific testimony—an unmistakable witness by the power of the Holy Ghost of the truthfulness of a specific doctrine like the cleansing and transforming power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith’s First Vision, the restoration of the priesthood, the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, the Church as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30), and the fact that we are indeed led today by living prophets and apostles. The investigators that best progressed toward baptism and the new converts that were retained and progressed toward the temple were those who prayed for and received specific testimonies. In this way, they are continually “nourished by the good word of God” and empowered to continue as disciples of Christ (Moroni 6:4; see also John 8:31). And so it will be with our students—and each of us. Specific testimonies, repeatedly acquired by the power of the Holy Ghost, lead to staying power. President Harold B. Lee taught: “Testimony isn’t something you have today, and you are going to have always.
A testimony is fragile. It is as hard to hold as a moonbeam. It is something you have to recapture every day of your life.”

Just as missionaries always invite investigators to come to know for themselves the truth concerning the specific things they learn and study, we must not neglect to do the same with our students. We cannot merely assume that they will do so. In the April 2008 general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks provided us powerful instruction concerning testimonies. He not only taught us what a testimony is and how it is obtained, but he also taught us how we can share our testimonies with others. As I listened to his words, I felt impressed that I, as a religious educator, need to review his instruction each semester with my students and discuss how it applies to the very doctrines and principles that we will study in the course. This is one way whereby I can ensure that I don’t simply assume things that may not be so. It is also a means whereby I help future missionaries to fill their spiritual quivers with their strongest arrows.

**Know the Doctrines of the Gospel**

As teachers of the gospel, we are very familiar with President Boyd K. Packer’s statement concerning the power of pure doctrine. “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior,” he taught. “The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.” I have personally read and used that statement in my teaching scores of times. I thought I knew it and believed it. It was as a mission president, however, that I observed and experienced, in dramatic ways, the transforming power of doctrine. Knowing, teaching, and living the foundational doctrines of the restored gospel transformed the mission, the missionaries, the members, and the investigators. We experienced in our mission something akin to what Alma described regarding his missionary and reactivation efforts among the Zoramites. “And now, as the preaching of the word [that is, teaching doctrine] had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had a more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened to them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). Truly, doctrine changed behaviors and attitudes within our mission. The virtue of the word of God powerfully led our missionaries “to do that which was just,” resulting in strengthened spirituality, improved obedience, increased work ethic, and more persuasive gospel teaching.
One of the most significant changes that came as a result of the statement on missionary work and the subsequent release of *Preach My Gospel* was the elimination of memorized lesson presentations. “Our purpose is to teach the message of the restored gospel in such a way as to allow the Spirit to direct both the missionaries and those being taught,” the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared. Missionaries were instructed to “not give a memorized recitation, but speak from the heart . . . out of [their] own conviction and in [their] own words.” To teach in one’s own words, out of one’s heart of conviction, and by the power of the Spirit, missionaries are specifically instructed in *Preach My Gospel* to seek “a deep knowledge of the doctrine.” To assist them in that objective, *Preach My Gospel* provides invaluable instruction for missionaries and members alike in the “essential doctrines, principles, and commandments that you are to study, believe, love, live, and teach.”

Knowing the doctrine—inside and out, broad and deep—is imperative in becoming “the greatest generation of missionaries.” Raising the bar requires increased gospel knowledge on the part of all prospective missionaries. The Lord promised that the Spirit will give us “in the very hour” what we should teach, but only if we “treasure up in [our] minds continually the words of life” (D&C 84:85). Missionaries effectively teach by the Spirit only after they have treasured up knowledge of the doctrines of the kingdom. That places a greater responsibility upon the shoulders of all religious educators to likewise raise the bar in our teaching of doctrine. Each of us can probably think of many ways in which we can do that. I know there are many areas in which I need to improve, but my experience with using *Preach My Gospel* to train full-time missionaries and member missionaries has caused me to focus on two specific ways that I can better help my students treasure up the doctrines.

**Connect the Dots**

Within the first few days after arriving in the mission field, I attended a series of district meetings where I observed our missionaries teaching one another the lessons. There were things that I heard that were encouraging and impressive, but there were also many things that discouraged me. One of the most common deficiencies that I observed was that the elders and sisters could recite the basic principles of the missionary lessons but lacked the depth of understanding to be able to adequately explain those principles or answer questions about them. It was almost like they were giving the investigators a thousand
pieces of a puzzle but little help in showing how they fit together to form a beautiful picture. I realized that these missionaries were not all that different from our students (and perhaps a large segment of the general Church membership). It is common for us to pack in our bags of doctrinal knowledge lots of snippets of information—facts, scripture references, inspirational stories, quotes, basic teachings, things we have heard in classes and quorums through the years. What is far less common (at least among the missionaries with whom I served) is the ability to connect the dots. Do you remember drawing a picture as a child by connecting the numbered dots? The dots by themselves didn’t reveal much. When connected, however, a delightful picture emerged. It works the same way with the doctrines of the gospel. Missionaries do disservice to their investigators if they only teach dots—isolated, unconnected, independent teachings. Real understanding and ultimate conversion comes when they connect the dots and see the big picture—the panoramic view of the great plan of happiness. *Preach My Gospel* helps the missionaries see those connections—the relationships between the principles and ordinances of the gospel and how each fits in the overall gospel plan. In addition to teaching *what* we believe, it gives us the reason *why* we believe it. For example, we can teach *what* the Restoration was, but understanding *why* it was necessary requires a connection to the Great Apostasy.

Another illustrative example would be teaching the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. Much can be taught about the *whats* of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. But the real power—the converting power—of these doctrines is found in their relationship to each other and their absolute connection to the Atonement of Jesus Christ. You can’t truly understand repentance without connecting it to faith. Interestingly, Amulek demonstrated this teaching method when he taught us about “faith unto repentance” not merely faith and repentance as separate doctrines (Alma 34:15; see also vv. 16–17). The *Preach My Gospel* pattern of gospel teaching by missionaries to investigators (and others) can, likewise, enhance our teaching as religious educators and help our students connect the doctrinal dots.

Doctrinal instruction comprised a significant portion of every zone conference in our mission. Using the doctrines taught in the missionary lessons (found in chapter 3 of *Preach My Gospel*), my wife and I sought to help the missionaries better understand not only all of the different dimensions of a specific doctrine but also how that doctrine is interconnected with and logically leads to the other doctrines we teach.
It was exciting and gratifying to see the reactions of our missionaries. The lights were turned on—almost as if it was the first time that they really got it. When missionaries connect the dots, their testimonies are strengthened, their gospel knowledge deepens, and their ability to teach others with clarity and conviction improves. Because of these experiences, I realize more than ever that helping prospective missionaries see the big picture of the plan of salvation and connect the dots of the doctrines of the gospel will enable them to hit the ground running as full-time missionaries and will bless their lives forever.

Teach Them How to Study the Gospel

Virtually all of the missionaries we served with had read the Book of Mormon prior to their mission—most of them had read it more than once. They hardly ever missed reading their scriptures, a habit often started in seminary. That is great news, but the flip side is not so good. One of the most common deficiencies I recognized among our missionaries was the lack of gospel and scripture study skills. To most, gospel study meant merely reading scriptures and approved Church books. In the years preceding their missions, there had been considerable emphasis on daily scripture reading and getting through a volume of scripture, but very little instruction on ways to effectively and deeply study the doctrines of the gospel. Many, if not most, of our missionaries were familiar with scripture mastery passages, often having at least some of those passages memorized. Yet they could not adequately explain the very passages they had committed to memory and rarely understood the scriptural context for them.

Since most of our missionaries had never done a topical or doctrinal study of any of the standard works, I introduced to them a project that proved extraordinarily successful. It not only helped them learn how to study the scriptures by looking for specific doctrines, but also increased their knowledge of gospel principles (particularly those doctrines taught in the missionary lessons) and strengthened their personal testimonies and spirituality. I gave each of them a new missionary copy of the Book of Mormon and four different colored pencils. Each color represented one of the missionary lessons. Their assignment was to carefully study chapter three in Preach My Gospel and make a list of the main doctrines taught in each lesson. From that list of doctrines they then studied the Book of Mormon each day in their personal study, looking for specific principles taught in the missionary lessons and marking those passages with the appropriate color. They were amazed at what they found and how clearly the Book of Mormon taught those
principles. Their pool of scriptures that could be used in teaching the lessons grew dramatically. Soon they were cross-referencing, writing notes in the margins, and sharing insights and applications with each other. It was exciting and gratifying to me to see their enthusiasm for scripture study. That enthusiasm, as well as what they were learning, became evident in their teaching. Their love for gospel study likewise affected their love for the work.

At an area mission presidents seminar, I found myself sitting at the lunch table with Elder Ballard and many other far more experienced mission presidents. Knowing that I was a religious educator by profession, Elder Ballard asked me how I had obtained my knowledge of the scriptures and doctrines of the gospel. I explained that virtually all I knew had come as I had prepared for teaching and prepared my lesson outlines. That, fortunately, was the point Elder Ballard wanted to make. Deep doctrinal knowledge—the kind of knowledge that is required to effectively teach others—rarely, if ever, comes just from reading. “Now, you need to get your missionaries to do the same thing,” Elder Ballard stated. He was teaching us that missionaries increase their gospel knowledge when they prepare teaching outlines for the individuals they are teaching. I realized then that missionaries (in fact, all of us) need to study in preparation to teach, not just read, the scriptures. Fortunately, I didn’t have to come up with ideas or programs to facilitate that. Preach My Gospel has the best ideas and is a missionary’s best gospel study program.

Preach My Gospel contains arguably the best instruction on effective gospel study ever published by the Church. While directed primarily to missionaries, the suggestions found in chapter 2 will bless any student of the scriptures, including religious educators. As we raise the bar in our teaching efforts, we can use the principles taught, the scripture references to be studied, and the learning activities included in Preach My Gospel (particularly the study ideas and suggestions on pages 22–24) with our own students.

Modeling effective study skills in our teaching will enable our students to learn by observation and personal practice, not merely by hearing us talk about these principles. Each day in my classes, I try to utilize suggestions from Preach My Gospel and expect my students to do the same. Some of the more pertinent practices that we can more frequently model for our students in our classroom discussions could include:
• Ask yourself, “What is the author saying? What is the central message? How does this apply to me?”
• Write in your study journal questions you have, and use the scriptures, words of latter-day prophets, and other study resources to find answers.
• In the margins write scripture references that clarify the passages you are studying.
• Try writing the main idea of a passage in your words in a sentence or short paragraph.
• Look for key words and make sure you understand what they mean. Use the footnotes, Bible Dictionary, or another dictionary for definitions of unfamiliar words or phrases. Examine the surrounding words or phrases for clues to what the key words mean.
• Look for connecting words and relationships between key words and phrases. Circle key words and then draw lines to link closely related words.
• Avoid excessive marking. The benefit is lost if you cannot understand your markings because you have too many notes, lines, and colors. Underline only a few key words to highlight the verse, section, or chapter.
• Use True to the Faith, the Bible Dictionary, and Topical Guide as you study specific topics and doctrines.
• Use the missionary lessons, supporting scriptures, Preach My Gospel, and the accompanying personal study activities to guide your study.12

Raising the bar of knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel is vital for missionaries today as they teach by the Spirit in their own words. The more they know the gospel, the more confident and powerful will they be as teachers. So it is with our students. The more we try the virtue of the word of God by teaching doctrine—by helping them connect the dots and know how to study more effectively—the greater will be their confidence in sharing the gospel with friends, family, and others they encounter throughout their lives. Learning, loving, and living Christ’s doctrine makes us better missionaries, but more important, as President Packer declared, it changes our attitudes and behaviors and thus deepens our discipleship. Because of that, we cannot be satisfied with merely getting our students through the scriptures. We must get the scriptures and doctrines of the gospel through them—deep within their minds and hearts and ever ready on the tips of their tongues. “We
possess these precious truths,” Elder Maxwell insightfully observed. “Now they must come to possess us!”

Know How to Share the Gospel

During an interview with a missionary that was struggling and wanted to go home, I heard an interesting yet disturbing comment. The elder said, “I have always wanted to go on a mission. I just didn’t know that I would have to talk to so many people about the gospel.” I was perplexed. What did he think he would be doing as missionary? Unfortunately, this wasn’t the only missionary who expressed those sentiments. There were more than a few. Another said, “I think I could be a good missionary if I didn’t have to talk to people.” Huh? As I scratched my head in bewilderment with this line of reasoning, it dawned on me why they would say such a thing. They had desired to serve as missionaries. They had prepared by saving money, keeping themselves worthy, and studying the scriptures. What they had not done, however, was actually talk to people (particularly those not of our faith) about the gospel. They had prepared but hadn’t really taken the opportunity to practice by actually doing what missionaries do. Talking about and desiring to do missionary work is the easy part. Doing it, however, is the hard part. If you don’t think so, ask almost any member about their personal member-missionary efforts. Part of the all-too-common condition I call “member-missionary paralysis” comes from not knowing how to share the gospel with others and an inability to recognize the abundant opportunities all around us to do so.

“The single most important thing you can do to prepare for a call to serve [as a full-time missionary] is to become a missionary long before you go on a mission,” Elder David A. Bednar taught. “You will not suddenly or magically be transformed into a prepared and obedient missionary on the day you walk through the front door of the Missionary Training Center. . . . Thus, a key element of raising the bar includes working to become a missionary before going on a mission.” It was not surprising to me as a mission president that those young men and women who had experiences in talking about the gospel with non-member friends or family members were much more confident in the mission field. Many came from areas where there were few Latter-day Saints in their schools and neighborhoods. Yet others came from predominantly Latter-day Saint communities. It was apparent from them that being a missionary—having experiences in sharing the gospel with others—was not so much a matter of geography as it was a deep love for the gospel, a recognition of its fruits in their lives, and a willingness
to share personal feelings about those things. These things can and should exist in the lives of our students wherever they reside—whether they are the only Latter-day Saint in their school or whether there are no Latter-day Saints. What can we, as religious educators, do to foster those feelings and give prospective missionaries greater skills in teaching about their beliefs and sharing their testimonies of the gospel?

“Teach One Another the Doctrine of the Kingdom”

Zone conferences, district meetings, and companionship study in the mission field are filled with settings whereby missionaries teach each other and then practice important skills. While I am not equating our seminary, institute, and religion classes with zone conference, I do see a parallel. Since coming home from my mission, I have realized that I can involve my students more in teaching each other the doctrines of the kingdom as the Lord commanded in D&C 88:77. There are many ways whereby we can do that. It could take the form of having our students teach a substantial portion of a lesson, small discussion groups, role plays, and individual responses to the simple question, How would you explain that to someone not of our faith? There is a temptation to be the dispenser of information rather than a director of learning. Undoubtedly, we learn more when we have to teach others. As a result, our students—prospective full-time missionaries and future moms and dads in “gospel-sharing homes”15—will be better prepared to share their testimonies and discuss their beliefs if they don’t just sit in our classes and soak it up but rather share with others what they have soaked up.

All too often, I think that there is good participation in my classes if I have students read a few scriptures or answer some shallow question that requires a no-brainer response. Now as I more conscientiously seek to afford my students opportunities to teach one another, I try to envision real-life situations that missionaries and members constantly encounter necessitating clear, concise, and convincing explanations. For example, I could pose this challenge to my students: “Tell me about the Book of Mormon—what it is, how we got it, and how you feel about it—in two minutes.” There are numerous ways whereby we can get our students to teach one another and address real-life missionary challenges. My students usually have more relevant situations, including questions they have been asked or challenges to our beliefs they have encountered. Those are often great teaching and missionary-preparing moments. Likewise, now when teaching a scripture block, instead of just calling on a student to read, I ask my students to look at
the context of the passage and then explain in their own words what is being taught. Similarly, when we have discussed doctrinal concepts, I invite students to summarize (usually in a minute or less) what we discussed in such a way that one who had not been involved in the entire class would understand the doctrine. Being able to synthesize and summarize, both verbally and in writing, is vital to acquiring greater doctrinal knowledge and valuable in sharing the gospel with others.

