Always Remember Him
ELDER D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON
On the cover:
The Cat Cat Waterfall in Sapa Town, Vietnam, leaves a memorable impression.

COVER PHOTO BY KS CHEW, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.
“Both Are Edified and Rejoice Together”

I am completing my sixteenth academic year at BYU this semester. A flood of memories has crossed my mind. I have taught many different classes, including world civilization, Utah history, Church history, Doctrine and Covenants, Old and New Testaments, Book of Mormon, and American government and society (an honors course covering the time from the founding of the United States through the Civil War). Some semesters have been in Jerusalem (with field trips to Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey), Rome, and Athens.

I wish they had all been perfect classes. They have not been, and much of the responsibility is mine. I think that taking personal responsibility without trying to shift blame may be the hardest thing for us to do. It seems there is always someone else to blame; however, if we are going to make real progress, the blame game needs to end, and we need to take responsibility for our students and for our classrooms.

To improve my teaching, I invited two students from BYU’s Students Consulting on Teaching (SCOT) program to help me this semester. This program provides a variety of options to help teachers on campus. During one class period they sat in on the class, taking notes. In another class they asked me to leave and interviewed the class, also providing students an opportunity to provide written individual responses to the questions asked. In another class they simply watched the students and me. Finally, they came into class and filmed the class. For each session the SCOT’s students provided me a well-organized summary, highlighting the positive and providing student perspectives to two questions: “What hinders your learning in class?” and “What suggestions do you have for improving this class?”

Obviously, not all teachers have access to such a well-run program. However, every teacher can get some feedback from students, parents, and priesthood leaders. Nothing prevents us from inviting someone to our class to observe. Of course, inviting feedback is scary. We might hear something about our teaching that will make us feel uncomfortable. In the end we should recall the Lord’s command to teachers, “Wherefore, he that teacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22). If the Lord invites both the teacher and the student to be edified so they “rejoice together,” then taking a personal assessment of where we are in our teaching may be a blessing even though it may cause some discomfort. We are all teachers even if not in an official classroom setting. Teaching is what we do—by word and deed.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
Editor
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“Always Remember Him”

ELDER D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON

Elder D. Todd Christofferson is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Address given at BYU–Idaho on January 27, 2009.

The sacramental prayers confirm that one of the central purposes of that ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ is that we might “always remember him” (D&C 20:77, 79). Remembering the Savior obviously includes remembering His Atonement, which is symbolically represented by the bread and water, emblems of His suffering and death. We must never forget what He did for us, for without His Atonement and Resurrection life would have no meaning, whereas, given the reality of both the Atonement and the Resurrection, our lives have eternal, divine possibilities.

I would like today to elaborate with you what it means to “always remember him.” I will mention three aspects of remembering Him: first, seeking to know and follow His will; second, recognizing and accepting our obligation to answer to Christ for every thought, word, and action; and third, living with faith and confidence in the realization that we can always look to the Savior for the help we need.
Seek to Know and Follow the Will of Christ
Just as He Sought the Will of the Father

First, remembering the Lord certainly means doing His will. The sacramental blessing on the bread commits us to be willing to take upon us the name of the Son “and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given [us]” (D&C 20:77). It would also be appropriate to read this covenant as “always remember him to keep his commandments.” This is how He always remembered the Father. As He said, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30).

Jesus achieved perfect unity with the Father by submitting Himself, both body and spirit, to the will of the Father. Referring to His Father, Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). Because it was the Father’s will, Jesus submitted even to death, “the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7). His focus on the Father is one of the principal reasons Jesus’ ministry had such clarity and power. There was no distracting double-mindedness in Him.

In the same way, you can put Christ at the center of your life and become one with Him as He is one with the Father (see John 17:20–23). You could begin by stripping everything out of your life and then putting it back together in priority order with the Savior at the center. You would first put in place the things that make it possible always to remember Him—frequent prayer, studying and pondering the scriptures, thoughtful study of apostolic teachings, weekly preparation to partake of the sacrament worthily, Sunday worship, recording and remembering what the Spirit and experience teach you about discipleship. There may be other things that will come to your mind particularly suited to you at this point in your life. Once adequate time and means for centering your life in Christ have been put in place, you can begin to add other responsibilities and things you value insofar as time and resources will permit, such as education and family responsibilities. In this way the essential will not be crowded out by the merely good, and things of lesser value will take a lower priority or fall away altogether.

I recognize that aligning our will to that of Jesus Christ as He aligned His will to the Father’s is something not easily achieved. President Brigham Young spoke understandingly of our challenge when he said:

After all that has been said and done, after he has led this people so long, do you not perceive that there is a lack of confidence in our God? Can you perceive it in
yourselves? You may ask, ‘[Brother] Brigham, do you perceive it in yourself?’ I do, I can see that I yet lack confidence, to some extent, in him whom I trust.—Why? Because I have not the power, in consequence of that which the fall has brought upon me. . . .

Something rises up within me, at times[,] that . . . draws a dividing line between my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven; something that makes my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven not precisely one. . . .

We should feel and understand, as far as possible, as far as fallen nature will let us, as far as we can get faith and knowledge to understand ourselves, that the interest of that God whom we serve is our interest, and that we have no other, neither in time nor in eternity.1

Though it may not be easy, you can consistently press forward with faith in the Lord. I can attest that over time one’s desire and capacity to always remember and follow the Savior will grow. You should patiently work toward that end and pray always for the discernment and divine help you need. Nephi counseled, “But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:9).

I witnessed a simple example of this kind of prayer a few weeks ago when Elder Dallin H. Oaks and I were assigned to conduct a videoconference interview of a couple in another country. Because we are conducting more and more business via videoconferences, we have a studio for that purpose set up on the fifth floor of the Church Administration Building, where our offices are located. Shortly before going up to the studio, I reviewed once again the information we had collected about the couple and felt I was prepared for the interview. As I came to the small elevator lobby on the fifth floor a few minutes before the appointed time, I saw Elder Oaks sitting alone there with head bowed. In a moment he raised his head and explained, “I was just finishing my prayer in preparation for this interview. We will need the gift of discernment.” He had not neglected the most important preparation, a prayer to “consecrate our performance” for our good and the Lord’s glory.

We Answer to Christ for Every Thought, Word, and Action

A second aspect of always remembering the Redeemer is to live conscious of the responsibility we have to answer to Him for our lives. The scriptures make it clear that there will be a great day of judgment when the Lord shall stand to judge the nations (see 3 Nephi 27:16) and when every knee shall bow and
every tongue confess that He is the Christ (see Romans 14:11; Mosiah 27:31; D&C 76:110). The individual nature and extent of that judgment are best described by Amulek and Alma in the Book of Mormon:

And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance. (Alma 12:12–15)

When the Savior defined His gospel, this judgment was central to it. He said:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:13–15)

Being “lifted up upon the cross” is, of course, a symbolic or shorthand way of referring to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, by which He satisfied the demands that justice may have upon each of us. In other words, all that justice could demand of us for our sins, He has paid by His suffering and death in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. He therefore stands in the place of justice. He is now the personification of justice. Just as God is love, God is also justice. Our debts and obligations now run to Jesus Christ. He, therefore, has the right to judge us.
That judgment, He states, is based on our works. The especially “good news” of His gospel is that He offers the gift of forgiveness conditioned on our repentance. Therefore, if our works include the works of repentance, He forgives our sins and errors. If we reject the gift of pardon, refusing to repent, then the penalties of justice which He now represents are imposed. Remember He said, “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:16–17).

Always remembering Him, therefore, means that we always remember that nothing is hidden from Him. There is no part of our lives, whether act, word, or even thought, that can be kept from the knowledge of the Father and the Son. No cheating on a test, no instance of shoplifting, no lustful fantasy or indulgence, no lie is missed, overlooked, hidden, or forgotten. Whatever one “gets away with” in life or manages to hide from other people must still be faced when the inevitable day comes that he or she is lifted up before Jesus Christ, the God of pure and perfect justice.

Speaking personally, this reality has helped impel me at different times either to repent or to avoid sin altogether. On one occasion in connection with the sale of a home, there was an error in the documentation, and I found myself in a position where I was legally entitled to get more money from the buyer. My real estate agent asked if I wanted to keep the money, a significant amount, since it was my right to do so. I thought about facing the Lord, the personification of justice, and trying to explain that I had a legal right to take advantage of the buyer and his mistake. I couldn’t see myself being very convincing, especially since I would probably be asking for mercy for myself at the same time. And I knew I could not live with myself if I were so dishonorable as to keep the money. I replied to the agent that we would stick with the bargain as we all understood it originally. It is worth a great deal more to me than any sum of money to know that I have nothing to answer for in that transaction when I appear before the Great Judge.

Let me give you another example. In my youth I once was negligent in a way that later caused an injury to one of my brothers. It was not major, but it required some stitches in his hand. I was embarrassed about it and did not own up to my stupidity at the time, and no one ever knew about my role in the matter. Many years later, I was praying that God would reveal to me anything in my life that needed correction so that I might be found more acceptable before Him, and this incident came to my mind. Frankly, I had forgotten all
about it. The Spirit whispered to me that this was an unresolved transgression that I needed to confess. I called my brother and apologized and asked for his forgiveness, which he promptly and generously gave. On reflection I realized that my embarrassment and regret would have been less if I had apologized when the accident happened. Of course, it would have been even better if I had followed the prompting of the Spirit at the time and avoided the injury to my brother altogether.

It was significant to me that the Lord had not forgotten about that event of the distant past even though I had. It was a comparatively small thing, but it still needed to be handled, or I would be answering for it at the judgment bar when the opportunity for repentance had passed. I realized once again that things do not get “swept under the rug” in the eternal economy of things. Sins do not take care of themselves or simply fade away with time. They must be dealt with, and the wonderful thing is that because of His atoning grace they can be dealt with in a much happier and less painful manner than directly satisfying offended justice ourselves.

We should also take heart when thinking of a judgment in which nothing is overlooked, because this also means that no act of obedience, no kindness, no good deed however small is ever forgotten, and no corresponding blessing is ever withheld.

**We Need Not Fear Since We Can Look to the Savior for Help We Need**

My third and final observation regarding what it means always to remember Him is that we can always look to the Savior for help. In the infant days of the Church, really before the actual reestablishment of the Church as an institution, Jesus counseled and comforted the two young men who were working to translate the Book of Mormon and who would soon have the priesthood conferred upon them, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Joseph was twenty-three years old at the time, and Oliver twenty-two. Persecution and other obstacles were frequent if not constant. In these conditions, in April 1829, the Lord spoke these words to them:

> Fear not to do good, my sons, . . . let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.
>
> Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you.
>
> Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.
Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in
my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the

Looking unto the Savior “in every thought” is, of course, another way
of saying “always remember him.” As we do, we need not doubt or fear. He
reminded Joseph and Oliver, as He reminds us, that through His Atonement
He has been given all power in heaven and earth (see Matthew 28:18) and
has both the capacity and the will to protect us and minister to our needs—
“Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails
in my hands and feet.” We need only be faithful and we can rely implicitly on
Him and His grace.

Isaiah states it this way, “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness,
the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither
be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment,
and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever,
and my salvation from generation to generation” (Isaiah 51:7–8; see also
verses 12–16).

Preceding the comforting revelation to Joseph and Oliver that I have
cited, the Prophet endured a poignant, painful experience, familiar to all of
us, that taught him to look to the Savior and not fear the opinions, pressures,
and threats of men. I quote from the account in our priesthood and Relief
Society manual, Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith:

On June 14, 1828, Martin Harris left Harmony, Pennsylvania, taking the first 116
manuscript pages translated from the gold plates to show to some of his family
members in Palmyra, New York. The very next day, Joseph and Emma’s first child
was born, a son they named Alvin. The baby died that same day, and Emma’s health
declined until she was near death herself. The Prophet’s mother later wrote: “For
some time, [Emma] seemed to tremble upon the verge of the silent home of her
infant. So uncertain seemed her fate for a season that in the space of two weeks her
husband never slept one hour in undisturbed quiet. At the end of this time, his anxi-
ety became so great about the manuscript that he determined, as his wife was now
some better, that as soon as she had gained a little more strength he would make a
trip to New York and see after the same.”

In July, at Emma’s suggestion, the Prophet left Emma in her mother’s care and
traveled by stagecoach to his parents’ home in Manchester Township, New York.
The Prophet’s trip covered about 125 miles and took two or three days to complete.
Distraught about the loss of his firstborn son, worried about his wife, and gravely
concerned about the manuscript, Joseph neither ate nor slept during the entire trip.
A fellow traveler, the only other passenger on the stagecoach, observed the Prophet’s
weakened state and insisted on accompanying him for the 20-mile walk from the
stagecoach station to the Smith home. For the last four miles of the walk, recalled
the Prophet's mother, "the stranger was under the necessity of leading Joseph by his arm, for nature was too much exhausted to support him any longer and he would fall asleep as he stood upon his feet." Immediately upon reaching his parents' home, the Prophet sent for Martin Harris.

Martin arrived at the Smith home in the early afternoon, downcast and forlorn. He did not have the manuscript, he said, and did not know where it was. Hearing this, Joseph exclaimed, "Oh! My God, my God. . . . All is lost, is lost. What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I that tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask. . . . How shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?"

As the day wore on, the Prophet paced back and forth in his parents' home in great distress, "weeping and grieving." The next day he left to return to Harmony, where, he said, "I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord . . . that if possible I might obtain mercy at his hands and be forgiven of all that I had done which was contrary to his will."

The Lord severely chastised the Prophet for fearing man more than God, but assured him he could be forgiven. "Thou art Joseph," the Lord said, "and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work" (D&C 3:9–10).

For a time, the Lord took the Urim and Thummim and the plates from Joseph. But these things were soon restored to him. "The angel was rejoiced when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim," the Prophet recalled, "and said that God was pleased with my faithfulness and humility, and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer, in the which I had performed my duty so well as to . . . be able to enter upon the work of translation again." As Joseph moved forward in the great work before him, he was now fortified by the sweet feelings of receiving the Lord's forgiveness and a renewed determination to do His will.2

As you know, the Prophet's determination to rely upon God and not fear what men could do became fixed after this experience. His life thereafter was a shining example of what it means to remember Christ by relying upon His power and mercy. Joseph expressed this understanding during his very difficult and trying incarceration at Liberty, Missouri, in these words: "You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves. Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:16–17).

In short, to "always remember him" means that we do not live our lives in fear. We know that challenges, disappointments, and sorrows will come to each of us in different ways, but we also know that in the end, because of our divine Advocate, all things can be made to work together for our good
(see D&C 90:24 and 98:3). It is the faith expressed so simply by President Gordon B. Hinckley when he would say, “Things will work out.” Because we always remember the Savior, we can “cheerfully do all things that lie in our power,” confident that His power and love for us will see us through.

Now I bless you that you will be able to always remember our incomparable and divine Redeemer—that you will feel the need and be able to discern and follow His will in all aspects of your life, so that increasingly you will be one with Him as He is one with the Father; that you will always retain an awareness of your accountability to the Lord to sustain you in your fight against temptation or, where needed, in your repentance of any sin or misdeed; and finally, that you will always have with you the quiet assurance of His love and grace that will enable you to withstand the assaults of the adversary and his supporters and to feel the comfort and reality of your Lord’s protecting care. I bless you that the promise to those who always remember Him—“that they may always have his spirit to be with them” (D&C 20:77)—will be fully realized in your life. I bear my witness of the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I bear witness of the reality of the living, resurrected Lord. I bear witness of the infinite and personal love of the Father and the Son for each of you and pray that you will live in constant remembrance of that love in all its expressions. 

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Notes

1. Deseret News, September 10, 1856, 212.

2. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 69–71.
The life of the Prophet Joseph Smith was one of dedication and service to the Lord. In preparation for his discipleship, Joseph received divine instruction from God which centered on living the first principles of the gospel.
Joseph Smith and the First Principles of the Gospel

RICHARD E. BENNETT

Richard E. Bennett (richard_bennett@byu.edu) is a professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU. Recently published in Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010).

So much of a biographical nature has been written lately on the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith that one may well wonder if there is anything new or important left to say about him. Dan Vogel and Richard Bushman, in their dramatically counterpoint interpretations of the Prophet—the former contending he was a “pious fraud” and the latter asserting he was a legitimate American prophet—have forced us to reconsider the earlier arguments and interpretations of Donna and Marvin Hill, Fawn Brodie, John Henry Evans, and George Q. Cannon. Yet the contrasting contributions of these latest two scholars, and the fervent, sometimes deeply emotional responses to them, have reinforced in my mind the conviction that the study of Joseph Smith’s life and religious contributions is a fruitful field, a field white already to harvest which continually beckons new generations to careful study and reflection. Too many devotional defenders in the past have denied the value of historical documentation, while too many critics have derided the place of scriptural authority. Both are necessary for the believing Latter-day Saint.

I wish to explore Joseph Smith’s life, specifically the years 1820–29, from a somewhat different perspective than some of my colleagues by suggesting
a different paradigm of thought, one deeply rooted in my conviction that
Joseph Smith was a man called of God. My thesis may be summarized as
follows: if Joseph Smith was called to be a prophet, then God assumed the
responsibility of teaching and training him in that role. Put another way, the
message of the gospel would have to be lived by the messenger of the gospel.
The integrity of the Restoration would require nothing less.

Our particular purpose is to explore from the pages of both Church his-
tory and holy writ how Joseph Smith was carefully and thoroughly taught
the first principles of the gospel, specifically repentance, during that forma-
tive, foundational decade of the 1820s. I propose to show that during this
ten-year journey of preparation from Palmyra to Fayette, Joseph Smith was
taught repentance and forgiveness in a profoundly personal and convincing
fashion that molded his character. Elsewhere, and in book-length form, I am
addressing how he was similarly instructed in those other principles of faith
in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism for the remission of the sins, and the gift of
the Holy Ghost, but in this article we have barely enough room to cover the
second principle of the gospel. I do so not to impugn the character of the
Prophet Joseph but to improve upon our understanding of his life, of Church
history, and of the Restoration.

Specifically we will approach the topic of divine instruction over three
different periods of time: (1) from 1820, following the First Vision, until the
time Joseph Smith received the plates in September 1827 or what we might
call early preparation; (2) from September 22, 1827, until early April 1829, or
the Martin Harris school of hard knocks; (3) and finally, the period of trans-
lation from April 5 until July 1, 1829, during which time Joseph Smith and
Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon.

“That His Sins Were Forgiven”: A Period of Preparation

If faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was the operative first principle of the First
Vision, the kind of mighty faith Joseph Smith exerted to deliver him from
a force that was set upon his destruction, then what was it that opened the
heavens the second time? The Prophet provides us with an answer in his
own account: “When, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first
of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself
to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins
and follies” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29). If the message of the gospel was
to be lived by the one entrusted and foreordained to bring it forth, it only
stands to reason that he would be inspired to seek help to overcome his weaknesses and have purged out of him the imperfections in his own life.

“During the space of time” between his First Vision in the spring of 1820 and September 1823, three and a half years of youthful adolescence, Joseph confesses that he mingled “with all kinds of society” and “frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weaknesses of youth” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). He does not go into detail as to what all those problems were, but most readers will readily identify with him. It is not only our sins that condemn us but likewise our foolishness, our rash judgments, those unkind and hasty words that may cut others deeply, our irrational behaviors, and wasting of time and talent. As Nephi warned, “they sell themselves for naught; . . . for the reward of their pride and foolishness they shall reap destruction” (2 Nephi 26:10). Although Joseph asserts that he was not “guilty of any great or malignant sins” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28), it appears evident that he had a magnified sense of his sins, for he “often felt condemned” for his imperfections and earnestly sought “forgiveness of all [his] sins and follies” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29).

It is a true principle that the closer one comes to God in prayer and in daily behavior, the more he will show us our weaknesses and stumbling blocks. “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness,” wrote the Book of Mormon prophet Moroni. “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27). As is often the case, while we pray for answers to what we consider to be our major
problems, God in his wisdom first shows us the beam that is in our own eye. Although sin is ever destructive, the consciousness of sin can activate the conscience, which, as part of the Light of Christ, can prompt us to turn away and cause us to “forget the thing which is wrong” (D&C 9:9).

So it was with young Joseph Smith. He may have had perfect faith but he was not a perfect man. Thus, what drove him to prayer that night in September 1823 in the family log cabin near Palmyra was, as Joseph later recorded, a strong desire “for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29).

According to the account written by the “second elder” of this dispensation, Oliver Cowdery, one of the first things Joseph remembered the angel Moroni telling him that night was “that his sins were forgiven, and that his prayers were heard.” Before the mission of translating the Book of Mormon could begin, the message of forgiveness first had to be communicated. Thus if faith in God opened the heavens the first time, repentance opened them the second time. This pattern of sacred instruction would be repeated in different times and places throughout the pages of early Church history.²

The prophet Mormon, Moroni’s father, who had seen so much of sin and corruption in his life, had well taught the principle of repentance and may have even foreshadowed his own son’s ongoing mission.

Neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.

For behold, they are subject unto him, according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. (Moroni 7:29–31)

Angels therefore come not to satisfy idle curiosity but to “call men unto repentance.” And so it was that September night in 1823.

While it is entirely appropriate to study Moroni’s message in the light of preparing Joseph Smith for his upcoming mission to translate “a book deposited, written upon gold plates” that contained “the fulness of the everlasting Gospel” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34), my purpose is to show how the unfolding scenes and heavenly manifestations of the Restoration taught
the prophet of the Restoration the first principles of the gospel, specifically repentance. Seen from this perspective, some of what Moroni, the master prophet, began to teach his apprenticed prophet may take on new meaning.

The very first scripture Moroni quoted—and is there not abundant irony that Moroni, a Book of Mormon prophet, was shown here to be a seasoned scholar of the Holy Bible?—was from Malachi, a warning against sinning: “For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble” (Joseph Smith—History 1:37). Then, quoting the third chapter of Acts, Moroni spoke once again of Christ’s warning that “they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40). He went on to quote from Joel chapter 2, verses 28 to the last, including the promise “that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord,” as Joseph himself had done, “shall be delivered,” for surely “your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:32, 28). Moroni quoted “many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations” that are not recorded (Joseph Smith—History 1:41).

In each one of his ensuing visits, Moroni repeated everything he had said the first time, because repetition does indeed bring conviction, not only recollection. Little wonder Joseph Smith later recalled that the biblical passages he cited were either “with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36), as was the case with the fourth chapter of Malachi, or “precisely as they stand in our New Testament” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40), as was the case of Moroni’s quoting from the book of Acts. One might see here not only Joseph Smith’s commission to translate the Book of Mormon but later, upon completing that work, the invitation to revise the sacred Holy Bible, not to condemn.
it but to raise and reclaim it. Moroni, in citing the Bible, was proclaiming and redeeming it. Just as the Bible had brought Joseph to the Sacred Grove, it was here again being used to instruct him in his new mission.

In those first twenty-four hours of angelic instruction, Moroni visited Joseph five times, three presentations that took up virtually the entire night, the next morning while Joseph attempted to climb the fence out of his father’s field, and then again at the Hill Cumorah. Warned the night before against viewing the gold plates for their fiscal value, especially considering the indigent circumstances in which the Smith family was living, when Joseph “made an attempt to take them out,” he was reprimanded and forbidden by Moroni from so doing. The angel told him that “the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time” (Joseph Smith—History 1:53).

We see in this the beginning of a course of training and careful instruction that had everything to do with the preparation of a prophet. As a seventeen-year-old in the fall of 1823, Joseph was clearly not ready to receive the plates and with them the mission of translation, nor would he be for some time to come. Moroni informed him that on the anniversary of his first visit, he desired to meet with Joseph Smith once every year in the very same place.

The mental, emotional, and spiritual significance of an annual visit with a heavenly being can hardly be overestimated. Latter-day Saints can identify with the current practice of an annual tithing settlement with their bishop or branch president or with regular worthiness interviews for temple recommends. There is a wonderful element of covenant accountability in such interviews. They serve as an opportunity for confessing sins, for repledging souls, and for reestablishing priorities so as to conform with the better good within us. And confession is good for the soul, not the casual mental exercise of pretending over our sins but the courageous act of admitting them to a real, listening, and sympathetic servant of God who, though not the source of forgiveness, can be the listening ear, the agent of divine reconstitution. The scripture says, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).

We begin to see in Moroni’s curriculum of instruction not only his role of mentor and tutor but also that of prophet and bishop. Having been told to join no existing church, where was this young man to turn for religious training and edification? His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, and some other members of the family continued to attend the Presbyterian Church, and it
is likely Joseph attended with them on occasions. He obviously held several conversations with ministers during these years and may have told more than discretion called for. His father, who had been uniquely prepared to believe in his son’s spiritual development through several visions and dreams of his own, believed in Moroni’s visit and had replied “that it was of God” (Joseph Smith—History 1:50) and encouraged him onward. Thus young Joseph likely looked forward to this annual interview as a sacred time to commune, to confess, to explore, and to inquire. The very knowledge that such interviews were pending may have wrought enormous impact on his faith, personal behavior, and developing sense of accountability and mission.

There is ample scriptural precedent and pattern for such training. Even though Christ at the tender age of twelve confounded the master teachers of his time, his own mission would not formally begin until he too was much older. In the meantime he continued to receive instruction and preparation, “grace for grace” from his parents and from his Father in Heaven “until he received a fulness” (see D&C 93:12–13). During this time, he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). The ancient Israelite prophet Samuel was similarly so instructed. The Lord had appeared to him as a trusting, believing young boy and likewise commissioned him, saying, “Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of everyone that heareth shall tingle” (1 Samuel 3:11). Yet the Lord took him under his wing, for “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Daniel even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:19–20). Nor did the Lord appear only once to Samuel, for he appeared unto him again in Shiloh, teaching and revealing much to his young prophet (see 1 Samuel 3:21). Nephi was similarly prepared by the Lord and by angels of God in his missions of obtaining the plates of Laban and of seeking a new promised land, a course of tutoring that his older, rebellious brothers refused to accept. Even Paul the Apostle, after his glorious vision of Christ while on the road to Damascus, went to be healed, anointed, baptized, and taught by the human agent of God’s miracle, a man named Ananias. Though filled with his commission, Saul tarried “certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus” (Acts 10:19; see also Galatians 1:15–18), presumably not only bearing testimony and confounding the unbelieving Jews but also being instructed and guided by his fellow Christians.
Joseph Smith does not explain the confidences and confessions he may have expressed during his annual visits with Moroni. During the intervening years between 1823 and 1827, when Joseph advanced from age seventeen to twenty-one, he became involved in treasure digging with Josiah Stowell of Bainesbridge, New York. Much has been made of Joseph Smith’s silver-mine diggings as a way to supplement his family’s meager existence. Though treasure seeking had been a common endeavor in New England and New York for decades and involved the energies of many, he grew increasingly uncomfortable with the whole process and sought to distance himself from the magic culture and folklore associated with it and the money-seeking nature of those involved, having said, at indelicate moments, more about angels and gold plates than he should have. Joseph came to regret his involvement in such activities and, as the time neared to receive the plates, tried to move on. But if he chose not share with us the private matters covered in his interviews with Moroni, he does give us surprising clues and insights into what they discussed: “Accordingly, as I had been commanded, I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days” (Joseph Smith—History 1:54).

One wonders at the deliberate choice of the words “instruction” and “intelligence.” The former we can all comprehend; the latter may have reference to “light and truth” that only revelation can impart, the kind of heavenly instruction, education, and refinement that sanctifies the spirit while it instructs the soul.

There was also more in Moroni’s training sessions than the plates and how to obtain them. He clearly foretold impending events “respecting what the Lord was going to do,” events that may have included the process of translation, the restoration of requisite authority, and further angelic instruction. Beyond the near future, Moroni also taught him “how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.” In these annual personal priesthood interviews, is it possible the Prophet Joseph learned how and when to organize and establish the Church of Jesus Christ, about priesthood offices, temples, and much more?

“At length,” Joseph Smith received the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate on the September 22, 1827, from “the same heavenly messenger”—with this one final charge: “that I should be responsible for
them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off” (Joseph Smith—History 1:59), but that, if faithful, he would be protected in his work. After four years of prophetic training in the principles of truth and righteousness, he was deemed ready and worthy for the next level of instruction. Yet even after all this, he had much to learn about repentance.

**Martin Harris and Preparations for Translation, 1827–29**

To what extent Joseph had confided in others about his visits with the angel Moroni is unknown; however, even before he received the plates, Martin Harris, a well-known farmer and respected citizen of Palmyra, had taken an interest in the young boy’s emerging mission. Joseph’s senior by twenty-two years, Martin Harris had served as a road commissioner and on several local juries. A committed churchgoer, he had earned a reputation as a student of the Bible.

Much of what is known of Harris in these early years we owe to Joseph Smith’s own account and to Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph’s mother, whose *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* still stands as an indispensable read, particularly for these formative years. According to her, Martin’s marriage to his cousin Lucy Harris was less than ideal. Short-tempered and hard of hearing, Lucy Harris strenuously objected to her husband’s interest in the budding Palmyra Prophet. She believed it would all lead to no good financially and insisted that she be involved in any of Martin’s dealings with the Smith family. Martin’s anxiety to substantiate the plausibility, if not the authenticity, of Joseph Smith’s work may be perfectly understandable, considering his difficult home situation. After all, it was their money that was on the line.

Well before the Prophet received the plates, “rumor with her thousand tongues” was circulating all about Palmyra, tending to discredit the reputation of the Smith family (Joseph Smith—History 1:61). Resultant persecution became so intolerable that Joseph and Emma wanted to move away to her home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, some one hundred miles to the south. “In the midst of our afflictions we found a friend in a gentlemen by the name of Martin Harris,” Joseph recorded, “who came to us and gave me fifty dollars to assist us on our journey” (Joseph Smith—History 1:61). By means of such timely assistance—equal to $2,500 of today’s standard of exchange—the pair were enabled to leave Palmyra and immediately reach Harmony in the month of December of 1827.
Over the next few months, Joseph continued working on the translation from the large plates of Nephi, completing 116 pages of foolscap-length pages of transcription with Martin Harris apparently working as his scribe. Beset by continuing criticism at home and perhaps bothered by lingering doubts of his own, Martin pleaded for Joseph to let him take the completed pages to show his insistent wife and her doubtful family. Disregarding the Lord’s warnings not to do so and his own better judgment, Joseph reluctantly agreed and surrendered the manuscript to his friend and benefactor. Regrettably, he did not make a second copy.

Martin abruptly returned to Palmyra where the worst of his intentions got the best of him. Carelessly breaking his promise to show them only to his wife and a selected few family members, he proved an unfaithful guardian of the sacred text and before long had lost them, no doubt lending them to others.

Meanwhile, hearing no news from Martin, which, as Lucy Smith recalls, “was altogether aside of the arrangement when they separated,” Joseph’s worries intensified that same spring of 1828 while facing another crisis at home. Emma had given birth to their first child, a son, who died in infancy. Remaining at his wife’s bedside day and night for two weeks during her difficult recovery, Joseph worried not only about her health but also about the state and condition of the manuscript. Finally, at Emma’s urging, Joseph returned to Palmyra for the purpose of learning the cause of Martin’s absence as well as his silence.

The morning of the intended rendezvous, Martin Harris was late for breakfast at the Smith home by some six hours, evidently stalling and searching, while Joseph and the rest of the family fretted within impatiently. Finally they saw him coming. With a slow, measured tread, his eyes fixed upon the ground, he reached the fence, then got upon it and drew his hat over his eyes. At length he entered the house. Lucy records what happened next:

Martin took up his knife and fork as if to use them but dropped them from his hands. Hyrum said, “Martin, why do you not eat? Are you sick?” Martin pressed his hands upon his temples and cried out in a tone of deep anguish, “Oh! I have lost my soul. I have lost my soul.”

Joseph, who had smothered his fears till now, sprang from the table, exclaiming, “Oh! Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath and brought down condemnation upon my head as well as your own?”

“Yes,” replied Martin, “it is gone, and I know not where.”

“Oh, my God, my God,” said Joseph, clinching his hands together. “All is lost, is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I who tempted the wrath of God asking
him for that which I had no right to ask, as I was differently instructed by the angel.

. . . Then must I,” said Joseph, “return to my wife with such a tale as this? I dare not
do it lest I should kill her at once. And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what
rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?”

In this dramatic moment, we glimpse something of the character of
Joseph Smith and the extent to which he had been taught. A lesser man would
likely have turned on Martin Harris and soundly berated him for his mis-
taken judgment. Human nature being what it is, we will often blame someone
else for causing our problems, especially when they share so much of the fault.
But in that heated moment of despair, Joseph Smith rose to his calling, tak-
ing full and complete responsibility for the entire matter: “I have sinned. It is
I who tempted the wrath of God.” If the first step of repentance is accepting
one’s own accountability, Joseph was here the teacher and Martin Harris his
tormented student.

Lucy goes on to show the depths of remorse her son then showed. “I
besought him not to mourn so,” she wrote, hoping to offer some sort of
consolation.

For it might be that the Lord would forgive him, after a short season of humiliation
and repentance. But what could I say to comfort him when he saw all the family in
the same situation of mind that he was? Our sobs and groans and the most bitter
lamentations filled the house. Joseph, in particular, was more distressed than the
rest, for he knew definitely and by sorrowful experience the consequence of what
would seem to others to be a very trifling neglect of duty. He continued walking
backwards and forwards, weeping and grieving like a tender infant until about sun-
set, when we persuaded him to take a little nourishment.

Returning home to Harmony immediately afterward, Joseph Smith con-
tinued prayerful, sensing a pending day of reckoning. Subsequently, Moroni
once again appeared to him, censuring him for having delivered the manu-
script into Harris’s hands. The Prophet said, “As I had ventured to become
responsible for this man’s faithfulness, I would of necessity suffer the conse-
quences of his indiscretion, and I must now give back the Urim and Thummim
into his (the angel’s) hands.”

Joseph then received a revelation that summer of 1828, soon after the
angel had visited him, in which the young prophet was chastised in no uncer-
tain terms:

Behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God,
and have gone on in the persuasions of men.
For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—

Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble. . . . For thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director to be trampled upon from the beginning. (D&C 3:6–8, 15)

Consequently, Joseph lost his privileges of translation for a season, a time of probation during which he continued to learn humility and penitence, more aware than ever before that the Restoration of the gospel and the translation of the Book of Mormon would come to pass with or without him.

Happily, some two months later, on September 22, 1828, the fifth anniversary of Moroni’s first appearance, Joseph Smith experienced the fruits of his penitence, saying, “I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim.” His mentor, too, “was rejoiced” at the lessons Joseph had learned in repentance and “told me that the Lord was pleased with my faithfulness and humility, and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer.”

The story of Joseph Smith, Moroni, Martin Harris, and the lost manuscript has one concluding episode. Nine months later, near the end of June 1829, at the Peter Whitmer Jr. farm in Fayette, New York, the angel Moroni appeared to the Three Witnesses: Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. Just as Moroni had come to Joseph Smith in September 1823 to declare forgiveness and to teach Joseph repentance, so also this visit of Moroni to Harris was predicated upon that same saving principle. Said Joseph Smith beforehand when indicating to Harris the possibility of his being one of the Three Witnesses, “Martin Harris, . . . you have got to humble yourself before God this day and obtain, if possible, a forgiveness of your sins. If you will do this, it is God’s will that you . . . should look upon the plates.” Well known in Church history is the fact that after David, Oliver, Martin, and Joseph had retired to the woods near the Whitmer house, nothing happened until Martin excused himself, believing, “as he expressed himself, that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for. He accordingly withdrew” and the angel appeared to the other three men. Only after Joseph rejoined Martin and accompanied him in fervent prayer, was the same vision opened to their view. “’Tis enough; ’tis enough,” he said; “mine eyes have beheld; mine eyes have beheld.” Then, “jumping up, he shouted, ‘Hosanna,’ blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly.”
Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and the Process of Translation, 1829

We now come to our third and final episode, that period of translation in which Joseph Smith and his new scribe, Oliver Cowdery, completed the Book of Mormon as we now know it. Virtually the same age as Joseph, Oliver (1806–50) was also from Vermont, had been a store clerk and taught in country schools. While boarding with Joseph Smith’s parents, he learned of the ancient record and the lost 116 pages. What piqued his interest in the work was the fact that he had “inquired of the Lord” on the matter. As recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, “as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art at this time” (D&C 6:14). Joseph Smith said, “The Lord appeared unto . . . Oliver Cowdery and shewed unto him the plates in a vision and . . . what the Lord was about to do through me, his unworthy servant. Therefore he was desirous to come and write for me to translate.”

The two men met each other for the first time on April 5, 1829, arranged some temporal business together the following day, and began the work of translation on April 7. Partners in the translating process, the great difference between the two men was in their spiritual preparation and academic approach to the task at hand. A teacher by profession who knew well how to read and write and do numbers far better than his partner, Oliver was nevertheless Joseph’s pupil in the first principles.

The profound intellectual difficulties Joseph Smith faced in translating an ancient unknown language even with the aid of the Urim and Thummim are hinted at in Oliver’s parallel failed experience as a translator and afford us yet another view of how repentance was once more taught during the translation process. It is noteworthy that the second elder of the Restoration began his mission by seeking the gift to translate. “Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you” (D&C 8:11). However, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has indicated, Oliver soon “failed in his efforts to translate.” Why? “Behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced. . . . You have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But behold, I say unto you that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:5, 7–8).
At issue here was more than Oliver’s attitude of teachability and humility; it was also an aptitude of intellectual application not so well developed in him as to bear results, at least not in the timely way now required. Oliver failed in the intellectually demanding work of translating because he had not thoroughly applied himself mentally to the task. As the Lord indicated, “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, ye shall feel that it is right” (D&C 9:7–8). Joseph Smith had learned both lessons—spiritual and mental—from his previous experiences. He had been schooled in matters of character and spirit for the past nine years and from his past experience with Martin Harris and the translation of the 116 pages, clearly, in hindsight, a preparatory school of remarkable learning. Can we really expect Oliver to have learned them as well after but a few days at the task? We may wish to revise our thinking on who was the student and who was the teacher.

The intellectual demands of translating were rigorous and extremely challenging. If the experiences and testimony of the Three Witnesses are to be taken at face value, the successful translation of the Book of Mormon was neither magical nor mythical but measured and marvelous, a careful confluence of obedience, recurring repentance, and consequent revelation on the one side, and a rigorous mental exercise of intense study, recall and recognition, and trial and error on the other. The specifics of translation remain a mystery, but it may be instructive to compare the work of Joseph Smith to that of his magnificent contemporary, the superlative translator of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, the brilliant French linguist Jean-François Champollion. Just five years before, Champollion had finally decoded the mysterious hieroglyphs of the famed Rosetta Stone found near Alexandria by Napoleon’s army in 1799. After a lifetime of studying Coptic, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, and a dozen other languages, Champollion, in his famous “Lettre à Monsieur Dacier” of September 22, 1822, exactly one year before Moroni’s initial visit, convinced the waiting world that he could read the ancient hieroglyphic writings of Egypt. As a result, Champollion, the man from Grenoble, is still rightfully revered as the father of modern Egyptology.

Whereas Champollion first naively believed that a thorough knowledge of Coptic would allow him to directly decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs,
he gradually came to the realization that such was quite dauntingly not the case. Hieroglyphic writings were not a single alphabet; they had a wide variety of spellings for the same person or place, and they had no vowels but plenty of shorthand contractions, such as in English one might write “pkg” for “parking” or “unvsty” for “university.” Furthermore, the ancient Egyptian scribes assumed the reader was conversant with their combinations of right vowels and contractions, “but this knowledge had been lost, although Coptic gives clues to it.”

After long and painstaking effort, Champollion concluded that hieroglyphs could not be read alone but in groups or clusters. Intently comparing the Greek to the Coptic, the Coptic to the demotic (a later simplified form of ancient Egyptian writing) and, by extension, the demotic to the hieroglyphic, Champollion noted that there were three times as many hieroglyphic signs as there were Greek words. Therefore, there had to be a combination or grouping of signs to convey a single meaning—in other words, consonants and syllables, essential components to phonetic expressions. Though the hieroglyphs employed no vowels, they were a combination of phonetics and pictures. Unlike others of his scientific contemporaries, such as Thomas Young of England, Champollion was now looking not just for more clues between the hieroglyphic and the demotic, but for the ability to read the maze of what constituted hieroglyphic writing.

What finally enabled Champollion to do what neither Young nor any others were able to accomplish was applying his mastery of Coptic to the problem. As one leading scholar has written, “His knowledge of Coptic enabled him to deduce the phonetic values of many syllabic signs, and to assign correct readings to many pictorial characters, the meanings of which were made known to him by the Greek text on the Stone.” The system of decipherment that Champollion had been methodically developing over several years was that hieroglyphic script was mainly phonetic but not entirely so, that it also contained logograms or a sort of shorthand symbols used to write native names and common nouns from the Pharaonic period. The combination of both constituted an ancient alphabet, which he now could prove and sufficiently read or decipher. Champollion thus came to the rightful conclusion that the hieroglyphic writings were not just of the later periods of Egyptian history but of the very earliest Pharaonic era as well. He therefore decoded the entire system and showed that hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic all corresponded
to the same language. Whereas Young may well have discovered parts of the alphabet, it was “Champollion [who] unlocked an entire language.”16

Joseph Smith, on the other hand, could barely read or write one language, English.17 Joseph Smith had neither the time, scholarly training, nor linguistic knowledge to decode one symbol after another; indeed his mission was not to master the linguistics required to read an ancient language but to translate or convey their meanings into English. His initial work of translation consisted of copying the various “characters,” letters, phrases, or hieroglyphs found on the large plates of Nephi into some sort of working alphabet. “I copied a considerable number of them,” he records, clear evidence of the strong mental exercise and careful study he too would need before translating could actually begin. Then only gradually did he begin to use what neither Champollion nor any other translator had at their command, the Interpreters. With the aid of these ancient instruments, Joseph Smith began to translate some of the characters.

It would appear that the process was less one of decoding or deciphering the precise meaning of the individual characters and inscriptions found on the plates, as Champollion had so painstakingly done with the Rosetta Stone, and more one of discerning the meanings conveyed thereon and then, in addition, struggling to transliterate such meanings into acceptable, King James Bible–vintage literary English. The translators seemed to have functioned on two levels: conveying meaning from the ancient text while simultaneously suggesting wording in biblical-sounding English far beyond the reach then in Joseph’s limited grasp. Thus we might argue that Joseph Smith was not a decoder or a pure translator in the Champollion sense of the word but a transmitter/translator and writer who, with the aid of the interpreters, transposed what he saw into exquisite English prose and poetry.

For all of this, Oliver was ill prepared. The customized reprimand and gentle reproof he received in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants were less a rebuke and more a reminder that God had already called and prepared his prophet; what was needed now was a humble, penitent scribe and devoted supporter and trusted eyewitness to visions soon to occur. “Do not murmur my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner; . . . it is not expedient that you should translate now. Behold it was expedient when you commenced; but you feared, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now; for, do you not behold that I have given unto my servant Joseph sufficient strength, whereby it is made up? And neither of you have I
condemned. . . . Be faithful, and yield to no temptation” (D&C 9:6, 10–13). It was a lesson in repentance not missed by either man.

If Joseph and Oliver learned repentance at the outset of translating, they were repeatedly reminded of its central importance as their work progressed. Well known is David Whitmer’s 1882 remembrance of a time Joseph Smith could not translate, despite all the gifts he had at his command. “He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards everyone,” Whitmer recalled.

To illustrate so you can see. One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma had done. Oliver and I went upstairs [obviously this was at the Whitmer home] and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchard, and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour—came back to the house, and asked Emma’s forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were and then the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful.18

Thus, to borrow B. H. Roberts’s phraseology, the translation “was not a merely mechanical process” but rather a laboratory of spiritual and mental application governed by the principles found in the very book they were now translating. Even after almost 10 years of preparation, Joseph Smith relearned the lesson that even the smallest sins or senseless hurts prevented the free flow of inspiration and revelation. By faith, faith unto repentance that led, in turn, to the guiding and revealing influence of the Spirit of the Lord, he lived his way through to the end of the translation process.

Conclusion

I suggest a new and different perspective from that offered by some of Joseph Smith’s biographers. No where have I argued that Joseph Smith was a perfect man or without blemish. His sins and imperfections were real, and while I have not dwelt upon them in any way to discredit his life, they surely caused him a great deal of grief and hardship. Yet our theme has been that if God called a prophet, he prepared that prophet in the first principles of the gospel. The mission of Moroni, in preparing the way for the translation of the Book of Mormon, was the charge given to angelic visitors: “to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of
the Father” (Moroni 7:30–31). Time after time, Moroni, the master prophet, trained Joseph Smith, the apprentice prophet, in matters of the soul, of honesty and integrity, in humility and patience, in repentance and forgiveness. Joseph Smith’s partners in translation, Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery, were likewise taught the same principles and learned from hard experience that the message of the gospel had to be lived by the messengers of the gospel to have any lasting effect. Integrity, not hypocrisy, would attract the best of men and women and make for a lasting movement. This injunction was repeated all the way up to Fayette and the organization of the Church in April 1830 and indeed, for years afterward. “Preach naught but repentance:” and “the thing that will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 19:21; 15:6; see also 16:6). Indeed, this lesson of repentance and forgiveness would be repeated numerous times throughout the pages of later Church history, including the famous vision in the Kirtland Temple in April 1836 when the Savior pronounced once again to Joseph and Oliver, “Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice” (D&C 110:5).

Notes

1. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, in Messenger and Advocate, February 1835, 79.

2. For instance, in the spring of 1836 at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, when Christ himself appeared before the altars of the temple, among the very first words he proclaimed to Joseph Smith and to Oliver Cowdery were, “Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me;...lift up your heads and rejoice” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:5). Just as faith precedes the miracle, repentance precedes the commission. The man must be “worthy of his hire” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:79).

3. Professors Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter are soon to publish a new biography of Martin Harris.

4. For more on Harris’s visit to the East, see Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources and Problems,” BYU Studies 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 325–52; see also the author’s forthcoming article “‘Read This I Pray Thee’: Martin Harris and the Three Wise Men of the East” (accepted for publication in 2010 in the Journal of Mormon History).


7. History of Joseph Smith, 166.


17. Emma Smith later retold the experience of the translation period to her son as follows: “I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; For, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals or after interruptions, he could at once begin where he had left off, without seeing either the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible” (“Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, October 1, 1879, 290).

On November 22, 1911, this monument was dedicated to honor Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. The Three Witnesses helped fulfill an ancient prophecy that “unto three shall they [the plates] be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true” (Ether 5:3).
Witnesses—
Those Who Assist to Bring Forth This Work

A. Bryan Weston

A. Bryan Weston (abjweston@yahoo.com) is a former director of the Hill Cumorah Visitors’ Center, Palmyra, New York, and a former missionary in the New York Rochester Mission.

As Joseph Smith was nearing the end of the Book of Mormon translation, working on the pages written by Moroni, he and Oliver Cowdery came across an invitation to share a view of the plates and other items with three witnesses. The Lord had said, “And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work; And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true” (Ether 5:2–3).

In the early history of the Restoration, Joseph described his circumstances and those of his family as “indigent” (Joseph Smith—History 1:46). Accordingly, Joseph would need help in bringing forth this marvelous work. “As my father’s worldly circumstances were very limited,” Joseph commented, “we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands” (Joseph Smith—History 1:55). This put constant stress on Joseph and made it essential for him to find others to assist him throughout these early days of the Restoration (which, incidentally, introduced several potential converts to the young prophet and to the message of the Restoration). Emma was only able to assist for limited time periods as a scribe for her husband.
Martin Harris, who had known the Smith family since their move to Palmyra, had shown interest in Joseph’s recovery of the plates. He assisted Joseph and Emma financially in the move from Palmyra, New York, to Harmony, Pennsylvania. Harris then provided very welcome relief for the Prophet by acting as the main scribe for the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation. Martin also took the transcription of a few characters from the plates to Luther Bradish in Albany and professors Charles Anthon and Samuel L. Mitchill at Columbia College (now Columbia University) in New York City to certify the accuracy of the translation and the authenticity of the characters, an endeavor that resulted unwittingly in a fulfillment of one of Isaiah’s prophecies (see Isaiah 29:11 and 2 Nephi 27:15–18). Harris might have helped even more were it not for his wife’s opposition. Although Harris was responsible for the loss of the 116 manuscript pages, he continued to support the Prophet and helped again and again. Eventually he mortgaged and later sold part of his farm to guarantee payment to E. B. Grandin for the printing and binding of the Book of Mormon.

Oliver Cowdery first learned of Joseph’s possession of the plates while boarding with the Smith family as he worked as a schoolteacher in Manchester, New York. As soon as the school year was over, he traveled with Samuel Smith to Harmony, Pennsylvania. They stopped en route to pay a brief visit to Oliver’s friend David Whitmer in Fayette, New York. Oliver promised David that he would write to him after he met Joseph to inform him whether Joseph really had the plates. Oliver and Samuel arrived at Joseph and Emma’s home on April 5, 1829. By April 7, Oliver had started to act as scribe for Joseph during translation. This began a remarkable time in the translation of the Book of Mormon. In about sixty to sixty-five days they were able to complete the translation process, with Oliver doing nearly all of the writing for the Prophet.

Soon after Oliver arrived in Harmony, he wrote at least two letters back to David Whitmer, assuring him that Joseph did indeed have the plates and that the story they had heard about him was authentic. As the persecution became too intense for the translation process to continue in Harmony, Oliver wrote again to David to ask if they could come to Fayette to finish translating. In the letter he also asked if David could come to Harmony to help them move to Fayette. David’s father, Peter Whitmer Sr., gave his son permission to leave—after he finished planting the spring crops.
In the next few days, the field that David needed to prepare was miraculously plowed, prepared, and spread with plaster of paris. David’s father noted the blessings they were receiving and told David to hook up his team and go to Harmony. He accordingly went to help the Prophet and Oliver come to Fayette. The Whitmer family became very instrumental in supporting Joseph in the work of the Restoration, both materially and spiritually. Seven of the eleven witnesses to the plates were, or would soon become, part of the Whitmer family (Oliver Cowdery would marry Elizabeth Ann Whitmer in 1832). The Whitmer home eventually became the site of the formal organization of the Church on April 6, 1830.

However, at this point in June 1829, those who would become the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon had already given significant help to the young prophet and had “assist[ed] to bring forth this work” (Ether 5:2). In the latter stages of the translation, Joseph and Oliver translated the verse in 2 Nephi that reads, “None shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God” (2 Nephi 27:12). Joseph later said that as Martin, Oliver, and David were talking with him in Fayette, they asked if they might be the witnesses. Joseph inquired of the Lord and received section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants. There the Lord confirmed their request and counseled, “And it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them. . . . And after, . . . you shall testify of them, by the power of God; . . . that I may bring about my righteous purposes unto the children of men in this work” (D&C 17:2–4).

These men became faithful witnesses of the Book of Mormon, of the plates, and of the angel, never denying their testimonies, even when they became disaffected with Joseph and the Church (Martin and Oliver later came back to the Church, but David did not). They had fulfilled three conditions of witnesses: they had assisted in the coming forth of the work, they had desired the privilege, and they remained faithful to their witness through the remainder of their lives.

Although conditions in our day are far different from those in Joseph’s, there is still a need for those who will help the Lord in the continual coming forth of this marvelous work. The gospel is still being restored to those who have not yet received it. Witnesses are still needed, and when we stand as witnesses, we are blessed. The Lord said, “Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor” (D&C 88:81).
As recorded in section 14 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord told David Whitmer, “And it shall come to pass, that if you shall ask the Father in my name, in faith believing, you shall receive the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance, that you may stand as a witness of the things of which you shall both hear and see. . . . And behold, thou art David, and thou art called to assist; which thing if ye do, and are faithful, ye shall be blessed both spiritually and temporally, and great shall be your reward” (vv. 8, 11). It seems the same principle applies to each of us—if we will ask the Father in faith for a witness through the Holy Ghost and if we are willing to be faithful in assisting the Father and the Son in bringing forth the work, we shall be permitted to stand as witnesses of the things we “hear and see” through the Spirit. The promise to us would be that we, too, “shall be blessed both spiritually and temporally, and great shall be [our] reward.”

Teachers in the Church must be faithful witnesses as they work with their students in helping to bring forth the Savior’s work. If they serve well, an increasing number of their students will “ask the Father in faith,” that they too may become witnesses.

Notes

1. Harris had asked Smith for a transcription of some of the Book of Mormon characters from the plates, along with a translation, which he would then take to linguistic specialists “in the East” to have them authenticated. It appears that he went to Albany and sought out Luther Bradish, a politician and student of languages, probably for advice about whom to consult for authentication. He then apparently obtained a letter of introduction from Samuel Latham Mitchill, vice president of Rutgers Medical College in Manhattan and former chair of natural history, chemistry, and agriculture at Columbia College, referring him to Charles Anthon, professor of classical studies at Columbia College. Harris and Anthon give conflicting accounts of what occurred during their visit. Harris claimed that Anthon gave him a letter authenticating the characters and the translation but that he tore it up after Harris explained the plates’ origin and their deliverance to Smith by an angel. Anthon later denied that he had done any such thing. Whatever occurred during the interview, Harris returned to Harmony convinced of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity and offered both financial support and personal effort in its publication. See Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems,” BYU Studies 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 325–52; and Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (New York: Knopf, 2005), 63–66.

2. Though initially enthused about Joseph Smith’s account of his reception of the Book of Mormon, Lucy Harris became skeptical when she was repeatedly denied a view of the plates. Her skepticism gradually turned to stiff opposition. She insisted that Harris obtain the translation manuscript, a demand that Joseph eventually complied with, which resulted in the loss of the first 116 manuscript pages. See Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, 61–69.

3. See Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, 80–82.
7. See Welch, “Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” 45.
8. See Welch, “Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” 47.
10. Of the seven, five were Whitmer sons by birth—David, Christian, Jacob, Peter Jr., and John—and two, Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery, had married or would marry into the Whitmer family. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 76–79; see also Larry C. Porter, *A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2000), 93.
11. Though different theories exist on the sequence of dictation and translation of the Book of Mormon plates, there is evidence to suggest that when Joseph Smith began translating again after the loss of the 116 manuscript pages, he picked up where he left off, at the beginning of the current book of Mosiah. Then, after completing his translation of the large plates, he went back and translated the small plates of Nephi and the Words of Mormon, both of which were then positioned at the beginning of the manuscript text and are hence located at the beginning of the published Book of Mormon. See John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 3–32.
The testimonies of the witnesses printed in the Book of Mormon offer compelling evidence in favor of its miraculous origin. Harper invites us to examine the evidence left by Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris (top to bottom) as well as the Eight Witnesses.
The testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses printed in each copy of the Book of Mormon are some of the most compelling evidence in favor of its miraculous revelation and translation. Here we have depositions by eleven men of the gold plates’ existence and by three of an angelic visitation. The three saw and the eight “hefted” the plates. For believers, that approaches proof of Joseph Smith’s miraculous claims. But some have questioned the nature of the witnesses’ experiences, arguing that they were supernatural and visionary. The witnesses, this argument asserts, did not see or touch ancient artifacts as we see or handle trees or chairs but only through unreliably subjective “spiritual eyes,” rendering their statements null and void.

Advocates of this thesis cite visionaries including Joseph Smith, who spoke of seeing with an “eye of faith,” and distinguish between the kinds of seeing done with “spiritual” and “natural” eyes. They claim Martin Harris saw only “with the spiritual eye” and rely on hearsay accounts that Harris disclaimed he saw the Book of Mormon artifacts with his natural eyes. Skeptics also note reasons to suspect the testimony of the Eight Witnesses, citing Stephen Burnett’s 1838 claim that Martin Harris said that “the eight
witnesses never saw them.”4 The suggestion that the Eight Witnesses never actually saw or hefted the plates and that the Three Witnesses viewed them solely supernaturally leads some to wonder if the witnesses saw anything substantive at all, opening to question the plates’ existence and the Book of Mormon’s truthfulness.5

The evidence left by the Book of Mormon witnesses is rich, varied, and uneven, including the following: The earliest documented statement of the Three Witnesses—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—is their statement in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery subsequently published in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. For the Eight Witnesses, it is their statement in the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon, also in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. The known historical record includes direct statements by two of the Three Witnesses and three of the Eight Witnesses that affirm their original testimonies. In addition, people who heard or heard of one or more of the witnesses describe their experiences left statements. This kind of evidence is both the most plentiful and the most problematic because it is hearsay. It is not personal knowledge of a witness but filtered through someone else. These statements were heard, written, and sometimes published by persons with vested interests either in affirming the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon or undermining it. These statements are most valuable as evidence of how a variety of people have chosen to interpret and respond to the Book of Mormon witnesses. From a legal and historical perspective, they are less valuable as evidence of what the witnesses experienced. The best evidence of that comes from the witnesses’ direct statements.

To arrive at an independent judgment, seekers need to examine the evidence for themselves and draw their own conclusions about its meaning and importance. I will quote the witnesses’ own statements that are not in the Book of Mormon and then provide a sampling of the wide variety of hearsay accounts. Then, with particular attention to the assumption that seeing with spiritual eyes negates one’s witness, I will analyze the statements as an historian who chooses to believe in the testimonies of the Book of Mormon witnesses and end with an invitation to my readers to join me in making that informed choice.