Several years ago when I served in a stake presidency, the stake president gave an assignment to the stake council and bishoprics. We were to write a summary of the entire plan of salvation that could be read in less than two minutes. At each meeting thereafter for many months we read to each other our short summaries of the plan. It was difficult to do, but enlightening. I learned a great deal from the insights of others. Perhaps you should try it. Such a doctrinal synthesis paper could be done on any variety of gospel principles. A colleague once said, “You don’t really know what you believe until you have to write it so clearly that no one could misunderstand.” That is why missionaries are instructed to write lesson plans or outlines each time they teach. As religious educators, we do the same thing. Perhaps we should give our students an opportunity to do the same. The more opportunities we can provide for our students to learn how to teach and talk about the gospel in a clear and concise manner, the more prepared and confident they will be to share the gospel with others.

“Stand as Witnesses of God at All Times”

As much as I love missionary work and preparing future missionaries, I am personally uncomfortable giving my students assignments to share the gospel with their friends of other faiths. To me, missionary work is not a project. I hope my students are praying for and having missionary experiences. I hope those preparing to serve full-time missions go with the missionaries to teaching appointments as directed and approved by local leaders. As a religious educator, I can’t control that. What I can do, however, is keep in the forefront of my teaching the tremendous blessings we have by reason of the restored gospel, the privilege of being members of the Church, and the covenantal responsibilities we took with baptism. I can teach that in every volume of scripture we are reminded that through our efforts as the seed of Abraham “shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessing of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:11). I can teach and testify that missionary work is directly linked to the Atonement of Christ. The more I feel the love
of the Savior in my life, the greater is my desire to stand as a witness of the Lord and share what He has done for me with others around me. In fact, sharing the gospel with others is a manifestation of our love for the Savior and our gratitude for His sacrifice in our behalf. President Howard W. Hunter declared, “Any time we experience the blessings of the Atonement in our lives, we cannot help but have a concern for the welfare of others. . . . A great indicator of one’s personal conversion is the desire to share the gospel with others.”

The more we can help our students understand who they are, what the Atonement has done for them, and why the Lord expects them to share the gospel with others, the how of missionary work becomes clearer. As President Henry B. Eyring taught:

I’ve studied carefully and prayerfully some who are remarkably faithful and effective witnesses of the Savior and His Church. Their stories are inspiring. . . .

There is no single pattern in what they do. There is no common technique. . . . They each seem to get a different answer, suited especially to them and to the people they meet.

But in one way they are all alike. It is this: they have a common way of seeing who they are. They can do what they have been inspired to do because of who they are. To do what we are to do, we will have to become like them in at least two ways. First, they feel they are the beloved children of a loving Heavenly Father. Because of that, they turn to Him easily and often in prayer. They expect to receive His personal direction. They obey in meekness and humility, like the children of a perfect parent. He is close to them.

Second, they are the grateful disciples of the resurrected Jesus Christ. They know for themselves that the Atonement is real and necessary for all. They have felt cleansed through baptism by those in authority and the receipt of the Holy Ghost for themselves. . . .

Those who speak easily and often of the restored gospel prize what it has meant to them. They think of that great blessing often. It is the memory of the gift they have received which makes them eager for others to receive it. They have felt the love of the Savior.

Conclusion

Being a mission president was for me the most intense, most busy, most demanding, most difficult, most tiring—both physically and emotionally—and most rewarding thing, outside of my family, I have ever done in my life. What a privilege it was to serve! I don’t know whether I did any good for others, but I know the mission did good for me. I am different because of it, and I will be forever grateful for that transformation. I am often asked, “What do you miss the most from
your mission?” Like any returning missionary, young or old, there are many things that will be deeply missed. (There are also many things that I won’t miss!) I already miss the constant involvement with the full-time missionaries—the teaching, training, encouraging, and lifting. I miss seeing the miracles that occurred within them and the miracles they wrought around them.

Upon returning to my faculty position at BYU, I must admit that I was disappointed that I was not assigned to teach Religion 130, Sharing the Gospel. But now I realize that all that I teach—whatever the course, whatever the concept—is truly missionary preparation and sharing the gospel. All of our students—and all of us, as well—are part of the prophetically envisioned “greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church.” For that vision to be realized, we must be the greatest generation of religious educators—missionary preparers, testimony strengtheners, gospel scholar developers, doctrinal dot-connectors, and, by all means, faith builders. That is a lot to do. That is a serious and sacred responsibility. So as my missionaries would often say, “Let’s step up. There’s a bar that needs raising.”

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Notes

12. These study suggestions are adapted from Preach My Gospel, 22–24.
An unrushed atmosphere is absolutely essential.

Courtesy of Richard B. Crookston
Of all the teacher’s roles, one of the least discussed is timekeeper. Along with everything else, it almost seems silly that a teacher would have to assume this additional role. But if the teacher does not take the role of timekeeper, it is left undone. All class periods are bound by both a starting time and a stopping time, and within that framework a teacher needs to introduce an idea, encourage and allow for student learning in a variety of ways, and bring everything together in a way that helps students want to change for the better. Since we are bound by time, we should make time our friend instead of our enemy.

In the February 2007 worldwide leadership training meeting, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “An unrushed atmosphere is absolutely essential if you are to have the Spirit of the Lord present in your class. Please don’t ever forget that. Too many of us rush. We rush right past the Spirit of the Lord trying to beat the clock in some absolutely unnecessary footrace.” Teachers must be the creators and maintainers of that unrushed atmosphere, even as they guide their students to learning.

How many of these scenarios sound familiar?

- The class begins and the teacher starts by saying, “We have a lot of material to cover today, and I don’t know if we have the time, so we will just do our best.”
• The class is rolling along smoothly until ten to fifteen minutes before the end when the teacher notices the clock and in a panic says, “We are never going to get this all in,” and then races to the end of class.
• The time to end the class has arrived, and the teacher is still talking. Now the time is past, and students are fidgeting, packing up their things, and starting to leave, one by one. The teacher pleads for them to stay to cover “just one more important point.”

All these scenarios result from poor time management. When teachers cannot manage their time, the Spirit feels a little less welcome. Student learning suffers.

A friend, an excellent public schoolteacher, said, “Time does not belong solely to the teacher. For the moments we teach, ownership of time is shared jointly between us and our students. To think that it is solely our own is a gross misassumption.” Teachers have an obligation as they plan their lessons to stay within the given time parameters, for their sake and for the students’. Obviously not all material will be addressed, taught, and learned, but part of the teacher’s duty is “selective neglect,” deciding which parts will receive attention and which will not. It is also not as important to cover material as it is to help your students personally uncover it. Generally a race against the clock covers more material, but this is a poor way for students to learn. Sometimes less is more. Consider these points:

• In gospel education, it probably will not be the only time that a student studies the book of scripture you are teaching in your course. Over a lifetime we will all cycle through the four standard works many times. Different principles and doctrines will be highlighted each time through, whether it is in a class or in personal study. It would be foolish to think that the burden of exposing students to everything in a block of scripture falls on one teacher in one class.
• An unspoken contract exists between teacher and student. Teachers generally like to start on time and want all of the students there to begin together. The flip side of the obligation is that students expect a teacher to end the class on time. Students have other duties to attend to—other classes, employment, study, social time, and so forth. When we as teachers do not uphold our end of the deal, we frustrate students, and the rising frustration level does not enhance the atmosphere.
• What would cause a teacher to go over time? Often teachers say they just lost track of time, which is understandably easy to do. The simple solution is to remember that part of controlling the class is to control the pacing, so we need to make that part of what we do as teachers. Other reasons teachers gave for going over time are that the class was going so well or that the students were so engaged, it was just difficult to stop. In almost all those cases, I have observed that it was not so much the students but the teachers who were engaged in telling a story or sharing some of their thoughts and feelings with the class. When teachers hold a class over so that they can keep talking, the class generally has descended to teaching-as-telling, and that is a very ineffective way for students to learn.

Below are five ideas to make time your ally and not your enemy:

1. **Think of timekeeping issues as you prepare your lesson.** Ask yourself some of these questions: About how long do I think this discussion will go? What follow-up questions are likely to ensue from this main question? What are some of the points I hope will emerge from this activity? How much time do we need at the end of class to allow for effective application? And perhaps the most important question: What are we really trying to do in class today—cover a lot of material, or help students really learn some important principles and doctrines?

2. **Make yourself aware of the time in a class.** Learn to glance at the clock or your watch on a regular basis. Make some visible marks on your lesson plan of the approximate times that you expect to be at certain spots. Stay aware of where you are and where you would like to be.

3. **Manage the discussion in class.** Some students like to ramble and dominate the time. Learn to gently help them summarize and tighten things up. Do not be afraid to say things like, “Let’s take just one more comment on this issue then move on.” Every class seems to have some students who want to stay on a topic longer and some who have had enough. It is the teacher’s job to keep the majority of the students engaged and interested so they will inquire and learn. That may require you to keep moving. Moving along is hard when students want to keep talking. We always seek more input from students, and we solicit more comments. When students begin to participate it always feels good, so it seems counterintuitive to stop taking comments on a subject in order to move on. But if the Spirit is in the class and the students are engaged, trust that when you move on to continue the learning process
they will stay engaged, and they will begin to see links and connections between their own life and a variety of scriptural passages, principles, and doctrines.

4. Do not make negative statements about the time. Students rarely, if ever, know how much their teachers think they need to accomplish in a given period. We make time our enemy when we play slave to the clock, then verbalize it to the class (‘‘Look at the time—there’s never enough time!’’). Be sufficiently aware of where you are so that students will have enough time to digest what is going on, and you will have enough to be able to challenge them to make positive changes, all within the framework of the allotted time. Announcing your frustration with the lack of time only serves to pass that frustration on to the students. They do not need it, and it does not help anything.

5. Always stay susceptible to the promptings of the Spirit. Our best efforts at planning and pacing may need to be revised when we hit a real point of testimony and power. The Spirit will tell us when that is, and we should learn to respond to it. But there are also times when the Spirit will suggest that we move on to be able to get to one of those points of testimony and power. The teacher has to summon the courage to lead the class to that point, even if it means shortening something else.

The ideal situation seems to be that we are able to create in the class a safe atmosphere in which students can ask, respond, create, testify, and change, all within the allotted time for the class. Some classes are fifty minutes, some ninety, and some two hours or more. The teacher who learns how to do all of that within the time allotted not only creates that “unrushed atmosphere” that Elder Holland speaks of but also honors the time and agency of the students, thus edifying them. The more edified they feel, the easier it is to help them learn.

Note

Grover: You take seriously the aims of a BYU education that classes should be spiritually strengthening, intellectually enlarging, and contribute to lives of learning and service. I understand that you spend the first day of class discussing the idea of how to acquire knowledge and enlarge faith through the dual combination of learning history and implementing what Elder Dallin H. Oaks called “the principle of independent verification by revelation.” Would you please discuss your ideas and classroom methods related to this approach.

Harper: In my Church history class, I start by asking a couple of questions. I ask my students what they know and how it is that they know it. They understand that I do not mean only proximate knowledge or even necessarily what we might call scientific or factual things. I’m not interested in minor details, such as how they know their name or when their flight leaves. I am interested in what they know about God ultimately. And then the follow-up question is how they know it. I really want them to think in terms of what a philosopher would call epistemology. I want them to engage epistemological questions; in other words, I want them to assess what they know and how they know what they know.

Mormonism is historical. We do not have theological schools; we have Church history classes. Instead of philosophical creeds that define the nature of God, we tell the story of Joseph’s First Vision, for example. Early in the spring of 1820, in a specific place, upstate New
York, a specific young man did historical things that evoked a vision of Heavenly Father and Christ. As a result of that vision, we understand the nature of God. So I want my students to think about those things: what it is that they know about God and how they know it.

Now, they have had these things in their mind a long time, but many of them have never thought much about how they know what they know or even tentatively assessed, “What do I know?” So on the first day of class in Church history, we make a couple of assertions. We assert that without a historical record we would know little or nothing about God. In other words, let’s say no prophets’ teachings are ever recorded or transmitted, then it doesn’t matter whether God has ever revealed Himself or not; we don’t know it. And that is especially true with Joseph Smith and the Restoration. If Joseph had his First Vision and learned the true nature of the Godhead but somehow did not transmit that knowledge to me, then I might as well be in the middle of the Apostasy; I would not know any better.

The point is that the historical record is fundamental. Without the documentation of the historical events of the Restoration, we would know nothing about the true nature of God. But as soon as that point is established, I try to help the students understand that the historical record is problematic—that just because something is documented doesn’t make it true, and just because something isn’t documented doesn’t make it untrue. There are people who are trained in history who worship history (I use that strong term purposefully) as if history were the ultimate way of knowing.

I want to emphasize to my students that history is only part of the best way of knowing, that once there has been a historical claim, that once Joseph has borne testimony, we have a wonderful way of verifying whether that testimony is true or not. And, of course, most of my students recognize this from the Book of Mormon. Probably the best-known explanation of this epistemology is in the tenth chapter of Moroni, which many of my students have tested. They know what we mean at this point in the discussion, what Elder Oaks means when he talks about the principle of “independent verification by revelation.”

To sum up, we know things about God, ultimate things, because somebody who knows them bears a testimony, and those testimonies are recorded for us, they are documented. We don’t know simply because the testimonies are documented. We know, or can know, because we can verify the testimony for ourselves by direct revelation, in an unmediated experience, except for the testimony itself. This, to me, is the most marvelous kind of knowing that there is. It beats
agnosticism, not knowing. It beats enlightenment rationalism, or strict scientific method, as a way of knowing. It beats any other epistemology that I have ever learned about or understood anything about.

**Grover:** Have you always done this the first day of class, or when and why did you decide to do this?

**Harper:** I have not always done it. I have done it for the last few years, and I refine it a little bit all the time. Although I am never quite satisfied with how it works, I feel it is the right way to go. I feel that what I can teach my Church history students is more than stories about Church history. I feel I have the obligation to teach them how to think about history or to model for them a way of thinking and inquiring and knowing. I feel I have the responsibility to give them an appropriate sense of respect for and skepticism of historians, their methods, and the historical record—the documents themselves.

I just came from a class where my students and I read a couple of the affidavits that Philastus Hurlbut collected in the early 1830s and which Eber Howe published in *Mormonism Unveiled*, one of the first anti-Mormon books, which is still very influential. And our work in class was to understand what Joseph experienced between his First Vision and the appearance of Moroni in 1823. We were not using these documents as sources of objective truth; we were letting them speak to
us, and we were asking them questions. We were assessing their claims. We were analyzing and triangulating what they had to say. We were, in other words, using other sources, other documents to see if we could verify their claims. Then, ultimately, we understood that we would have to test these claims by revelation. Do these claims agree with the Book of Mormon and the testimonies that we have of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon? Insofar as they do, we can trust them. Insofar as they don’t, we can’t.

I feel it is my obligation to, as Arthur Henry King put it, “arm the children,” and I take that very seriously. I differ in this way from some of the other professors who are doing the same kind of work but might do it in a little different way or with different methods, and that is fine because there is more than one way to teach. We all do different things well and take different approaches, and I feel one thing I can contribute to the study of Church history is not only to tell the story but also to give students a sense of the provenance of the story. Again, what do we know and how do we know it? The students are fascinated when they get to read for themselves Joseph’s first written account of the First Vision or the variety of other accounts that he gave, then test those claims for themselves. They hear the claims of the critics saying, “Oh, do you know that Joseph made such and such a number of statements about the First Vision and they’re inconsistent with each other?” In class we say, “Let’s see.”

We show them how they can open these documents on the Internet through the selected collections from the archives of the Church database, accessible online via the Harold B. Lee Library Web site. They get terrific electronic images of these documents, and they read them for themselves. And I haven’t had one student yet come to the conclusion that Joseph Smith was lying to them. They feel enriched. They feel like the historical record is rich. And they feel like they are empowered by this way of learning about Church history. They feel like they have access to the raw materials, and they can test them. They can verify the claims that Joseph makes by themselves through hard intellectual work accompanied by prayer to their Father in Heaven. Revelation comes through that process.

That’s the thinking behind this method, and we’re trying constantly to refine our methods so we accomplish those purposes as best we can. I want the students to be empowered so that when they hear critics of Joseph Smith make a claim, the students will either know from their own experience with the historical record that the claim isn’t true or they’ll have the tools to go find out for themselves. I tell them
they should do that with everything I tell them—don’t take my word for it. They had better say, “How does Brother Harper know that?” and I’d better be able to give them a good answer to that question.

Grover: You have an academic background in history and, as I understand, a degree in non-LDS history. How does this affect the way you teach?