Joseph Smith’s history is the primary historical source that tells how the Book of Mormon prophesied of witnesses; how he received a subsequent revelation inviting Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris to become the Three Witnesses (see D&C 17); and how, after an angel showed them the plates, eight other men gathered to see and heft the plates
themselves. Joseph’s mother’s later memoir presents a later version of Joseph’s earlier account.7

Besides Joseph’s history and the statements of the Three and Eight Witnesses in the Book of Mormon, there are a few direct statements by witnesses themselves in which they affirmed their June 1829 experience seeing the plates. For example, Martin Harris wrote to Hannah Emerson in 1870: “Concerning the plates, I do say that the angel did show to me the plates containing the Book of Mormon. Further, the translation that I carried to Prof. Anthon was copied from these same plates; also, that the Professor did testify to it being a correct translation. I do firmly believe and do know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, for without I know he could not [have] had that gift, neither could he have translated the same. I can give if you require it one hundred witnesses to the proof of the Book of Mormon.”8

David Whitmer wrote An Address to All Believers in Christ in 1881 in response to what he felt was a misrepresentation of his testimony by John Murphy. Echoing the statement of the Three Witnesses in the Book of Mormon, David wrote:

A PROCLAMATION. Unto all Nations, Kindred Tongues and People, unto whom these presents shall come:

It having been represented by one John Murphy, of Polo, Caldwell County, Mo., that I, in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the ‘BOOK OF MORMON.’

To the end, therefore, that he may understand me now, if he did not then; and that the world may know the truth, I wish now, standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once for all to make this public statement:

That I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with

After being a witness to the reality of the gold plates, David Whitmer left the Church and eventually wrote this pamphlet in which he voiced the reasons for his dissension. Though he used the pamphlet as a platform to criticize the Church and its leaders, he also bore a powerful testimony of the authenticity and divinity of the Book of Mormon.
As the last surviving of the Three Witnesses, David Whitmer spoke for all of them in 1887: “I will say once more to all mankind, that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also testify to the world, that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever at any time denied their testimony. They both died reaffirming the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I was present at the deathbed of Oliver Cowdery, and his last words were, ‘Brother David, be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon.’”

Besides their formal testimony in the Book of Mormon, three of the Eight Witnesses left known written accounts of their experience. After escaping from jail in Liberty, Missouri, Hyrum Smith wrote in 1839, “Having given my testimony to the world of the truth of the book of Mormon, the renewal of the everlasting covenant, and the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven, in these last days; and having been brought into great afflictions and distresses for the same, I thought that it might be strengthening to my beloved brethren, to give them a short account of my sufferings, for the truth’s sake.” As part of the subsequent narrative, Hyrum summed up what he had suffered and why. “I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life.”

Hiram Page, another of the Eight Witnesses, was whipped in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1833 for his profession of Mormonism. He left activity in the Church in 1838 and in 1847 wrote to William McLellin. “As to the Book of Mormon,” he affirmed:

it would be doing injustice to myself and to the work of God of the last days, to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830, and know the same thing to be false in 1847. To say my mind was so treacherous that I had forgotten what I saw. To say that a man of Joseph’s ability, who at that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi, could write a book of six hundred pages, as correct as the Book of Mormon, without supernatural power. And to say that those holy angels who came and showed themselves to me as I was walking through the field, to confirm me in the work of the
Lord of the last days—three of whom came to me afterwards and sang an hymn in their own pure language. Yea, it would be treating the God of heaven with contempt to deny these testimonies, with too many others to mention here.12

Joseph Smith’s history mentions that John Whitmer, another of the Eight Witnesses, assisted much in scribing the Book of Mormon translation.11 Writing subsequently as the Church’s historian, John wrote in third person that his brother “David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, were the Three Witnesses, whose names are attached to the book of Mormon according to the prediction of the Book, who knew and saw, for a surety, into whose presence the angel of God came and showed them the plates, the ball, the directors, etc. And also other witnesses even eight viz: Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer Jr., Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith, are the men to whom Joseph Smith, Jr., showed the plates, these witnesses names go forth also of the truth of this work in the last days. To the convincing or condemning of this generation in the last days.”14 In 1836 John wrote further: “To say that the Book of Mormon is a revelation from God, I have no hesitancy, but with all confidence have signed my name to it as such.” This was John’s last editorial in his role as editor of the Church’s newspaper, and he asked his readers’ indulgence in speaking freely on the subject. “I desire to testify,” he wrote, “to all that will come to the knowledge of this address; that I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates, and know of a surety that Joseph Smith, jr. has translated the book of Mormon by the gift and power of God.”15 Three decades later, John and his brother David were the only two surviving Book of Mormon witnesses. At that point, just two years before his own death, John responded to an inquirer about the witnesses. John replied, “I have never heard that any one of the three or eight witnesses ever denied the testimony that they have borne to the Book as published in the first edition of the Book of Mormon.”16

These first-person statements by Book of Mormon witnesses are far outnumbered by hearsay statements of persons reporting what they heard about the testimonies. Hearsay is problematic evidence. It is, by nature, unverifiable. Furthermore, the hearsay accounts are inconsistent. What witnesses reportedly said in one account differs from the next. Historians value hearsay for what it reveals about how people and events were interpreted by others, but it is not reliable evidence for interpreting people and events in the first place.
People trying to reconstruct from hearsay what the witnesses saw will end up frustrated. Though much of the hearsay evidence unequivocally declares that the witnesses saw and/or hefted the plates, some of it obfuscates that point. It is not reliable for reconstructing their experiences. The hearsay accounts show that one’s faith in the Book of Mormon witnesses or lack thereof is based not simply on hearing the witnesses’ testimonies but on how one chooses to receive and understand their testimonies.

Believers in the Book of Mormon heard the witnesses declare that the plates were real and that the Book of Mormon was true. Sally Bradford Parker wrote of hearing Hyrum Smith: “He said he had but two hands and two eyes. He said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.”17 Theodore Turley wrote of hearing John Whitmer say, “I now say I handled those plates. There was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them.”18 Joshua Davis heard John declare, “I, with my own eyes, saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.”19 Daniel Tyler heard Samuel Smith say that “he had handled them and seen the engravings thereon.”20 One remembered hearing Martin Harris say, “I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. . . . I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates; I saw the angel; I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true.”21

A wide variety of nonbelievers in the Book of Mormon (including newspaper writers, Protestant missionaries, and Latter-day Saints who had lost their faith) claim they heard the witnesses declare something other than that the plates were real and that the Book of Mormon was true. In 1838, disenchanted Church members Stephen Burnett and Warren Parrish wrote of hearing Martin Harris deny that he had seen the plates with his natural eyes or that the eight witnesses saw them at all, or that Joseph ever had them.22 Parrish wrote that Martin Harris “has come out at last, and says he never saw the plates, from which the book purports to have been translated, except in vision; and he further says that any man who says he has seen them in any other way is a liar, Joseph not excepted.”23 John Murphy wrote that he had interviewed David Whitmer, who acknowledged that his witness was nothing more than an impression.24

Book of Mormon witnesses responded to these hearings with corrections. When he learned how Burnett and Parrish were interpreting his statements, Martin Harris “arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true.”25 He maintained his faith and understood
what he had said differently than Stephen Burnett and Warren Parrish did, as Burnett acknowledged. “No man ever heard me in any way deny . . . the administration of the angel that showed me the plates,” Harris wrote later.26 David Whitmer wrote and published a pamphlet in response to Murphy in 1881, in which he affirmed how literally he believed his testimony as stated in the Book of Mormon. That same year Whitmer wrote “A Few Corrections” to the editor of the Kansas City Journal, which had misrepresented him.27

As an early convert in Ohio, Stephen Burnett felt the Holy Spirit and a desire to take the gospel to his relatives. He led his parents into the Church and responded successfully to revealed mission calls (see D&C 75:35; 80). He “was the first one that sounded the glad tidings of the everlasting gospel” in Dalton, New Hampshire.28 But by 1838 Burnett felt completely disillusioned. He felt he had tried but failed to regain the Holy Spirit. Finally he “proclaimed all revelation lies” and left the Church.29 Burnett wrote candidly to Lyman Johnson, explaining his decisions. “My heart is sickened within me when I reflect upon the manner in which we with many of this Church have been led & the losses which we have sustained all by means of two men in whom we place implicit confidence,” Burnett wrote, referring to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. He felt that Joseph had used his influence for financial gain and had prophesied lies. He continued his compelling story:

I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it—lo[a]th to give it up—but when I came to hear Martin Harris state in a public congregation that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundations was sapped & the entire superstructure fell [in] a heap of ruins, I therefore three weeks since in the Stone Chapel gave a full history of the church since I became acquainted with it, the false preaching & prophecying etc of Joseph together with the reasons why I took the course which I was resolved to do, and renounced the Book of Mormon with the whole scene of lying and deception practiced by J. S & S. R in this church, believing as I verily do, that it is all a wicked deception palmed upon us unawares[.] I was followed by W. Parrish Luke Johnson & John Boynton all of who Concurred with me, after we were done speaking M. Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true.30

Burnett gave us a rich metaphor by describing his faith as a building whose foundation had been shattered, leaving only a heap of ruins. Those who share his experience know exactly what he means. One strategy of coping with the devastating loss is to pull what remains from the heap of ruins and try
to rebuild something sensible. Burnett and others since have dug into the pile of statements by and about the Book of Mormon witnesses and fashioned an alternative way to interpret the testimonies of the eleven eyewitnesses. Those whose faith in their own spiritual experiences has been shattered doubt that the witnesses had authentic spiritual experiences either, and therefore seek alternative explanations for the testimonies of the witnesses. Acknowledging that “Harris and others still believe the Book of Mormon,” Burnett wrote, “I am well satisfied for myself that if the witnesses whose names are attached to the Book of Mormon never saw the plates as Martin admits that there can be nothing brought to prove that any such thing ever existed for it is said on the 171st page of the book of covenants [D&C 17:5] that the three should testify that they had seen the plates even as J[oseph] S[mith] Jr. & if they saw them spiritually or in vision with their eyes shut—J S Jr never saw them any other light way & if so the plates were only visionary.”

One is struck by the three instances of if in Burnett’s statement. He built his interpretation of the witnesses on hypotheticals: if the witnesses never saw the plates as he believed Martin Harris had said, and if Joseph never saw them, then they were only visionary. After listening to Burnett expound that rationale, Martin Harris asserted unequivocally, in contrast, that the plates were real. As Burnett reported, Harris said “he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them.” Harris did not wish to be understood as Burnett understood him.

The hearsay accounts like Burnett’s have been useful to others for building a believable alternative to the straightforward statements of the witnesses. Grant Palmer wrote of his own youthful faith being undermined by later doubts. His chapter on the Book of Mormon witnesses expresses his doubts about the authenticity of accounts by the witnesses in the Book of Mormon and instead draws on the hearsay accounts, where he finds some threads that enable him to conclude that the witnesses thought they had experienced the plates but had not. This explanation is appealing to some because it does not completely dismiss the compelling testimonies of the Book of Mormon witnesses even as it categorizes them as unreal.

Those who suspect their own spiritual eyes of playing tricks on them find it hard to believe that the witnesses saw anything with their spiritual eyes. To these souls, promises that the witnesses would see the plates with eyes of faith sound foreign, and are best regarded as artifacts of a bygone era when lots of people thought they could see things that were not real after all. They cannot
trust the Book of Mormon witnesses. They literally find it easier to trust hearsay than direct statements. Grant Palmer and Dan Vogel repeatedly choose to privilege selected hearsay more than the direct statements of the witnesses. Such choices led Palmer to conclude that the witnesses “seem to have seen the records with their spiritual eyes and inspected them in the context of a vision, apparently never having actually possessed or touched them” (emphasis added). In their formal statements, their other direct statements, and in the hearsay accounts, the Book of Mormon witnesses did not speak that way. They did not say they had apparently seen or seem to have seen. Over and over, they testify that they saw. When their statements were misrepresented, being interpreted as visionary and therefore not real, they reasserted the authenticity of their experience. Some of them are on record expressing certainty in the reality of the plates and their divine translation. None of them is on record expressing doubt in those things. The skeptics selectively dismiss the earliest, most straightforward witness statements and favor accounts like Burnett’s hypothetical alternative. They reject direct evidence and selectively accept some of the hearsay. They obfuscate.

The historical record describes a rich mix of what one scholar called the Book of Mormon’s “artifactual reality” beheld with eyes of faith. Indeed, the statements of the Three and Eight Witnesses seem to purposefully mix and merge these ways of knowing and verifying. Regardless of how one decides to understand their words, the witnesses left us no evidence that they doubted the reality of what they experienced supernaturally as well as physically and tangibly. As Terryl L. Givens observed:

One historian has written of Martin Harris’s alleged equivocation about his vision, pointing out that he claimed to have seen the plates with his “spiritual eyes,” rather than his natural ones, and thus that he “repeatedly admitted the internal, subjective nature of his visionary experience.” It is not clear, however, that visionaries in any age have acquiesced to such facile dichotomies. . . . Paul himself referred to one of his own experiences as being “in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell” (2 Cor. 12:3). He obviously considered such a distinction irrelevant to the validity of his experience and the reality of what he saw. It is hard to imagine a precedent more like Harris’s own versions in which he emphatically asserts until the day of his death the actuality of the angel who “came down from heaven” and who “brought and laid [the plates] before our eyes, that we beheld and saw,” while also reporting, according to others, that he “never claimed to have seen them with his natural eyes, only with spiritual vision.”

Givens clearly discerns the quality of direct versus hearsay evidence. Meanwhile, Vogel, who chooses to believe the hearsay more than the direct
statements, acknowledges his need for “qualifying verbs and adverbs” because
the “analysis is speculative or conjectural.”

When it comes to the Book of Mormon witnesses, the question is which
historical documents is one willing to trust? Those whose faith has been deeply
shaken sometimes find it easier to trust lesser evidence rather than the best
sources or the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence. But that choice
is not a foregone conclusion. It is neither inevitable nor irreversible. William
McLellin believed the witnesses. He met three of them—David Whitmer,
Martin Harris, and Hyrum Smith—when they passed his home in Illinois
in August 1831. He walked several miles with them and “talked much” with
them and other saints for several days that summer. Of August 19, William
wrote, “I took Hiram the brother of Joseph and we went into the woods and
set down and talked together about 4 hours. I inquired into the particulars
of the coming forth of the record, of the rise of the church and of its prog-
ress and upon the testimonies given to him.” Of the next morning, McLellin
wrote, “I rose early and betook myself to earnest prayed to God to direct me
into truth; and from all the light that I could gain by examinations, searches
and researches I was bound as an honest man to acknowledge the truth and
Validity of the book of Mormon.” He asked Hyrum Smith to baptize him.
McLellin served several missions, some as an Apostle, before becoming deeply
disaffected later in the 1830s. He spent half a century frustrated by what he
simultaneously loved and hated about Mormonism before receiving a letter
from a Salt Lake City anti-Mormon named James Cobb, who wrote assuming
he would find an ally. McLellin wrote back: “When I thoroughly examine a
subject and settle my mind, then higher evidence must be introduced before
I change. I have set to my seal that the Book of Mormon is a true, divine
record and it will require more evidence than I have ever seen to ever shake
me relative to its purity I have read many ‘Exposes.’ I have seen all their argu-
ments. But my evidences are above them all!” He explained further, “When a
man goes at the Book of M. he touches the apple of my eye. He fights against
truth—against purity—against light—against the purist, or one of the truest,
purist books on earth. I have more confidence in the Book of Mormon than
any book of this wide earth!” McLellin described his own repeated readings
of the Book of Mormon before noting his personal experiences with some
of the witnesses. “When I first joined the church in 1831,” he wrote, “soon I
became acquainted with all the Smith family and the Whitmer family, and I
heard all their testimonies, which agreed in the main points; and I believed
them then and I believe them yet. But I don’t believe the many stories (contra-
dictory) got up since, for I individually know many of them are false.”

It is hard to imagine someone better positioned to evaluate the testimo-
nies of the Book of Mormon witnesses than William McLellin. He spent
much of his life disaffected from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints and had no interest in sustaining it. Yet as he wrote of his 1831 expe-
rience with the Book and its witnesses, he was bound by the evidence to
acknowledge its truth and validity. He not only knew the testimonies of the
Book of Mormon witnesses, he knew some of them personally and inter-
viewed them intimately. He was no fool, no dupe. And he was positioned
to know whether the witnesses were fools, dupes, or conspirators. So well
informed, McLellin chose to believe the testimonies of the witnesses were
truthful. Why not make the same satisfying choice? Why not opt to believe
in the direct statements of the witnesses and their demonstrably lifelong
commitments to the Book of Mormon? This choice asks us to have faith in
the marvelous, the possibility of angels, spiritual eyes, miraculous translation,
and gold plates, but it does not require us to discount the historical record or
create hypothetical ways to reconcile the compelling Book of Mormon wit-
nesses with our own skepticism.

Notes
on the Book of Mormon, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature
2. See Moses 1:11; Dan Vogel, Early Mormon Documents (Salt Lake City: Signature Books,
“not seen with the eyes of my body, but with the eyes of my spirit” (Miscellaneous Theological
Several hearsay accounts declare that Harris testified to seeing the plates with spiritual eyes
or eyes of faith (EMD, 2:255–56). Dissenters in 1838 cited Harris’s declaration that he never
saw the plates with his natural eyes (Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, Orange Township,
Geauga County, Ohio, 15 April 1838, Mss 155 box 2 folder 2, Letterbook 2, pages 64–66,
Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City).
4. Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, Orange Township, Geauga County, Ohio,
April 15, 1838, Mss 155 box 2 folder 2, Letterbook 2, 64–66, Church History Library.
5. EMD, 1:468–72. Grant Palmer follows this argument and reading of the evidence,
leading him to the conclusion that “the witnesses seem to have seen the records with their
spiritual eyes and inspected them in the context of a vision, apparently never having actually
possessed or touched them” (Palmer, An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins [Salt Lake City:
Signature Books, 2004], 207; emphasis added).
18. Theodore Turley’s Memorandums, Church History Library.
23. *Evangelist* (Carthage, Ohio), October 1, 1838, 226.
26. Martin Harris to H. B. Emerson, January 1871, in *Saints’ Herald*, April 1, 1876, 198.
30. Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, 64–66.
31. Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, 64–66; emphasis added.
32. Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, 64–66.
34. Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 207, see also 175–76; emphasis added.


An angel instructs the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi about the birth and mission of the Savior (see 1 Nephi 11). This painting is part of a series of scenes from the Book of Mormon commissioned by the Sunday School for use as instructional aids.
This article proposes that Nephi’s vision (1 Nephi 11–14) forms the interpretative centerpiece of his writings. Implied in this thesis are the premises that Nephi had an explicit purpose in writing, sufficient literary skills, and control of his source material to accomplish his purpose. To establish this thesis, I will consider several themes in Nephi’s vision and then demonstrate how these themes pervade the books of 1 and 2 Nephi.

The Structure of Nephi’s Writings

We recall that Nephi was commanded to keep two sets of records. The first was begun shortly after his arrival in the promised land (see 1 Nephi 19:1) and became the basis of the record that we now call the large plates. Nephi’s second account—the subject of this article—formed the bulk of the record that we now call the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi to Omni).

Nephi began the small plates by abridging a record of his father’s ministry and then writing a record of his own (1 Nephi 1:16–17; 6:3; 8:29; 10:1; 15). In Nephi’s abridgment of his father’s record, Lehi is clearly the protagonist—the
main actor who initiates or motivates most of the events in the story—as he receives and carries out God’s commands. Nephi’s role in Lehi’s record is to help fulfill his father’s leadership. Although Nephi remains deferential to his father throughout his whole life, once he begins the account of his own ministry he exercises increasingly greater leadership and more direct influence in the story. In doing so, Nephi never demeans his father’s contributions or supplants his authority. In fact, Nephi begins the account of his own ministry with a summary of Lehi’s major prophecies (1 Nephi 10). Nevertheless, he recognizes and begins to accomplish his own divine commission.

Lehi’s and Nephi’s records are tied together by more than historical contiguity. More importantly, they are connected by thematic emphasis and spiritual significance. Lehi’s dream of the tree of life appropriately concludes his record. It details in largely allegorical terms the promise of salvation that Lehi had received in the “dreams and visions” with which Nephi begins his father’s record (see 1 Nephi 1:5–19). Similarly, Nephi begins his own record with a vision of the plan of salvation (1 Nephi 11–14) and, as we shall see, concludes with an extended prophecy based on that vision (2 Nephi 25–33).

These structural similarities between the two records are not accidental. They signal Nephi’s continuing deference to the patriarchal authority of his father and reveal a central purpose of these records: to illustrate that revelations and spiritual experiences serve as the foundation of sacred historical narrative. In this article, I argue that Nephi’s vision provides the core themes that guide and direct his writings. Within Nephi’s account, the vision plays several crucial roles: (1) it defines the plan of salvation, (2) it provides a framework for Nephi’s historical narrative, (3) it defines a covenant-based identity for the Nephites, and (4) it unifies the Nephites’ prophetic tradition.

Plan of Salvation

Nephi receives his vision because of his desire to “know the things that my father had seen” (1 Nephi 11:1) in his dream. While Lehi’s and Nephi’s experiences both center on the plan of salvation, they represent, for the most part, different literary genres. Lehi’s dream is largely allegorical, while Nephi’s vision is largely a historical narrative. An allegory is a certain kind of symbolic representation whose particular features—the iron rod, mists of darkness, and the great and spacious building—are not actual places or things. Rather they are symbols; they stand for spiritual realities whose significance transcends the precise denotation of their referent. While these elements have no
empirical place in the material world, they are not ephemeral. Each object and event in the allegory symbolizes a critical truth of the plan of salvation, as the following table shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tree of life; the fountain of living waters</td>
<td>love of God (see 1 Nephi 11:21–25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rod of iron</td>
<td>word of God (see 1 Nephi 11:25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fountain of filthy water</td>
<td>depths of hell (see 1 Nephi 12:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mists of darkness</td>
<td>temptations (see 1 Nephi 12:17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large and spacious building</td>
<td>vanity and pride (see 1 Nephi 12:18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruit of the tree</td>
<td>eternal life (see 1 Nephi 15:36; D&amp;C 14:7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These and other elements are woven into an allegory that describes five logical possibilities for God’s children in relation to the plan of salvation:

1. Some lose their way when they encounter temptations (see 1 Nephi 8:23).
2. After experiencing the goodness of the gospel, some become ashamed because of the vanity of the world (1 Nephi 8:24–28).
3. Some are saved by faithfully following the word of God (1 Nephi 8:30).
4. Some consciously seek for and embrace worldly vices (1 Nephi 8:31).
5. Many are destroyed by the filthiness of the world (1 Nephi 8:32).

The overall message is that through the exercise of agency, everyone will eventually realize one or another of these five alternatives. The dream assures that the blessings of eternal life are available to all who receive the word of God and remain faithful to it throughout their lives. However, those who compromise or reject God’s plan inevitably experience sorrow, misery, or spiritual destruction.

After hearing his father recount the dream, Nephi seeks divine confirmation through reflection and prayer. The resulting spiritual experience includes a similar allegory of redemption so that Nephi can interpret the dream for himself and his brothers, including elements that Lehi had omitted in his own retelling (see 1 Nephi 15:21–36). Nephi’s vision, however, adds a literal dimension. Nephi sees relevant future events as they would transpire in real space and time and as they would involve real people. Rather than depict logical alternatives, Nephi’s drama of deliverance occurs in four historical acts.
differentiated by time, place, persons, and purpose.

*Christ’s mission (1 Nephi 11).* In this act, the Savior of the World is born of a virgin (vv. 13–20), ministers unto the people (vv. 21–28), chooses twelve Apostles and blesses and heals multitudes (vv. 29–31), and is crucified (vv. 32–33). The world then fights against the Apostles (vv. 34–35), and the wicked are eventually destroyed (v. 36).

*The promised land (1 Nephi 12).* The second act of the vision is divided into four successive scenes: wars, contentions, and destructions among the Nephites and Lamanites (vv. 2–5), the ministry of the Lamb of God among the Nephites following his resurrection (vv. 6–8), four generations of righteousness resulting from Christ’s ministry (vv. 11–12), and the final destruction of the Nephites because of their wickedness (vv. 13–19).

*The chosen people (1 Nephi 13).* The third act reveals a “great and abominable church” among the Gentiles, whose founder is the devil (v. 6). It persecutes and kills the Saints of God, scatters his chosen people, perverts the Bible, and champions worldly vices (vv. 5–9, 26–29). Some Gentiles come to the promised land and establish a mighty nation that is delivered by God (vv. 10–19). Here God begins to fulfill his ancient covenants of salvation by bringing forth the inspired record of Nephi’s people, which contains the fulness of the gospel of the Lamb of God. This promise of salvation is stated explicitly: “And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be” (1 Nephi 13:37).

*The covenant fulfilled (1 Nephi 14).* By means of a “great and a marvelous work” (v. 7), the Gentiles are converted to the gospel of the Lamb and are numbered among the covenant people of the Lord. The “church of the Lamb of God” spreads throughout the earth, although its “dominations . . .
were small,” when compared with those of the great and abominable church (v. 12). In order to save the “church of the Lamb,” God sends his wrath upon the “mother of harlots” through wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth (vv. 13–17).

In summary, Nephi’s vision develops a narrative of salvation around three dominant themes:

- **Christ’s gospel.** The plan of salvation is made effective through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the foundation of which is the Atonement.
- **Promised land.** The central earthly developments of the plan of salvation occur in lands of promise, including the Holy Land and the promised land.
- **Chosen people.** Those who accept and live Christ’s gospel are considered his church and the covenant people of God.

**Historical Framework**

The three main themes of Nephi’s vision appear in various forms in his historical writings. Woven together, these themes present a compelling account of how time and eternity, man and God, and earth and heaven work together to fulfill God’s divine purposes.

*Christ’s gospel.* At the beginning of his record, Nephi identifies the “power of deliverance” as a prime purpose of his writing: “I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). The eternal dimensions of deliverance are amply illustrated in the sermons and exhortations of his narrative. In Nephi’s writings, the blessings of salvation become effective in individuals’ lives through their conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the blessings of the Atonement.

Reflecting the importance of conversion in individuals’ lives is the fact that Nephi’s own conversion is his first explicit act in his small plates record. Nephi (1) recognizes a spiritual deficiency in his life, (2) seeks God’s help to overcome, (3) receives blessings from God through the Holy Spirit, and (4) obeys God’s commandments and serves others as a result (1 Nephi 2:16–18). The account of his own conversion establishes a pattern for all other people in the story. All of the details that Nephi includes in his narrative about Lehi, Nephi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, and Jacob emphasize one or more of these steps of conversion, either in a positive or negative way.
Promised land. Nephi’s historical narrative is nearly consumed with his extended family’s preparing for and obtaining the promised land. In fact, they repeatedly risk health, wealth, safety, and life to do so. They continually submit themselves to privation and suffering and receive, in turn, miracles, revelations, and heavenly aids (for example, the Liahona) to obtain this goal. Reinforcing the importance of this concept, Nephi’s record contains the term “land(s)” 164 times, and the phrase “promised land(s)” or “land(s) of promise” 28 times, making the concept one of the most oft repeated in his account. Nephi’s emphasis echoes the divinely directed odysseys of Abraham and Moses in their respective quests for a land of promise. “And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction” (1 Nephi 17:13–14).

Chosen people. A third dominant theme of Nephi’s historical narrative concerns his family, the people led by God to inhabit the promised land. Lehi’s abiding desire to preserve his entire family in righteousness is manifest in taking them all, not just the willing, into the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:1–5), in his recruiting Ishmael’s family to “raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise” (1 Nephi 7:1), and in his desire “that my family should partake of [the fruit of the tree of life] also” (1 Nephi 8:12). Reinforcing the place of this theme in Nephi’s record is the fact that the term “people” appears 183 times in Nephi’s writings, making it even more frequently mentioned and centrally placed than “land(s).”

As soon as we learn about Lehi’s family, we become aware of the rift between Laman and Lemuel, on the one hand, and the rest of the family, on the other. This rift and its consequences become one of the dominant themes of Nephi’s narrative, contrasting their reactions to gospel teachings, spiritual experiences, divine commandments, priesthood authority, and historical challenges (see 1 Nephi 2:8–14; 3:28–31; 7:8–21; 15:1–16:5; 17:19–55; 18:9–21; 2 Nephi 1; 4; 5).

Covenant Identity

In addition to framing Nephi’s historical narrative, the core themes of the vision—Christ’s gospel, promised land, and chosen people—serve as signs of
a covenant by which the blessings of salvation are promised to the Nephites. In their basic form, each covenant theme is introduced at the beginning of the narrative through revelations to Lehi and Nephi and then enlarged throughout Nephi’s record.

*Covenant of Christ’s gospel.* Nephi observes that Lehi, “testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also of the redemption of the world” (1 Nephi 1:19). As Nephi’s narrative unfolds, the promise of redemption is expressed in the general availability to mankind of the fruit of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8:11–15), “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (1 Nephi 15:36) and is made explicit in the mission and sacrifice of the “Redeemer of the world,” who was “slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:27, 33). The terms of the covenant of Christ’s gospel are concisely defined in Nephi’s vision: “The Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and . . . all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved” (1 Nephi 13:40). This passage goes on to say that the “words of the Lamb” contained in the records of both the Nephites and “the twelve apostles of the Lamb” will clarify the means whereby all nations may avail themselves of redemption through his sacrifice (see 1 Nephi 13:40–42; see also 2 Nephi 2:27–29; 9:23–24).

*Covenant of the promised land.* This covenant first appears as part of Nephi’s conversion experience. After blessing Nephi because of his faith, the Lord defines how he intends to bless Nephi: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (see 1 Nephi 2:19–21; see also 1 Nephi 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:20; 4:4; 5:20).

As defined in Nephi’s record, the promised land is the sign of an eternal covenant with God. As long as the Nephites obey God’s commandments, they prosper, which, for the Nephites, meant living in mortality *as if* in the presence of God and in eternity in his literal presence. In contrast, when they fail to keep this covenant, they do not prosper in mortality and lose the promise of his presence and the quality of his life in eternity.

*Covenant of the chosen people.* The covenant of the chosen people is also revealed to Nephi as a consequence of his conversion.
And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.

And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance. (1 Nephi 2:22–24)

The most general statement of the covenant of the chosen people is found in Nephi’s commentary on his vision: “Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (1 Nephi 15:18).

Accordingly, the progressive distinction of Lamanites and Nephites throughout Nephi’s record, including the curse that befell the Lamanites after being separated from the Nephites, reflects the terms of this covenant. Complying with the leadership condition of the covenant of the chosen people, Nephi also consecrated his brothers Jacob and Joseph to be “priests and teachers” over his people to help ensure that they were governed properly (2 Nephi 5:26; see also 1 Nephi 2:22). Nephi ends his commentary on the covenant-based society of his followers with a general assessment of Nephite life: “We lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

Prophecy

In addition to his vision, which serves as an extended prophecy of the works of God in earth’s mortal existence, Nephi’s account contains four major prophetic discourses, focusing on and developing the three dominant themes of the vision.

Lehi blesses his posterity. At the end of his life, Lehi gathers his extended family around him to give them final blessings and instructions. Nephi does not record all of Lehi’s counsel on this occasion (2 Nephi 4:14); however, what he does include focuses on the covenants and conditions of salvation introduced in his vision.

Lehi’s first blessing is bestowed upon Laman and Lemuel on condition that they obey their younger brother, and upon Nephi and his followers if Laman and Lemuel do not obey (see 2 Nephi 1:28–32; 4:11). This first blessing takes the form of an extended prophecy about the covenant of the promised land in the last days. The formal terms of the covenant are twice
reaffirmed (see 2 Nephi 1:9, 20), and Lehi introduces what it means to prosper in terms of this covenant (see 2 Nephi 1:9). To this end, Lehi exhorts his family to “remember to observe the statutes and judgments of the Lord,” “be determined in one mind and in one heart, united in all things,” “put on the armor of righteousness,” and “rebel no more against your brother” (see 2 Nephi 1:16, 21, 23, 24). By contrast, Lehi reminds them that those who break this covenant will “dwindle in unbelief,” be “scattered and smitten,” be “cut off” from God’s presence, and “come down into captivity” (2 Nephi 1:10, 11, 17, 21).

Lehi’s blessing to Jacob emphasizes the covenant of Christ’s gospel and takes the form of a prophetic discourse on the doctrine of Christ. Lehi first testifies that Jacob had been redeemed from the fall and that the Atonement is central to the redemption of mankind (2 Nephi 2:2–7). Lehi next asserts that Christ’s atoning sacrifice not only makes possible the remission of sins but also “brings to pass the resurrection of the dead” (2 Nephi 2:8), thus preparing the way for the judgment of mankind. Also required for the judgment is moral agency, which is made explicit in mankind’s being enticed by and having to choose between competing alternatives. This “opposition in all things” is built into the very structure of existence; hence the whole of creation is engineered to clarify the essential choices that mankind, as moral agents, must make, thus preparing them inevitably for the Judgment (see 2 Nephi 2:5, 10–16).

Lehi continues his blessing to Jacob with an examination of the role of the Redeemer in overcoming evil and the Fall of Adam. Lehi reveals that evil and its related vices and consequences were introduced to the world by Satan, who rebelled in the premortal existence and enticed Adam and Eve to disobey God’s commandment in the Garden of Eden. As a consequence of the Fall, God created a probationary state that allowed mankind to repent of their sins. The remission of sins and the resulting blessings of liberty and eternal life would not be possible without the mission and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and without the faith, repentance, and obedience of his disciples. By contrast, those who reject the blessings of Christ’s sacrifice will suffer the captivity and death of the devil (see 2 Nephi 2:16–29).

Lehi’s final blessing to his posterity is directed toward Joseph and focuses on the covenant of the chosen people. In this blessing, Lehi identifies himself as a descendant of the patriarch Joseph, who delivered the house of Israel from destruction. Commenting that “great were the covenants of the Lord
which he made unto Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:4), Lehi specifically testifies that in the latter days:

- “The Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel . . . to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:5).
- A “choice seer unto the fruit of my loins” will help to restore the ancient covenants to earth. His name and that of his father will be Joseph (2 Nephi 3:6–11, 15).
- The records of Joseph’s and Judah’s descendants together will confound false doctrines, eliminate contention, establish peace among the chosen people, and help restore the house of Israel. The record of Joseph’s descendants will be brought to light by the work of this seer (see 2 Nephi 3:12, 17–19, 24).
- The Lord will preserve Lehi’s seed forever (see 2 Nephi 3:16).

*Jacob’s commentary.* Nephi includes in his record some of Jacob’s comments on why the prophecies of Isaiah are so important to the covenant people:

I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—

That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God [covenant of Christ’s gospel]; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance [covenant of the chosen people], and shall be established in all their lands of promise [covenant of the promised land].

Behold my beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children. (2 Nephi 9:1–3)

In commenting on Jacob’s prophecies, Nephi observes that although Jacob spoke “many more things to my people at that time” (2 Nephi 11:1), those which Nephi includes in his record serve his purposes, which further develop his covenant-based interpretive framework. He then declares the central purposes for keeping the record of his ministry. Each of these is key to the message of salvation as defined by his vision.

Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ. . . .

And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.
And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. (2 Nephi 11:4–6)

Isaiah’s prophecies. While Lehi’s interest in the brass plates centers on the genealogy of his fathers (see 1 Nephi 3:3, 12; 5:11–16), Nephi emphasizes the prophecies of Isaiah (1 Nephi 6:1; 20–21; 2 Nephi 7, 12–24). These prophecies provide an authoritative antecedent to and doctrinal elaboration of Nephi’s vision, as summarized in the following table.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah’s prophecies</th>
<th>Nephi’s vision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering of repentant Israel in the latter days (chosen people) (1 Nephi 21:1–6; 2 Nephi 15:26–30; 21:11–16)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth and mortal mission of the Savior (Christ’s gospel) (2 Nephi 17:14–16; 19:1–7)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion of Jews and Gentiles to Christ, their Redeemer (chosen people and Christ’s gospel) (1 Nephi 21:22; 2 Nephi 22:1–6; 24:1–7)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of Zion in the last days (promised land) (1 Nephi 21:7–21; 2 Nephi 12:1–4; 14:1–6; 24:26–32)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of the wicked in the last days (Christ’s gospel) (1 Nephi 20:14; 21:24–26; 2 Nephi 20:1–34; 23:1–22; 24:9–25)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment of God’s ancient covenants of salvation (all three) (1 Nephi 20:9–22; 21:23–26; 2 Nephi 8; 21:1–9)</td>
<td>1 Nephi 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strong thematic connections between Isaiah’s prophecies and Nephi’s vision allow Nephi to liken Isaiah’s prophecies unto his people, “for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). In short, Nephi is able to interpret Isaiah’s prophecies authoritatively because he had received a comparable vision. An implication of this correspondence is that Nephi selected the prophecies from the brass plates that provide historical antecedence and spiritual legitimacy for his own.

Nephi’s prophecies. In the extended testimony that follows the Isaiah passages and concludes his record, Nephi reprises the central themes of his vision, placing them once again in the context of the plan of salvation. The correspondence between Nephi’s vision and his final testimony is summarized in the table below.
Although common themes receive roughly comparable treatment in both accounts, the final testimony greatly expands the role of Nephi’s record in restoring the covenants of salvation in the latter days. While the responsibility to write only that which is sacred occupies Nephi’s attention throughout his life, his focus becomes particularly acute at the end. A detailed comparison of the two accounts is instructive for the purpose of this study.

Although Nephi’s vision reveals the general contours of the plan of salvation in material, temporal, and human contexts and although righteousness triumphs in the end—its proximate story is filled with destruction, death, and despair: the Saints are scattered following Christ’s crucifixion, the Nephites are destroyed, and the Gentiles pervert the “record of the Jews” and oppress the “remnant of Israel.” At the point in the vision of almost total hopelessness, the angel who guides Nephi through each scene gives him three assurances of an eventual deliverance (see 1 Nephi 13:30–32). These promises provide a turning point for the vision. Challenges still exist, but progress toward the

<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Vision (1 Nephi)</th>
<th>Testimony (2 Nephi)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Christ ordains twelve apostles</td>
<td>11:29, 34</td>
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<td>Christ is tried and crucified</td>
<td>11:32–33</td>
<td>25:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostles are persecuted; Jews scattered</td>
<td>11:34</td>
<td>25:14–15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destruction of wicked at the end of time</td>
<td>11:35–36</td>
<td>30:9–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wars and destructions among Nephites</td>
<td>12:1–5</td>
<td>26:2–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s ministry to Nephites</td>
<td>12:6–10</td>
<td>26:1, 8–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteous utopia among Nephites</td>
<td>12:11–12</td>
<td>26:9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nephites destroyed as a people</td>
<td>12:13–19</td>
<td>26:10–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentiles to occupy the promised land</td>
<td>13:10–19</td>
<td>26:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “record of the Jews”</td>
<td>13:20–29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition of salvation for Gentiles</td>
<td>14:1–6</td>
<td>30:1–7</td>
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</table>
complete achievement of the plan of redemption is steady and sure from this point until its ultimate fulfillment.

The first step in this transformation involves the Gentiles: “Wherefore saith the Lamb of God: I will be merciful unto the Gentiles, unto the visiting of the remnant of the house of Israel in great judgment . . . insomuch that I will bring forth unto them . . . much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:33–34). The key to this step is explained in the following verses:

For behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb.

And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation. (1 Nephi 13:35–36)

In short, the blessings of salvation will be made available to all mankind in the latter days by the sacred writings of Nephi and subsequent writers of the record, which will not only define and document the plan of salvation but also bring to pass its fulfillment in the last days. Nephi’s vision further predicts that his sacred record will complement the “record of the Jews” (Old Testament) and the “records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (New Testament) in order to unite both Jew and Gentile—the entire human race—in the bonds of the gospel (see 1 Nephi 13:23, 38–42).

Nephi expands this theme in his final testimony. He testifies that the Book of Mormon will serve as a standard of truth in the Final Judgment (see 2 Nephi 25:18) and correct false doctrines and convince the Gentiles of their apostate conditions (see 2 Nephi 28). At the end of his testimony, Nephi witnesses to the truthfulness of his record in terms that are unique and powerful in all of revealed scripture:

Hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness. (2 Nephi 33:10–11)
Also included in Nephi’s final testimony is a witness that the promise of salvation will be realized by those who accept and keep its covenants. In holiness and solemnity, Nephi rehearses a formal dialogue with the Father and the Son regarding the requirements of salvation. This dialogue concludes with the promise to the faithful, “behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life,” and with the declaration that the doctrine of Christ is the only way to realize this blessing (see 2 Nephi 31:11–21, especially v. 20). Nephi shares his personal witness of this promise: “I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33:6).

Conclusion
This brief overview indicates the extent to which Nephi’s vision provides a framework for interpreting the historical, exegetical, and prophetic contents of his record. Taken as a whole, his vision presents a drama of salvation whose blessings are defined in revelation, expanded in prophetic discourse, partially realized in the historical experience of a covenant community, fully realized by select members of Lehi’s immediate family, and promised eventually to all of God’s children who meet the conditions of the associated covenants.

Notes
1. As part of his upbringing, Nephi acknowledges receiving formal training in “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). In addition, Nephi had the faithful example of his father, Lehi, whose record was essential to his own prophetic legacy.

2. Mormon’s abridgment of Nephi’s first account was part of the 116 pages of translated manuscript that were lost when Joseph Smith entrusted them to Martin Harris to convince his doubting wife of the veracity of the ancient record (see Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005], 66–69).

3. Examples include warning the people of Jerusalem of impending destruction (see 1 Nephi 1:13–20), fleeing Jerusalem with his family (see 1 Nephi 2:1–15), sending his sons to obtain the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 3), and recruiting Ishmael and his family for the journey (see 1 Nephi 7).

4. For example, Nephi seeks a testimony in order to accept his father’s visionary leadership (see 1 Nephi 2:16), carries out Lehi’s inspired directions (see 1 Nephi 3:7), and considers “the tent of my father” as the family’s spiritual center (see 1 Nephi 3:1, 7:22).

5. Nephi’s vision is not simply a meaningful retelling of Lehi’s dream. It is also an expansion of and commentary on it. The vision confirms Nephi’s spiritual gifts and justifies his prophetic perspective. In other words, Nephi’s vision is a powerful statement of the divine authority of his own ministry.

“save” or “salvation” (1 Nephi 13:40; 15:14–15; 19:11, 17). Antonyms of “deliverance” illustrate the consequences of disobedience—for example, “captivity” (1 Nephi 10:13), “scattering” (1 Nephi 10:13), and “destruction” (1 Nephi 3:17; 7:13).

7. Examples include Lehi to his sons (see 1 Nephi 2:9–10; 2 Nephi 1–4); Nephi to his brothers (see 1 Nephi 4:1–3; 15:6–16:4; 17:23–55); Jacob to the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 6–9); and Nephi to his posterity (see 2 Nephi 31–33).

8. Contrast the distinguishing characteristics of Nephite society—obedience to God’s commands, domesticated economies, preservation of sacred records and objects, raising families, appropriate defense, effective use of natural resources, temple worship, industriousness, and righteous leadership—with those of the Lamanites—“sore cursing,” “iniquity,” “hardened their hearts,” “skin of blackness,” “loathsome,” “idle people, full of mischief and subtlety” (see 2 Nephi 5:10–24).

9. As a qualification of this covenant, the descendants of Laman and Lemuel are promised that they will be preserved so that the blessings of salvation can be made available to some of them when they eventually accept this covenant.
“The angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood” (Mosiah 27:11).
The Testimony of Alma: “Give Ear to My Words”

JOHN W. WELCH

John W. Welch (WELCHJ@lawgate.byu.edu) is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School at BYU. Address given at Campus Education Week in August 2003 and rebroadcast on KBYU and BYUTV.

I am humbly grateful for the invitation to share with you a few thoughts about the wonderful words and the inspiring testimony of Alma the Younger. I am amazed and enriched by the words of this truly towering figure in the Book of Mormon. I share the feelings of Elder L. Tom Perry, who has written, “Alma the Younger has been a special favorite of mine.” I hope to do some small justice to a few of his exquisite words.

In Alma 36, at the very beginning of his masterful blessing to his firstborn son, Helaman, Alma admonished, “My son, give ear to my words” (v. 1). We would all do well to follow this counsel, to give special heed to the powerful testimony of Alma, and to recognize the doctrinal purity and power that permeates the texts of this remarkable father, teacher, prophet, high priest, chief judge, governor, soldier, and record keeper. It is hard to say enough about this spiritual, dynamic, and articulate disciple of Jesus Christ.

Alma truly knew his Savior, the coming Redeemer, the Good Shepherd, who still stands at the head of his flock today. We should bear in mind that Alma paid the price for this knowledge. He made significant sacrifices. For example, he left the most powerful position in his society to become a humble
full-time missionary, going at one time into the apostate city of Antionum when he himself was feeling “infirm,” perhaps due to failing health or some chronic malady. I stand in awe of the risks that he took in the gospel’s behalf, especially when he went all alone, with no companion or bodyguard, right into the jaws of absolutely certain hostility in the city of Ammonihah, the hotbed of Nehorism, not long after he himself as chief judge had personally ordered the execution of Nehor. Going into this city, he fasted and prayed many days over the sins of this people, to the point of such great hunger that it led to angelic intervention (see Alma 10:7). I am also struck by all that had to transpire that we might have these precious words. I can only imagine the laborious efforts he and others undertook to record and preserve the speeches of this great leader in an era when writing such things was not a simple task. Remembering these sacrifices helps me to treasure these words all the more.

The speeches of Alma in the Book of Mormon are among the very richest chapters of the entire book. I think it is fair to call them a doctrinal epicenter of the Book of Mormon. Alma’s words bear repeated dissection, and they reward persistent pondering. I know that, like most of the Book of Mormon, the words of Alma will wear me out long before I wear them out.

Alma the Younger, of course, is best known for his unforgettable conversion story, rendered very sensitively by the artist Minerva Teichert, whose depiction I think clearly communicates the merciful holiness of the powerful angel of the Lord who appeared to the wayward young man and the four sons of Mosiah. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has said, “The life of the younger Alma portrays the gospel’s beauty and reach and power perhaps more than any other in holy scripture. Such dramatic redemption and movement away from wickedness and toward the permanent joy of exaltation may not be outlined with more compelling force anywhere else.”

But beyond his conversion, Alma became a strong public servant and influential political figure in Nephite civilization. In a way, Alma was the John Marshall of his day. Like Marshall, the formative chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, Alma served as the inaugural chief judge under the new Nephite legal system of the reign of the judges. He would also become a sort of Winston Churchill of his people, holding Nephite society together at a time of civil war, personally going out in one-on-one hand-to-hand combat against the arch-kingman Amlici; Alma’s words and deeds successfully galva-
nized the Nephites and led them to victory as Churchill did for the Allies in World War II.

At the same time, this Alma went on to become a great prophet. He suffered the refining agonies of prison confinement, much as the Prophet Joseph did in Liberty Jail. Here you see Teichert’s depiction of Alma’s and Amulek’s miraculous liberation from prison after enduring many days of brutal confinement.

Concurrently, Alma became something of the Thomas Aquinas of the Nephite world— his theological discourses, especially my favorites Alma 13 and 42, are among the richest doctrinal expositions in scripture. Alma persuasively articulated truth as he confronted formidable theological opponents—from the priestcrafty Nehorites and the Rameumpton-building Zoramites, to the logician Zeezrom and the philosophizing Korihor. Readers should approach Alma’s intellect and his keenly chosen words with the same receptive respect one uses in approaching the words of the greatest masters in world literature. In 1997, Noel Reynolds and I were able to participate in a private weeklong scholarly conference, which was organized by an exclusive non-LDS thinktank, in order to study the political theory implicit in the Book of Mormon’s teachings about liberty. After several days of intense scrutinizing, scholars who for the first time encountered the brilliant discourses of Alma expressed high regard for the depth and power of his compelling insights.

For these and many other reasons, understanding Alma is crucial to any understanding of the Book of Mormon. He is central. King Benjamin’s speech is phenomenal, yet it is only a single speech, given on one occasion, the coronation of Mosiah the Second, and is encompassed in only four chapters. Of Alma we have ten speeches, comprising over sixteen chapters, not to mention several other shorter Alma texts. These words are treasures of spiritual literature standing at the core of the Book of Mormon.

The testimony of Alma is indeed the spinal cord that runs through the backbone of Nephite prophetic history. Genealogically, we have an interesting situation here, with Alma standing in a position that we do not often appreciate, as you will see on this chart.
He is the son of Alma₁, the priest of Noah who was converted by Abinadi. We don’t know when Alma the Younger was born, but since he was still a young man at the time of his conversion, it was probably around 95–100 BC. He probably wasn’t born much before 125–120 BC, right around the time that his father’s covenant community rejoined the Nephites in Zarahemla. Alma the Younger has three sons: his oldest is Helaman, who will become the leader of the stripling warriors about ten years after Alma’s mysterious departure. Helaman’s son, Helaman₂, is the one after whom the Book of Helaman is named. The son of Helaman₂ is Nephi, the one who goes with his brother Lehi and converts the Lamanites in the miraculous episode reported in Helaman chapter 5. His son is another Nephi, the one after whom the book of 3 Nephi is named, who prays that he might know that the Lord will come on the morrow. And after
that Nephi we have his son, another Nephi, who begins the book of 4 Nephi, and then the plates pass to his son Amos, to his son Amos, and to his brother Ammaron, who is the one who gives all of the plates and Nephite sacred artifacts to Mormon. So, in a sense, Mormon got the plates from Alma. It was Alma the Younger who received the plates and sacred implements from King Mosiah, the last king before Alma became the chief judge. Can you see why one may call Alma and his lineage the backbone of the Book of Mormon? This point might also explain why Mormon and the Nephite record keepers took special efforts to preserve the speeches of Alma, their most illustrious ancestor. He is the lynchpin in the main line of Nephite prophets all the way down until the virtual end of their civilization.

In light of the importance of his texts, I wish to examine four sources of power in the words of Alma the Younger; I hope that these four points will help you gain greater appreciation and understanding of his words and testimony. First, I will show how he speaks with an authentic voice of true personal experience. Second, he knows his audiences and tailors his words to meet their particular needs and circumstances. Third, he makes very skillful and creative use of language and literature. And fourth, he bears open testimony of his deepest spiritual desires and of vital eternal truths.

1. Alma speaks with an authentic voice of personal experience.

In commenting on ways in which Alma’s words subtly and authentically reflect his unique persona, we enter a fascinating field. In a moving article about Alma’s totally repentant transformation, published in the March 1977 Ensign, Elder Holland invites us into the life of this engaging person: "There is so much that should be said of him: his political role, his high priestly power, his missionary trials, his concern for his sons. He saw people repent at great social and political cost. Some paid with their very lives. . . . He taught deep doctrines, he lived by sublime personal values, and he rejoiced in his own missionary success and the success of his brethren. . . . All this came after his willingness to undergo . . . the monumental process of the soul called repentance."

We are the great beneficiaries of Alma’s remarkable candor about his own mistakes and successes. Alma spoke as a personal witness and bore personal testimony of the things that he had experienced and learned. As a writer, he does not hold back from us his personal character. He lets it spill out. As a speaker, he is personal and intimate. If we are receptive readers, we can
know this man. We can see his character as he shares with us his innermost thoughts.

Take Alma 5 as an example. In this speech, he pours out his feelings. He says, “I speak in the energy of my soul” (v. 43). “I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? . . . They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true” (vv. 24–46). Not all speakers are as intimate and personal with their audience as is Alma. He is not afraid to stand up and share his personal experiences. That openness gives his words power. That forthrightness lets people know exactly where he stood. You never are in doubt about where Alma stands on the gospel of Jesus Christ. He does not mince words. His speeches reflect his real life, and in doing so they reflect the truth in a very powerful, personal way.

Each prophet, of course, has his own personality. Their personalities come through in their vocabulary, out of their life experiences, and through the concerns that deeply drive them. The prophet Jeremiah was different from the prophet Isaiah. President Brigham Young’s personality was different from President David O. McKay’s. In Alma’s case, consider two key parts of his life that distinctively give extraordinary power to his words: his conversion, and his work as a jurist.

The crux of Alma’s life came, as he tells in Alma 36:18, when he remembered, in his moment of darkest distress, that his father had spoken of one Jesus, a Son of God who would come to atone for the sins of the world, and he cried out, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness.” He never forgot that moment. The mercy that was shown to him in his desire to repent (otherwise unworthy as he was) became the driving characteristic of his total existence. If you listen carefully, you can hear echoes of this life-changing moment throughout his speeches, as Professor Kent Brown has shown in his study published in the 1992 Sperry Symposium volume. For example, we all remember Alma’s soliloquy in Alma 29, “O that I were an angel” and could speak “as with the voice of thunder,” “with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people” (vv. 1–2). What we don’t often think is this: Alma is thinking and talking here about that very angel who appeared to him, with a voice of booming thunder that shook the earth and urgently cried repentance to him. Alma wants to be like that
angel! Professor Brown is right: The similarities between the angel of Alma’s conversion and the angel of Alma’s yearning “cannot be missed.”

That conversion experience was real. That reality surfaces again and again. As I have charted out elsewhere in print, subtle linguistic evidence makes it apparent that Alma’s three accounts of his conversion in Mosiah 27, Alma 36, and Alma 38 all originated from the same man. Remarkably, even though these tellings come from three different times or stations in Alma’s life, and even though they are separated in the Book of Mormon by many words, events, conflicts, and distractions reported in more than a hundred pages of printed text, Alma’s distinctive words and phrases come through loud and clear, bearing the unmistakable imprints of a single distinctive person. His conversion story becomes the heart of his farewell testimony to his son Shiblon in Alma 38, who, Alma reminds, had been delivered by God from bonds and stoning at the hands of the Zoramites just as Alma had been delivered from his own spiritual bondage and work of destruction. His conversion stands behind his words of warning to the people in Ammonihah that they will be utterly destroyed if they, as he had once done, sought to “destroy his people” (9:19); and again, the “marvelous light” (36:20) of that conversion stands behind his encouragement to the poor in Antionum, who are told that they can plant the seed of truth, feel it swell, and taste its light and know as he came to know that the truth is good and that it is real (32:35). In these and many other ways, Alma’s indelible conversion gives his words potent credibility as he speaks incessantly from this platform of real personal experience.

Because of his own deliverance, Alma repeatedly testifies that there is no other way by which we can be saved than through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. In his sermons, you can find him speaking of merciful deliverance on at least twelve major occasions. The crux of Alma 7 deals with the deliverance of the Atonement, with the suffering that Christ bore, painfully reminiscent of Alma’s own bitter suffering that racked him with eternal torment and pain. The plan of redemption is again a major theme in Alma 12–13, when he himself is in dire need of deliverance from prison in Ammonihah, and again in Alma 33, where he appropriately quotes to the Zoramites the words of Zenos, who like them had himself been excluded from places of worship yet knew how to pray to and be heard by his Redeemer. Over and over, the atoning Christ, who joyously brings deliverance, is the central figure in the concerns of Alma. We misread Alma if we do not see his words against the setting of his personal experiences of deliverance.
Because of his own fortuitous redemption, Alma’s character is infused with patience and generosity toward others. He generously dedicated himself to proclaiming the word, because, as he says in Alma 6:5, “the word of God was liberal unto all.” Alma turned no one away. He went to the poor, to the rich, to his enemies, to his friends. He would give them anything, for he personally had been given much.

But Alma was also a jurist, for whom mercy could not rob justice. Together with his legal personality came a strong sense of justice and accountability. He knew that people are responsible for their actions. Alma was an experienced judge. Professionally, he was the highest jurist in the land. He served as chief judge for eight formative years, working long hours, being involved in landmark cases such as the trials of Nehor, and Korihor, with himself on trial in Ammonihah. You can take Alma off the bench, but you can’t take the bench out of Alma.

### Legal Themes in Alma’s Speeches

- Standing before the judgment bar of God (Alma 5)
- Basis of God’s judgment (Alma 12)
- Concept of restorative justice (Alma 41)
- Operation of justice and mercy (Alma 42)

Thus, when Alma speaks of the judgment of God, he speaks with legal experience. In at least ten passages, you can find Alma talking about God judging his people. For example, when Alma describes what it will be like when we stand before the judgment bar of God in Alma 5:15–23, he devotes nine verses to describing how we will feel standing before God as our judge. He asks: When we look up to God in that day, “do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord and say our works have been righteous? Or can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, ye a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?” This sounds to me like a judge speaking to us, like a person who has had actual people standing before him, waffling, trying to lie, trying to misrepresent, but feeling shame and knowing full well that they must be held accountable for what they have done.

Judge Alma is the one who tells us most explicitly in Alma 12:14 the three evidentiary grounds on which we will be judged: by our words, our
deeds, and our thoughts. He says, “For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; ... and our thoughts will also condemn us, and in this awful state will shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.”

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<th>Reference</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Audience Setting</th>
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<td>Alma 9</td>
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<td>wicked people in Ammonihah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma 12–13</td>
<td>the plan and holy order of God</td>
<td>wicked people in Ammonihah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 19</td>
<td>“O that I were an angel”</td>
<td>unknown</td>
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<td>Alma 32–33</td>
<td>humility, faith, prayer, atonement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma 36–37</td>
<td>Alma’s conversion, following the lord</td>
<td>his son Helaman</td>
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<td>Alma 38</td>
<td>Alma’s conversion, wise counsel</td>
<td>his son Shiblon</td>
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<td>Alma 39–42</td>
<td>sin, redemption, justice, mercy, resurrection, restoration</td>
<td>his son Corianton</td>
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</table>

Alma the Younger’s first recorded speech (see Mosiah 27:24–31) was the impromptu account of his conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. After his conversion, he devoted his life to preaching the gospel to all who would listen. His ten speeches or formal statements are identified in this chart.

Again, it is Alma the judge who articulates the meaning of restorative justice in Alma 41. He explains that the meaning of the word *restoration* is to bring back good for that which is good; evil for that which is evil; devilish for that which is devilish. This restorative concept, which epitomized the ancient Israelite eye-for-eye, bruise-for-bruise rubric of talionic justice, undergirded Hebrew law in biblical times, as judge Alma would well have known.