Harper: Well, I wrote a master’s thesis on the first decade of the restored gospel, but I wrote a book on colonial Pennsylvania purposefully to broaden my understanding. I wanted to understand the world into which Joseph Smith was sent. I wanted to understand the stage on which the Restoration of the gospel took place.

I feel very much that although this training has equipped me, I have also gained in the process what I regard as a very healthy skepticism of the historical method. It is not a way to ultimate truths. I started out studying the ancient Near East, and I just couldn’t get very satisfied reconstructing the past out of pottery shards and papyrus scraps. The folks who do that are really remarkable; I have the greatest admiration for them. But the point is that all of history is in some ways a very primitive set of tools, of reconstructing the past with very finite minds out of very limited source material and technique. So our historical method is primitive. It’s like Fred Flintstone–era technology, but we have that wonderful blessing of being able to verify the things we learn, at least the most important things.

When I say that, I do not mean to treat prayer casually. I don’t think we should necessarily go and ask the Lord whether every little thing is true. What I mean is that we can test Joseph Smith’s claims. You can verify whether the Book of Mormon is true by an independent experience, independent of anybody else except you and the Godhead. You can do that with Joseph Smith’s First Vision, and you can do that with all important questions. It does not happen when you treat it flipantly or when you are unwilling to exercise the faith but when you are willing to exercise the faith and work hard intellectually and believe in the marvelous power of revelation. And it is the most empowering way of knowing that I have ever seen or experienced.

Grover: Church history seems to be undergoing a period of secularization, such as the Mormon studies programs at Utah State and Claremont. How important is it that BYU or Church education keep up with this current trend of engaging Mormon studies academically?

Harper: I think those programs are good things, but I do not think of them as doing any kind of ultimate good. God’s work and glory is to bring His children to eternal life. Academically speaking those are fine
things. I am pleased with the increased attention to Mormon studies both here and abroad. I encourage these developments. I keep up with what is going on there, but I want to have a healthy sense of perspective and priority. So those are, by no means, the most important things that are going on. I think that one of the most important things going on with respect to Church history is when we empower students with the understanding that they had better bring their very best brainwork to the project. They had better get their intellect out and working, their spiritual sensitivities heightened, their lives moral, and their proximity close to the Holy Ghost, which will make them fit recipients for revelation and for the testifying whisperings of the Holy Spirit. I know people with very impressive intellects who study Mormon history and have no faith in the divine Restoration. I also know people who study it and have the testimony that it is a divine restoration but seem fearful—and I use that word purposefully—of studying it in an academic way. I do not see why those things are incompatible given the commandment to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

I believe Elder Neal A. Maxwell and others have articulated the responsibility we have that if we are going to study our history academically, we need to master the tools, the techniques, and the skills to seek learning by study. But just as important, if not more so, we had better have the spiritual sensitivities to seek learning by faith. Either we keep both dimensions of that commandment or we don’t keep it at all. I am concerned about emphasizing only one aspect or the other.

Grover: I often hear students say they do not want religion classes to be academic. Do you think that students have trouble intellectually engaging their beliefs?

Harper: It’s not that students cannot intellectually engage their beliefs. They certainly can. They are very capable of it. I used to teach at Lehigh University when I was doing my graduate work there, and the students were smart young men and women. But generally speaking, they were not as gifted as students at BYU. The student body at BYU and BYU–Hawaii, where I taught for two years, are sharp and capable. Some of them are sometimes lazy, and some of them have this assumption that they shouldn’t work their brains very hard in a religion class. I resent that. They are assuming a passive position. Elder David A. Bednar wrote a wonderful piece published in the Religious Educator that I use in my classes to illustrate this point about acting on what we know. He evoked Joseph Smith as someone who learned by acting. As soon as Joseph had a piece of knowledge to act upon, he went and did what he was supposed to do.
Well, our students need to get that in their lives too. They need to be willing to act—that is, to be active and not just passive learners. It is not my obligation to feed them Church history or the Doctrine and Covenants as they sit passively by. It is my obligation to facilitate their active seeking of learning by study and by faith. I will bend over backwards to meet them on those terms, but I get frustrated with them when they are not very anxiously engaged.

I’ll tell you a story. I rode up the elevator one day to my office with a student, and I don’t know what experience the student had just had, but it must have been frustrating. With some hostility the student said, “Are you a religion teacher?”

I said yes.

Then the student said, “Why isn’t it fun?” I mumbled some incoherent answer. I didn’t know what to say. I was quite taken aback.

I could not stop thinking about this conversation for hours afterward. I resented the assertion that my job description was to make sure the students have fun. I felt like I was supposed to be an entertainer. I do not want my students to have a bad experience. I do not try to be mean or ruin their lives by any stretch, but I am not very worried about making it fun.

I think all the time about how to make it right, about how to increase the likelihood that we will learn by study and by faith, and that is what I really care about. Now, I would say that overwhelmingly the students warm up to this idea. The students at BYU overwhelmingly want to achieve the aims of a BYU education. They want what the restored gospel has to offer to them.

In some ways, many of these students have had relatively easy academic lives, because of their conditioning in high school or elsewhere, and the university may be the first real challenging thinking they have done. I would say that a lot of them warm up to it, maybe after some initial chafing, and lots of them come here hungering and thirsting after it.

So I would not trade this student body for any in the whole world. We start class with an opening prayer, and I feel a sense of gratitude to my Father in Heaven that I have students who are as sharp intellectually as any on the planet, who also bring with them that faith that is manifest in their prayerfulness, in the gratitude they express in their prayers, and in asking the Lord to bless them with His Holy Spirit as they learn in an academic setting. It is the most wonderful mixture—to learn by study and faith.
**Grover:** Is there anything else you would like to say about the topic?

**Harper:** Well, just that I think when we do our best work, we consecrate our minds to God. We obey the commandment to love God with all our mind and heart when we take our religion seriously from an academic perspective. I think, though, that there is a danger of congratulating ourselves about how smart we are, and how much we have figured out, and so on. It seems to me that higher education has a terrible occupational hazard, and I have experienced this myself. I remember it as a student, and I see some of my own students wrestling with it, as I have done, and that is avoiding the gain of a real heady sense of yourself—a kind of intellectual arrogance: “To be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29; emphasis added). One of the conditions on which the Lord will open to us is if we consider ourselves fools before God (see 2 Nephi 9:42). There needs to be a devout humility and a recognition of one’s nothingness. If we understand ourselves in that way, as we really are, then it will be a worshipful thing to work with our brains falteringly—but as best as we can—toward the fullness of God’s truth (see D&C 93). But if we start to get too confident that our intellect is sufficient by itself to find truth, then we are in a very dangerous predicament.

You began by talking about some of the secularization of Church history. Some of that is very good. In other words, we have had some excellent research and writing done, by which we understand an enormous amount more about the Restoration than we otherwise would have. Holding our research and writing to high scholarly standards and a rigorous historical method leads to far greater understanding than less informed or disciplined methods. But there is also some of it that is so arrogant, so narrow-minded in its assurance of its superiority, that in an ultimate sense it is of no value at all. So it’s a fine line. It is a balance that we try to strike, and it is a wrestle. It is a challenging and very intellectually and spiritually stimulating exercise to try to learn by study and by faith and to try to help students do that as well.

**Notes**


“More Freedom from Earth-Stains, More Longing for Home”

Camille S. Williams

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About two years ago, Dr. Shirley Klein, Renee Beckwith, and I began a research project initially called “Joy in Mothering.” It seemed to us that there are a lot of grim-faced mothers of preschoolers buzzing about in their minivans and too many sorrowful mothers of sullen teens wondering when they might again feel the love and closeness they felt when they held those children as babes in arms. We thought there ought to be ways of realizing more joy in the journey.

We suspected mothers may feel overwhelmed at the physical care children require (and they do!) and may feel isolated by a seemingly endless stream of diapers and spit up. Some feel looked down on, their homemaking judged as nothing of real value, and their children disparaged as “crib lizards” or “vomit comets.”

Mothers feel all of these things, even mothers employed outside the home. But as we surveyed the literature, and as we talked with mothers themselves in focus groups, we found that mothers are caught between two contradictory models of mothering. These models also have application for fathers, for teachers, and for general human relations.

Mother as Manager

The first might be called the mother-as-manager model. In this model, task-completion and efficiency are stressed. Sometimes there is even a separation of the means and the ends. By end, I mean the goal
of an activity. For example, one end sought by a mother I met in a grocery store aisle was to keep her two young children from climbing out of her cart each time she stopped to select an item. The means, or method, she used was to threaten ominously that if they got out again she would be very, very mad. Her end, or goal, was probably to keep them safe and to finish shopping before the day was done.

But I am not sure her children understood what the end was. Maybe they thought the end was to keep mom from getting mad, and, depending on the mom, there might be a thousand things other than the children’s behavior that could trigger her anger or that could pacify her. Another safety-conscious mother might use the means of strapping the children more tightly in the cart. One efficient mother leaves her children with a friend while she shops; another mother promises a treat if the children are good. Some mothers involve their children in the shopping experience, making it a game of who can spot the oatmeal or guess how many oranges will weigh exactly one pound. The shopping will still get done, but for some of these mothers, the time together will also help build a good relationship with their children.

If ends are separated from means in what might be called a strategic view of mothering, childcare techniques are designed to be applicable to every child. In this view, as Victoria Wynn Leonard points out, the
“tasks of mothering are merely technical procedures, performed by anyone with the requisite skill, much as anyone with the requisite skill can repair an automobile; no relationship with the vehicle is required in order to perform the task.”

With this technique, only the output matters: children are products with self-toileting, self-dressing features. Needless to say, reliance on mother-as-manager techniques of childcare could create a climate in which a particular child’s, or a particular mother’s, emotional and spiritual needs and abilities are not the primary focus, nor is the refinement of the relationship counted among the outcomes.

**Mothering as Practice**

Contrasting with the mothering-as-management model is what Wynn Leonard calls mothering as practice. In this model, mothering is more than managing. Both means and ends matter as notions of the good are worked out individually with each child. This is a two-way relationship; neither mother nor child controls it. In this kind of mothering, mothers are attentive to means and ends, understanding that both build their relationship with an individual child. For example, the means used to toilet train a child are tailored by the mother to the individual child. The means of caring for her child matter to the mother and to the child because the outcome is not merely a self-toileting child but also a relationship of trust and sensitivity between mother and child and a reservoir of shared experience.

I bring before you these two models of mothering, or relationships, because they remind me of what we see in scripture. In the Council in Heaven, the spirit children of God were taught the Father’s eternal plan for their happiness. In the Father’s plan, both the means and the ends are of profound importance. As it turns out, the end, “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), cannot be achieved by the wrong means, such as coercive or manipulative practices.

We were taught the Father’s plan, and then Lucifer presented the ultimate management plan: he would “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). You and I and all the rest of humanity were going to be Lucifer’s trophy kids. Our agency overridden, he would haul us back to heaven, which would then come under new, seemingly more efficient, management.

Had his plan been tried, it would necessarily have involved coercion or manipulation of human agency that would have made our life on earth miserable and meaningless, our choices really his, not ours.
Maybe he just wanted to do a cheap redemption. If he could control us, if we did not sin, it would not cost him very much to redeem us (see Moses 4:1, 3). Satan’s plan could never have worked, in any sense. Neither the means nor the end he proposed were in keeping with the work and the glory of the Father.

In contrast to the efficient Lucifer, Christ did not present a plan of His own at all. He offered Himself in furthering the plan of the Father, who knew, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks states, that “in the course of mortality, we would become subject to death, and we would be soiled by sin.” Reclaiming us from death and sin required a Savior willing to pay the high price of his own suffering. He had to be willing to condescend to be born into this mortal world as a vulnerable child (see 1 Nephi 11:16), to enter into the covenant of baptism (see 1 Nephi 11:27), to suffer all our sorrows and afflictions, even death, “that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people” (Alma 7:12). He could not guarantee that each of us would return because we could choose to reject Him at any time.

Relationships cannot be managed nor controlled without doing violence to the relationship and to the person we are in relation with. Mothering as practice, the willingness to enter into a genuine relationship with each child over the course of our lifetimes, is closer to what the Lord would have us do than mere management. But our eagerness to prevent our children from falling into sin, to make sure our children choose right, may tempt us to manage our relationship with them or to try to manipulate them into doing what is right. We must resist the temptation so that our children may better learn to put their trust in God and to choose good because they love Him. This is not to say we make no rules, or simply believe things will work out without our help. It means, as one of our former stake presidents put it, “we can’t do the Lord’s work using the devil’s tools.”

Teaching Our Children

As we consider how to help our children return to God, let us remember what we learned before we left Him:

1. We knew that a body of flesh and bones is a great and powerful gift.
2. We knew that we are agents.
3. We knew that good can be distinguished from evil.
4. We knew that good is stronger than evil.
5. We knew that Christ is our Redeemer; His is the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved.
These are the things we must learn all over again in this life and the things we need to teach our children to keep them as free as possible from earth-stains.

First, we must teach that a body of flesh and bones is a great and powerful gift. There are so many ways to go wrong in teaching about the body. We should not abuse our bodies, neither should we worship them with incessant buffing and gilding. From the early days of childhood, we can teach our children the Word of Wisdom, that alcohol, drugs, and tobacco hurt the mind, the body, and the spirit, and make it harder for us to hear the voice of the Lord. This law of health is also a protection from the evil designs of those who profit from selling addictive substances and who exploit those users.

Because we are embodied beings, our spirit is not more real than our flesh. We are both body and spirit, and the body is not merely an instrument of the spirit, nor, as Arthur H. King pointed out, is the spirit trapped in the body “like a squirrel in a cage.” The human body is, as Robert P. George puts it, an intrinsic good, given to us by God. Gendered bodies empower us for service within the family. Let us remember that just as Christ’s Atonement was the service of an embodied being, much of our service, as mothers and others, will require significant bodily as well as spiritual labor.

Within the family, a child learns the reassurance and joy of appropriate, loving physical contact. A clasp of the hand, a pat on the shoulder, a hug, and a kiss on the cheek retain their power of communicating love and concern throughout our lives. We should use care in disciplining our children and ourselves so that the body is not demeaned in any way.

We can, and do, make what Robert P. George calls prudential arguments about the misuse of the body, warning against the spread of STDs and the carnage of drunken driving, for example. But what we actually want to instill in our children is respect for persons and a deep reverence for human intimacy and the sanctity of human life itself. Reverence for the sanctity of the person and for the procreative powers prevents us from laughing at raunchy jokes, from dressing inappropriately, from viewing pornography and violent films, as well as from participating in sexual intimacy outside of marriage, abortion, and so-called mercy killing. In contrast, the managerial approach may use fear and disgust as the driving force for avoiding nonmarital sex and alcoholic beverages. Our task in teaching the Word of Wisdom and chastity is to preempt both negative attitudes and behaviors through positive teachings and positive relationships.
Second, we teach that we are agents. Satan seeks to “destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3) and “to destroy the world” (Moses 4:6), presumably by turning our agency awry. Arthur King noted that it might not be necessary for the devil to entice us to do evil, that all he may need to do is distract us with a wide range of entertainment. If much of our time, money, and energy is used up by entertaining fare on the Internet, on video, on audio, in print, or through other media, then we may spend too little time studying scriptures, playing with and teaching our children, serving in the temple, and ministering to neighbors’ needs. We must show our children why such things are not worthy of their time and attention, lest they remain forbidden pleasures for the child to try later in life. That means we do not have hidden forbidden pleasures ourselves either.

As we give our children the rules of life to live by, we ought to be sure that they are inoculated against some of the pernicious theories of our day. While the Lord does take into account each person’s circumstances, we know that each of us is born with the Light of Christ and the gift of agency. That means that we bear some responsibility for our choices. Theories of human personality and child rearing which negate agency are antithetical to the gospel. The scriptural accounts of premortal life, of Adam and Eve, and of their early posterity make it clear that each individual is an agent choosing between good and evil, between serving God and serving the devil. Sometimes merely using the jargon of the social sciences changes how we view our responsibility for our choices. We should take care that we do not view ourselves as incapable of choosing to serve God or as determined by our genes or by our upbringing to commit sin.

For example, after Cain had murdered Abel, creating the first deep earth-stain, the Lord asked him, “Where is Abel, thy brother?” Cain’s answer was flippant, tinged with disrespect: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Moses 5:34). No remorse, no regret, no empathy, no respect for anyone but himself.