Strikingly, it is no surprise that it is judge Alma, of all the prophets, who wrestles most of all, particularly in Alma 42, with the tension between justice and mercy. After all, as a judge he had been required both to apply the demands of the law and also to consider the petitions for mercy in a number of very hard cases. Getting justice and mercy together is the ever-present task of every good judge.
Like a judge or lawyer, Alma also knows how to ask penetrating questions. In Alma 5 alone, I count fifty questions that he asks, one after another: “Can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?” (5:19). “Can ye feel so now?” (5:26). “Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God?” (5:27). “Are ye stripped of pride?” (5:28). “Of envy?” (5:29). “Of what fold are ye?” (5:39). His questions go on and on, extremely effectively. As I give ear to his words, I feel like I’m being cross-examined by a masterful jurist who knows how to ask me exactly the right questions.

2. Alma knows his audiences and tailors his words to their needs and circumstances.

It helps us give ear to Alma’s words when we see how sensitively he spoke to each of his particular audiences. Because we know that he spoke so personally to them, we can hear him speaking personally to us, as we too share many of the recurring concerns and persistent predicaments felt by those Nephite audiences.

Consider the audience’s role in each of his ten main texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audiences Addressed by Alma</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 27</td>
<td>To his family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5</td>
<td>To church members in Zarahemla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7</td>
<td>To righteous members in Gideon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 9</td>
<td>To wicked people in Ammonihah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 12–13</td>
<td>To his accusers in Ammonihah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 29</td>
<td>To himself in prayer to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 32–33</td>
<td>To the poor outcasts in Antionum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 36–37</td>
<td>To his righteous son Helaman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 38</td>
<td>To his second son Shiblon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 39–42</td>
<td>To his wayward son Corianton</td>
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First we have his spontaneous conversion speech in Mosiah 27, where he stands up and addresses his family and friends who have fasted and prayed over him for three days and three nights. He knows how much they had worried about him, before and during this ordeal. He addresses their concerns using straightforward, graphic terms that must have been both relieving and astonishing to them, telling them exactly what had happened to him in the
amazing reversal that he has just experienced. His style here is succinct and declarative.

Next we have Alma 5. Here Alma is speaking to backsliding church members in the city of Zarahemla. Remember that there had been 3,500 converts the year before. It had been a great, successful year for the missionary effort following the defeat of Amlici. But Alma had a retention problem; perhaps some had joined for social or political reasons in the aftermath of the civil war. In this setting, Alma delivers a classic covenant renewal speech, encouraging people to renew or to deepen the level of conversion they had previously experienced. Here his style is authoritative, drawing heavily on phrases from King Benjamin’s renewal text given in the same city of Zarahemla forty-two years (or six sabbatical periods) earlier.

In Alma 7, Alma speaks to the righteous people in the new city of Gideon. These people were probably children of the immigrant people of Limhi, for they named their city after Gideon, who was Limhi’s captain who had been killed by Nehor. Thus, their fathers had been rescued from captivity and suffering themselves, and they must have sought solace concerning the death of their friend and hero Gideon. In this setting, Alma focuses on the Atonement of Jesus Christ, a message that would have spoken deeply to these faithful souls as he told them that Christ would “take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (7:12). Here Alma’s style is consoling and sympathetic as he makes a special point of reaching out to them personally in his own language or dialect.

In Alma 9, we encounter a totally different mood. Alma boldly delivers a pure prophetic judgment speech to the wicked people of Nehor in the land of Ammonihah. Here Alma focuses on repentance and how God will deliver people only if they properly repent; otherwise they are ripe for destruction. His style is blunt and consequential.

Alma chapters 12 and 13 comprise two of the most powerful chapters in all of the Book of Mormon, dealing with the plan of salvation and the holy order of the Melchizedek Priesthood prepared from before the foundation of the world. After being in prison for about three months, Alma took this one last opportunity to testify of his authority as the ruling high priest and to give his accusers a final opportunity to understand the true plan of redemption and the eternal powers of the ordinances of the priesthood. Nehorism specifically rejected the Nephite doctrines on sin and priesthood, so Alma addresses
precisely those two topics, meeting his Nehorite challengers squarely on the issues most vital to them, as well as to us. His words here are deliberative, freighted with ritual allusions and cosmic symbolism.

In Alma 29, Alma’s primary audience is himself. Who can fail to sense his sincerity as he ponders the wish and prayer of his heart: “O that I were an angel” (v. 1). We will come back to this interior text.

Alma 32–33, on planting the seed of faith and nourishing its growth, are words tailored exactly to the needs of the poor outcasts in Antionum who had built the synagogue, in which the Zoramite leaders would not let them worship. Here Alma uses the imagery of planting and nourishing a seed to reap a glorious harvest, something that even the poorest peasant farmer among them would readily understand. His themes are humility, faith, prayer, and coming unto Christ. His style is empathic and invitational.

Alma chapters 36–42 preserve Alma’s words to his three sons, Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. How different the blessings and instructions are to each! There is nothing trite or rubber-stamped here. Alma was a good father; he knew each of his sons personally. He had taught and worked with them. Helaman, the responsible oldest son, suitably received the firstborn’s doubled blessing (twice the length of Shiblon’s) and is charged with the duty of keeping the records. Shiblon, a middle son, receives wise social counsel: “use boldness, but not overbearance” (38:12), “see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness” (38:12–13). Corianton, the wayward son, is told of sin, abomination, crime, resurrection, restoration, and judgment in words that would set his teeth on edge as the Hebrew father was told that he should speak at Passover to a son in need of censure and repentance.

From this brief survey, I hope you will agree that we have our work cut out for us as we strive to hear the rich and manifold tonalities in each of Alma’s speeches. We give sharper ear to his carefully tailored words when we hear them through the ears of his audiences. And speaking of Alma’s carefully crafted words, let us turn to my third point.

3. Alma makes very skillful and creative use of language and literary forms.

Alma is obviously a very skillful writer. He was gifted with words from the time of his youth. When Mosiah 27 describes Alma and the four sons of Mosiah who caused so many difficulties for Alma’s own father and the Church,
it notes that Alma was adept at flattering the people with his words. He was a
skillful orator. He knew how to use words. That was how he was able to cause
so many problems. After his conversion, he employed that impressive talent
in the work of the Lord. Let's look more closely to better appreciate a few of
the amazing compositional qualities of Alma's words.

Alma was precise with individual words. For example, in Alma 36, as
Alma strives to communicate the ecstasy he felt at the joy of his conversion,
he quotes Lehi when he says, “Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi
saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of
angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did
long to be there” (36:22). Twenty-one words are quoted precisely, absolutely
perfectly, from the words of Lehi in 1 Nephi 1:8. This tells us that Alma knew
his scriptures by heart. He could quote them verbatim (as he also quoted the
words of Zenos spontaneously in Alma 33:4–11). By the way, if you think
about it, this precision also bears strong evidence of the miraculous nature of
Joseph Smith’s translation. I doubt that, in translating Alma 36, Joseph said
to Oliver, “Please read back to me what we had Lehi say in 1 Nephi chapter 1.
I want to get the quote exactly right.” I think that if he had said this, Oliver
would have walked off the job.

In addition, Alma was meticulous about his cumulative and collective
words. Certain words seem to have been measured and counted. We spot this
trait in Alma 31: 26–35, when Alma prayed before entering the Zoramite city
of Antionum. In that prayer he invoked the sacred name “O Lord” exactly
ten times. It seems more than coincidental that ten is the traditional ancient
number of perfection, an especially suitable number of times for uttering the
holy name of God. That Alma would invoke the divine name ten times seems
hardly accidental.

Alma was also skillful in sentence composition. He made brilliant use of
antithetical parallelisms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antithetical Parallelism in Mosiah 27:29–30</th>
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| I was in the darkest abyss;  
But now I behold the marvelous light of God. |
| My soul was racked with eternal torment;  
But I am snatched and my soul is pained no more. |
| I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken . . . ;  
But now that they may foresee that he will come and that he remembereth. . . . |
In Mosiah 27 we find the words that he spoke right after his conversion. Just liberated from three days of torment and finding his whole life changed, he speaks in a spontaneous style: I was this, but now I’m that. I was this, but now I’m that. We find these antithetical parallelisms especially in verses 29 and 30. Let me emphasize them: “I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more. I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now [I affirm] that they may foresee and that he remembereth every creature of his creating.” These back-and-forth statements are called antithetical parallelisms: they are typically pairs of abrupt, short statements that work as good one-liners. They are especially suitable in showing surprise such as Mosiah 27.

Alma also made skillful use of complex structural chiasmus or inverted parallelism. This is the style of writing that presents a series of words in one order (A-B-C) and then turns around and presents them in the opposite order (C-B-A). Chiasmus is not completely unique to Hebrew literature, but its use is an indication of Hebrew style. A good example of chiasmus is found in Leviticus 24:13–23. Alma, as a close student of scripture, may have learned this writing technique from passages such as that one on the plates of brass.

Alma chapter 36, the entire chapter, is the best example of chiastic writing that I know of anywhere in the Book of Mormon or, for that matter, in world literature. It tells the same conversion story as does Mosiah 27, but now, with more time to structurally formalize his words, Alma takes all of the antitheticals and packs the bad things—I was this, I was this, I was this—in the first half of Alma 36, and then puts all the good things—now I am this, I

<table>
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<th>Chiastic Centerpiece of Alma 36</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lost the use of his limbs (v. 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feared to be with God (v. 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was racked with the pains of a damned soul (v. 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was harrowed up by the memory of his sins (v. 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembered Jesus Christ, a Son of God (v. 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cried, “Jesus, thou Son of God” (v. 18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was harrowed up by the memory of his sins no more (v. 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was filled with joy as exceeding as was his pain (v. 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longed to be with God (v. 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received the use of his limbs (v. 23)</td>
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</table>
am this, I am this—in the second half of the text. Using his own voice and original words, he has rearranged his initial spontaneous words into a masterful inverted parallel structure. You see here only the center elements in the overall chiastic structure of Alma 36.

The rest, we might say, is literature. Alma 36 is truly an impressive utilization of chiastic composition. Not only these center verses, but the entire chapter is structured chiastically, making it one of the longest chiasms you will find anywhere. Its degree of balance is also very remarkable. The center is right in the middle: 52 percent of its words precede this turning point, 48 percent are behind it. Twenty-five of its words appear exactly twice in the chapter: once in the first half and once again in the second half. After reading through this chapter with me, a famous scholar of Old Testament Yahwistic poetry smiled and said, “Mormons are very lucky. Their book is truly beautiful.”

And more than that, Alma uses chiasmus not just as a literary device but to focus attention on the critical turning point of his life. Chiasmus is the best literary form with focusing power. From these pivotal words, we can see the real pivot point of Alma’s life. It wasn’t the coming of the angel, where we might put it. The turning point of Alma’s life was three days later. “I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness” (vv. 17–18). He even makes the structural contrast explicit: “Yea, my soul was filled with joy was as exceeding as was my pain” (v. 20), as if to say, “Get the point. I’m comparing the two. You can’t understand the one without the other.” Alma uses chiasmus as an effective focusing tool that embraces this entire chapter, which begins and ends with related words: “My son, give ear to my words” (v. 1) and “now this is according to his word” (v. 30), marking the boundaries of this textual space.

This was one of the first chiasms I discovered in the Book of Mormon as a missionary in 1967 and published in 1969 in BYU Studies. It remains one of my favorites. According to a recent statistical analysis by Boyd and Farrell Edwards in BYU Studies, the odds of this central configuration occurring by chance are minuscule.6

Alma was also creative with his words. Perhaps the most clever use of chiasmus is found in Alma 41:13–15. In speaking to Corianton, as we mentioned previously, Alma had to explain the meaning of the word restoration.
The Nehorites taught that all people would be restored to a condition of happiness. Alma had to explain that the meaning of the word *restoration* is to bring back “good for that which is good, righteous for that which is righteous, just for that which just, merciful for that which is merciful.”

Then, as it appears in the English translation, he says: “Therefore, my son, see that thou art merciful unto your brethren, deal justly, judge righteously and do good continually.” Notice that he had said, “You will get a good reward if you are good; therefore be good.” But after having said only that much, the pattern is unbalanced. He has mentioned good, righteous, just, and merciful twice in the first list of pairs; and thus far he has only given that list once in the opposite order. So he continues: “And if ye do these things, ye shall have your reward.” He goes through the same four, again, in the opposite order: “Ye shall have mercy restored unto you again, you shall have justice restored unto you again, you shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again, and you shall have good rewarded unto you again.” He has given us a list of pairs and then a pair of lists in the opposite order. This is very clever.

### First a List of Pairs in Alma 41:13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Righteous</td>
<td>Righteous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just</td>
<td>Just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merciful</td>
<td>Merciful</td>
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### Then a Pair of Lists in Alma 41:14

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Merciful</th>
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<tr>
<td>Justly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Righteously</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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<td>Mercy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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(Alma 41:13–15)

But again, the form of this passage is not just ornamental. Alma’s creative use of chiasmus in Alma 41 perfectly communicates the essence of restorative justice, namely that God’s justice will be balanced. As in Leviticus 24, the
use of chiasmus in Alma 41 communicates the essence of ancient Israelite jurisprudence: bruise for bruise, tooth for tooth; or in other words, let the punishment match the crime. So the use of chiasmus in Alma 41 serves Alma’s needs beautifully and also gives us an exquisite example of this style of writing. Research has shown that some people knew about chiasmus in Joseph Smith’s day, although there is no indication that Joseph himself was aware of it; and even so, knowing a few of its rudiments is one thing; producing creative masterpieces of this quality is a very different matter.

4. I would conclude by giving ear to ten points as Alma bears open testimony of his deepest spiritual desires and of vital eternal truths.

Let’s turn particularly to Alma 29 and try now to give special ear to his words in these ten respects:

1. Let us appreciate the intensity with which Alma says, “I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, . . . that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth” (Alma 29:2). Repentance is the key for us all, if we are to eliminate sorrow in our own lives or in the world around us. Alma 29 was written very shortly after one of the most sorrowful days in Alma’s life. Thousands of bodies were laid low in the earth (see Alma 28:11). The Nephites had fought a vicious battle in the defense of the rights of Ammonite converts to stay in the land of Zarahemla. This was a bittersweet time in Alma’s life. He felt the pain, the cost that had been paid by those soldiers and their families. Alma also knew the price that the Ammonites had paid to become converts to the Church. He also had witnessed up close the cost that Amulek had recently borne as the men in Ammonihah cast out the believing men and burned their books, along with their women and children. Among those women and children, would there not have been Amulek’s own wife and children? Alma knows that all this sorrow could have been averted by a willingness of some to repent. Helping someone to repent from day to day may be the most important function and operation of the priesthood. Alma looked up especially to Melchizedek as the greatest high priest, and why? Because when Melchizedek preached repentance to his people, they did repent, perhaps the most desirable priesthood miracle of them all.

2. Alma continues in 29:3–4, “But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.” What’s wrong with Alma’s wish? He goes on to explain, “I ought
not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life.” Alma knows the eternal truths that God is in charge; that he has allotted certain roles, callings, situations, or challenges to each of us; and that he will give everyone their free agency to choose in those roles the path of death or the path of life. Much of happiness is found in being content with whatever our just Lord has willed for us.

3. Let us give ear as he goes on in verse 5, “Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless.” We might ask, Is this Alma the lawyer again, thinking of them as acquitted from guilt? He continues, “But he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.” Alma knows that opposition is in the very nature of this creation. As Alma grew older, things seem to have become even more black and white for him. This happens when we see things more in an eternal perspective: areas of gray become less significant. Ultimately, things either build up our desire in favor of the kingdom of God or take away from it.

4. What do we hear in verses 7 and 8 where he then asks, “Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth? For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have”? Alma knows that the Lord will grant unto all nations the level of wisdom that they need. Throughout his speeches, Alma knows that we grow in knowledge incrementally. As a seed grows, we become perfect in that one thing, and then we go on to the next. For Alma, perfect knowledge is not received in a single chunk. Instead, God gives to each person incrementally the amount that he or she is to have at this time, according to the heed and diligence that each person is willing to bring to bear.

5. Alma knows that we grow not only in knowledge of that which is just and true but also in a knowledge of that which is good. Notice and give ear to Alma’s particular words here. It is one thing to know that something is true, another thing to know that it is good. When the seed begins to grow, I think it is significant that the first thing that a person knows, in Alma 32:33, is that the seed is good. Indeed, Satan knows a lot of truth; he is very smart. But what Satan doesn’t know or won’t respond to is that which is good. Hitler knew a lot of truth, but what he didn’t know was how to put that knowledge
of mathematics, communications, or economics to work for good purposes. I think Alma wanted us to know that the gospel is both true and also that it is good.

6. Next in Alma 29:9, Alma’s testimony turns to sharing his joy: “And this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.” Alma knows that joy is found in helping others, especially in helping them fulfill eternal needs. If you ever feel sad or sorry for yourself, follow Alma’s pattern. Go out and do your visiting teaching or your home teaching; find a way to help someone repent. There you will find joy, as he did.

7. Do we give ear as Alma reminds us that we must remember what the Lord has done? When he sees others truly penitent, then he remembers “what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me” (v. 10). Remembering is a spiritual process. Remembering is to the past as faith and hope are to the future. It is significant that we make only one promise as we partake of the sacrament, namely that we will remember him always.

8. Alma remembered specifically that he had been heard of God. He testifies that God will hear the words of our mouth. Let us listen carefully here. There is an upside to this and a downside as well. Sometimes we only want God to hear our prayers when we are taking a test or find ourselves in great need. Perhaps on a Friday night or off at a party, we’d rather not have God listening in to what is going on. But Alma learned that God heard him even in his most rebellious moments.

9. Alma ends his testimony in chapter 29 by speaking of the fruits of joy and happiness that will come by planting and cultivating a particular word that will spring up in us unto eternal life. He is carried away with joy because

The Word

Believe in the Son of God,
That he will come to redeem his people,
And that he shall suffer and die
To atone for their sins;
And that he shall rise again from the dead,
Which shall bring to pass the resurrection,
That all men shall stand before him, to be judged

(Alma 33:22)
he had been called “by a holy calling, to preach the word” (v. 13). For Alma, that word is the seed that we must plant: “And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts” (33:23). In Alma 33, Alma reveals what that most important seven-part “word” or proclamation is.

We give ear to this word when we plant, cultivate, and give room for this word of faith in our lives.

Lastly, Alma’s soliloquy ends with a final priestly blessing to all people, grounded in the eternal hope of everlasting life, “that they may sit down in the kingdom of God” and “go no more out” and that all things “may be done according to [the] words” God has promised as Alma has spoken (29:17). Alma’s testimony veritably glows in that bright hope of eternal glory. Let us give ear to that sure word of promise.

In sum, for the many reasons we have discussed, Alma bears a powerful testimony. We do well indeed to give heed to his words. I hope that these few suggestions will help you give closer ear to his words. He speaks directly, boldly, unequivocally, with unflinching language of sure knowledge. As he testifies in Alma 36:4–5 and 26, I would not that ye think “that I know of myself,” for “if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things,” but “many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted,” and the knowledge which I have is of God.” Think of hearing Alma bear this testimony; what a direct and beautiful testimony he bore!

Brothers and sisters, I add my testimony of the truthfulness of the plan of salvation and redemption and of the goodness of the words which Alma has spoken. I say with Alma, “Who can deny” the truthfulness of these words? (5:39). I say with Alma, “Can ye withstand these sayings?” (5:53). I say with Alma, “What have ye to say against this? . . . The word of God must be fulfilled” (5:58), for these things are true.

I hope and pray that in some beneficial way you will never think of the words of Alma quite the same way again, that you will see him as a towering figure in the center of the Book of Mormon out of which so much continues to emerge. His legacy throughout the Book of Mormon is indelible. He did as much as or more than any other to prepare and to hold the Nephite nation together, that there would be a righteous and knowledgeable group preserved to greet the resurrected Lord as he came to instruct them at the temple in Bountiful. I pray that Alma’s words may similarly prepare us to receive the coming of the Savior and to stand before him at the Judgment, which will surely occur one day.
Notes

1. L. Tom Perry, “Alma the Son of Alma,” in *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 98.


Though times of discouragement and despair will arise in our lives, we can rely on the power of the Book of Mormon to give us hope and encouragement.
Toward Emotional Maturity: Insights from the Book of Mormon

LARRY W. TIPPETTS

Larry W. Tippetts (TippettsLW@ldces.org) is an institute teacher at the Salt Lake University Institute.

The dreaded D’s—discouragement, despair, and depression—seem to be on the rise. It is common for teachers to have youth grappling with feelings of loneliness, discouragement, anger, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and tendencies. These negative emotions are often accompanied by fear and self-doubt, enemies of the faith in Christ so essential to progress and happiness in mortality.

Our quest as Saints of God is to come out of the darkness and into the light. Peace, happiness, and joy are within reach, but they require a mighty change of heart. Spiritual conversion precedes emotional maturity. Gospel classrooms can be places and occasions where students regain perspective and cultivate positive emotions to combat the negative circumstances and feelings that are part of the latter days.

The Book of Mormon contains much of worth to strengthen and assist us in our quest to rise above the discouraging circumstances of our times. Nephi speaks repeatedly of being “exceedingly sorrowful” (1 Nephi 3:14; 17:19). The sons of Mosiah reflected on a time at the beginning of their mission to the Lamanites when their “hearts were depressed” and they nearly returned
home (Alma 26:27). The two thousand stripling warriors experienced being “depressed in body as well as in spirit” while engaged in defending their freedoms (Alma 56:16). Alma was “weighed down with sorrow” and experienced “anguish of soul” (Alma 8:14). Nephi writes of having his “heart . . . swollen with sorrow” and experiencing “agony of soul” (Helaman 7:6). Mormon speaks of experiencing sorrow all of his days because of the wickedness of his people (see Mormon 2:19).

Importance of Emotions

Furthermore, while counseling his son Shiblon, Alma wrote the following insightful advice: “See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Passions are strong emotions that, according to Alma, need to be disciplined or controlled, much as a bridle can channel the energy and strength of a young horse to productive purposes. Emotions play a vital role in determining our level of happiness in life. Without them, life would be sterile and bland. However, unbridled feelings seldom result in a more productive life.

Emotion is frequently defined as an affective or psychological state of consciousness that often arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort. More simply, emotions are the feelings we have. Strong feelings impact us mentally and physiologically—for good or for ill.

Feelings or emotions can be roughly dichotomized as positive or negative. Positive emotions include happiness, love, peace of mind, contentment, empathy, patience, hope, and joy. Negative emotions include resentment, bitterness, anger, fear, rage, discouragement, jealousy, worry, self-pity, and irritability. Positive emotions give zest to our lives; they make life meaningful. They are necessary for happiness and well-being. Negative emotions, despite the fact that we try to avoid them, are also necessary for the mortal experience as there must be opposition in all things (see 2 Nephi 2:11). Periods of low moods are normal and a part of the testing experience inherent in mortal life. A “dark night of the soul” can be therapeutic in the long run if we are able to turn our hearts to God. During a time of great difficulty in my life, I came upon the following lines written by William Blake. Memorizing these words helped me better understand Lehi’s injunction about the need for opposition, enabling me to keep my negative emotions in check.
Joy & Woe are woven fine.
A Clothing for the Soul divine.
Under every grief & pine,
Runs a joy with silken twine.

Blake also writes:

It is right it should be so.
Man was made for Joy and Woe.
And when this we rightly know
Thro the World we safely go.¹

Inasmuch as both positive and negative emotions are part of mortality, one of life’s challenges is to minimize the impact of negative moods and emotions by learning from them. Otherwise, negative emotions will come to dominate our waking hours, preventing us from experiencing the joy intended for mortality.

**Emotions and Agency**

Alma’s counsel to Shiblon teaches that passions and emotions are within our realm of accountability. There can be a moral component of our emotions just as there can be a moral component of our thoughts and actions. A particular emotion, such as anger, might be moral or immoral depending on whether it manifests itself productively or unproductively. Unfortunately, some popular psychology teaches that we are responsible for our actions, and possibly even our thoughts, but feelings are beyond our control; we simply are incapable of choosing our emotional state. Such notions are contradicted by the teachings of prophets, ancient and modern.²

Initially, we may have negative emotions wash over us unbidden, but we have the power to channel those emotions productively, and possibly even to dispel them by replacing them with a divine counterpart. Satan’s mission is to destroy our agency through the captivity of our wills. He never comes closer to touching the core of our being than when he captures our hearts, our feelings, and our thoughts. Just as sinful behaviors can become habitual, some emotions such as resentment, bitterness, and hopelessness can also play into the purposes of the adversary.
Negative Emotions, Latter-day Bondage

The sons of Mosiah became discouraged and distressed about the obstacles facing them as they began their mission among the Lamanites. “Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success” (Alma 26:27, see also Alma 17:10). Apparently depression is not exclusively a latter-day challenge.

Clinical depression has a physiological basis in brain chemistry that can result in sadness, aimlessness, lack of physical strength, or even self-destructive feelings, and successful treatment usually requires professional help and possibly medication. Clinical depression is usually not a moral issue and has more in common with having poor eyesight or a bad back than a bad attitude. It is not something we choose to experience. Depression is a misfortune but not a fault. We also commonly use the term depression to refer to situations or states of mind most of us experience from time to time such as when we feel discouraged, have the blues or the blahs, or are “down in the dumps” about circumstances or events in our lives. The sons of Mosiah were not likely suffering from clinical depression; rather, they were experiencing the normal discouraging circumstances that come with mortal life. This type of depression, like clinical depression, also involves negative emotions and feelings. It is sometimes difficult to determine which aspects of our feelings and behavior remain within our own control. If we are not vigilant, the discouragement that comes from issues over which we have no control can lead to negative behaviors and attitudes over which we do have control—another reason for seeking professional medical help when facing prolonged depression.

A noted therapist wisely wrote, “The thing that characterizes those who struggle emotionally is that they have lost, or believe they have lost, their ability to choose those behaviors that make them happy.” Unhappiness is exacerbated by choosing to focus on negative emotions. By learning to recognize our emotional state and utilize the great gift of moral agency, we can escape the worst consequences of unhealthy negative emotions. Of course, our best efforts will be in vain without the light and strength available through the gift of the Holy Ghost and the merciful enabling power of our Lord’s Atonement.
Insights from the Book of Mormon

One of the great themes of the Book of Mormon is bondage and deliverance. The word *bondage* appears 88 times, and the word *deliver* (or one of its derivatives) is used 236 times in this remarkable record. I have selected several examples of how different characters in the book dealt with intense emotions. Viewing some negative emotions as a form of bondage, we can observe how various individuals were delivered from the bondage of discouraging feelings and, in the process, find strength for our own lives. Also, the wisdom of Alma’s counsel to Shiblon is evident, as in each case it was necessary to “bridle” emotions so that love could prevail.

*Lehi and Sariah—a family crisis (see 1 Nephi 5:1–8).* In these few verses we gain a glimpse into the negative emotional state of a mother who fears for the loss of her sons. The delay of the four brothers in returning from their journey to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates has resulted in some negative feelings within Sariah such as fear, worry, and anxiety. Unfortunately, as often happens, she takes out her frustration on the person nearest at hand—her husband, Lehi. Nephi artfully records this poignant scene allowing the reader to sense the deep emotion involved. “[My mother] truly had mourned because of us. For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father” (1 Nephi 5:1–3; emphasis added).

Lehi could respond with negative emotions of his own. It would be easy for him to become defensive under the circumstances. Some might feel Sariah deserves a rebuke for her lack of support and her emotional accusations. Instead, Lehi maintains emotional control and reassures Sariah that all will be well with their sons. So certain is Lehi of the Lord’s guidance that he speaks of the promised land as an accomplished fact (“I have obtained a land of promise”). Nephi records, “And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:6; emphasis added). I picture Lehi comforting Sariah not only with his words but also with an embrace, allowing her to release her pent-up emotions. Upon the return of her sons, Sariah is comforted and bears her witness of the prophetic role of her husband, saying, “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the
wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak” (1 Nephi 5:8; emphasis added).

Sariah’s negative emotions directed toward Lehi were understandable but still unproductive. By keeping his own emotions hopeful and positive, Lehi was able to be a source of strength and comfort to his wife. We never again read of Sariah complaining. On the contrary, this experience may have prepared her to play a more significant role in helping the other wives and children bear the trials of their journey.

When we consider the kinds of circumstances that tear marriages and families apart, they almost always result from emotional immaturity. Many conference talks have challenged the Saints to overcome the anger and bitterness that lead to behavior unbecoming of a Latter-day Saint. Positive emotions, coupled with living in harmony with Church teachings, almost always lead to better resolutions of marriage and family problems.

Nephi’s discouragement and resolution (see 2 Nephi 4:17–35). The next example addresses the issue of how to manage discouragement and feelings of inadequacy. Nephi’s father has died and the responsibility for the extended family has fallen on Nephi’s shoulders. His elder brothers have begun to denounce Nephi viciously and threaten to take his life. We are indebted to Nephi for recording this experience in his journal so that we might learn from his experience. We are witnessing a young prophet in a deep state of depression caused by some very real and very negative circumstances.