Cain became minimally courteous toward the Lord when told that the earth, stained with Abel’s blood, would no longer yield to Cain her strength. Faced with a loss of his livelihood, Cain’s attitude changed slightly. He justified his choices but did not accept responsibility for his exercise of agency. He refused to see the situation truthfully. Rather, he saw himself as a victim of greed and of low self-esteem due to lack of positive reinforcement from God, who did not respect Cain’s offering. Cain suffered from poor anger-management skills. His glorying in sin became the whine of victimization when he said, “My
punishment is greater than I can bear” (Moses 5:38). He then saw his own sin in the face of every man: he feared being killed by a brother as he had killed his own brother. His self-deception was profound and bound him and his posterity in a web of evil relationships that came to be known as secret combinations.

We can surrender our agency to physical or emotional addictions, to evil combinations, or to wrongheaded theories about the nature of human beings; but that, too, is a choice we make as agents unto ourselves. Obedience without agentive choice is, at worst, hypocritical, and at best, temporary. We need to reach the whole child, the soul of the child, not just the child’s behaviors. This is a labor-intensive method that has no guaranteed outcome because the agency of the child remains intact. It is sometimes painful; it is always worth the effort.

Third, we teach that good can be distinguished from evil. We live in a time when there is cynicism about whether any idea, person, or entity could accurately be called good or evil. Some doubt whether there could be truth with a capital T, and whether, if there were, we would have the ability to perceive such a thing. The Light of Christ is given to all who enter this world that they may judge between good and evil (see Moroni 7:18–19). God has also sent us messengers such as prophets to help us discern the good. They are willing to tell us the truth, even when we don’t want to hear it. That is what parents are for, too. We teach rules, the what-to-dos and the what-not-to-dos of life, but we also teach our children in whom they can put their trust. It is one thing to teach that God forbids a certain action; it is quite another thing to help a child enter into a covenant to serve the Lord.

Covenants are agreements between persons who stand in a specific relationship to each other. Covenants combine both rules and relationships. For example, in baptism, we agree or promise to remember our Savior and to stand as a witness for Him in all times and in all places. In that promise we acknowledge our relationship to Him as one of reliance on His atoning grace. And as disciples in His service, we come to desire good because of our covenantal relationship with Christ.

Simply setting up consequences for good and bad behavior is not enough to teach our children. Adam and Eve, like little children, did not have a full understanding of good and evil when they were first placed in the garden to be proved, to see whether they would do “all . . . the Lord their God [should] command them” (Abraham 3:25). In beguiling Eve, the serpent was far more subtle than simply suggesting she disobey God. Rather, he used a ploy familiar to contemporary rhetoric: he adjusted the definitions. He redefined the consequences
of transgression, appealing to her desire to be like the Father: “Ye shall not surely die, . . . ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Moses 4:10–11). He did not tell the whole truth. Eve would, indeed, know good and evil, but unlike God, she would still lack the wisdom to always do good and would lack the power to save herself from the effects of sin.

When Adam and Eve transgressed, God did not simply invoke consequences. That is, He did not say, “I told you if you touched that tree you were dead; and now you’re dead,” sending them summarily into mortality, hoping they would catch on to obedience. They learned from their own experience to choose good, rather than evil, but it was not automatic. We do not necessarily learn what we should from our experiences, good and bad. We need someone with greater wisdom to help us understand our experiences. God did not abandon Adam and Eve in their sins. He called them out of hiding and taught them the plan of salvation (see Moses 6:62) so they could repent, be forgiven, and then enter into the covenant of baptism (see Moses 6:50–53, 64–66).

They learned from their transgression to trust in the Lord and to “lean not unto [their] own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). The lessons they learned in the Garden of Eden gave them a willingness to obey fully, though their understanding was incomplete. One evidence that they learned from their experience is that they obeyed the command to sacrifice before they understood why. Thereafter, they were taught by God and angels to do all things in the name of the Son, to “repent and call upon God in the name of the Son” (Moses 5:8). Doing so prepared them so that by the power of the Spirit their eyes could be opened and their understandings enlightened (see Moses 5:10–11): they could better “see and understand the things of God” (D&C 76:12). They learned to obey the commandments of God, the rules of life, but they also learned about relationships: they learned to trust God and his messengers.

Contrast Cain’s experience with good and evil. Unlike his parents, who transgressed but then repented and turned themselves to God, Cain was counseled by the Lord but would not hearken to the counsel. The Lord was willing to work with Cain, to help him repent from the sinful sacrifice, and to help him turn away from Satan’s employ. But Cain held on to his anger, and his anger separated him from God, his brother Abel, and his parents, just as Satan’s pride and wrath separated him from the Father.

When we choose evil, we enter the company of evildoers. Cain entered into relationships based on evildoing. He joined himself to a
wife who loved Satan more than God, and then he entered into a secret oath to murder his brother and to keep the knowledge of it from his father, Adam (see Moses 5:28–31). Those secret oaths and covenants are in opposition to the work of God. Cain gloried in his wickedness, not unlike some of earth’s tyrants who have by their secret combinations afflicted entire nations and peoples with misery and death. He rejected both the law and the loving people who would have helped him turn to God.

Fourth, we teach that good is stronger than evil. God is more powerful than the devil, who eventually will be bound (see D&C 45:55). Many today despair at the evil in the world. Evil sometimes seems so pervasive that some begin to believe that if enormous evils exist, good cannot exist. However, both exist, and the existence of one does not negate the existence of the other. Compare the evil actions of those who killed thousands on September 11 with the thousands of good, brave, and kind actions taken by individuals caught in the tragic events of that day. Those good actions, those good people, will have a greater impact over time than will the evil to which they responded.

Satan cannot destroy the work of God. Though he may rage in the hearts of men for a time, he has already lost. One of his names, Perdition, means “lost.” Our children need to know that the devil is a real being, but they also need to know that followers of Christ can shun him, and be protected from him. The story of Moses experiencing the power of God and the power of the devil in rapid succession illustrate the glory and power of God in comparison to the temptations of the devil. When Satan commanded, “Moses, son of man, worship me” (Moses 1:12), Moses looked upon him and said, “Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?” (Moses 1:13). If our children have experienced the goodness of God, it will be easier for them to recognize that by birthright they are entitled to better than Satan has to offer.

Fifth, we teach that Christ is our Redeemer, the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved. Our children must come to know Him not as an abstract entity to whom we submit an application for eternal life, but as the loving being who longs to welcome us home. We cannot force conversion upon our children; we cannot convert them by manipulating their emotions nor by making the gospel more entertaining than other competing activities. We can only encourage them, testify of truth, and enter into a genuine relationship of learning about God with them. They will find through their own prayers, scripture
reading, and receiving ordinances and blessings that the power of God is real and good.

If we try to bring them to Christ by managing them, we should not be surprised if they adopt a philosophy like Korihor’s, that it is by the management of each individual creature that we fare in this life. They will have learned about the means—management and manipulation—and that will have destroyed the end—freely loving and following Christ. Or they may suppose they must conquer by their own strength, that all this church stuff is the foolish traditions of frenzied minds, and that no one really can know a being who could redeem them (see Alma 30:12–18).

We teach our children the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, but those truths will enter their souls partly through their relationships with us and mostly through the relationship they themselves have with Christ. If we have respected their agency and have a truthful, genuine relationship with them, I think they are better prepared to choose to have a truthful relationship with Heavenly Father and to be open to His enlightening their understandings.

We do not know the hour nor the day in which our children must call upon Christ with all the energy of their souls, or be lost. And in that day, like Alma, they must trust that they can say within their hearts: “Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness,” (Alma 36:18) and have confidence that He will lovingly “snatch” them too from that awful state that their souls will be pained no more (see Alma 26:17; Mosiah 27:29).

Christ knows each of us and has atoned for each of us. If our children know Him and are walking in His ways, they will look forward to meeting Him, not His general manager nor His personal assistant. For He is the “keeper of the gate” through which each of us must pass if we are to be saved, and “he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41).

Notes

3. Kathleen Bahr has demonstrated in her studies of family work how caring for the home and yard can be approached as a means to build good family rela-


5. See Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 40–41; compare D&C 121:41–46.


13. See also the experiences of Christ, Alma the Younger, and Joseph Smith.
Death is part of Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness. We may actually spend more time, money, and effort preparing for unlikely contingencies than for the certainty of death.
Death is part of Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness, for “it was appointed unto man to die” (Alma 42:6). From a Latter-day Saint perspective, however, death is not the end. The scriptures assure us that those who die in the Lord “shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them” (D&C 42:46). The Lord says of the righteous that “those that die shall rest from all their labors, and their works shall follow them; and they shall receive a crown in the mansions of my Father, which I have prepared for them” (D&C 59:2). So while it is true that when we have lived together in love, we appropriately “weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45), we need not fear death if we live right. One way of diminishing fear of anything, including death, is to prepare for it—“If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30). However, even though death itself is not to be feared, preparing for death—at least in these times—is complicated, much more so than in the days of the pioneers.

It occurs to me that as Latter-day Saints, we may actually spend more time, money, and effort preparing more for unlikely contingencies than for the certainty of death. We buy health insurance because we might get sick. We buy car insurance because we might have an accident. We store a year’s supply of food because we might go hungry. We invest for the future because we might live to be a hundred. None of this is wrong, and indeed all of it has been specifically encouraged from the pulpit. Surely, however, it is just as important, arguably more
important, to plan for an event that is not a contingency. Any planning in advance will benefit both you and those you leave behind.

Despite this, there is little evidence that planning for death receives regular and consistent encouragement in our meetings and literature. We are good about preparing our children for baptism, preparing our young men for missions and the Melchizedek Priesthood, and preparing others to attend the temple. Much less attention is given to preparing our affairs in advance of our death. This is unfortunate because modern society has become increasingly complex, and advance preparation is not just a matter of procrastination. Often we simply do not know what to do, what papers to keep, where to put them, and so forth.

The reasons for avoiding the topic of preparing for death are not hard to fathom. Notwithstanding the certainty of death, we live in a place and time that clings to youth, considers aging a horror, and avoids contact with the dying.

My father passed away on November 29, 2005. He was eighty-seven, had been ill for ten years, and had been under hospice care for several months. In short, his death was not a surprise, and we felt ready for it, emotionally and spiritually. What was a surprise, at least to me, was how technically unprepared I felt when he was gone, notwithstanding ample warning and plenty of time to put things in order. Suddenly, my siblings and I were scrambling to accomplish things that certainly could—and definitely should—have been attended to long before.

Spurred by the loss of my father and the things we learned in that process, I started putting together a plan so that when my time comes, my loved ones will have a road map to follow and will find that much of the difficult technical aspects of death in the complex modern world have been handled. This article summarizes the results of that effort.

I expect you know some of the things you need to plan before you die, but you have not thought of everything; despite having spent scores of hours on this project, neither have I. But after working on it for a while and sharing ideas with others, I think I have made what I feel is a thorough and adequate preparation for my death. This article tells you what I have prepared.

There are several things this article does not attempt to address. First, I am not a specialist in estate planning or taxation, so I do not address those issues here. Information about guardians or conservators in the event of disability before death will not be found here. End-of-life issues—such as organ donation or the extent to which heroic measure should or should not be taken in the face of fatal disease or
trauma—are not discussed. I offer no suggestions for those who may not wish to share all their financial information with all members of their family. I mention but make no attempt to give even a thumbnail description of such instruments as powers of attorney, durable or otherwise. I do not discuss the best way to dispose of heirloom items, though this can be a very delicate and important matter.

**Paperwork: Safe, Accessible, and Up-to-Date**

Just about everything you need to do to prepare for death will create paperwork. These time-of-death materials need to be managed so as to (1) keep them safe, (2) make them accessible to those who will have to deal with the aftermath of your death, and (3) keep them current.

**Safe.** As you will see below, the information that will be included in the paperwork you are going to generate and gather would allow an identity thief to have a field day. It must be kept secure. I suggest the purchase of a fireproof, waterproof, tamperproof safe, one that can be bolted to the floor of a closet. I also suggest the use of a bank safe deposit box, which will contain a copy of what you will put in the safe at home. This way, you and those who follow will have access to the materials in the safe even if the house burns down.

**Accessible.** Making the material accessible is equally important. This has two parts. First, and most obviously, if you die and no one knows how to get into your safe and bank safe deposit box, you have not solved anything. Tell your spouse and mature children where the safe is and how to open it. Give someone responsible a copy of the key and combination to both the safe and safe deposit box, and put that person’s name on the approved list at the bank. Second, make sure the materials are user friendly. Below I will make some specific suggestions in this regard, but the big-picture objective is to leave things in such a way that your survivors can sit down with the materials you have prepared and be led quickly and efficiently through them. I believe you will soon discover in going through this exercise that you have not only organized things for the benefit of your survivors when you die, but have also made a pretty easy situation for anyone who must care for you if you are disabled. For that matter, you have also made easier the day-to-day management of your own affairs.

**Up-to-date.** Finally, bear in mind that things change quickly, and arrangements that make sense today may not be satisfactory a year from now. Keep the time-of-death materials current and up-to-date by scheduling an annual review near the date of your birthday.
Preparing for Death and Organizing Time-of-Death Materials

You are going to need to purchase a large capacity, sturdy three-ring notebook and about twenty-five tabbed dividers. The home safe needs to be big enough to hold it, and a copy of its contents will go in the bank safe deposit box. A list of the basic set of tabs might be labeled as follows below, but you will probably want to add others.

*Tab 1: When we die.* This is the first place your survivors will turn when they discover you have died. It will contain short instructions and an overview of all else that the notebook contains. The instructions and materials behind this tab are the most complicated to assemble and will take the longest to describe in this article. The instructions in my notebook are set forth in numbered paragraphs subtitled as follows:

1. Death and burial expenses. Early in the process, I want to head off any panic about what has been arranged and prepaid, and what still needs to be taken care of. In this paragraph, I tell my survivors in general terms what arrangements we have made concerning the payment of a cemetery plot, mortuary services, and a grave marker. I also tell them where in the notebook they can turn to find originals of the cemetery deed, the mortuary services contract (or insurance policy), and the grave marker.

2. Handling of remains. Leaving nothing to chance, I want my survivors to know whom to call in the immediate aftermath of my passing. If you have made advance arrangements with a mortuary, provide the name and phone number. We also state here our preferences for who should help dress our bodies. I recommend, where appropriate, the advance preparation of ceremonial temple clothing for burial, and your instructions should indicate where these may be found.

3. Death certificates. We were amazed at how many copies of the death certificate are required. Some need to be certified copies, others can be ordinary photocopies. In this paragraph, I explain how many of each to request from the mortuary (five certified copies minimum, ten might be safer, but there is a cost).

4. Cemetery arrangements. Here I provide a succinct summary of the location of the burial plots we have purchased, who to call to have the graves opened and how much this is likely to cost, and (again) where to turn in the notebook for the original documents and more detailed instructions.

5. Grave marker. After your death, your survivors may tend to think that if they do not spend lavishly, people will conclude they did not love you. My wife and I have already purchased our markers.
and even had them installed on our still empty burial plots. After our deaths, the stonemason will enter the death dates. This allowed us to select the style, cost, and so forth.

6. Graveside service. The text here explains what we want done, for example, who should preside and who we would like to have dedicate our graves, offer a prayer, and lead the singing. In our case, we request that the graveside service and burial precede the memorial service (seems to get the heavy lifting over with first so the memorial service can be a little lighter in spirit).

7. Memorial (or funeral) service. I explain here that Kate and I have prepurchased our caskets and that each of us has sketched out the program for our memorial services. We have placed a sample printed program at the back of this first section, along with an electronic copy on a CD in a plastic sleeve so they can easily make any needed modifications, then print a final and go get it copied somewhere. This is an area where you can spare your survivors sales pitches at a time of great vulnerability.

8. Obituaries. In this section we have roughed out the basic elements of our own obituaries and even decided where we want them published. Printed copies are in this same section and are included on the same CD mentioned in paragraph 7.

9. Notifications. One of the little surprises following my father’s death was how hard it was to think of all the people that should be notified without leaving anyone out and how time consuming it was to locate phone numbers and addresses. In this paragraph we include our thoughts on the subject, listing by name and phone number people to notify in the categories of official or business (including of the names and contact information for your attorney and accountant), Church, family, and friends. For good measure, we have thrown in copies of our family rosters.