Notice the strong language Nephi uses to describe his emotional state: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . . When I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Nephi reminds himself of the many blessings God has given him (2 Nephi 4:20–25) but then asks why, in light of God’s goodness, he feels so terrible. “Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken [a symptom of depression], because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?” (2 Nephi 4:26–27; emphasis added).
Nephi views his lack of peace and happiness as a temptation of Satan that results in feelings of anger, depression, and hopelessness. In this remarkably transparent account, Nephi describes the specific crucial behaviors he utilizes to shake off this terrible state and restore peace to his soul. “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul” (2 Nephi 4:28). These powerful words and those that follow suggest Nephi is making an internal resolve to use his agency to “get a grip on himself” in a sense, and to see his circumstances through God’s eyes. He turns with firm resolve to the Savior, his rock and salvation. We read his prayer of faith and his commitment no longer to trust in the “arm of flesh,” which symbolizes the mortal perspective. It is as though Nephi is saying, “Lord, I will no longer trust in my own limited view of our discouraging family situation; I will put my trust only in thee!”

Nephi’s experience has been highly instructive and helpful as I have faced various discouraging circumstances that left me wallowing in feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. I encourage students to sincerely ponder and internalize those powerful words, “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.” As students contemplate these words, faith and power will be restored to their heart. This is powerful spiritual medicine. I feel strengthened by the idea that I need not be a victim of my negative emotions. It requires me to recognize that I have responsibility for my feelings and impels me to use my agency to press forward and improve. Without the understanding gained from Nephi’s journal, it would be easy to rationalize my negative moods and resort to justifying the feelings and behavior that usually flow from them.

Pahoran’s response to Captain Moroni’s anger (see Alma 60–61). During a critical time of the war with the Lamanites, Captain Moroni sends an epistle to Pahoran, the governor of the land. Moroni incorrectly assumes that Pahoran is not fulfilling his responsibilities to the army. He accuses Pahoran of neglect, thoughtlessness, slothfulness, and withholding provisions (see Alma 60:5–9). Moroni blames the losses in battle on Pahoran’s iniquity, going so far as to suggest that he may have become a traitor to his country (see Alma 60:18, 28). Most of Captain Moroni’s assumptions were wrong. Though inspired by patriotic feelings, his strong emotions were negatively shaped by the difficult circumstances he faced. In today’s world such accusations to a superior officer would be worthy of rebuke, dismissal, or even court-martial.
Pahoran’s reply is a remarkable example of emotional restraint. By choosing not to take offense, he was able to communicate clearly and work toward resolving the problem. In his letter, Pahoran sympathizes with the plight Moroni and the Nephite armies are experiencing. After explaining that a rebellion has occurred in Zarahemla, driving the rightful government out of the land, Pahoran reestablishes a rightful and kind relationship with Moroni with these mature words: “And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart” (Alma 61:9).

Consider how this kind of reaction could calm a potentially explosive situation in a family or work environment: (1) “It mattereth not”—whenever possible, we can set aside the mistakes of others and move forward. (2) “I am not angry”—maintaining a mature emotional state of being and refusing to take offense are essential to resolving differences. (3) “I . . . rejoice in the greatness of your heart”—we can express our love by giving others the benefit of the doubt and attributing noble and righteous motives to their words and actions. How sweet it is to have someone dismiss our follies, refuse to get angry, and acknowledge that our motives were pure. Pahoran was clearly in full control of his emotions and prevented a division between him and his capable military leader.

Mormon counsels his son amid discouraging circumstances (see Moroni 9:4–6, 25). The Book of Mormon preserves a poignant letter of joy and woe from a father to his son sometime during the final battles of the Nephite nation. It contains a valuable lesson about managing the negative emotion of hopelessness, which often leads people to simply quit trying. Mormon recounts his efforts to get his people to repent, but everything he has tried has been in vain. “When I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against me; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them” (Moroni 9:4).

However, Mormon uses this seemingly hopeless situation to remind his son that they must continue to labor diligently in their callings to teach, warn, and testify, regardless of the response of the people, “for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 9:6).
Toward Emotional Maturity: Insights from the Book of Mormon

Moroni’s persistence reminds me of a parable by Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, who told about “a just man who comes to Sodom hoping to save the city. He pickets. What else can he do? He goes from street to street, from marketplace to marketplace, shouting ‘Men and women, repent. What you are doing is wrong. It will kill you; it will destroy you.’ They laugh, but he goes on shouting, until one day a child stops him. ‘Poor stranger, don’t you see it’s useless?’ ‘Yes,’ the just man replies. ‘Then why do you go on?’ the child asks. ‘In the beginning,’ he says, ‘I was convinced that I would change them. Now I go on shouting because I don’t want them to change me.’”

The message is clear. If we allow negative and discouraging feelings to overwhelm us when others reject our efforts to help them, we only jeopardize our own spiritual well-being. Parents are sometimes discouraged about continuing to have family home evening or scripture study because it doesn’t seem to be strengthening the family. In fact, children sometimes rebel with such intensity that parents conclude it is doing more harm than good and just give up. Missionaries sometimes wonder why they should bother to study or to tract every day when no one seems to be the least bit interested. If we use lack of success with others as a reason to cease or diminish our own efforts, then we ourselves may lose the Spirit and jeopardize our own exaltation.

From the stories just recounted we learn valuable lessons of life. From Lehi we learn of the importance of self-control and Christlike love and compassion. From Nephi we grasp the value of shaking off our own mortal perspective of difficult circumstances and turning to God. We sense the practical wisdom of always thinking the best of others as Pahoran did. And from Mormon we learn to never give up in righteous efforts.

Sometimes our help and strength during depressing times comes directly from God as it did for Nephi, and other times the help and perspective comes from others who are at a higher level of managing their emotions (Sariah was strengthened by patient Lehi; Captain Moroni was blessed by steadfast Pahoran). In every instance, favorable outcomes were made possible by the power that flowed through self-mastery combined with divine grace or enabling power.

**Emotional Maturity—a Christlike Quality**

Emotional maturity is the ability to increasingly rise above our negative or destructive moods and emotions. The greatest use of our personal agency may be to determine what sort of inner world we create for ourselves each day.
Emotions can be very powerful and have a significant, possibly even a central, influence in shaping our thinking and behavior. The emotions can also positively or negatively affect our spirituality and our ability to receive and properly understand personal revelation.

Our feelings are one of the means through which God often communicates with his children. President Boyd K. Packer taught, “In your emotions, the spirit and the body come closest to being one.” He further explained that “the spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual.” As we mature spiritually, we can learn to distinguish between true spiritual feelings and the emotional feelings that we sometimes confuse with the spirit. Our commitment must rise above the pull of negative feelings and moods. That is the purpose of our covenants—to help us do the right thing regardless of the state of our feelings. In The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis records these words from the fictional devil to his nephew, “Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.” Sometimes, as Lewis writes in Mere Christianity, we simply have to tell our moods “where they get off.”

Inasmuch as one of the central purposes of our mortal experience is to learn to recognize and respond appropriately to the influences of the Holy Ghost, it is of critical importance that we learn to discern between healthy and unhealthy emotions. If the Holy Ghost works frequently through our feelings, it is essential that we guard against the deception and confusion that flow from misinterpreting our feelings.

I am convinced that emotional immaturity is among the most common reasons we stumble in establishing close relationships—with God, with ourselves, and with others. Among the most valuable characteristics of spiritual maturity we can possess is the ability to dispel unhealthy negative emotions. I find it helpful to suggest to my students three levels of emotional growth. The “way of the child” (or telestial level of emotional maturity) is to give full vent to our emotions—positive or negative. The “way of the honorable man of the earth” (terrestrial level) is to control our emotions in a socially acceptable manner. Surely this is a step up, but there is a more excellent way. The “way of the sincere disciple of Christ” (celestial level) is to strive to eventually eliminate or dispel (not stifle) negative emotions and replace them with a divine counterpart.
Additional Insights from the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon contains numerous other passages to strengthen us emotionally. Overcoming the pull of negative emotions will require great effort on our part. Just as lust or selfishness, or indeed any temptation or trial, must be battled mightily with the protection of the full armor of God, so also negative emotions and discouragement must be recognized and battled. We will be held accountable for discouragement or bitterness if we do nothing, especially when God has given us resources to recognize, fight, and eventually conquer them, although it may be a lifelong battle. Remember Mormon’s counsel: “Let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 9:6).

Change our circumstances. Sometimes the only remedy for negative emotions is to alter our environment in some way. When we wake up in the morning with the weight of the world on our shoulders, half-paralyzed with discouragement, even the simplest action may begin an emotional transformation. Get out of bed, take a shower, make the bed, eat some breakfast; then one is more likely to deal rationally and productively with the problems of the day. Other circumstances require more drastic action, such as getting new roommates, finding new friends, changing jobs, etc. The Nephites frequently packed up their tents or abandoned their homes in order to avoid an increasingly unfavorable environment.¹³

Changing our perspective. There are times when we have limited agency in altering negative circumstances. We simply have to endure difficult situations. But we have full agency to choose how we interpret, think about, perceive, and even remember negative events or conditions in our lives. For example, when Alma’s people were placed in bondage to Amulon and the wicked priests of King Noah, their trials were hard to bear and they turned to God for strength. He comforted them with these words: “And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15). Mormon and Moroni could not change the discouraging circumstances into which they were born, but they continually reframed their experiences by viewing them through an eternal perspective, or the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).
Recall Pahoran choosing to interpret Captain Moroni’s motive in such a manner as to bring about a positive solution to a most discouraging situation. Emotions generally flow from experiences in life and how we process them. If this is so, the greatest battleground for emotional control is in our minds. Even if we cannot change the circumstances that elicit discouraging emotions, we can call upon inner resources and divine grace to alter the way we look at or remember painful circumstances. How we choose to interpret a painful memory is a matter of agency.

The “Light of Christ test.” Mormon’s well-known teachings on the Light of Christ (anything that leads us to Christ is good; anything that leads us away from Christ is evil) help us distinguish between good and evil (see Moroni 7:16–19) and also evaluate the impact of our emotions. Is my emotional state drawing me closer to Christ? Are my current feelings inspiring me to be more Christlike in my attitudes and behavior? A negative emotion, although painful or uncomfortable, can nevertheless serve a useful purpose—it signals that something in our lives may not be right. Like the warning lights in our cars, negative emotions call our attention to the need for some kind of an internal tune-up. Anger, resentment, or discouragement are possibly an indication that something is not right with our heart, our thinking, or our perceptions, even though our behavior may be exemplary. I have learned through experience to distrust my judgment during times of emotional discouragement, and I try not to make important decisions while under the influence of a negative mood.

Learning new emotional habits. Bridling our passions can lead us to examine how our own state of being can lead to solutions rather than to blaming others. New ways of resolving problems open up to us when we are no longer blinded by unproductive emotions. The phrase “be of good cheer” appears over a dozen times in scripture, and in nearly every instance the counsel to cheer up comes in the midst of difficult or discouraging situations. For example, Christ’s voice came to Nephi as his people faced execution if they did not renounce their belief in the sign of Christ’s birth (see 3 Nephi 1:13; Alma 17:31). President Hinckley was an avowed optimist. “It isn’t as bad as you sometimes think it is. It all works out. I say that to myself every morning.” Pessimism and optimism are learned emotional states. The emotional maturity to learn a new emotional state requires effort.
Deliverance—the Atonement of Christ

When my family was faced with a life-threatening illness, there were occasions when deep sadness overwhelmed us. At that time my wife found Helaman’s words very therapeutic. We made a copy of his words for our bedroom, and I carried a small copy in my shirt pocket. “Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us, . . . yea, and also give us strength. . . . Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him. And we did take courage” (Alma 58:10–12).

Emphasizing the dual purposes of the Atonement, Elder David A. Bednar distinguished between the “cleansing and redeeming power that helps us to overcome sin and a sanctifying and strengthening power that helps us to become better than we ever could be relying only upon our own strength.”

The redeeming power of Christ’s Atonement not only cleanses us from the burdens of sin, but also helps us bear the sickness and infirmities inherent in mortal life (see Alma 7:11–12). The enabling power of the Atonement helps us to gradually change our human nature and “be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) by gradually replacing negative emotions with Christlike counterparts. Bitterness and resentment, for example, can be dispelled and eventually replaced with divine pity or compassion through this enabling power.

I continue to marvel at the number of contemporary challenges addressed by the Book of Mormon. Like Nephi, the sons of Mosiah, and Captain Moroni, we too can have access to the grace and power available through the Holy Ghost, the priesthood, and our covenants. Our students need to know that exercising faith in Jesus Christ will enable them to find happiness, joy, and peace, despite the negative challenges that are a necessary part of the mortal experience. Although we will all experience our share of negative circumstances, it is critical that we not allow the emotions of the “natural man” to dominate our lives. Elder Richard G. Scott reminds us that negative experiences and the feelings usually associated with them need not be the defining characteristic of mortal life:

The challenges you face, the growth experiences you encounter, are intended to be temporary scenes played out on the stage of a life of continuing peace and happiness. Sadness, heartache, and disappointment are events in life. It is not intended that they be the substance of life. I do not minimize how hard some of these events
can be. When the lesson you are to learn is very important, trials can extend over a long period of time, but they should not be allowed to become the confining focus of everything you do. Your life can and should be wondrously rewarding. It is your understanding and application of the laws of God that will give your life glorious purpose as you ascend and conquer the difficulties of life. That perspective keeps challenges confined to their proper place—stepping-stones to further growth and attainment.16

We should not underestimate the influence of the positive environment of a gospel classroom where the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, are used to help students manage negative circumstances and emotions. The following note was written by an institute student following one of her classes: “I am so glad I came today! I’ve been trying to repent of some things and combined with school and other life stresses, life seems so discouraging at times. I was so tempted to miss institute today and just go home and take a nap before work. But it seems like your lesson today was for me. Thank you. God shows his love to me through other people very often. I felt so loved and hopeful while sitting in class today. It is so amazing to me that Heavenly Father is so mindful of each son and daughter. It makes my heart happy.”

Notes


12. John uses a metaphor of light and dark to describe the various spiritual, psychological, or emotional states we find ourselves in. “Walking in the light” is descriptive of our life when we are in harmony with God. “Walking in the darkness” is a description of our life when we are out of tune with God (see 1 John 1:5–10).

13. See 2 Nephi 5:5; Omni 1:12; Alma 27:10; also, Abraham found it “needful . . . to obtain another place of residence” (Abraham 1:1).


Mother Teresa of Calcutta lived and died a saint in the eyes of those who knew her. Though she inspired many during her ministry among the poor and needy, Mother Teresa herself struggled with feelings of loneliness and unrest.
As a professor at BYU, I have in the past year met with more students and mature members of the Church who are burdened with doubt and are on the verge of throwing in the towel and leaving the Church than I have met in the previous twenty-five years. Some wrestle with Church history issues, others with doctrinal matters. In every case, the person allowed his or her questions to morph into doubts, but this process is unnecessary. As Elder John A. Widtsoe pointed out, each of us will have questions so long as we are thinking, reflective human beings. Questions are a part of life, a vital part of growing in truth and understanding. But doubt should be only a temporary condition, a state that is resolved either through the serious pursuit and investigation of the matter under consideration—resulting in acquisition of new knowledge by study or by faith—or in a settled determination to place the question “on the shelf” for a time, at least until new insights or perspectives come to light.¹

“Doubt is a perennial problem in the life of faith,” Oxford theologian Alister McGrath observed. “Doubt reflects our inability to be absolutely certain about what we believe. As Paul reminds us, we walk by faith, not by sight.
(2 Corinthians 5:7), which has the inevitable result that we cannot prove every aspect of our faith. This should not disturb us too much. After all, what is there in life that we can be absolutely certain about? We can be sure that 2 + 2 = 4, but that is hardly going to change our lives. The simple fact of life is that everything worth believing in goes beyond what we can be absolutely sure about.”

That forward pursuit, in which we do not allow the unknown to distract or beset us, is called faith. Faith is in fact the antidote to doubt, the answer to skepticism, the solution to cynicism. It is “hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21), an “anchor to the souls of men which [makes] them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4).

This is a topic worthy of an entire book at least, but in this article I would like to pursue two ways of dealing with doubt: learning to manage the seasons of unrest in our lives and taking the distant view as prerequisite to eventually seeing things as they really are.

**Times of Darkness**

“The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead based on faithfulness.” This definition of the gift of the Holy Ghost has been used for a very long time. While eternal life or exaltation is the greatest of all the gifts of God in the eternal scheme of things (see D&C 6:13; 14:7), the receipt of the Holy Ghost, given at the time of confirmation and administered by the laying on of hands, is a divine grace of immeasurable worth. “You may have the administration of angels,” President Wilford Woodruff stated. “You may see many miracles; you may see many wonders in the earth; but I claim that the gift of the Holy Ghost is the greatest gift that can be bestowed upon man.”

The *constant* companionship. *Constant!* That word is a bit daunting. Why? Because I know by personal experience that I do not enjoy a constant flow of revelation, a constant effusion of discernment, a constant sense of comfort and confidence, or a constant outpouring of peace and joy. While I have miles and miles to go before I rest, at least in terms of cultivating the gift and gifts of the Spirit as I should, I know something about the precious privilege it is to have the Spirit’s direction and warmth. I know something about how vital it is to avoid ungodliness and worldly lusts and how diligently I have tried to be a dedicated disciple of the only perfect being to walk this earth. I guess
you could say that I really do try to keep myself going in the commandment-keeping direction, knowing with a perfect certainty that the fulfillment I enjoy in this life and the eternal reward I hope to receive in the life to come are parts of the mercy and grace promised to the followers of the Christ.

My trust is in Jesus. My hope is in his atoning power to forgive my sins, cleanse my heart, transform my mind, and glorify my soul hereafter. But I do not always feel the Spirit in the same way from moment to moment or from day to day. How often have you had a magnificent and uplifting Sabbath, partaken reverently and introspectively of the emblems of the sacrament, been enlightened and motivated by the sermons and lessons delivered, searched the scriptures and discovered “new writing” as the Spirit directed your eyes and your attention to passages in holy writ that had special meaning that very minute, and knelt in prayer at the end of a supernal day and thanked a gracious God for his tender mercies? In short, how often have you closed the day on a spiritual high in which the Spirit of God like a fire was burning in your heart, only to awaken the next day with a very different feeling, one that caused you to notice that you did not feel the same Spirit you enjoyed only hours before; one, in fact, that prompted you to cry out, “What happened? Where did it go? What did I do? Was I wicked during the night without realizing it?”

Perhaps I am the only member of the Church of Jesus Christ to experience such a thing. But I do not think so. My guess is that each one of us has our spiritual highs and lows; but these are caused not by negligence or willful sin, not by a negative attitude or a critical or murmuring disposition, not by anything we have done wrong. So what’s going on? “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” Jesus said to Nicodemus, “and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The word translated here as wind is the Greek word pneuma, which may also (as in Hebrew) be rendered as breath or spirit. It is as if Jesus had said, “The Spirit goes where it will, and you can hear the sound [also rendered as voice] but you cannot always tell where it came from or where it is going. So it is with each person who has been born again.”

For one thing, the influence of the Spirit of God is not under our immediate direction or control. It cannot be called here or sent there according to human whim. It cannot be manufactured, elicited, or produced whenever we as humans desire it; however, we can certainly set the stage—we can prepare properly, listen to uplifting music, search the scriptures, pray, and ask humbly
for the Spirit’s intervention or manifestation. But we cannot presume upon the motions or movement of this sacred spiritual endowment. “You cannot force spiritual things,” President Boyd K. Packer explained. “Such words as compel, coerce, constrain, pressure, demand do not describe our privileges with the Spirit. You can no more force the Spirit to respond than you can force a bean to sprout, or an egg to hatch before its time. You can create a climate to foster growth; you can nourish, and protect; but you cannot force or compel: You must await the growth.”

Clearly you and I cannot enjoy the Spirit’s promptings or peace if we are guilty of unresolved sin, if we continue to pause indefinitely on spiritual plateaus, or if we persist in living well beneath our spiritual privileges. My impression is that all of us understand this. What we do not so readily understand is that the power of the Holy Ghost may come and go in terms of its intensity and its evident involvement in our lives. What President Harold B. Lee taught about testimony is true with respect to the work of the Comforter. He explained that our testimony today will not be our testimony tomorrow; a testimony is as fragile as an orchid, as elusive as a moonbeam. In practical language, this means that we should take heart even when we do not feel the presence of the Holy Ghost with the same magnitude on a regular, ongoing basis.

In October of 2000, I experienced something I never had before—I went into a deep depression for several months. Oh, I’d had a bad day here and there before, had known frustration and disillusionment like everyone else, but I had never been trapped by the tentacles of clinical depression so severely that I simply could not be comforted and could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. For days at a time I only wanted to sleep or gaze at the walls and be alone. For weeks I felt as though I was in a closed casket, a prison cell that allowed in no light or sound whatsoever. I prayed. Oh, how I prayed for deliverance! I sought for and received priesthood blessings. I counseled with my friends who had known such pain and alienation from firsthand experience. One physician described my condition as “depletion depression,” meaning my body, my emotions, and my mind had chosen—whether I liked it or not—to take a vacation from normalcy. I had been driven for too long and could no longer live on adrenaline. I clung to my wife and children. I read the Liberty Jail revelations from the Doctrine and Covenants over and over, holding tenaciously to the words, “Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment” (121:7). Again and again I pleaded with my Heavenly Father, in the
name of the Prince of Peace, to lift the pall, chase the darkness away, and bring me back into the light. It was so very dark and lonely out there!

During those weeks of suffering, I had great difficulty feeling the Spirit. In my head I knew that I was “worthy” in the sense that I was striving to live in harmony with the teachings of the Savior, but I simply did not feel the peace, joy, and divine approbation that I had come to expect and cherish. I was serving as a stake president at the time, and the First Presidency and my Area Presidency tenderly and kindly encouraged me to turn everything over to my counselors, take the break I needed, and follow my doctor’s orders, including using prescribed medication if needed. Let me see if I can state this more accurately: I knew in my mind, in my heart of hearts that the Lord was pleased with my life, but I did not feel close to God as I had felt only days and weeks before. This experience, which, by the way, thankfully passed within a short period of months, taught me something that was and is extremely valuable—namely, it is one thing to have the Spirit of the Lord with us, even the “constant companionship of that member of the Godhead,” and another thing to always feel that influence. Many, if not most times that the Spirit enlightens us, we feel it. Many, if not most times that we are being divinely led, we are very much aware of it. But there are occasions when the Holy Ghost empowers our words or directs our paths and, like the Lamanites who had been taught by Helaman’s sons Nephi and Lehi and enjoyed a mighty spiritual rebirth, we know it not (see 3 Nephi 9:20).

That is to say, there is a mental or intellectual component to spiritual living that is in many ways just as important as the emotional component. Sometimes God tells us in our minds, sometimes in our hearts, and sometimes in both (see D&C 8:2–3; 128:1). To take another example, I found as a priesthood leader that it was not uncommon at all to work with a person who had been involved in serious transgression and then watch with sheer delight as changes took place in their bearing and their behavior as the light of the Holy Spirit returned to their countenances. They were forgiven. The sin was now behind them. And yet they themselves could not let it go, could not forgive themselves, and strangely, sought to respond more to some sense of personal inner justice than to the workings of the Spirit and the word of their ecclesiastical leader. In many interviews in which I counseled such individuals to not look back and to move on with their lives, I found myself reading the following profound lesson from the Apostle John: “If our heart condemn us”—that is, if our overactive conscience continues to plague us after a
remission of sins has been granted—we should remember that “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20; emphasis added).

Seasons of Unrest

Each of us, at different times in life, encounters what we might call “seasons of unrest,” periods of time when we do not feel close to our Lord, when we feel unworthy, when we almost feel as though God has turned his back on us, or when we find ourselves filled with questions and perhaps even doubts. During such seasons, there are remarkable lessons to be learned from the saintly woman who came to be known to the world simply as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Born in 1910 as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, this slight but spiritually sensitive soul determined early in life that she wanted to serve her Lord and Savior through loving and caring for the “poorest of the poor” in India. At age eighteen she traveled to Ireland to become a part of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a cloistered assembly of sisters dedicated to education.

In 1948 she received permission from her local authorities and from Rome to assume a different role as a nun—to go out into the streets; to visit the homes of the poor, the starving and emaciated, the sick and the dying; and to deliver to them tenderness and food and love and a kind word, including the word of salvation found in and through Jesus Christ. She had felt a specific call from God to do this in 1946. After establishing the congregation or ministry known as the Missionaries of Charity in 1948 and being named as its overseer under her local bishop, Mother Teresa’s work expanded and grew to fill the earth, and the poorest of the poor in many lands received the comfort, peace, sustenance, and dignity to which each person is entitled as a child of God. She continued her work, driven and directed by that charity that flows from heaven, until her frail and spent body gave up the ghost in 1997, leaving behind a legacy of love that will forevermore be celebrated. That’s the story.

Let’s take a moment, though, to consider the rest of the story, a poignant insight into Mother Teresa’s life that was not known by the public until 2007, the tenth anniversary of her death. Brian Kolodiejchuk, a member of the Missionaries of Charity, published a book entitled Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light and made known, for the first time, most of her personal correspondence, which revealed a secret that she had carried in her heart for some fifty years. You see, in spite of a lifetime spent in the service of God and her fellow mortals, spending decades of taxing and arduous labor and grueling
hours devoted to the refuse and offscouring of society and almost fifty years of ministering to “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40), Mother Teresa’s life had also been one of pain, of emptiness, of spiritual alienation, of searching for comfort, of doubt and despair. The author explained, “Mother Teresa strove to be [the] light of God’s love in the lives of those who were experiencing darkness. For her, however, the paradoxical and totally unsuspected cost of her mission was that she herself would live in ‘terrible darkness.’” Mother Teresa wrote that from 1949 or 1950 “this terrible sense of loss—this untold darkness—this loneliness this continual longing for God—which gives me that pain deep down in my heart—Darkness is such that I really do not see—neither with my mind nor with my reason—the place of God in my soul is blank—There is no God in me—when the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God—and then it is that I feel—He does not want me—He is not there. . . . The torture and pain I can’t explain.”

Her season of unrest of almost fifty years actually caught her off guard; it was something that she had never anticipated in her wildest imaginations. And yet, in spite of it all, in spite of the doubt and the pain and the agony of loneliness—in spite of what she did not feel—she knew in her mind that God loved her, was reinforcing and upholding her, and would stand by her. In time she came to realize that her sufferings were divinely orchestrated by God to allow her to more closely identify with those she served—the lonely, the confused, the starving, the downtrodden—to allow her to know something of their pain. And with greater maturity she also came to know that her torturous personal agonies had been put in place to humble her, to drive her to her knees, to cause her to trust implicitly in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to allow her a glimpse into the nature of her Redeemer’s passion, his alienation, his rejection, his emptiness during the hours of Gethsemane and Golgotha. She became a fellow traveler on the road of pain, one who participated in the fellowship of his suffering.

Mother Teresa certainly didn’t always live in the light, joy, peace, solace, and sweet refreshment that one would expect to be enjoyed by such a saintly person, but she possessed a faith in Jesus—a total trust, a complete confidence, and a ready reliance upon his merits, mercy, and grace—that transcended her bitter cup and gave her the unbelievable strength and enabling power to carry on her labors and maintain her optimism and tender tutorials to her sisters and coworkers. “Cheerfulness,” Mother Teresa wrote, “is a sign of a generous and mortified person who forgetting all things, even herself, tries to please her
God in all she does for souls. Cheerfulness is often a cloak which hides a life of sacrifice, continual union with God, fervor and generosity.”

David C. Steinmetz has written:

> From time to time everyone endures a barren period in the life of faith. Prayers bounce off the ceiling unanswered. Hymns stick in one’s throat, and whatever delight one once felt in the contemplation or worship of God withers away.

> In such circumstances Christians should “do what is in them”—that is, they should keep on keeping on. They should keep on with their prayers, their hymns of praise and their daily round of duties. Even though it seems like they are walking through an immense and limitless desert, with oases few and far between, they plod on, knowing that obedience is more important than emotional satisfaction and a right spirit than a merry heart.

> To such people, “God does not deny grace.” They live in hope, however, that sooner or later the band will strike up a polka and the laughter and the dancing will start all over again. But if it does not—and it did not in Mother Teresa’s case—the grace that was in the beginning will be at the end as well. Of that, one can be sure.

> She did not abandon the God who seemed to have abandoned her, as she very well might have done. By doubting vigorously but not surrendering to her doubts, she became a witness to a faith that did not fail and a hidden God who did not let her go. That is what sanctity is all about.

I still have moments and days of depression that creep into my soul unexpectedly, times when I feel confined and shrouded, gloomy and overwhelmed, but I have learned to work through it, to “keep on keeping on.” And yes, there are those times when questions arise, hard questions—whether challenges to doctrine or Church history—when I am stumped for a season or baffled for a time. But I will not give in to doubt or to fear. I know what I know, and I refuse to discard or belittle what I know because of some minuscule matter that my limited understanding cannot explain for the time being.

If a person received direct heavenly guidance in every aspect of their lives, Elder Orson Pratt asked, “Where would be his trials? This would lead us to ask, Is it not absolutely necessary that God should in some measure, withhold even from those who walk before him in purity and integrity, a portion of his Spirit, that they may prove to themselves, their families and neighbors, and to the heavens whether they are full of integrity even in times when they have not so much of the Spirit to guide and influence them? I think that this is really necessary, consequently I do not know that we have any reason to complain of the darkness which occasionally hovers over the mind.” Similarly, Elder Richard G. Scott stated that we should take heart when no answer comes after extended prayer. “Be thankful that sometimes God lets you struggle for
a long time before that answer comes. Your character will grow; your faith will increase. . . . You may want to express thanks when that occurs, for it is an evidence of His trust.”

On many occasions the Spirit of the living God has whispered truth to my heart, verities that my head did not yet comprehend. I can wait. Far too many manifestations of divine favor and confirmations of the truth concerning scores of matters—coming through the Spirit and founded upon the rock of revelation—have come into my mind and heart for me to trip over the pebbles of what I do not yet understand. I will be patient. The Almighty has spoken in words and feelings that I cannot and dare not deny.

A Time of Decision

Many decisions, when made in earnest, when made with one’s whole heart, are extremely influential in our lives. I decided to marry Shauna Sizemore in the Salt Lake Temple in 1971. I decided that I would love her, cherish her, pray for her, provide for her, be a righteous example for her, and be attentive to her needs and deepest desires. Only she can say how well I have done that, but I have really tried to make her happy and secure. And all of this because of a decision.

I decided when I was very young that I would observe the Word of Wisdom all my days, that I would abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and habit-forming drugs. My wife and I made a decision before we were married that our marriage would best be visualized as a triangle representing Shauna, Bob, and the Lord. Our individual lives and our marriage would belong to him. We decided that we would welcome children into our home, pay a full tithing, be active and involved in the Church, and accept and magnify callings. We have been married now for a little less than forty years and, despite the challenges and pain and vicissitudes of life that inevitably come to every marriage, ours has been a happy union. We have had our differences, our disagreements, our divergent views on things; but the idea of throwing in the towel and choosing to divorce has never been an option. We feel the influence of that Holy Spirit of Promise to whom it is given to bind and seal couples and families for eternity. We made an eternal decision. We have stuck with it. And that has made all the difference.

Almost thirty years ago a colleague and I were asked to read through, analyze, and look for patterns in a massive amount of anti-Mormon propaganda. It was drudgery. It was laborious. It was depressing. It carried a bitter
and draining spirit, and consequently I had to just push my way through to complete the assignment. After a period of addressing certain questions, my partner shook his head and indicated that the constant barrage of issue after issue was simply wearing him down and he wasn’t sure he could stick with it. I pointed out that we were almost done, that a few more hours would be sufficient to make our report. He stared at me for a moment and asked, “This isn’t damaging to you, is it? I mean, you don’t seem to be very upset by what we are reading.” I assured my friend that there were obviously other things I would rather be doing and that the hateful and contentious spirit did in fact weigh on me, but no, I wasn’t particularly bothered by it. “Why?” he followed up. “I can’t say for sure,” I responded. “It’s ugly but it doesn’t really affect my faith.”

Not long ago I was in conversation with a friend of another faith. She began to ask about my impressions of some anti-Mormon videos on the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham that had recently been released. I indicated that I had seen them and put them away. She asked, “Bob, this doesn’t cause you to wonder if you’re believing in a fairy tale?” “Of course not,” I replied. “This doesn’t make you doubt that Joseph Smith was a true prophet?” she inquired. “Not in the slightest,” I said. She then added, “I just don’t understand you!” Later that night as I laid in bed, I rehearsed that conversation, which reminded me of the one I had thirty years earlier. I asked myself: Why am I not unnerved by attacks on the Prophet Joseph, the Church, or its teachings? Why don’t these things challenge my mind or get to my heart? I wasn’t sure.

Not long afterward, I sat with my wife in our living room as we watched the April 2007 general conference. As I usually do, I took notes that would help remind me and my students of what was said—at least until the May issue of the Ensign came out. During the Sunday morning session, Elder Neil L. Andersen began his remarks by relating the very touching story told by President Gordon B. Hinckley in the April 1973 conference of a young Asian man who had joined the Church while in the military but later faced the sobering realities of ostracism by his family and foreclosure of future promotions in the military. “Are you willing to pay so great a price for the gospel?” President Hinckley had asked. “With his dark eyes moistened by tears, he answered with a question: ‘It’s true, isn’t it?’ President Hinckley responded, ‘Yes, it is true.’ To which the officer replied, ‘Then what else matters?’”

Elder Andersen continued:
The cause in which we are laboring is true. We respect the beliefs of our friends and neighbors. We are all sons and daughters of God. We can learn much from other men and women of faith and goodness. . . .

Yet we know that Jesus is the Christ. He is resurrected. In our day, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the priesthood of God has been restored. We have the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Book of Mormon is what we claim it to be. The promises of the temple are certain. . . .

It's true, isn't it? Then what else matters? . . .

How do we find our way through the many things that matter? We simplify and purify our perspective. Some things are evil and must be avoided; some things are nice; some things are important; and some things are absolutely essential.

Then came the following words, words that have changed my life and provided answers to the question, Why doesn't anti-Mormonism affect my faith? “Faith is not only a feeling,” Elder Andersen taught, “it is a decision. With prayer, study, obedience, and covenants, we build and fortify our faith. Our conviction of the Savior and His latter-day work becomes the powerful lens through which we judge all else. Then, as we find ourselves in the crucible of life, . . . we have the strength to take the right course.”

That was it. That was the answer. Faith is a decision. Decades ago I made a decision: I determined that God is my Heavenly Father. I also decided that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Redeemer, my only hope for peace in this life and eternal reward in the life to come, and that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, through whose instrumentality the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, many plain and precious truths, the keys and covenants and ordinances of the priesthood, and the organization of the Church have been restored. I decided that I would be loyal to the constituted authorities of the Church, that I would not take offense when there came an either inadvertent or intended “ecclesiastical elbow,” as Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to call it. I decided that I was in this race for the long haul, that I would stick with the Good Ship Zion and that I would die in the faith in good standing. No man or woman would ever chase me out of the Church. No unresolved issue or perplexing doctrinal or historical matter would shake my faith.

Now, I suppose some would respond that I am either living in denial or am simply naïve about troublesome problems. I assure you that I am neither. I am a religious educator, have been so for over thirty years, and am very much aware of seeming incongruities that pop up here and there. I spend a good portion of my time with people who are of different faiths, and some of them are ever so eager to bring to my attention questions intended to embarrass
me or the Church. There are just too many things about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that bring joy and peace to my heart, light and knowledge to my mind, and a cementing and sanctifying influence into my family and my interpersonal relationships for me to choose to throw it all away because I am uncertain or unsettled about this or that dilemma. To put this another way, the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts.

There is a very tender scene in the New Testament that comes to mind when I contemplate what it would mean to leave the Church or to take my membership elsewhere. When Jesus delivered his Bread of Life Sermon, a deep and penetrating message on the vital importance of partaking fully of the person and powers of the Messiah, many in the crowd at Capernaum did not understand and were even offended by the Master’s remarks. “From that time many of his disciples went back,” John records, “and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?” What a poignant moment: our Lord seemed to display a sense of disappointment, a somber sadness for those in the darkness who could not comprehend the light. Would he be left alone? Was the price too great to pay? Was the cost of discipleship so expensive that perhaps even those closest to him would leave the apostolic fellowship? “Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:66–69; emphasis added). Once one has enjoyed sweet fellowship with Christ, how does he or she turn away? Where does one go? What possible message, way of life, social interaction, or eternal promise can even compare with what Jesus offers?

Many years ago I attended a symposium where a number of presentations on Mormonism were made, some of which were fairly critical of our faith and way of life. One man, a convert to the Church, spent the first two-thirds of his talk quipping about all of the silly, nonsensical, embarrassing, and even bizarre things that had happened to him since becoming a Latter-day Saint. The crowd roared. The laughter over the Church and its programs was cruel, painful to hear, and continued nonstop for almost an hour. And then the speaker became very sober and said, in essence: “Now all of this is quite hilarious, isn’t it? There are really some dumb things that happen within Mormonism. There are matters that for me just don’t add up, un-Christian behaviors that really sting, and situations that need repair. I think we all agree on that. But now let me get to the meat of the matter: I have spent many years of my life studying religions, investigating Christian and non-Christian
Faiths, immersing myself in their literature, and participating in their worship. I have seen it all, from top to bottom and from back to front. And guess what: there’s nothing out there that will deal with your questions, solve your dilemmas, or satisfy your soul. This gospel is all there is. If there is a true church, this is it. And so you and I had better become comfortable with what we have.” He stepped down from the podium as silence reigned in the room. His message had struck a chord.

**Conclusion**

Some years ago, my Evangelical–Latter-day Saint dialogue group—about twelve to fifteen of us who meet twice a year to discuss similarities and differences in doctrine—came together to consider the claim of Joseph Smith to be a prophet. The conversation, as always, was pleasant, cordial, and instructive. One of my Evangelical friends said at a certain point, “You have to understand that we as traditional Christians take the Savior’s warning against false prophets very seriously. This is why we just don’t jump on the bandwagon and accept Joseph Smith without serious reservations.” I spoke at that point: “We understand your position and can see where you’re coming from. But that same Lord, in that same chapter, said something that is just as deserving of our attention and ought to be a significant part of your assessment of Joseph Smith—when it comes to judging prophets, ‘ye shall know them by their fruits’ (Matthew 7:16). The fruits of Joseph Smith, including the people of the Church, their manner of life, the lay ministry, the missionary effort, the temples, the charitable work of the Church throughout the world—these are things that cannot be taken lightly.”

Some have wandered away from the Church because they did not exercise the kind of faith that required a decision. Consequently, when something went wrong or something else didn’t seem to make sense, they chose to avoid Church meetings and eventually the Church.

If you have allowed unanswered questions in your life to develop into destructive doubts, I plead with you to think through the long-term implications of a decision to distance yourself from the Church. Ponder on what you are giving up. Think carefully about what you will be missing. Reflect soberly on what you are allowing to slip from your grasp. If you are one who finds yourself struggling with a doctrinal question or a historical incident, seek help. Seek it from the right persons, including your Heavenly Father. Be patient. Be wise. Assume the best rather than the worst. If you are an otherwise active
member of the Church who finds yourself overly troubled by something that should never have happened or something that can be remedied in your heart by simply recognizing that all of us are human and that forgiveness is powerful spiritual medicine, leave it alone. Let it go. Keep the big picture and refuse to be bogged down by exceptions to the rule. Focus on fundamentals. Simplify your life and open yourself to that pure intelligence from the Spirit that is promised to us all, a state of mind and heart characterized by calmness and serenity.

“Faith is basically the resolve to live our lives on the assumption that certain things are true and trustworthy,” Alister McGrath has written, “in the confident assurance that they are true and trustworthy. And that one day we will know with certainty that they are true and trustworthy.” Have you made a decision? Have you made the decision? Have you sought for and obtained a witness from God that the work in which we are engaged is heaven-sent and thus true? If you have not, remember that such a quest is foundational to your future happiness and peace. Pursue it with fidelity and devotion. If you have received such a testimony, cherish it, cultivate it, and ask the Father in the name of the Son to broaden and deepen it. Then make the decision. Such a decision is a surrender to what you know in your heart of hearts to be true, even though you cannot necessarily see the end from the beginning.

As God’s light shines in our individual souls, it shines also on things of eternal worth in the external world. That is to say, the light within points the way to go, the path to pursue, the avenue to tread. Contrary to a world immersed in pure naturalism, when we are alive with faith, then for us, believing is seeing. C. S. Lewis, the great Christian writer who had such unusual insight into sacred matters, observed: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

Notes

5. Boyd K. Packer, “That All May Be Edified” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 338; emphasis in original.


8. St. John of the Cross (1542–91) spoke of “the dark night of the soul” through which one passes as a part of the divine purification that brings about a union with the Lord; see his Dark Night of the Soul, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1959).


17. Alister McGrath, Doubting: Growing through the Uncertainties of Faith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 27.

Misbehavior in the classroom can be solved as teachers handle disruptive students in a positive and loving manner.
If teaching youth involved only careful preparation and pleasant delivery, teacher success and satisfaction would probably be much higher. However, a wild card—student misbehavior—can thwart even the best instruction plans. Superfluous conversation, sarcasm, tardiness, put-downs, speaking out of turn, applying makeup, passing notes, and eating breakfast only begin the list of possible disruptions, limited only by the creativity of students.

While gospel understanding and love for those we teach usually lead us to deal with student misbehavior constructively, most of us can recall responses that we regret. In an effort to help us deal with student misbehavior more effectively, this article briefly explains our tendency to use coercion and why we should avoid it, then focuses on positive and practical strategies of preventing and addressing disruptive student behavior.

The Coercive World around Us

Unfortunately, much of the discipline we experience throughout our lives is coercive. By coercion I mean the use of punishment or threat of punishment to
get others to act the way we would like and the practice of rewarding people by letting them escape our punishments and threats. Basically, this means making things unpleasant for others until they do it right, or giving them something desirable but taking it away if they don’t do what we want.

The use of coercion is all around us. Most people are used to being reprimanded for bad work, yet seldom noticed for good. Our legal code is basically a list of penalties for noncompliance; “justice” is generally sought to impose penalties, not to reward good. Public schools often manage student behavior through coercive measures such as sharp reprimands, imposing additional work, withholding recess, threatening to remove points, or being sent to the office. In a way, most of us have been institutionally trained through experience to use coercive discipline.

So why do we use so much coercion? The simple response is that it works! Punishment and other coercive means can, at least temporarily, stop undesired behavior. Because coercion is so common and its results are often immediate, and because alternatives appear lacking, its use in religious education may seem natural, even warranted. However, not only are there abundant alternatives, but coercion often has unwanted side effects that make its use problematic, particularly in religious education.

**Side Effects of Coercive Discipline**

Think of coercion (use of punishment, threat of punishment, or taking rewards away) as a prick from a thorn. Upon being pricked, we promptly pull away in an effort to escape the discomfort. We probably also become aware of the circumstances that produced the prick and try to avoid them in the future. The primary learning produced by coercion is escape and avoidance. Most of us try to avoid situations where we might be punished, choose not to associate with people who might punish us, and don’t try things for which we might be punished.

If a student were punished and then simply self-corrected the behavior, punishment might be okay. However, students too often associate punishment with the teacher who gave it, the classroom where it was received, and the educational organization in which it was given. Dr. Murray Sidman explains, “Instead of getting them to learn, punishment causes them to shun the environment where learning is supposed to take place.” Students who make such associations, justified or not, may seek to escape and avoid the teacher, learning environment, and organization by disengaging teacher instruction, skipping
class, or even dropping out. In a desperate effort to escape perceived coercion, some students may even counter-coerce or retaliate (e.g., insult teacher, rally peers against teacher, threaten not to return, and so forth).

Other limitations and potential side effects of coercion include:

- misbehavior reoccurs in absence of the punisher
- student may learn sneaky behaviors to avoid punishment
- coercion does not teach the appropriate response
- punished individual is often identified as undesirable in eyes of peers
- coercion has weak generalization—the intended lesson seldom extends beyond immediate context
- our use of coercion often models behavior we hope our students will avoid

It has also been noted that coercion becomes less effective over time. As education professors Hofmeister and Lubke explain, “Reprimands lose their effectiveness—future reprimands have to be even more personally destructive to be effective.” This leads to a “cycle of a gradually increasing emphasis on reprimands and decreasing student sensitivity to reprimands.”

For religious educators, there are additional incentives to avoid coercion and seek more positive means of discipline. A key reason to reduce disruptive behavior is to help ensure presence of the Spirit. While the class may be quiet in the wake of coercion, the negative feelings associated with coercion often leave us without the Spirit. Furthermore, use of coercion often stirs up pride, which can make a student less likely to give place in their heart to “the word” (see Alma 32:28). And finally, in our effort to teach the “good news,” I can think of few tragedies greater than a student wrongly associating our use of coercion with the Church and gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not the cause of punishment but rather our consummate means of avoiding it.

**Should We Never Use Punishment?**

There are clearly instances when the Lord and his prophets have conceded the use of punishment for the good of an individual or benefit of the group (see John 2:14–16; Matthew 16:22–23; Helaman 11:3–4). The Lord says we may reprove “betimes with sharpness” (D&C 121:43) and President David O. McKay says it is “better one [student] starve than an entire class be slowly poisoned.” I am voicing no objection to the qualified use of such punishment; I have seen instances when such measures were clearly needed and applied in the spirit of love. However, we should be careful not
to take these phrases out of context to justify ill-advised use of coercion. “Reproving betimes with sharpness” is proceeded by the Lord’s foremost direction that our influence be maintained “by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness,” and only sanctioned “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:41–43). And President McKay precedes his statement by saying, “You should exhaust all your other sources before you come to that.” Occasionally circumstances may warrant our use of coercion; however, it would be misguided to let the exceptions guide our practice.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said it this way: “Discipline with severity, discipline with cruelty, inevitably leads not to correction, but rather to resentment and bitterness. It cures nothing. It only aggravates the problem. It is self-defeating.”8 Due to the potential side effects, we should avoid, as much as possible, the use of coercion (use of punishment, threat of punishment, or taking rewards away). Stated candidly by Dr. Glenn Latham, “Only those who do not know a better way persist in using coercive methods to maintain—or attempt to maintain—order in the classroom.”9

A Better Way

Avoiding punishment as a means of discipline is not an endorsement of permissiveness. President Hinckley succinctly stated, “Permissiveness never produced greatness.”10 We need to maintain high standards and expectations of student conduct, but we need to do so in ways conducive to our objective of strengthening youth and inviting them to come unto Christ.

Among the definitions of discipline is “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.”11 This definition preserves the Latin origin of the word discipline, which is disciplina “instruction,” from the root discere “to learn,” and from which discipulus “disciple, pupil” derives.12 Thus discipline becomes part of our overall effort to teach. And learning is the primary objective of discipline, not silence. As Elder F. Melvin Hammond explained, “Discipline gives direction and teaches self-control.”13 Discipline in this manner becomes something we do for our students, not to them.

Following is a discussion of principles and selected strategies for (1) preventing classroom disruptions and (2) addressing misbehavior as it occurs in class.
Preventing Disruptive Behavior

When asked how she successfully managed a classroom of perceived troublemakers, a volunteer seminary teacher struggled to respond. I noticed she struggled in part because her success had little to do with how she managed misbehavior and a lot to do with how she prevented it from ever occurring. Though not an inclusive list, a few preventative measures are discussed here: keeping focus on good instruction, establishing high expectations (rules), and catching students doing good.

*Focus on good instruction.* As a general rule, centering our efforts on good instruction provides the best means of minimizing disruptive behavior. President Boyd K. Packer explains: “The easiest way to have control over those whom you teach is to teach them something—to feed them. Be well prepared and have an abundance of subject matter organized and ready to serve. There is no substitute for this preparation. As long as you are feeding the students well, few discipline problems will occur.” Simply put, students occupied in the learning process don’t have time to misbehave.

Focusing on good instruction may seem obvious, yet it is surprisingly easy to be distracted by student misbehavior. When disruptions occur, Hofmeister
and Lubke warn that a “cycle can be created, in which lack of attention to the primary instructional tasks creates the vacuum in which misbehavior thrives, and this misbehavior further distracts the teacher from the primary instructional task.” As a young seminary teacher, I experienced this firsthand. Faced with two students in a class of thirty-six who were particularly adept at disruption, I began spending increased time considering and implementing management strategies. As a result, lesson effectiveness waned, and the other thirty-four increasingly disengaged students began creating distractions of their own. Effective instruction needed to be reenthroned.

When considering the best way to deal with class disruptions, look first to improving our instruction—it is one area in which we have total control. And when student disruptions occur, before suspending planned instruction to address it, consider the possibility that pressing ahead with solid instruction can often reengage disruptive students.

Establish and maintain high expectations. President Henry B. Eyring explains, “Your choices of what you expect will have powerful effect on [students’] choices of what to expect of themselves.” There is a tendency for people to behave in ways in which others expect them to behave. This has important implications for student behavior in our classrooms.

When expectations are clearly understood, student behavior not only tends to be more appropriate, but students tend to feel more secure knowing what is expected of them. Students can then focus and achieve without having to guess or seek recognition in an inappropriate manner. By clearly communicating class expectation and consequences for noncompliance, a student is more likely to view our reaction to their misbehavior as fair, thus curtailing punishments’ potential side-effects. On the other hand, students may feel a teacher is unjust when consequences are received if they have not clearly understood the expectation.

We commonly teach expectations of student behavior as classroom “rules.” Whatever the name, the following guidelines can help us communicate them more effectively:

- In general, keep rules to four or five. Long lists can be counterproductive. Rules should be such that both students and teachers are able to remember them.
- Each rule should be simple, clear, and general enough to cover a variety of situations. For example, the rule “Be respectful” can address class disruptions, fair treatment of classmates, and much more.
Positive Classroom Discipline

- Rules should be instructive rather than prohibitive. A succinct list of *dos* is generally more effective than a laundry list of *don’ts*.
- Early in the year, formally teach and provide a rationale for the behavior we expect. It may also be beneficial to post and periodically review the rules or expectations.

Teaching and implementing rules or expectations does not require a stern tone or hint of impending punishment to be effective. Expectations can be effectively taught in creative, even fun ways. For example, to convey the expectation that students speak positively to each other, a teacher used a plastic tree and a fictional story about people who cut down trees using insults. A phrase at the bottom of the plastic tree read, “Be kind to my tree!” From then on a negative student remark was likely followed by someone in the class light-heartedly, yet effectively, saying “Be kind to my tree!”

Here is an example of one teacher’s classroom rules and expectations designed using the suggestions above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be respectful and kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared to learn (in seat, on-time, with scriptures/journal/pencil).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek to make seminary a great experience for all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Catch students being good._ Elder Marvin J. Ashton noted, “We strengthen and build by pointing out the good traits of a person and cause fear and weakness by being unduly critical.” Sadly, we often grow accustomed to reprimanding bad behavior and ignoring the good. However, praising appropriate student behavior increases the likelihood of such behavior. And when we specifically state what the student has done or is doing successfully we teach or remind other students what the appropriate behavior is by drawing attention to a student modeling the correct behavior.

Praise can be regarded as positive feedback. While almost any sincere statement of praise is better than none, Young and his coauthors instruct that recognition of good behavior can be more effective by following these criteria:

- Be specific and descriptive so student is aware of what we are praising. “Great, you’ve got your scriptures and journal at your desk” is better than “Thanks for doing that.”
Be sincere—students can often detect when we are less than honest or trying to manipulate them.

Give praise immediately after the appropriate behavior occurs.

Give praise frequently.  

Most people enjoy receiving sincere praise. However, some youth concerned with their image may be embarrassed by a teacher’s public praise. To reduce this possibility while maintaining the benefits of praise, Randall S. Sprick recommends a number of things we can do:

- “Praise individual students privately.”
- “Describe the positive behavior in a nonemotional and nonpersonal manner.”
- “Avoid pauses after praising an individual student.”
- “Evaluate effectiveness of your feedback by what students do, not by what they say.”

Addressing Disruptive Classroom Behavior

While a significant amount of behavior problems can be avoided through preventative measures, disruptions may still occur. How we handle these disruptions can directly impact the tone of our class and often provides a measuring stick by which students determine our view of them as well. As once said, “It’s how you treat the one that reveals how you regard the ninety-nine.”

In my experience, most classroom misbehavior is not malicious, and it is counterproductive for us to think so. By and large, students simply need a prompt or occasional reminder of the expected behavior and its rationale. The techniques discussed here are aimed at handling common misbehaviors in their early stages (for example, disruptive talking, nonparticipation, clowning around, and not following instructions). Although not a comprehensive list, these techniques can be very effective in dealing with misbehavior without coercion.

Use simple reminders. Students often engage in behaviors without realizing they are interfering with instruction. For these behaviors, teachers can use simple cues and signals that remind students what they should be doing yet require minimal disruption to instruction. For example:

- Signal or gesture. Making eye contact with a disruptive student while the rest of class is otherwise engaged and motioning the student put away homework, open scriptures, discontinue conversation, or listen (e.g., head nod, pointing to ear, and so on). Remember, the purpose is
to remind, not punish. An overly stern look or display of disappointment is not necessarily productive.

- Proximity. Moving closer to the disruptive student can serve as a quiet reminder to be more attentive. This approach generally does not require a break in instruction. Upon noticing approach of the teacher, most talkative students will stop. When a teacher is delivering instruction next to their desk, few students would consider being disruptive.

These are quick ways to remind students of their behavior without interrupting instruction. Again, such approaches assume most students want to have a positive classroom experience and therefore need only a simple reminder to get back on task.

*Involve the disruptive student.* Inviting a disruptive student to participate in the lesson can be very beneficial. This can be done by asking them to read, share what they think, give an example, or respond in some other way. If handled correctly, this approach can quickly engage the student in the lesson, thus eliminating the disruption. However, it is important to remember that the purpose is to engage the student in the lesson, not to put them on the spot or humiliate them.

A common mistake when asking disruptive students to participate is doing so when they are unable to readily respond. For example, a teacher asks a disruptive or disengaged student to read a particular verse of scripture. Everyone waits while the student picks up scriptures, asks teacher to repeat reference, and fumbles to find the chapter. While the disruptive behavior made instruction difficult, the wait brought instruction to a halt. Such delay can be avoided. For example, the teacher could ask three students to read consecutive verses, having the disruptive student read last. This allows the disruptive/unengaged student time to find the verse and be ready to participate. Also, participation can be gained in ways that require little or no prior knowledge of the lesson. For example, the teacher might ask a disruptive student to share what he or she might do in a particular circumstance then relate their response to similar circumstances in the lesson being taught.

*Ignore inconsequential behavior.* Ignoring disruptive behavior may seem counterintuitive to maintaining high expectations. Yet our attention to a student’s misbehavior may at times have a reinforcing effect, thus making the misbehavior more likely in future. If this is the case, and the misbehavior is inconsequential, that is, annoying but does not hurt or demean, like talking
out of turn or making a silly comment, it may be best to ignore it, focusing instead on good instruction.

However, ignoring inconsequential behavior is not an idle approach; the misbehavior may still be addressed in a not-so-public setting (i.e., after class), and consequences may still apply (i.e., reflected on citizenship grade). Also, ignoring inappropriate behavior is most effective when we praise even the slightest increase in the student’s effort toward improvement.

**Stop-Redirect.** When simpler methods are ineffective, it may be necessary to stop a student, group of students, or even an entire class and quickly instruct or remind them of the appropriate behavior. When using this method, Latham recommends that a teacher address the misbehaving students as discreetly as possible, and in a calm voice follow these steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop-Redirect</th>
<th>Example (small group)</th>
<th>Example (classwide)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Say something positive.</td>
<td>“I can see you two are having a good laugh.”</td>
<td>“Class, I’m glad you’ve got a lot of energy today.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Briefly describe the problem behavior.</td>
<td>“However, your conversation is disrupting others.”</td>
<td>“Let’s focus that energy on what King Benjamin is teaching us in chapter 5.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe the desired alternative behavior.</td>
<td>“Try finding the principle mentioned in verses 4–6.”</td>
<td>“Read verses 7–8, considering the connection between covenants and freedom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Give a reason why the new behavior is more desirable.</td>
<td>“I think you’ll find an important message.”</td>
<td>“This directly applies to our own covenants.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Provide positive feedback.</td>
<td>“Good search. What principles did you find?”</td>
<td>“Better focus, thanks. What connections do you see?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although this procedure may appear cumbersome, its application can be quite natural. The effectiveness behind this approach is that it teaches or reteaches the appropriate behavior in a simple, clear, and positive manner.

**Talk to a disruptive student privately.** At times it is helpful to speak privately with a student who continues to cause disruptions. This can often be accomplished briefly before or after class. By going “between thee and him alone” (Matthew 18:15), a student is less likely to feel the pressure of peers, power struggles become less probable, and the student is more likely to reason. When consulting with the student privately, *Teaching, No Greater Call* suggests, “You should do so tactfully and with love. Describe the conduct that
is disruptive while at the same time making clear that you love and respect the person. Ask for the person’s support, and try to find solutions together. Then do all you can to show increased love. As President Brigham Young counseled, ‘Never chasten beyond the balm you have within you to bind up.”

Additionally, if the student persists in the disruptive behavior, speaking with them privately is often the best time to discuss consequences (e.g., move seats, make-up work, consultation with parents, etc.). As a rule of thumb, these private meetings with students about classroom behavior should be brief, clear, and as positive as possible.

*Involve peers.* Our students have a desire to belong, to be noticed, to be of concern to those whom they respect and consider important. For this reason, employing peers in the management of student behavior can be very powerful. Having students both ignore disruptive behavior and respectfully remind one another of class expectations can significantly reduce misbehavior. We can promote positive peer support of class expectations by acknowledging such support when it occurs, utilizing class presidencies, and enlisting the help of individual students. Finally, our respectful interaction with disruptive students provides an instructive model for students to follow.

A word of caution: While peer influence can be powerful when employed in a positive way, it can be destructive when applied coercively. Few things are potentially more devastating to a youth than to be collectively punished by peers, particularly peers in the gospel. Furthermore, few things can drive a stronger wedge between a teacher and a student than a student perceiving the teacher to be an instigator of a coercive reaction by peers. Coercive peer influence, even when it stifles disruptive behavior, offers little chance that “all may be edified” (D&C 88:122).