10. Birth and marriage certificates. We discovered that for some insurance-related purposes, you have to provide copies of birth and marriage certificates. It took some real time to find what was on hand at home and even more time to order what was not available from county registrars around the country. We have obtained these and put the originals or certified copies in plastic sleeves in the notebook in this first tab.

11. Financial and legal matters. This subparagraph gives a very brief overview of our financial and legal affairs (for example, it explains that we have wills and a trust, the basic notion of how the trust is supposed to work, and identifies the basic categories of assets we own). It is
merely introductory and explains that the details are found elsewhere in the notebook.

12. Use of the notebook. In this final paragraph, I list each tab that follows this first “When we die” tab and what is contained in it. It is essentially a table of contents to the rest of the notebook. It will be much easier—and shorter—to describe the remaining tabs.

**Tab 2: Farewell letter.** Given that the first tab has been so businesslike, we hasten to tab 2, a letter addressed to our children and grandchildren in which we express all the things we hope we were able to say in person before we die.

**Tab 3: Health insurance.** If I am comatose, I want someone to know how to navigate this important aspect of my planning. Behind this tab is the original of my health insurance policy, a copy of my insurance card, and some basic instructions about how it is supposed to work.

**Tab 4: Life insurance.** This tab contains the originals of our life insurance policies. Ahead of these is a one page summary of what policies we have and information about how to make a claim (including phone numbers and addresses).

**Tab 5: Auto insurance.** It is important to let your survivors know who handles your auto insurance. This tab has the original policy. This is also helpful if you are incapacitated and loved ones are driving your car to take you to the doctor and pick up prescriptions.

**Tab 6: Home insurance.** This contains the original home insurance policy.

**Tab 7: Disability insurance.** This contains the original of my disability policy. When I die, it becomes valueless, but it is essential to anyone struggling to care for me if I am in a state of incapacity.

**Tab 8: Other insurance.** We have what we call an “umbrella policy,” and the original is in our notebook. Put the originals of any other policies you might have in your notebook.

**Tab 9: Assets and liabilities.** This tab contains, first, a summary of our major assets, both investment and noninvestment, down to the level of our cars. Following that are original deeds to real estate (and accompanying title insurance policies), original certificates of title to our cars, and reasonably recent account statements from our bank.

**Tab 10: Social Security.** The Social Security Administration sends you a statement once in a while about what you are entitled to upon retirement. Put the current one behind this tab in the notebook. It also contains information about death and disability benefits that could come in handy.
Tab 11: Budget. Everyone should have a budget. This is for our current benefit, not for the mop-up crew, but the notebook seems like a good place to put it, and it would certainly come in handy if someone had to step in and run things because you have become vegetative.

Tab 12: Pension/IRA/401(k) plan. Contains original plan documents including (this is important) beneficiary designation statements. Also includes current account statements.

Tab 12: Other investments. If you have investments other than those in tax-qualified accounts, include information about them in this tab and add copies of current account statements if applicable.

Tab 13: Bank account. The assets and liabilities tab already includes a copy of a recent account statement from your bank, but if you’re feeling charitable, put another copy here.

Tab 14: Retirement plan. The term retirement plan means different things to different people. To an estate planning attorney, such a plan may include provisions for the support of your surviving spouse, and perhaps your children and grandchildren. But as used here, it simply means a written plan for how much you can afford to withdraw each year from your investments to pay for retirement. This is helpful if you’re incapacitated. If you are organized enough to have one (and if you don’t have such a plan, you’ll want to get one), this is the place to put it.

Tab 15: Wills and trusts. You don’t need me to tell you that you should have wills and perhaps a trust. Put the originals behind this tab.

Tab 16: Powers of attorney. In addition to wills and a trust, there are some other important legal documents you should consider: a general power of attorney, a power of attorney for health care, and a directive to physicians and providers of medical services (“living will”). It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss what these do for you, but their names give you an idea. Put the originals behind this tab.

Tab 17: Wallet contents. Make a photocopy of the front and back of every card you carry in your wallet or purse, including credit cards, driver’s license, health insurance card, ATM debit card, etc. If you ever lose your wallet, or if your survivors can’t find it, here is the place to turn. It will show all the numbers to call to report lost or stolen cards or to cancel them in the event of death.

Tab 18: Home safe. You will have shared this information orally, but put information about how to access the safe in this tab. Since the notebook will be in the safe, you might wonder why I say this. Answer: if the house has burned down and your family is resorting to the bank safe deposit box, they will be able to get a copy of the notebook and be
reminded of how to access the safe, which will almost certainly contain important and valuable things beyond the notebook.

**Tab 19: Safe deposit box.** In this tab, remind survivors of the location of, and how to gain access to, the bank safe deposit box. You might have important stuff in there that you will want them to get, whether you are dead or incapacitated. Check with the bank to determine whether local laws place restrictions on postmortem access to safe deposit boxes.

**Tab 20: Cemetery.** Put the originals of your cemetery deeds behind this tab. It wouldn’t hurt to include a map of how to find the plots within the cemetery (the cemetery will provide one).

**Tab 21: Mortuary.** This is where you put the originals of your contracts with the mortuary (sometimes in the form of a specialized insurance policy).

**Tab 22: Household bills.** Someone is going to have to make decisions about the house. Make a list of all the bills you pay, list the account numbers, and tell how you generally pay them (for example, automatic debit to the bank account, automatic charge to the credit card, check, and so on).

**Tab 23: Computer user names and passwords.** Make a list of all the user names and passwords for online accounts you regularly use. When you are dead, it might be helpful for someone to go into these accounts to give notification, cancel subscriptions, and so forth.

**Conclusion**

Implementing the suggestions made in this article is not difficult, but it is time-consuming and requires some perseverance. Typically, you will begin with a rush of enthusiasm only to find it hard to stay with it until the notebook is finished. I encourage you to persevere.

At a recent family gathering, Kate and I sat down with all our children (all are adults) and got out the notebook. We explained what it was, what it contained, and turned through the various tabs to show them its contents and how to use it. There was some predictable protest from those who did not want to contemplate our demise, but it was easily overcome. We were able to give them a preview of what to do when we die and how we have made things easier for them to manage from a technical standpoint. I think they appreciated it then, but I know they will appreciate it much more later on. We have tried to teach them that we are not afraid of death, that discussion of it need not be avoided, and that when planned for, it can even be treated with a certain lightness of heart. We want to make our deaths as much a
turnkey experience as possible so our children can focus without nervous distraction on the much more joyful aspects of this essential—and universal—part of God’s plan for His children.
As part of an active learning experience, student Natalie Manwaring creates an audio version of an article for the Religious Studies Center Web site.

Courtesy of Richard B. Crookston
I did not grow up with the gospel in my home, but because of a teacher I had as a young woman, I gained a personal testimony of the reality of my Savior’s love. My teacher did not live within my ward boundaries, nor did I ever attend her formal classes, but I claim her nonetheless. My teacher was a regular on the Church-speaking circuit, and she invited me to be her visual aid. After she had offered extensive, important instruction to her congregation, she invited me to sing “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” as an illustration of the principles she had taught. I was flattered to be invited, and I sang with my whole heart to please and honor my mentor, but something else happened in the process. As I sang those lyrics, I knew. I knew what I was singing was true. I knew He really did live and love me “to the end.” I knew that He really was “my kind, wise heav’nly Friend.” I knew. As I committed my voice to that task and offered the best of my young talent, heaven burned into my soul the reality of the things about which I was singing.

At new student orientation at BYU that year, an energetic presenter began by telling the freshmen that there were many myths at BYU. She assured them that some of them are true, including that students get engaged a lot. “In fact,” she continued, “I have been engaged several times. I make it a goal to get engaged at least five times per semester.” The new freshmen were wide-eyed and giggling. She continued, “I suggest that you call your parents at the end of the semester, even at the end of this class, to tell them that you got engaged.”
not the topic. Engagement in learning was. My serving as a visual aid was not critical to the success of my teacher’s presentation, but being engaged in learning was critical to achieving a changed heart.

The goal of authentic student engagement might be illustrated by a lesson about an apple. A teacher who wanted her students to learn about an apple could simply stand before them and offer a well-researched, carefully prepared presentation documenting the characteristics of an apple. Likely, her students would leave the lesson with more information than they had arrived with. She could also show a picture of an apple. Those students would certainly know more still for having engaged themselves visually with the subject. The teacher might increase the breadth of the sensory connection by actually taking an apple to class for the students to see, feel, smell, and touch. But best of all, the teacher who expects to make a lasting impression on her students could take an apple to class—maybe several different types of apples—and offer tastes of them all. Those fully engaged students would leave the classroom knowing the subject personally because they had been invited to make it their own.

Psychological research demonstrates that people are more likely to “behave” their way into thinking than they are to “think” their way into behaving. Put simply, if we smile, we will actually be happier; if we whistle a happy tune, we will be less afraid; and if we count our blessings, we will feel greater gratitude. Or, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “Faith is a principle of action.” We receive a testimony of truth and grow in faith as we live the gospel. Learning and becoming happen best by doing because “if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17). I sang “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” and as I sang those lyrics their truthfulness became my personal testimony. The message became my own as I did something with it. The doing afforded the Spirit the occasion to seal it upon my heart and promoted my knowing and remembering.

One thoughtful teacher who encouraged student engagement understood the difference between the impact of passive and active classroom environments. She planned her classrooms to be student workshops more than teacher presentations. To acquaint her eleven-year-old students with the priesthood, rather than lecturing those potentially restless young men on the duties and importance of the ordination they were about to receive, she escorted them to the empty baptismal font and invited them to step into that promising place and read the scriptures containing the baptismal covenant. Together they recalled the details of their own baptisms. From there, the engaged
group went to the sacrament table, where they read and discussed the scriptures relevant to the sacrament, including the sacrament prayers. They paraded to the bishop’s office, where they each obtained a donation slip and proceeded to fill it out. They discussed together the importance of those donations and how they are used to help the needy. They concluded the activity with two missionaries sharing stories of spiritual experiences from their service. The eleven-year-olds were allowed to ask questions as well as handle the elders’ daily planners, *Preach My Gospel* manuals, and name tags. By the end of the participatory lesson, those young men understood the priesthood more deeply and personally because they had been engaged in places and practices relative to the priesthood in an active, multisensory way.

Interactive games can be satisfying, effective ways to engage students in learning. The age-old Cub Scout acronym, KISMIF (Keep It Simple, Make It Fun), remains a valuable guideline. *The Big Book of Team Building Games* by John Newstrom and Edward Scannell thoughtfully suggests that classroom games are useful to make a clear, memorable point; build class morale; encourage trust among class members as they share insights and develop common solutions; promote flexibility among class members; and reinforce appropriate behaviors such as cooperation, listening, and creativity. Games are also inexpensive, participative, and low risk. One teacher found that a game of “Getting to Know You Bingo” on one of the first days of early-morning seminary in a class that included students from five different high schools established common ground and built bridges between students who lacked immediate connection. A connection was made between two students who were both scuba certified—one student was a young woman from the high school located just through the parking lot. The other was a hearing-impaired young man from a magnet school several blocks away. They were both made aware of something they had in common rather than believing they were very different.

At a stake girls’ camp, young women from five wards were bound together in playful cooperation as they worked together to untie the human knot they had made by joining hands in a tangled fashion across a circle. They talked and strategized, then ducked under, climbed over, and twisted around in a low-risk effort to create an untangled circle. In the process, they learned important but gentle lessons about cooperation, communication, trial and error, and sticking to a task. They also gained an appreciation for the varied talents and insights of girls with whom they had not previously been acquainted. That simple, no-cost game provided a quick, playful, interactive way to encourage relation-
ships among those girls without sitting them down for a heavy-handed lecture on the subject.

Although games have broad and compelling usefulness, several potential danger zones are important to remember. Be well prepared with all requisite props, manage time carefully, choose games that forward and fortify learning without becoming an end unto themselves, and avoid simplistic images that can be distracting, especially from sacred themes. For example, occasionally leaders invite young people to prepare extemporaneous skits using gospel themes. When the youth respond with silly presentations about sacred subjects like morality or prayer, the skits can quickly become irreverent.

Engaged learning adapts well to students’ short attention span. One very able but very frustrated new Sunday School teacher returned from his first Sunday with a new class of lively adolescents ready to make an appointment with the bishop to request his release. In spite of the teacher’s extensive preparation, those spirited young people had checked out barely moments into the teacher’s presentation. Eager to redeem himself, that faithful teacher returned the next week with a fresh pacing strategy. He prepared his lessons in ten-minute segments titled “Into,” “Through,” and “Beyond.” The “Into” section consisted of an attention-getting activity that might be as simple as a drawing, an object, a thought-provoking question, or a quick quiz. The “Through” section moved the students from that initial attention-getting activity to the concepts he sought to teach. That section might include carefully selected scripture reading, storytelling, or a comprehensible presentation of a doctrinal point. The final “Beyond” section included the all-important answer to the age-old question of teenagers, “So what?” During that segment, the teacher helped the students apply the principle to their own lives. Sometimes he began that important process by sharing a story from his personal life. Occasionally he tossed a beanbag and asked, “So what?” to the student who caught it. Always he asked carefully prepared, nonthreatening, open-ended questions to encourage thought and personal application. In the course of a thirty-minute lesson, the teacher generally moved through the cycle of “Into,” “Through,” and “Beyond” three times.

An engaged community of learners includes celebration—celebration of each other, celebration of the subject matter, and celebration of learning itself. Unfortunately, we often segregate work and play as if they were mutually exclusive, when, in reality, engaging work in the form of learning is among the most satisfying forms of play. In his book Happier, Tal Ben-Shahar suggests that a skillful teacher can “create
environments at home and school that are conducive to the experience of present and future benefit, pleasure and meaning.” Especially as we engage in earnest study of the gospel, the essence of which is aptly called the “plan of happiness,” our students should find happiness, satisfaction, and even fun.

One bright and fun-loving early-morning seminary teacher organized an annual “Granny Awards” every spring, corresponding to the Grammy Awards. For several months before the celebration, she served her family pancakes and waffles daily, smothered with Mrs. Butterworth’s syrup, then saved the empty granny-shaped bottles to paint gold and use as clever awards at her seminary celebration. Students nominated characters from the volume of scripture they had been studying that year, then presented to the class their reasons why that scriptural character deserved to be awarded the Granny for best leading lady/man, or best supporting lady/man, or which scriptural story deserved the prize for best overall or best story. The class voted to identify the winners, after which the student who had made the nomination accepted the golden syrup bottle. The annual celebration served as a review, involved restless students, and promoted a community of learning.
Active learning also addresses the needs of students with various learning styles. As a hopeless left-brainer, a classic linear thinker, I like lectures and find pleasure in worksheets. School in its traditional, rote rigidity is a perfect fit for me. Desks in neat rows and binders with exacting subject divisions please me. Increasingly, however, our classrooms are filled with students who learn differently. Efforts to engage students with creative and diverse strategies are essential for the non-linear learners and refreshing for all the rest.

One Jewish convert to the Church delighted his students by providing them with an authentic Passover feast to familiarize them with the symbols of that event. Those students had a multisensory experience with bitter herbs that enabled them to understand and literally taste something of bitterness.

Another teacher appealed to the learning style of her class by creating simple rhymes and musical phrases for each of the scripture mastery verses. Those students will forever know where to find the story of Joseph fleeing from temptation. Who could forget “Genesis 39, Potiphar’s wife’s dirty mind”?

Students who are especially physical learners came to life in a seminary class when their teacher invited them to come to the whiteboard in groups of six until all had had a turn. After having read a scriptural passage, they were asked to write a single word or phrase in response to a question such as “What quality do you admire about the character?” or “What is an important theme of that passage?” or “What do you appreciate about your dad/mom/bishop?” When the entire board was filled, the class read and discussed the results of their combined effort.

An unforgettable Sunday School teacher extended himself beyond the normal bounds of a formal presentation with imaginative, unpredictable “Into” activities. To familiarize the class with the elements of Daniel’s dream, he brought into the Relief Society room a giant Michelin Man with all the bulgy body parts labeled to represent the various kingdoms that would be destroyed by the stone cut out of the mountain without hands. On another Sunday, class began when a noisy kazoo player began to march down the aisle blaring a raucous tune on his annoying instrument. The teacher engaged the musician in an interview to learn that he was off to pay his tithing and wanted to be sure he received appropriate credit for his good works. After that engaging “Into” activity, the class turned to Matthew for the “Through” part, a discussion of doing alms to be seen of men.

are very effective at teaching the young to find pleasure in the right things. Adults, themselves often deluded by infatuation with fatuous models, conspire in the deception. They make serious tasks seem dull and hard, and frivolous ones exciting and easy. Schools generally fail to teach how exciting, how mesmerizingly beautiful science or mathematics can be; they teach the routine of literature or history rather than the adventure.”

How much more “mesmerizingly beautiful” is the gospel than even the best of science or mathematics! With creative engagement, students can taste the delicious fruits of active learning—sometimes even literally. Faith is a principle of action. As teachers facilitate classrooms that promote authentic, active student engagement, students will find learning as delicious as a ripe apple, as memorable as a favorite song, and as personal as a visit to the baptismal font. They will “behave” their way into “knowing” and get happily engaged again and again. 

Notes

4. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, quoted in Ben-Shahar, Happier, 94.
Respect is more a function of attitude, posture, and tone of voice than of grammar.

Courtesy of Richard B. Crookston
Have you ever been called on to pray in a class or a meeting and found yourself stumbling over archaic pronouns or verb conjugations no longer used in everyday English? Is it “Thy approval” or “Thine approval”? Is it okay to say “Thou might”? When do I say “Thou dost,” and when do I say “Thou doest”?

Most languages do not present this problem. German speakers, for instance, address Heavenly Father as they would address a family member or close friend. Interestingly, because English is a Germanic language, many of the familiar forms in German are very similar to the archaic English forms we use in prayer. But in German these forms are still used every day in conversation, whereas in English they have almost completely vanished from common usage.

As Latter-day Saints, we often receive reminders from our leaders to use “prayer language.” Most members desire to follow this counsel, but they struggle. Why? Because in spite of all the reminders to use prayer language, no one teaches them how. Actually, it’s not that difficult, and a few shortcuts even make it possible to avoid the most common stumbling block: tricky verb conjugations. Let’s take a brief look at some of the forms we use in prayer.

**Thou and Thee**

Instead of addressing Heavenly Father as You, we are taught to use the pronouns Thou and Thee. Thou is used as the subject of a sentence.
Thee is used as an object—a direct object, an indirect object, and an object of a preposition. Thus, we say:

“Thou art kind and gracious.” (subject)

“Wilt Thou bless us with safety as we travel.” (subject)

“We love Thee and Thy Son.” (direct object)

“We give Thee thanks for our blessings.” (indirect object)

“We have faith in Thee.” (object of the preposition in)

Thy and Thine

Likewise, we should use the possessive pronouns Thy and Thine in prayer rather than Your. The difference between the two forms is identical to the difference between the indefinite articles a and an. If the word following the possessive pronoun begins with a consonant (or a vowel that behaves as a consonant, such as in universe or usual), use Thy. If the word begins with a vowel sound (abundance, authority, unsurpassed), we use Thine.

“Thou hast restored Thy Church and Thine authority in these latter days.”

“Watch over us with Thy loving care.”

Verb Conjugations

This is where most people struggle, because the archaic forms in English, just as the modern forms, do not always follow the rules. The rule is that you add an ending to any verb following the pronoun Thou. The ending is –st or –est for most verbs. Thus, we would say:

“Thou givest us bountiful blessings.”

“Thou helpest the needy.”

“Thou restorest our peace.”

“Thou speakest the truth.”

“Thou takest from us our sorrows.”

Of course, English always presents exceptions. In verb conjugations using the pronoun Thou, these exceptions involve to be and to have as well as several auxiliary verbs (verbs such as may, can, or shall that modify the main verb). Since there is no consistency here, we must simply memorize the correct forms. For instance, we say:

“Thou art kind and generous.”

“Thou hast given us great blessings.”

“Wilt Thou bless our home with Thy Spirit.”

“. . . that Thou shalt never turn Thy heart from us.”

But we also say:
“Thou canst not lie.”
“We ask Thee that Thou mightest bring peace to our souls.”
“We have gathered to worship Thee today that Thou mayest know of our love for Thee.”

Less common auxiliary verbs include couldst, shouldst, and wouldst. The last of these three might be used now and then in our prayers, but rather than pleading, “Wouldst Thou grant unto us Thy Spirit,” we would probably more often say, “Wilt thou grant unto us Thy Spirit.”

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<th>Common Verb Conjugations with Thou</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thou art</td>
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<td>Thou dost (auxiliary form)</td>
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<td>Thou wilt</td>
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<td>Thou canst</td>
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<td>Thou wouldst</td>
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<td>Thou protectest</td>
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<td>Thou commandest</td>
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<td>Thou helpest</td>
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**Dost and Doest**

What is the difference between dost (pronounced like dust) and doest (two syllables, the first pronounced like do)? From reading the scriptures, most Latter-day Saints probably have a fairly accurate (and perhaps intuitive) sense for this. The former is an auxiliary verb and always accompanies the main verb in the clause. Examples are:

“When thou dost lend thy brother any thing” (Deuteronomy 24:10).

“Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?” (1 Kings 21:7).

“Thou dost bless us when we obey Thy word.”

The latter form is the second-person, present-tense conjugation of the active verb to do. It is used when no other verb is present in the clause. Examples of its usage are:

“If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door” (Genesis 4:7).

“God is with thee in all that thou doest” (Genesis 21:22).

“If Thou doest this in our behalf, we thank Thee.”

Some may also wonder about the form doth that appears often in scripture. Doth is the archaic third-person conjugation of do. Thus, we read in scripture, “Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”
(Matthew 24:42). *Doth*, just like *dost*, is only used as an auxiliary or helping verb. When used as the main verb, the correct third-person form would be *doeth*, as in “Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand *doeth*” (Matthew 6:3).

**Avoiding Verb Conjugations**

Some people might still be uncomfortable with adding the –*st* or –*est* endings to verbs, or perhaps they can’t ever seem to remember that the correct conjugation of *will* is irregular (*wilt*). If this is so, they can avoid this dilemma altogether by using the command form. For example:

“*Give* us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

“And *forgive* us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

“*Bless* us with Thy Spirit.”

Using the primary verb in its infinitive form (*to* + verb) is also a method some people use to avoid the confusing verb endings. Examples of such phrases are:

“We ask Thee *to bless* us with Thy Spirit.”

“We ask Thee *to protect* us from evil.”

Some people also select an auxiliary verb (usually *wilt*) and use it almost exclusively.

“*Wilt* Thou *grant* us Thy love.”

“*Wilt* Thou *bless* this class.”

“*Wilt* Thou *forgive* us our sins.”

Although these sentences look like questions, they are actually command forms with an auxiliary verb added to soften the effect.

**Consistency**

Some Church members might wonder why we use the archaic forms when addressing our Heavenly Father but are not consistent in using similar forms when referring in prayer to other people or things. For example, why don’t we say, “Father, *wilt* Thou bless Brother Wilkins. He hath lost his job and needeth employment”? Probably because it sounds unnatural, even humorous, in our day and would draw attention to the language itself and away from that for which we are praying.

Of course, the question might also be asked, Why don’t we just do away with the archaic forms and use *You* and *Your*, our modern familiar forms? To this question I have no reasonable answer, since
members of the Church who speak other languages generally address their Heavenly Father in an intimate, personal manner just as they would address a family member or close friend. It can even be argued that the archaic forms we use in English actually place a barrier of artificial and awkward formality between the supplicant and his or her Father. We often hear that these forms show proper respect for Deity, but does that mean it is impossible for German- or French-speaking members to show appropriate respect in their prayers? Of course not. Respect is more a function of attitude, posture, and tone of voice than of grammar. I suppose the only answer to this difficult question is that as long as our leaders counsel us to use the archaic forms, we ought to comply and learn how to use them correctly.

Using the Scriptures as a Pattern

We can become familiar with the language of prayer and its correct forms by reading the scriptures, particularly the King James version of the Bible. The King James Bible is also widely considered a masterpiece of English literature because of its beautiful prose. The Book of Mormon, by contrast, is somewhat inconsistent grammatically but can still serve as a pattern for prayer language in most instances.

By paying closer attention to the language itself as we read, we can become more familiar with the forms and usage of this now archaic English and expand our vocabulary of appropriate words and expressions we might use in prayer.

Reverence and Respect

As mentioned above, other languages, such as French and German, have no archaic form that might by its rare usage connote respect or reverence. God is addressed with the familiar pronouns used among family members and close friends. In such languages, individuals show respect and reverence through tone of voice, sincerity of heart, and humble posture.

These signs of reverence are more important, of course, than correct grammar or even the use of “prayer language.” The honest but ungrammatical prayer of a humble son or daughter is certainly more pleasing to our Heavenly Father than the eloquent but pretentious prayer of the learned. If we can learn, however, to express ourselves effectively and correctly and still remain sincere and humble, we will be more able in our public prayers to speak appropriately for the class or congregation.
Eran Hayet, executive director of the BYU Jerusalem Center
Holzapfel: We want to focus on what the new Jerusalem Center program has to offer. In the past there were three incarnations. There was the pre-Jerusalem Center program, which was the David Galbraith–Kelly Ogden era, when we did not have a building. Then there was the Jerusalem Center program that began with the building of the BYU Jerusalem Center and continued until the center was closed to students in 2000. Then the program began anew in 2007.

Huntington: I think one purpose of this interview is to have teachers and faculty be aware of (a) the new program and (b) the new executive director so they are acquainted with you, Eran Hayet, and know a little bit about your background.

Holzapfel: First of all, the original director was a BYU full-time faculty member who came from Provo. When did you come to the center?

Hayet: I first came here in January 1994. Kent Brown was the director.

Holzapfel: Could you tell us a bit about your background, where you were born and where you lived?

Hayet: I was born in a kibbutz in upper Galilee called Kibbutz Ga’aton. I lived on the kibbutz until I was seven years old. We lived in what I would call the old kibbutzim—the way that kibbutzim used to be—because today they are not the same. It was a sharing community very influenced by socialist views, democratic socialist ideas, a special
invention of Israel Zionist socialists. So I grew up in a kind of com-
mune, sleeping and eating and learning together with the kids. We
didn’t live with our parents at the time; we just had some quality time
every day with them. We slept in a dormitory with the other kids.

When I was seven we moved for three years to Chile. My father
was sent there by the kibbutzim movement. This again is a very unique
Israeli thing. It’s a little hard to explain, but there were Zionist activists
going out to try to offer Jewish people to immigrate to Israel. This was
done through youth movements, and my father with my mother, my
two brothers and me, went to Chile in that role. We missed the Yom
Kippur War. In “compensation” we got the coup d’état in Chile. So we
had some tough times in 1973 with the overthrow of Salvador Allende.
We came back in late 1973 to the kibbutz for a couple of years. Then
we went again on another mission, this time at the Jewish Agency
raising funds for the state of Israel in the Central American Jewish com-
munities. We were stationed in Panama for four years. I came back to
Jerusalem in 1979 with my twin brother when I was fifteen. For five
months we lived with our grandparents in Jerusalem, and then my par-
ents came. I finished the last two years of high school in Jerusalem.

**Huntington:** By that time were you speaking both modern Hebrew—
and Spanish?

**Hayet:** Yes.

**Huntington:** Could you speak English?

**Hayet:** I was fluent in Spanish with an Israeli accent. I also think
I improved my English in Panama because they taught English in the
Jewish school there.

After two years of school in Jerusalem, like most Israelis I joined
the army in 1981, a couple of months before I was eighteen. I served
for five years—three of those I was an officer in the Air Force, not a
pilot. I left the military after five years. After that, I was very heavily
involved in politics in Jerusalem in the youth division of what was
called Mapam; this was the socialist party of Israel at that time. It was
part of the labor coalition at one time and then left it. I joined the
university and became very involved in political life on the Hebrew
University campus.

**Huntington:** The Hebrew University campus on Mount Scopus?

**Hayet:** Yes. I focused on Latin American studies and interna-
tional relations, but this is not really something that is meaningful in
my career or the things that I did later on. In 1990 I was appointed
spokesperson for Peace Now, the largest peace movement in Israel, and
coordinated its operations against the Israeli settlements in the West
Bank and the Gaza Strip. I was involved for ten years with politics and then left it overnight.

_Huntington:_ _Were you married at the time?_

_Hayet:_ Yes. I was married to Na’ama already and I had a son, Nimrod. In 1992 my daughter Noa was born. Then we had a third child, Hadas, who is now seven years old. They are my three bosses. In December 1993 or January 1994, the Jerusalem Center was looking for a facility manager, and I was looking for a job. At that time my uncle was involved at the MOR Company. I started to work with them dealing with some security equipment. They got to know me, and then they offered me the job here as a facility manager.

_Huntington:_ _For the benefit of our readers, could you tell us about the MOR Company?_

_Hayet:_ The MOR Company is a facility management company, and the name actually comes from “Mormon.” The company was established in 1987, right after the Jerusalem Center was opened. It was established to provide security, maintenance, and custodial services for the Jerusalem Center. At that time the company was headed by Eliezer Rahat (chairman) and Arie Goldenberg. Later, Arie Goldenberg went his way, and Nahum Nuriel is now CEO. The MOR Company is in charge of the overall facility management. The company has developed and now has different projects outside of the center, mainly in Jerusalem. Eliezer Rahat is still involved with the center, however, and has always considered the Jerusalem Center as the jewel in the crown. This is the project that he’s most proud of, and he’s done some very important projects like the Supreme Court in Israel, the Open University, and the Shaarey Tzedek Hospital, but he still considers this as his best accomplishment. By the way, David Resnick, one of the two architects of the Jerusalem Center, also considered this one of his major accomplishments. He is one of the leading architects in Israel.

_Huntington:_ So you started here with the MOR Company as a facility manager and you were here doing that from 1994 until . . .

_Hayet:_ Until 2002. In 2002 we realized that students were not going to come here for a while. Professor Arnie Green was the last director to leave here in 2002, and Jim Kearl appointed me as agent for the Jerusalem Center. This meant responsibility for the operations of the Jerusalem Center, including a power of attorney to deal with finances. So I started as an agent, and then it evolved to be the executive director.

_Huntington:_ During the absence of the students, what was the Jerusalem Center doing?
Hayet: First, we had to be ready for more students, and we didn’t know when students would be coming back. We had a challenge to find the balance between a dramatic cut in our costs and maintaining what is essential to keep the building from deteriorating. It started with a very painful process of reducing our workforce by half. You have to understand that these were all loyal and devoted workers that only circumstances pushed out. We decided at least to do it in a dignified and fair way: Professor Jim Kearl came for a special visit, and together with Arnie Green we met each one of the workers, explained the situation, thanked them, and gave them generous severance pay. Now, what do we do with a closed building? If you want to keep it in good shape, you have to maintain it. All student rooms had to be shut down, and one of our nightmares was that when we will try to reopen them, they will be a mess. So we had to learn how to keep up the center while not spending too much money.

Second, we wanted to maintain the presence of BYU and the Church in the Holy Land. For that we expanded some of our activities and developed others: With some wonderful service couples, assigned to the Jerusalem Center, we developed community services and outreach activities such as helping schools and universities mainly with their English programs and offering help in the hospitals. Of course, we still held concerts in the center. We have one of the best concert programs in the country. It started with classical music, and then we expanded it to jazz and ethnic music. We offered the facility to worthy groups, donating the facility for some activities. Occasionally we had conferences here, meetings of some organizations dealing with charities and with culture. The building was always open for tours.

Huntington: Do the tours still occur?

Hayet: Yes, again, to keep a good presence in the Holy Land. I think we achieved that. Third, we used the time when the building was closed to finish some projects to improve the facility. We added a new student commons area. We added some safety systems to the building, such as fire sprinklers all over the building, which was a very big project. We refurbished the rooms, changing carpets, wallpapers, and so on. We used that time for projects.

Huntington: The purpose of the building is for students, but since they weren’t here you took advantage of the down time.

Hayet: Yes. We believed the students would eventually come back, so we used the time without students for remodeling to have the building ready for their return.
**Huntington:** Then, all of a sudden, students came back, and this certainly must have changed your life.

**Hayet:** Yes, they did change my life. I didn’t realize how much actually. You know, the building had a different pace and rhythm without the students, so we were focusing on different issues. I have to admit it caused some of the assistants here to slow down, and when the students arrived we had to get moving again. Actually we expected them during 2006, but it had to be put off because of the war with Lebanon. We were preparing and getting ready for the students to be back, hoping that no catastrophes happened. We tried to do whatever we could to make sure that the building was ready for the first group of students. Just in case, we asked the first forty-four students to consider themselves as pioneers and a part of the effort to reinstate the BYU Jerusalem Center program after six years of being shut down... and they fully cooperated. They were a great group of young adults—mature and responsible.

**Holzapfel:** What was your number-one concern that you had when you realized students were coming back? Security?

**Hayet:** Obviously security. We have a set of rules here to protect the students. Some say things like, “You’re dealing with adults. How come you have curfew time?” or “You make us go out in groups of three, and you’re chauvinist in a way because you’re asking men to join the women.” When we were planning to reopen the center, we had a visit from Church security. Greg Dunn, head of security for the Church, was appointed to talk with us. We had long discussions about what we called risk management. I very much like his philosophy. He had experience in some dangerous places in the world, and he said, “You’re not dealing really with security—this is risk management. If you keep rules and regulations, in most places in the world when others are not safe your people will be safe.” I relate to that philosophy. I thought that this is what we were doing, but I was very glad to hear it from someone with longtime experience in security.

We have a unique system here because of our philosophy. People look at us and ask, “How come in this conflict area your guards are unarmed?” This is a longtime policy. I think we’ve managed during the years to become a place that is perceived as a neutral place that is friendly with everyone. So in that sense it’s not a target. This was our main goal, not to be a target. So we were never really concerned with the threats over the building, or really about our students as targets, but since we’re in an area of conflict we have to deal with potential problems and regular crime. My main concern is that students will not
be caught in a security incident. At least we can say that we’ve done our utmost to keep them safe, but I can’t guarantee security here or anywhere.

Holzapfel: We can’t guarantee safety anywhere. For example, there was the incident at Trolley Square in Salt Lake City.

Hayet: If an incident like that happened at another campus, no one would say we need to close the university down, but here it might happen because we are far away, we’re in a high-profile area related to ongoing conflict, so if something happens here it’s different. Of course, I’m concerned with security and safety of the students, and this is my main concern. People always have electricity, always have hot water, always have food, and they should. It would be a failure if we don’t provide that, but these are smaller concerns. So, of course, my main concern is the safety of the students. So we are chaperoning them as much as we can. We try to treat them as adults. We tell them what the rules are. We have to have certain confidence in them, if we want to turn them loose in the city. We have to leave them some freedom. They haven’t come here to be closed in the building, but on the other hand we have strict regulations, and we are very serious about them. If a student is breaching those, he might find himself on a plane back home.

Holzapfel: But that, in real sense, makes everybody else safe. If everyone follows the rules, then they’re all better off.

Hayet: Yes, I think they are appreciative. I think that most of them understand, but occasionally, especially after they are here awhile, we tell them, “Look, you came to a dangerous place,” and then they say, “Where is the dangerous place? It’s not here. We feel so safe; we feel so comfortable.” You need to remind them, “You might be comfortable; you have started to know the city; you’ve been here three months already. If you’re too comfortable, you have to understand that things can still happen, and if they happen and they are serious enough it could impact the whole program.” So you need risk management. We need to check ourselves also. It’s not only to ask them to do what they should do and to keep full regulations, but we need to check if the city out there or other places changed and we’re not aware of it. We need to be constantly monitoring to make sure that we know what’s happening.

At the center there is something unique—the combination of me, as an executive director of the center, and Tawfic Alawi, who is Palestinian, as the assistant director, in charge of security. Where else in the country is there a site that the Palestinians are in charge of security? This is what we have here, and the combination of my background in Israeli security, police, and army mentality and Tawfic’s connection with the
Palestinian contacts, language, and cultural mentality gives the center a unique security system that cannot be found in many other places.

**Holzapfel:** BYU always felt it was important to be neutral and not favor either side of the conflict. Now we have both sides looking out for us.

**Hayet:** I think the center’s combination of Israeli and Palestinian directors allows us to look at things more objectively. For example, if Tawfic says it’s not safe to go into Jericho, then it’s not safe to go into Jericho. If an Israeli says it’s not safe to go into Jericho, some might question, “Maybe he doesn’t want people to go to a Palestinian town. Maybe his motives are different.” So I think we can look at situations and judge them in a better way, detached from politics, which is so difficult to do over here.

**Holzapfel:** You’ve done a good job with this. What has it been like to work with the faculty now that you are the executive director?

**Hayet:** Well, of course, this was a concern for me at first. How many people would say, “How come someone that is not a Mormon is the director of the Jerusalem Center? How come he doesn’t have any teaching or academic background?” Actually the “how come” question is also asked from the other side. The other day I applied for a visa to Egypt, and in my meeting with the Egyptian consul he said, “You’re asking for a visa as the director of a Christian/Mormon group, but you’re Jewish. How come?” So this “how come” question comes from all sides. Sometimes I ask it too. I have had only cooperation here every day from all parts. The teachers who come here are very supportive.

I was very pleased when I heard that Paul Peterson would come back because I used to report to him. He was the director here when I was facility manager. We had long discussions and were very good friends. I knew that it would work very well, and then, unfortunately, he couldn’t come. When I heard that Ray Huntington was coming, I didn’t know what to expect. Ray is now finishing his second year here as an associate director and academic coordinator, and I couldn’t be more pleased. I think we’re a great team. I have great support and couldn’t ask for more.

**Holzapfel:** Well, I think one reason Jim Kearl thought of you is that you are well liked. You are kind, nice, quiet, and not intrusive. You handle well the ever-changing administrators, faculty, service couples, and students who come through the Jerusalem Center. I know this can be very difficult, to have the people you work with always changing.

**Hayet:** Thank you. I’m trying to be open and work together with people and learn some of the Mormon culture so that I don’t make mistakes. I try to be kind and respect people, and I’m receiving only
kindness and respect from them. I think in most cases you just have to say it once in a nice way, in a nonoffensive way, and it works. I don’t know if this method would work in other places, but in this specific place and with this culture, it does work. I also think people here at the Jerusalem Center work extremely hard. Last year, Ray Huntington, David Whitchurch, and Byron Merrill worked days and nights to reinstate the program. Later came Vic Ludlow, Richard Draper, Craig Ostler, David Seely, Andy Skinner, Roy Huff, and Keith Wilson—all doing a great job and contributing to a life-changing experience for many of our students. When we reopened the program, we wanted to make sure the basics worked first, and this required a great deal of effort. Later on we’ve added some more activities, and we believe now we are pretty much settled, although we are always open for improvements.

Holzapfel: In Provo we were sad to see the students stop going to Jerusalem. Around the Provo campus, we saw the number of Jerusalem bags decrease until we stopped seeing them. Of course, students could participate in other ways in our classes, but without the program we realized students were no longer getting the same experience. However, I thought one of the benefits of having the Jerusalem program put on hold is that sometimes when we have a program year after year, we don’t have time to stop and think: Is there another way to do this? Is this the best way to do this? Why do we have this rule? Is that rule really necessary? So the question I have is having had that break and starting over, have you been able to ask those kinds of questions like, Why do we do it this way? Is this the right way?

Hayet: Arnie Green left us a kind of a legacy. I think this was the foundation of what we’re doing today, but we realized after implementing it that some things needed to be changed. We told the first group of students who came after the closure, “You will have a great experience. This is guaranteed; don’t worry.” But we were experimenting. Some of the things we tried with them we decided to drop. They were in a way privileged, and also they were a smaller group and had some special attention. We’ve changed some of the rules and the policies. Some of the rules that have to do with disciplinary issues we’re trying to address and be open-minded. We are trying to go with time and be modern, while keeping the expectations of parents and of the institution but also responding to some requests, thoughts, and reactions from the students. We have made some changes in what we call the policy handbook, which policies the faculty and students get in both the orientations in Provo and Jerusalem.
Before every group I read the handbook again and look at things that need to be changed. They are not major changes, but we have had some discussions about dress issues and other issues like dating and pairing off. We need to keep the expectations and go according to the honor code and always be reasonable.

Holzapfel: Well, if you look at parents who went to BYU in 1975 and their kids who go to BYU now, you want the same goals but certainly, because things change, you wouldn’t want the same rules. It would be unbearable because society changes. So you would hope that the Jerusalem Center would adapt as BYU has adapted.

Hayet: Now we need to adapt ourselves to BYU and to what has changed there, but we need to also, of course, look at the environment that we’re living in here in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Center also has its own policies, but we’re trying to dialogue with the students to a certain point.

Holzapfel: That’s good. It’s important not to think we’re creating the exact program of 2000. We have a new program. That’s why I love this idea of the rebirth of the Jerusalem program; it’s a different Jerusalem program. So when you talk to your older sister who was here fifteen years ago, it’s going to be different. We keep the program alive that way.

Hayet: One thing is not different. We are still trying to make every day of class a kind of life-changing experience. We’re keeping the program very intensive. I don’t think we’re giving up the academic demands or requests. We have tried to prepare the students in a better way for that. They need to know that when they come here that they will be involved in a serious academic program. We try to emphasize it again and again because when some of the students come here they think, “Wow, we are in the Holy Land; we’re going to go on many field trips.” In a sense, they get the feeling of a tourist here, and they need to remember this is not the only reason they are here. They are much more than tourists. Students who don’t realize this in the early stages struggle a little later.

Holzapfel: There’s going to be some constancy, but change is healthy. Ray, what do you think is the biggest contribution of this new arrangement with Eran as executive director? What’s the best advantage?

Huntington: Over the years I have had the opportunity of working with five Jerusalem Center directors. They have all been great, and I think that they were each here at a time when their talents were best used. The first director of the center from BYU was Martin Hickman, and he came here to establish a BYU university program. He’d been a dean for twenty years, so he knew what a university program ought to
look like here at the center. Each director has come and added their unique gifts and talents. I’ve always looked at Eran and Tawfic as a bridge between what we’ve had and where we’re going. Eran is Israeli, and he knows his culture, language, and people. Tawfic is Palestinian, and he knows his culture, language, and people. Eran and Tawfic get along great. They’re great, they’re good friends, and they work really well with each other.

Holzapfel: Who works right under Tawfic?

Hayet: He has the whole security department. In addition, he is in charge of computer and communication systems and the logistics of field trips.

Holzapfel: What a great combination to have Palestinian Christians, Palestinian Muslims, and Israelis working together at the Jerusalem Center!

Huntington: I wanted to say a couple more things. Eran and Tawfic are both hands-on. Eran is very hands-on and is very much involved with what is happening, and he is extremely respectful. If I or Tawfic has an area that is our unique responsibility, Eran will always defer to us. I’ve never felt threatened at all with what I do here. I just feel so comfortable. This really is a very comfortable working relationship. Plus, Eran and Tawfic put in long hours.

Holzapfel: They’re hard workers.

Huntington: They will be here at 7 p.m. I tell them, “Time to go home. You need to go home.” They work very hard at what they do here.

Holzapfel: Let me ask you a couple of hard questions. In the past there have been complaints from some professors that when students return from the BYU Jerusalem experience they have shifted their viewpoint to pro-Palestinian or maybe even anti-Israeli. What are we doing to try to keep the program neutral?

Hayet: First, I’m pro-Israeli. This doesn’t mean that I’m against Palestinians. And you don’t have to be anti-Israeli in order to be pro-Palestinian; you can be pro-both actually. I think I’m pro-both, but of course I’m coming from the Israeli side, so this is my environment. Coming from the other side, Tawfic obviously has a more Palestinian perspective. I’m aware of those claims. Actually the criticism that BYU students leave the Jerusalem program anti-Israeli comes from some Israelis too. First I have to tell you, as a pro-Israeli, I feel totally comfortable with our approach, and I think our goal here is not for the students to be pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian. When I first talk to them
on the evening of their arrival, I tell them that they should keep their minds open and shouldn’t take sides.

I know that people here have a tendency because of the intensity of the events to take one side one day and an opposite side the next day. I will tell them, if I have the opportunity for that, what are the most sensitive issues. Students need to understand the sensitivities here, and they need to understand the complexity of the situation, not everything is simple and superficial as it’s seen on CNN or BBC or Fox News; I hope that by the time they leave here they are actually more confused than when they just arrived. This would mean that they understand the complexity of the situation. I think our goal with the students is to expose them to different views from all sides of the issues. This is difficult because even between Israelis there are so many different views; it is not simply Israeli versus Palestinian viewpoints.

So it’s hard to balance, but we try to offer them opportunities to hear different views in this short time that we have without overwhelming or boring them. As a part of the academic program, an Israeli instructor teaches them the Israeli narrative, and a Palestinian instructor the Palestinian one. We also have some extracurricular activities such as lectures by local speakers. One of the influential things is the encounter students occasionally have with people who are victims of the conflict and are suffering. This creates strong emotions for students; in fact, when any of us see someone suffering we feel empathy for that person. I think that this direct exposure to suffering is one of the reasons that students leave changed. Some of our students meet and get to know local people, Palestinians and Israelis; that direct contact will also influence their views and change old perceptions.

By the way, sometimes we hear just the opposite claim, “Why are you too pro-Israel?” Why are the majority of our guests to tours and concerts Israeli?

We are aware of people’s criticism, but I feel comfortable with what we do here, and I really believe that we are sensitive, open and welcoming to everyone. The composition of our management helps us keep those checks and balances.

Holzapfel: Was there resentment from either Palestinians or Israelis when we left and closed the center for students? Did they feel like we no longer supported them?

Hayet: No, I don’t think so. I think it took time to realize that we left and the center was no longer active in its academic program. I think there was some disappointment but also a lot of understanding. We were not the only people who left or the only programs that
were cancelled. No one came here and tried to put pressure on us to be back, but whenever we asked, people told us, “You should be back. You should get your students back here. It’s safe on both sides.” We always felt from both sides that they wanted us back very much. We didn’t ask the extreme and erratically orthodox, but we got a lot of sympathy here, and I think the center and Mormons are respected here and that we have many more friends today than enemies. Maybe there was opposition in the past. This opposition is gone.

**Holzapfel:** Is it because BYU kept its word about not proselytizing, or is it because they saw these students as nice, clean, respectful kids?

**Hayet:** What I say is not a scientific or empirical study, but I have some assumptions. In terms of the radical orthodox, whenever they see that something is, in fact, done—that there is a firm decision—they yield so in a way the opening of the Jerusalem Center some twenty years ago ended most of the active opposition. As for sympathy and respect for the center and for Mormons in general, this has a lot to do with the commitment made by the center, by the Church and its leaders, and by the leaders of the University not to proselytize. I think respecting that decision has brought a lot of sympathy. The ongoing exposure of the community here to the center through concerts, tours, and outreach activities only benefited the Mormons’ image. I think everyone who has been directly exposed to a Mormon has had a good experience here and has a good image of the Mormons as a group, as a society, and as a community, and that’s why we have so many friends in the country.

**Holzapfel:** So are you glad you took this position as executive director?

**Hayet:** I’m very glad. It’s a job, but it’s a great one. I enjoy most of what I do. I never regretted working in my other role, but I really like this one, mainly the interaction with the teachers and the interaction with the students. This is something that is worth waking up for every morning.
God’s modern-day prophets repeatedly have warned us about the perilous and tumultuous times in which we live (see, for example, D&C 1). Those perils and tumults certainly include both so-called “natural” disasters of various sorts and those caused by human error or wickedness. But a new factor—global climate change—recently has emerged as a significant issue. Scientists tell us that our earth is getting warmer, for reasons which are perhaps still not fully explained. As part of that trend, more severe weather phenomena can be expected and, some believe, are in fact already occurring. Severe widespread droughts, floods, wildfires, excessively high ambient temperatures, high levels of devastating tornadic activities, an anticipated busy hurricane season in 2008, and other climate extremes plague us here in America. A recent devastating earthquake in China and a horrendous hurricane in Myanmar remind us that other nations and peoples are also suffering on a grand scale.

The pain, sorrow, and profound sense of loss experienced by so many worldwide serve as somber reminders of the ineluctable fact that mortality is intrinsically unpredictable, with periods of relative tranquility punctuated by spikes of violent disorder. We cannot ensure or even assume our temporal safety but must look elsewhere for the inner peace—that “lovely child of heaven”1—sought by all who love the Lord and desire to dwell with Him.
At least some of the pains we suffer and trials we experience come as an inevitable consequence of life itself. We live in a world governed by natural laws, not all of which operate for our short-term benefit. Thus, we have no immunity against a host of diseases and cannot escape the accidents and misfortunes that are inherent in our own biology or are related to the physical world in which we live. If wildfires devastate our neighborhood and our home is set ablaze, we may lose not only property but also life itself. If we live in the low-lying lands of the Ganges Delta, and a devastating hurricane and storm surge overwhelm our dwelling place, personal and community-wide disaster may occur. As we grow older, all of us suffer the natural results of aging. We may delay death from disease or accidents, but ultimately we cannot avoid it. It is all part of the natural order of things and one of the conditions we agreed to when we came to earth.

Some may query why God permits disasters to occur. Why doesn’t He, out of the abundance of His omniscient power, simply stop them and permit us all, in whatever land we live in, to wear out our lives in tranquility, peace, and security? Why is there so much suffering, so many tears, so much sorrow?

I do not believe that any of us knows the precise, detailed answers to those and many other important questions relating to human suffering, but we do know the grand outlines of the purposes of life. The Father’s great plan of happiness, known also by other terms including the plan of salvation (see Alma 42:5), teaches us that mankind chose to enter mortality and that we came to earth with full understanding that to do so would inevitably require us to undergo adversity. President Spencer W. Kimball wrote:

> We knew before we were born that we were coming to the earth for bodies and experience and that we would have joys and sorrows, ease and pain, comforts and hardships, health and sickness, successes and disappointments. We knew also that after a period of life we would die. We accepted all these eventualities with a glad heart, eager to accept both the favorable and the unfavorable. We eagerly accepted the chance to come earthward even though it might be only for a day or a year. Perhaps we were not so much concerned whether we would die of disease, of accident, or of senility. We were willing to take life as it came and as we might organize and control it, and this without murmur, complaint, or unreasonable demands.²

It hardly needs repeating that the adversity found in mortal life is closely related to moral agency. Anything which removed adversity from our lives, with its concomitant suffering, disappointment, and tears,
would inevitably render null and void the Father’s great plan of happiness for His children. Moral agency, a vital component thereof, would no longer exist.

Much of the perceived meaning of adversity depends on our perspective. Some, faced with the grim realities of unpredictable turmoil and violent loss, overwhelmed by pain and tears, grow bitter and give up in despair. In their bitterness, they may rail at God and the seeming injustice of life. Others use the experience, troubling as it is, to learn there must needs be “an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). They realize that our adversity and afflictions “shall be but a small moment” in our eternal journey (D&C 121:7). They come to understand, as did the Prophet Joseph Smith, that “all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). And they comprehend that no mortal suffering, no matter how painful, even begins to equate with that of the Savior, who came to earth “to suffer, bleed, and die” for man. He who “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4) endured “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer” (Mosiah 3:7). True disciples are able to see personal trials in a broader perspective, in their true light—as opportunities to grow spiritually and, in the long term at least, as blessings which refine and purify receptive souls.

Trials and tribulations thus are essential for our spiritual growth. Joseph Smith, who certainly endured more than his share of life’s problems, understood that principle. Said he, speaking to the Twelve on one occasion: “You will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God, and God will feel after you, and He will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God.”
“That’s all very well,” you may say, “but the Twelve are stronger and more spiritually strengthened and mature than I am. Surely what applies to them isn’t meant for me.” I don’t agree—all who are or may be called Saints are held to the same standard of conduct. Each of us individually, regardless of our position in the Church or the world, is expected to show our worthiness by our behavior. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me,” Jesus said (John 14:21).

True disciples realize that Elder Orson F. Whitney spoke an eloquent truth when he said: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire.” (Incidentally, Elder Quentin L. Cook, then the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve, drew upon the essence of Elder Whitney’s remarks in commiserating with members of the Poway California Stake on October 27, 2007.)

Secure in their knowledge that God’s love for them never varies (and indeed cannot vary—His very nature forbids it), the hearts of
those who see adversity as a teacher, and not a snare which entangles them, resonate with the Apostle Paul’s glorious declaration: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39). With that understanding, they soldier on, enduring with faith and patience “all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [them]” (Mosiah 3:19). They stand steady as an example to others, recognizing that shared burdens somehow are made lighter and that courage is infectious.

During October 2007 a series of sixteen devastating wildfires swept through Southern California, from north of Los Angeles to southern San Diego County. More than 1,900 homes were destroyed, and many others damaged, as the fires raged over scores of thousands of acres. At least seven deaths resulted. Property damage was in the billions of dollars, and half a million people were evacuated from their homes, some for several weeks.

There are, I believe, important lessons to be learned from the California fires and from other disasters at home and abroad. They are lessons which apply to all of us, both those directly affected, and others like myself who witnessed, wept, and worried from afar. Unless these lessons are learned and applied wisely, the sheer horror of the pain and sorrow felt by so many may blight and destroy lives. But that need not be if we but learn to “trust in the Lord with all [our] heart; and lean not unto [our] own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). I believe these lessons supplement but do not replace those mentioned previously in relation to the Trolley Square shootings in Salt Lake City earlier in 2007.

In focusing on the California fires, I do not wish in any way to suggest that the suffering and loss felt there was greater than—or perhaps even equal to—those suffered by people elsewhere around the nation and globe. I focus on the fires in California only to illustrate generic lessons to be learned by all of God’s children when faced with the inevitable tears and sorrow which come, in one way or another, to all of humankind.

**Disasters Can Enhance the Sense of Community**

Survivors of tragedies typically suffer from a profound sense of loss, which may last for a long time. The fundamental assumptions on which survivors’ perceptions of reality are based are overturned, or at least severely shaken, and they experience a major disturbance in their sense of inner peace and tranquility. In physiological terms, their inner
homeostasis is disrupted, and they must seek a new equilibrium. In the process of attaining this, they may need to discard some perceptions of what matters in their lives, adjust others, and accept some that are new to them.

That new equilibrium, with its necessary adjustment of values and mores, is made easier to attain as sufferers enhance their sense of fellowship with others. In the fellowship of suffering many find a sense of community never before experienced. The British discovered that fundamental truth during the Blitz of World War II. Of these perilous times, as Britain reeled under German air attacks by night, Winston Churchill wrote: “These were the times when the English, and particularly the Londoners, who had the place of honour, were seen at their best. Grim and gay, dogged and serviceable, with the confidence of an unconquered people in their bones, they adapted themselves to this strange new life, with all its terrors, with all its jolts and jars.”

Churchill recalls a particularly difficult night, with heavy bombing in central London, when one Londoner he greeted noted, with grim gaiety, “It’s a grand life, if we don’t weaken.” In that sense of “we’re all in this together” there is great strength, both for the individual and for the community as a whole.

As we discover that we’re all in this together, we are led to a great truth: all men and women everywhere are our brothers and sisters. As we join in the fellowship of suffering, we find that we are tied inextricably to everyone else, and they to us, by the bonds of kinship. When they bleed, we hurt; when they weep, we mourn. Their pains and sorrows become ours. And we come to realize that only to the extent we are willing to “bear one another’s burdens . . . and . . . mourn with those that mourn . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9) can we ever become a Zion people, reconciled to God. To Cain’s cynical and dismissive question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) we reply, “No, but I am his brother, and thus I share in his sorrows and must do all I can to alleviate them and bind up his wounds.”

The enhanced sense of community in the face of suffering was experienced by many Latter-day Saints in Southern California, often through selfless service to others. Many were overwhelmed by the kindness of their fellow Church members, friends, and neighbors. Religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences were forgotten as all joined to provide service for each other. It was a time when many undoubtedly remembered with renewed understanding Paul’s words
to the Athenians: “[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

One Church member in California who delivered “sifter boxes” to destroyed homes ran into owners who initially were wary of him being around their properties. As always occurs in every disaster, there were some miscreants in California who took advantage of others’ misfortune to enrich themselves. But when the property owners found the Church member was only there to help, their attitudes softened and our member was able to have comforting conversations with them. One shared the sorrow his family felt over having their dog die in the fire which destroyed their home. Often what people needed most was a loving word of encouragement, a hand of fellowship, a sincere assurance that others cared about them and stood ready to help.

**Societies in Developed Countries Are Increasingly Vulnerable to Disasters**

At first glance, this statement may seem not to apply to the United States of America, the most powerful country in world history. But the truth is that as our society and those in other developed countries have grown more sophisticated and specialized, our vulnerability to disasters actually has increased. We now have little surge capacity in our health care, food distribution, and communications systems. Our energy sources (principally natural gas, coal, oil, and electricity) may come from hundreds, even thousands of miles away and are not under individual, community, or even state control. In the simpler days of our grandfathers, most of our food and energy sources were produced locally, and people were, in general, much more self-reliant than at present. Our society is characterized by interdependence between components: if one fails, there may be a cascade of interrelated failures.

The interactions between the various components of our increasingly complex societies can have unforeseen effects. Many experts believe, for example, that the California firestorm did not result simply from someone carelessly playing with matches, although at least two of the sixteen fires apparently were caused by arson. But the confluence of Santa Ana winds blowing at high velocity from inland deserts over a drought-stricken land, an overabundance of debris on the forest floor, and the intrinsic problems of protecting suburbs that push deeper into flammable wild lands each year, helps explain the cause of most of the California fires.
Prudent Planning Precedes Proper Performance

If there is one lesson to be learned from the California fires of 2007, it is the need to plan ahead. Admittedly, the perfect storm will defeat the perfect plan every time. We must therefore be flexible and prepared to improvise and adjust as necessary. To do so requires intellectual and judgmental flexibility more than unlimited resources. Furthermore, as every good military person knows, the best plan requires adjustment as soon as the first shot is fired.

That said, however, there simply is no substitute for prudent planning and the practice that goes with it if we are to respond properly to whatever crisis may come our way. A word of caution: though no planning exercise can be considered foolproof, it is both wise and prudent to plan for the worst case, not the best. It is essential to know at the individual and family levels what to take with you if you have to leave your home at short notice. Highest priority must go to getting the people involved safely away, with special attention to vulnerable groups, including the old, the poor, children, and the infirm. But proper consideration must also be given to pets and other domestic animals, cash, valuable documents, vital genealogical information, and so forth.

There simply is no one-size-fits-all plan: each person, family, community, and business organization must prepare differently, taking into account the likely nature of what may have to be faced. One Church member in California emphasized the need for prudent planning. Said she, “We learned something from this—be organized. Know where everything is. Have a checklist.” She and her family were shocked to see flames approaching and had trouble thinking about what they wanted to save in their limited time with limited space.

It goes without saying that individuals and families must not only plan but also practice carrying out the plan they produce. Every time a plan is practiced, flaws, errors, and shortcomings are exposed and illuminated, and changes for the better can be made.

The first seventy-two hours after an emergency are likely to be the most critical. Planning, preparation, and practice will pay big dividends during this vital period. The most effective preparations for and response to disasters of any sort are found in the principles of self-reliance at personal and family levels.

When Michael Leavitt, the federal secretary of Health and Human Services, came to Utah in April 2006 to discuss preparations for a possible influenza pandemic, his central message was that we should not
depend totally on governments to bail us out of trouble. They will want to help, of course, but in the short-run at least, local resources will determine the outcome. Granted, Mr. Leavitt was not talking about catastrophic fires, but his basic message, which calls for self-reliance, rather than total dependence on government, seems applicable in a generic sense.

Latter-day Saints have been advised by the living prophets for more than seventy years to store food, water, clothing, and other essentials for a day of need. Sadly, I think that too few of us have listened and acted as we know we should. I recognize that the California wildfires were capricious, sparing one house while destroying others around it. But the wisdom of listening to and acting on the advice of the prophets cannot be questioned. We have, after all, the sure and certain promise that the Lord is bound if we do what He says, but if we do not do what He tells us to do, we have no promise (see D&C 82:10).

“If Ye Are Prepared Ye Shall Not Fear”

Doctrine and Covenants 38:30 sums it all up. We are to prepare, as best we can, for whatever eventualities lie in the future, be they good or bad. Then, and only then, after we have done our best, are we promised freedom from fear. I testify that faith will trump fear every time, as hopelessness and despair give way to gratitude for blessings received and promised, and growing confidence in God’s love for us. Now, of course, the Lord sends the rain on the just and on the unjust (see Matthew 5:45), so we have no promise of a life free of adversity. Far from it: the scriptures remind us that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). But what is really important to remember in any discussion of adversity has already been pointed out. Adversity’s presence in our lives is essential if we are to grow spiritually. If life is the anvil, adversity is the hammer that shapes and molds us into something better, more suitable for the Lord’s purposes, than we otherwise would be.

Preparation involves both temporal and spiritual elements. When Jesus said “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), He meant what He said. To do so will, of course, take the eternities to accomplish. It is not a task to be completed in mortality. The Prophet Joseph Smith, who understood that principle, summarized it as follows: “When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step-by-step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of
exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world.”

In summary, the terrible wildfires which swept as a torrent of flame over much of Southern California in October 2007 resulted in widespread destruction and untold suffering and sorrow. But their effects and those of other disasters, both natural and man-made, can also provide valuable lessons for the future as we adopt an eternal perspective on life and accept the vital role of adversity in helping us to grow spiritually. Essential parts of the necessary healing process include enhancement of our sense of community, a recognition that our sophisticated and complex society is increasingly vulnerable to disasters, and the need for prudent planning to mitigate (though it can never totally eliminate) the effects of disaster on our lives. Above all else, we must recognize that faith trumps fear: “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, in an appeal for peace and goodwill addressed to the people of Missouri, Nauvoo, March 8, 1844, as quoted in Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 468.


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The BYU Easter Conference

The 2009 Easter Conference will be held Saturday, April 11, 2009, in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium. Bonnie D. Parkin will be the keynote speaker. *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration* will be available soon. It will contain the proceedings from the 2008–9 presentations.

Visit [http://easterconference.byu.edu](http://easterconference.byu.edu) for more information.

Church History Symposium

The 2009 Church History Symposium will focus on preserving Church history. It will be held February 27 at the BYU Conference Center. Elder Marlin K. Jensen will be the keynote speaker.

Visit [http://rsc.byu.edu/comingSoonHistory.php](http://rsc.byu.edu/comingSoonHistory.php) for more information.

The Eleventh Annual BYU Religious Education Student Symposium

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Staff Spotlight

Editorial Board Member

Kathryn Callister’s first and foremost love is her six children and eighteen grandchildren. She has a bachelor’s degree in English from BYU; she loves to read everything, but particularly she loves to read and discuss the scriptures. She has just finished serving with her husband, who presided over the Canada Toronto East Mission and will now serve with him in New Zealand, where he will be a member of the Pacific Area Presidency. Among other assignments in each of the women’s organizations, she has taught institute and early-morning seminary.

Production Manager

Brent Nordgren grew up in Provo, Utah. He served a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Edinburgh, Scotland. Brent received his AS from Utah Valley University and his BS from Brigham Young University, and he is currently pursuing an MBA from Utah State University. He has an entrepreneurial spirit and has owned and operated a number of businesses throughout his career. He is the production manager for the Religious Studies Center. As such, he oversees strategic designing and marketing of the numerous RSC publications. He is also involved in generating awareness for the RSC. Brent enjoys reading, participating in several sports, and traveling. He and his wife, Annette, live in Provo, Utah, and have four children and four grandchildren.

Student Editorial Intern

Erin Tanner Mecklenburg inputs the editing changes at the Religious Studies Center. She ensures all articles are formatted consistently and does a cursory editing job before printing them for the student editors. As each article is edited, the editors bring it back to her, and she makes the changes and prints a new one so the process can continue. Erin has worked at the RSC since her first semester at BYU in 2004 and plans to stay until she graduates in April 2009. In January 2008 she married Chris Mecklenburg, whose studies in biology and chemistry are a fun opposite to her art history major. She loves art, traveling, her family, being from Provo, weddings, religion classes, the outdoors, and of course all her friends from the RSC.
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Those manuscripts that meet all criteria and appear to fill current needs will be peer reviewed and will receive a friendly, but careful, review. Authors will then be notified of the decision about publication. This process generally takes four to six months, and publication will generally occur within a year after acceptance has been received.

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

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