**Have a Plan**

A “discipline plan” is developed when a teacher considers possible student misbehavior and determines ahead of time how they will handle those problems should they arise. A clear plan helps us avoid making poor decisions when under pressure and helps keep us from falling back on coercive means. Without a clear discipline plan, teachers are likely to rely on instinct and react emotionally to each situation. Furthermore, establishing a discipline plan and implementing it consistently helps us ensure just treatment of all students.

To create a discipline plan, consider the most common classroom disruptions then decide which intervention to use first. Next decide which
intervention you would use second if this intervention were to fail. And, if the first two interventions did not work, decide which intervention you would use next—and so forth. When devising a discipline plan, it is also important to remember President Packer’s counsel: “The successful teacher will not overreact. He will start with gentle elements of discipline and move to the more powerful and persuasive types. . . . Most situations can be controlled with even a slight gesture. If the gesture does not work, the teacher can always apply something a little more intense. On the other hand, if he fires his heavy artillery first, there’s little left to do, if the student will not respond.” 25

As a general rule, a behavior plan establishes a hierarchy of interventions from least to most intensive. Here is an example of one volunteer seminary teacher’s discipline plan:

**Behavior Plan: How I will react to classroom disruptions**

1. Simple gesture: motion to open scriptures or put homework away, finger to my lips, ear, etc.

2. Proximity.

3. Class involvement: ask student to participate (e.g., read, share opinion or experience, etc).
   a. Caution: avoid requests that delay instruction or make student look foolish.

4. Stop-redirect: Individually or classwide; refer to class expectations.

5. Talk to student alone before or after class (by phone if needed).
   a. Avoid emotion.
   b. Briefly describe what I see, what I expect, and why it’s important.
   c. Ask their support in making class better for them and everyone else.
   d. Briefly explain consequences should behavior continue (e.g., assigned seat, contact parents, etc.). Express desire that they avoid such consequences.

6. Peer support: Involve class presidency and or others (avoid “project” mentality).

7. Contact parents: Inform them of the behavior, class expectations, explain what’s been done, seek their input, and explain how you plan to proceed. May invite parent to attend early-morning class with their student.

8. Contact priesthood leader only if misbehavior continues unsustainably, be descriptive of student behavior and what’s been done. May invite a member of the bishopric to attend class and assist with management of student behavior.
Even when using an effective behavior plan, occasion may arise when consequences need to be applied (e.g., assigned seat, contacting parent, and so forth). To be considered fair, consequences need to be understood by students prior to any rule violation warranting their delivery. And when delivering consequences we should avoid emotion, lectures, and longwinded explanations. Generally an approach that is succinct, matter-of-fact, and void of animosity is best. Remember the intent of such consequences is appropriate behavior not retribution. Furthermore, as some students may consider consequences “reproving,” we should show “forth afterword an increase of love . . . lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43).

Avoid Common Traps

Dr. Glenn Latham has identified a number of teacher responses to misbehavior that often trap teachers into reactive and escalatory responses. These traps include:26
• Criticism: fault finding
• Sarcasm: making fun of a student through ridicule
• Threats: strong warning of impending punishment if student does not quickly behave
• Questioning: asking students to explain why they misbehave
• Arguing: seeking to convince students the teacher is right and students are wrong
• Force (verbal or physical): shouting at students or physical intimidation
• Despair: portraying a sense of hopelessness

Dr. Latham explains, “These counterproductive measures typically get teachers trapped into a quagmire of reactive, out-of-control responding that creates a coercive environment which students want to escape and avoid.”

Principles That Help Guide Our Discipline

_We choose._ Some may occasionally justify misuse of coercion on student misbehavior (e.g., “I wouldn’t have angrily raised my voice if they had listened in the first place”). To so justify negates our agency as teachers. We are always faced with a moment of decision after a student misbehaves. If we do not accept responsibility for our actions in these moments, we have given up our ability to act and therefore relegate ourselves to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26).

_Be consistent._ Consistency in our discipline helps avoid many pitfalls. If we make exceptions we in effect demonstrate to students that less is acceptable. The student may see us as unfair. They learn that we can be manipulated. Furthermore, it is likely that many of the most challenging classroom disruptions would never rise to such concern if relatively small and simple approaches, like those outlined above, were consistently applied early on.

_Student behavior can adapt._ Some may feel we have little influence over classroom behavior because students bring ingrained patterns of behavior with them. Certainly each student’s background and behavior are unique, yet behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment. With some ease we socially adapt our behavior to fit a variety of situations such as a movie theater, a sporting event, and church. We can expect our students to similarly adapt their behavior to our class.

_Teacher perception of student matters._ President Packer explains: “It is essential for a teacher to understand that people are basically good. It is essential to know that their tendency is to do the thing that is right. Such an
exalted thought is productive of faith. . . . There was always hope. No matter how fractious or difficult or lawless others appeared, I knew that somewhere within them was a spark of divinity to which we can appeal.”

_Don’t take it personally._ On the whole student misbehavior is not malevolent. Talking to a friend, occasional disinterest in lesson, trying to portray the latest version of cool, even mischievousness seldom if ever indicates student contempt for a teacher. Assuming student maliciousness is generally counterproductive.

We socially adapt our behavior to fit a variety of situations such as a movie theater, a sporting event, and church. We can expect our students to similarly adapt their behavior to our class.

### Conclusion

President Hinckley stated, “In large measure the harshness that characterizes so much of our society is an outgrowth of the harshness imposed upon children years ago.” Sadly, children raised on coercive teaching are likely to
follow similar patterns when they become teachers and parents. Our example of positive discipline can help break this cycle by showing loving and positive approaches to discipline that students may not see anywhere else.

Furthermore, beyond cessation of misbehavior, discipline should reflect our commission to teach. President Hinckley explained, “Eternal life will come only as men and women are taught with such effectiveness that they change and discipline their lives. They cannot be coerced into righteousness or into heaven.” In many ways, student misbehavior presents an opportunity to teach and may indeed require good teaching to be properly corrected. Such an opportunistic view of misbehavior can dramatically alter for good our approach to disruptive students.

Finally, use of positive discipline allows students to more readily notice our love for them, and more importantly the Savior’s love. And as students more readily recognize this love they are more likely to respond to what is taught in meaningful ways. As the Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind.” Appealing to the ultimate example, President Howard W. Hunter taught, “God’s chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect.” May we do the same.

Notes

2. Adapted from K. Richard Young and Richard P. West, Positive Strategies for Teaching and Discipline (Logan, UT: Utah State University, 1992), 2–3.
4. See figures section in Young and West, Positive Strategies.
5. Alan Hofmeister and Margaret Lubke, Research into Practice: Implementing Effective Teaching Strategies (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), 169.
6. The word *gospel* is an Old English term *gōd spell* (*gōd* “good” + *spel* “news” = “good news”) that generally refers to Jesus, his atoning sacrifice, and resulting promise of hope and salvation. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_news_(Christianity).
24. *Teaching, No Greater Call* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 86.
As members of the Church attend the temple regularly, they can learn to more fully appreciate the Sabbath day and realize the similarities that exist between the two ancient practices.
A Holy Day,  
a Holy Place,  
a Holy Life

P. SCOTT FERGUSON

P. Scott Ferguson (fergons@byui.edu) is a full-time Religious Education faculty member at BYU–Idaho.

Gospel truth may be viewed as one great whole, but we sometimes struggle to comprehend that wholeness. While learning line upon line, we may stretch ourselves by discovering the many relationships that one precept shares with another, until the day comes when we can understand them as a whole (see D&C 101:32–34). In this light, I believe gospel truths are often best understood when paired together. Concepts such as faith and repentance, justice and mercy, the lower law and the higher law, and immortality and eternal life are better understood when studied as pairs. We gain a deeper understanding and testimony of a given truth as we study how it interacts with other truths. For example, as we come to understand the intricate relationship between faith and repentance, we feel a natural desire to approach the throne of God to seek forgiveness.

Consider Sabbath observance and temple worship. A preliminary glance might suggest that these concepts are distant cousins at most. However, a deeper study of Sabbath observance and temple worship against the backdrop of Old Testament imagery and language reveals a much more intimate relationship. In fact, a study of this tandem helps us appreciate the Sabbath as
a holy day set apart to celebrate spiritual rebirth—entrance into the kingdom of God. The temple is a holy place set apart for celebrating entrance into the highest degree in that kingdom. Together, a holy day and a holy place help us live a holy life.

Old Testament Imagery, the Sabbath Day, and the Temple

Throughout our scriptural history, a day of rest plays a prominent role. Our Creator taught the need for resting from labor by resting himself:

> Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

> And on the seventh day, I, God, ended my work, and all things which I had made; and I rested on the seventh day from all my work, and all things which I had made were finished; And I, God, saw that they were good.

> And I, God, blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it I had rested from all my work, which I, God, had created and made. (Moses 3:1–3)

Hebrews 4:4 adds that “God did rest the seventh day from all his works.” As the creative effort came to a halt, what do you suppose the Savior spent his time doing? While scriptural detail is scant, there are a couple of clues given. For example, he first blessed the day and then sanctified the day. As I reflect on the phrase “bless and sanctify,” I am immediately drawn to an ordinance associated with the Sabbath day—the sacrament. As the emblems of the sacrament are prepared on this holy day, they are blessed and sanctified before being shared with the congregation: “O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread. . . .” On this Sabbath day of rest, the Lord blessed and sanctified his creations. Acting in accordance with the pattern later seen in the sacrament, he set the earth apart for a sacred purpose and blessed his creation that it might glorify the Father.

On our day of rest, we partake of emblems of the sacrament that have been blessed and sanctified. Perhaps the desire of the Lord is that we might become blessed and sanctified like him, a holy people, set apart for a specific purpose. Certainly latter-day scripture confirms this idea: “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” (D&C 59:9). What a wonderful opportunity it is to celebrate our spiritual birthday weekly so that one day we may be prepared to celebrate our marriage into the family of God through the temple ordinances!
Consider the value of using the Sabbath as a day of worship and preparation for meaningful temple attendance. As we pursue this approach, a whole new way of viewing the Sabbath begins to emerge. Sunday becomes a holy day to prepare individuals to enter a holy place. Sanctification inaugurated with the sacrament finds ultimate fulfillment in the ordinances of the holy temple. As we ponder both Old Testament scriptures focusing on the Sabbath day and latter-day revelation on the subject, we see a wonderful pattern emerge that teaches the importance of the day being a precursor to making sacred covenants in the temple.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord... (Exodus 31:12–16; emphasis added)

Phrases like “a sign between me and you throughout your generations,” “the Lord that doth sanctify you,” and “perpetual covenant” take us from behaving in a holy way one day of the week to a holy state of being all week. It is in holy temples where sacred covenants are made that make it possible to enter into God’s presence or rest. Both the day and the place are designed to bring this about. The Old Testament Student Manual expands on this dimension of Sabbath worship:

The concept of sanctification and the idea of rest as used in the scriptures seem closely related. The rest of the Lord is defined as “the fulness of [God’s] glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:24). Alma taught that certain early Saints entered the “rest of the Lord” after being made pure through a process of sanctification (Alma 13:12). . . . Once each week man is commanded to cease his own labors and allow God to perform his work of sanctification on him. . . . Mankind must enter into the Lord’s work on that day. This work involves making themselves and others more godlike, another way to speak of sanctification. Doing the work of the Lord (sanctification) often involves great activity on the Sabbath day, and the day may not be restful in the usual sense. . . . The Hebrew verb la-avodh, “to worship,” means also “to work” and “to serve.” This holy work then creates a new and holy man; therefore, the Sabbath is tied into the work of creation.
Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

Without “the power of godliness,” meaning without righteousness, “no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.” The unrighteous would be consumed in his presence. “Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.” To be sanctified is to be clean, pure, spotless, free from sin. In the ultimate and final day, the sanctified will be those of the celestial kingdom, the kingdom where God and Christ dwell. “But they [the children of Israel] hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence”—because they would not become pure in heart—“therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:21–24). All Israel might have seen the Lord had they taken the counsel of Moses, but only a few did.2

Sabbath and Temple Worship Are Both Freewill Offerings

Slaves in Egypt were not free to dedicate one day in seven to serving a different master. As bondsmen, the Israelites could not set their own schedules, vacations, leisure, or even family time. “With his mighty hand,” God freed the Israelites from slavery and oppression. With his mighty hand, we are preserved day to day by his matchless power. As free men, agents unto ourselves (see 2 Nephi 2:26–29; D&C 58:27–28), we are free to worship whomever we choose. Upon Israel's entrance into the promised land, clear instruction was given: “Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought thee out; . . . keep the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

Today, both our Sabbath worship and our temple worship are symbols of our faith.1 Men remain sovereign to choose for themselves whom they will worship. God wants our devotion because we love him, not because he is an all-powerful being. Sabbath observance and the temple worship are two of the best ways of showing our love and paying our devotions to our Creator.

Temple worship, like Sabbath observance, is a freewill offering in both frequency and intensity. While some instruction is available on how to live the Sabbath day honorably, for the most part we are free to choose our behavior. President Harold B. Lee observed, “My experience has taught me that the prompting of the conscience to a faithful Church member is the safest indicator as to that which is contrary to the spirit of worship on the Sabbath Day.”4 Likewise, we do not report the frequency of our temple attendance; that is a matter between us and the Lord.
A Holy Day Prepares Us for a Holy Place

On the Sabbath day we have an opportunity to reconcile our view of our life with God’s view of our life. This is like the way we balance our checkbook to see if the bank’s view of the account is the same as ours. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption to enter therein.” It is through reconcileing ourselves with God that we qualify to receive the Holy Ghost. Nephi taught, “He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do” (2 Nephi 31:12).

On the Sabbath we have the opportunity to reflect on whether we are doing as we have covenanted to do. The sacrament worship service is the means the Lord has put in place for renewing and reviewing our qualification and preparation to enter into his kingdom. Perhaps this is one of the things the Lord meant when he taught, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). This holy day, when used to its fullest potential, will put us on the path that leads to greater covenant making. Honoring the Sabbath is perhaps one of the best ways we can prepare for the temple.

There is, however, another gate through which we must enter as we “press forward” (2 Nephi 31:20) on the path that leads to the highest degree within the celestial kingdom (see D&C 131). Elder James E. Talmage taught, “The temple endowment is seen as the continuation and culmination of the covenants made at baptism. Temple covenants include ‘tests by which our willingness and fitness for righteousness may be known.’” Through proper Sabbath and temple worship, we are able to assess our worthiness to enter the kingdom of God, where we may progress until we are ultimately made “equal in power, and in might, and in dominion” with God (D&C 76:95).

The culmination of temple worship occurs in temple marriage, which is mandatory to enter the highest degree where God and Christ dwell. Elder McConkie taught, “In the same sense that baptism opens the door and starts repentant persons traveling on the path leading to eternal life, so also does celestial marriage. This holy order of matrimony also opens a door leading to celestial exaltation.”
Many of the themes associated with honoring the Sabbath find complete fulfillment in the temple. The following table illustrates this correlation between these two principles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sabbath Observance</th>
<th>Temple Worship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sets us apart, keeps us unspotted from the world</td>
<td>Sets us apart, qualifies us for the highest degree in the celestial kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps us enter into covenants associated with a broken heart and contrite spirit</td>
<td>Helps us enter into a covenant of sacrifice and consecration—offering of the whole soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows willingness to take upon us his name</td>
<td>Places his name upon us through temple ordinances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renews covenants associated with entrance into the celestial kingdom</td>
<td>Renews covenants associated with the highest degree in the celestial kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants abundant blessings, both temporal and spiritual</td>
<td>Ultimately makes available all that the Father has</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are fitted for entrance into the kingdom of God through weekly renewal of baptismal covenants, which opens the gate and leads us up the path toward the kingdom of God, coupled with renewal of covenants made in the endowment and sealing ordinances through proper temple worship. Concerning the Sabbath, the Lord said, “And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act . . . in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—that inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received” (D&C 43:8–10). Concerning the temple, the Lord said it is “a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction . . . that they may be perfected in the understanding . . . in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth” (D&C 97:13–14).

The rate at which we learn on the holy Sabbath and in the holy temple is determined by our devotion to the covenants we make. We prepare ourselves for advancement in God’s kingdom by receiving and making even greater covenants. The Prophet Joseph Smith referred to this advancement as climbing the rungs of a ladder: “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.”
In conclusion, proper observance of the Sabbath as a day set apart to renew covenants that are preparatory in nature, prepares us for making greater covenants in the temple. Truly a holy day has been given to us to prepare us for a holy place so we may live a holy life. What a great blessing to have both a day and a place where we might come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent!

Notes

4. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 179.
5. Smith, History of the Church, 6:58.
The Sacred Grove is part of a four-hundred-year-old forest that covered much of western New York at the time of the Smith family’s arrival in the area in 1818 or 1819. Today, there are six trees that we know to be well in excess of 200 years old. There are also six to eight trees scattered throughout the grove that are between 180 and 200 years old. All of these trees are considered “witness trees” because they were likely in the grove at the time of the First Vision.
Holzapfel: Thank you for joining us today in the Sacred Grove. Don [Enders], please tell us briefly about this special place and what you have observed during your work with the Church history sites in New York.

Enders: Over the years, the Sacred Grove has gone through quite a bit of change. It was a dozen years ago that the Church hired Robert Parrot to manage this woodland. During these years we have seen that if we are patient, let Mother Nature do her work, assist her a little, and pray for the blessing of heaven upon this sacred place, it can renew itself. And it has indeed done that to a large extent. It is now healthier than it has been in the last hundred years. It is extremely fitting that the God of nature prepared this place for the time when he would appear with his Son to the boy Joseph Smith and inaugurate the work of the Restoration. The grove stands as a witness to that great event, the First Vision. So we are very pleased to see the grove root itself in more healthy terms, with plants that have long been absent now able to germinate and find place again, along with the return of wildlife, all of which are evidences that the grove is doing better.
Years ago we became aware that the grove needed some help. We arranged in 1998 for Environmental Design and Research, a respected horticultural firm at Syracuse, New York, to do an extensive study of the grove. Their assessment led to the Church hiring Robert Parrot, a specialist in forest management, to care for this sacred woodland. We are extremely pleased with the way the land has become healthy, productive, natural, and safe under his watchful eye. It has been inspiring to quietly watch the grove renew itself these last dozen years.

**Holzapfel:** Larry [Porter], please give us a brief history of your own experience with the Sacred Grove and what you have observed.

**Porter:** I first came to the grove in 1968. When I walked out to the grove, it had more the appearance of a park. The forester at that time made sure that if a tree needed to come down, it came down. If a tree had problems, such as rotting on the interior, they would clean it out, put cement into the base, and use that to preserve the trees. It was a different philosophy of management of the grove at that particular time. But I recall very vividly coming out into the grove and being by myself, very appreciative of the things that happened in this locale and not knowing the exact spot but nevertheless offering up my prayers to heaven in regard to Joseph Smith’s vision and the success of our visit in gathering the material.

**Enders:** I first came here in 1961. I have a recollection of those days. I was a missionary for the Church. We met at pageant time in the grove and had the opportunity to walk about the grove, actually into the grove, off the path. I remember that there was much bare ground, and to a large extent you could see across the woodlands. Of course, I was in no position to know how the grove was being taken care of. I do not think a thought about its maintenance ever entered my mind. I just supposed somebody knew what was going on. Maybe it was left only in the hands of the God of nature. So I certainly had perspective but not much thought about what needed to unfold as a maintenance program. Through the years, as I have worked with the Historical Department, I have become aware that there needed to be a maintenance focus. I remember that until a dozen years ago, when a tree needed to come out someone would come in with equipment, drive right into the woodlands with big heavy trucks, compact the soil, yank those critters out, cut those limbs off, load them up, grind them down, and be out of here. I have come to appreciate in the past dozen years the insights of a person like
Charles Canfield, then director of the historic site, who had the sense to say, “We need to consider how we treat the grove.”

**Porter:** I think they made a grand choice. When I came here in 1968, the grove was open, as you have indicated. In the late 1960s, there were a number of logs or benches in the grove that seemed to have attracted people and they felt that they had found the exact spot. I recall the bleachers that were set up nearby, and I attended a meeting or two or three or four here in the grove.

**Enders:** I myself sat there a good number of times.

**Porter:** With its flooring and wooden deck and the wooden pulpit.

**Enders:** With the sound system and lights.

**Porter:** In those days, those working in the grove were busy with their tree operation and snipping. If a tree base developed a problem and there was a space there, they cleaned out the space and filled it with cement. And Bob, I do not know if there are any cement trees left.

**Parrot:** No, thankfully we have no cement trees in the grove.

**Holzapfel:** Bob [Parrot], please provide us a brief history of your involvement in the Sacred Grove.

**Parrot:** Well, just as some background, I too have been walking in the grove since about 1961. As I became professional and began to look at it with a professional eye, I would often wonder, “What in the world are they doing here? Do they realize what they are doing to this forest?” The forest was essentially being manipulated in such an artificial way that it was open and parklike and almost sterile. There was almost a complete absence of indigenous species or wildflowers and plant life; there was no decaying woody material on the ground that would support and shelter chipmunks and wild turkeys and woodpeckers and songbirds and all the creatures that we would like in a forest.

**Enders:** Yes, even those animals were absent.

**Parrot:** Of course, I had no contacts with anybody until I was approached to assist in getting the logs out for the log home. In the course of discussions with the site director at the time, and eventually you [Don] and others that were involved, I learned that the Church was seeking to change course and implement a sound management policy for the grove that would restore the ecological balance and the fertility to the soil—also to make the grove look as wild and natural and as much like it may have looked in the 1820s as we could accomplish. Basically, the parties involved in the Church had a concept. Most of the concept was good, but some of it was not totally viable or
desirable. For example, the Church envisioned an old grove forest, but we did not want strictly an old grove forest in there because an old grove forest is predominantly large, overmature trees that have a relatively short lifetime. There is an absence of viable regeneration in such forests. My job was to take the Church’s raw concept and to develop it into a workable and sustainable forest management program. That has been my privilege to do for the last twelve years or so.

Enders: What we know is that you have taken the approximate seven acres and helped us as a Church to catch the vision of what the woodland was like in the 1820s. And through regeneration the grove is expanding and will soon reach 150 acres.

Parrot: Well, that was one of the objectives of the Sacred Grove Conservation program, to restore the forest to the original size it was when Joseph went there. The First Presidency thought that it was not just a small patch of trees that Joseph went to for his vision. He went to a specific area perhaps, but it was part of an overall contiguous forest. One of our objectives is to restore the forest to its original size and appearance. This also allows for expansion of the grove trail system as the Church continues to grow. All the Church-owned area surrounding the original grove had been about seven acres. Then the Church acquired Hyrum’s hundred-acre property, and the grove became about thirteen acres of mature forest. That was all we had until about 1998, when additional forested areas were purchased and the grove expanded into them. All the former farmland and fields surrounding the grove are being allowed to regenerate naturally back into forest as well. We have regeneration that is as old as fifty years and areas that are as young as ten years. This area behind us, for example, is about thirty-five years of regeneration.

Enders: And all of this helps ensure that future generations, not only of Latter-day Saints but of all visitors, will have the opportunity to come in and quietly experience this woodland.

Porter: This is a very primeval forest. In that seven acres there are a number of trees, you have told us, that date back to the time of Joseph Smith. Would you like to indicate what is left of that early forest?

Parrot: We have six trees that we know to be well in excess of 200 years old. To be more exact, they are approximately 225 years old. We have one tree, of the six, that is probably between 300 and 350 years old. Because the dating process is not terribly precise, we consider those six trees to be the “witness trees” because we know that they are more than old enough to have been
here at the time of the First Vision. But we also have perhaps another six or eight trees scattered throughout the grove that are somewhere between 180 and 200 years old. So, more than likely they were here at the time of the First Vision, although they were just seedlings. All the trees of that age are around the original hundred-acre portion of the farm.

**Porter:** Without enumerating all the kinds of trees—I know you have a list that I have looked at, and it is substantial—can you tell us what the primary trees were that existed here in the days of the Smiths?

**Parrot:** The forest environment that we have here now, I believe, is very similar to what was here in the Smiths’ time. From looking at the species that they used in the construction of their buildings, for example, we see that they used the same species of trees that we have now. There were probably a couple of species that were here then that are not here now, such as the American chestnut and the American elm, both of which were killed off by invasive species from overseas. But aside from that, I think that everything that was here then is here now. The dominant species in these forests are sugar maple, beech, basswood, ironwood, and hickory. Those are the dominant species in the forest now, although we have approximately thirty species of trees in and around the Sacred Grove.

**Enders:** Now tell us just a wee bit about the forest regeneration and the upper canopy, lower canopy, and ground covering.

**Parrot:** It has been since the implementation of the forest management program, which has basically been in the last decade, that any meaningful progress has been made. There has been a tremendous change in the appearance of the grove. It has become lush and green. There has been a return of indigenous species of wildflowers and plant life. The floor of the forest is mostly covered with green in the summer, whereas in the past it was just bare, brown leaves. There has been a tremendous increase in the regeneration of viable young trees, which is essential to the preservation of the grove. Trees do not last forever, just like humans, and we have to have replacements that grow. We strive for diversity of species in there so that we are not putting all our eggs in one basket; in case another invasive insect or disease comes in and wipes out a specific species, we have got plenty of other species there to take its place. The most rewarding aspect for me is to see the change in appearance. When we first started the program, of course, there was no downed organic material on the floor of the forest; everything was cleaned up and groomed and sanitized. Decaying organic matter from downed logs and that sort of
thing is where the trees get their nutrients. That is why the forest was so lacking in natural vegetation and regeneration. When we first started leaving the downed logs, we would have visitors come in and complain that it looked messy—“It looks messy in there! You are not caring for the Sacred Grove!”—when in fact we were just beginning to care for the Sacred Grove. But now we have visitors who have returned after ten or fifteen or twenty years, unaware that we have implemented any change in policy, noticing the change. They often come in and ask and say, “I was here years ago, and now the forest looks so lush and green and healthy. Why is that? What is happened to bring about that change?” The fact that they recognize the change without knowing that we are striving for it shows that they are unbiased in their assessment.

**Enders:** So, what you are saying is that your work creates an atmosphere so subtle that folks have no idea what happens here. They do not even know that you have been at work.

**Parrot:** But they enjoy it, they appreciate it, and they like the appearance of the grove as opposed to what they saw before.

**Porter:** What protective measures have you put in place when the ice comes and the wind blows, or microburst hits—who is first on the job and looking at the grove?

**Parrot:** Well, one of our prime priorities here, of course, is the safety of the visitors to the site. The forest is inherently a dangerous place. Every tree has dead branches that can fall from the tops of the trees in windstorms and the like. Of course, severe catastrophic storms will bring down whole trees. We are very vigilant about that, and it is my job to monitor the weather conditions and close the grove whenever the winds exceed approximately forty-five miles per hour. I inspect the grove after such storms and take care of any hazards that may have developed. If we have a catastrophic storm, then I am busy in there for some time. Don was here when we had the last ice storm in 2003. The place was just devastated. But most of the material that went down in that storm (and we lost over a hundred trees) has since disappeared and decayed, returning to and enriching the earth. Only the large logs remain, and we want those. That is another one of our objectives, the old grove forest ambience. We are not striving for an old grove forest *per se*, but we want to incorporate as many of the features as we can, such as downed logs and moss and fungi, which we have an infinite variety of growing in the grove now. They were not here before because there was nothing for them to grow on. And the wildlife was not here before because there was nothing for them to live in and to feed
on. The balance is returning to the grove, and the evidence is clear anywhere you look that it is very important that we stay the course. Nature is a long-term project. You cannot keep tinkering with it and veering off in other directions. So we are on track and need to stay on track and hopefully we will.

Holzapfel: Tell us briefly about the insects and animals that have returned. What have you observed?

Parrot: Well, there are a lot of insects that we do not even notice and we would consider unimportant, but the Lord put them here for a purpose, even if it is something as mundane as just breaking down a decaying log. All of that speeds the process. They bore through the log, making passageways where the water comes down and soaks through those passageways, and that speeds up the process of decay. In the meantime, there are wild turkeys, woodpeckers, and other birds that are more than happy to feed on these very insects that are breaking down or are living in the decaying organic matter. As the birds chop at the log or chew it apart to get at the insects, they also speed up the decay process. It is amazing that those things have returned so quickly because they were not here before. I knew what would happen over time when we initiated this program, but I never expected it to happen so quickly. Ten years is just a blink of an eye in nature’s time frame.
There has been a very noticeable and significant change in ten years. I feel that it is, in part, due to what we are doing, the good things that we are doing, and to the fact that we stopped doing the wrong things. I think it is, in part, a sign from the Lord saying, “There. You are on the right track. You see how nicely that works? Stay the course.” He guides us just as we would guide children who are doing something, perhaps attempting to drive a nail or use a handsaw or any number of things: if their technique is flawed, we direct them a little bit, show them how to do it, praise their efforts, and point out how much better the new way works. That is my feeling for what is taking place here.

Holzapfel: One of the themes developing in our conversation today is “return.” Bob, in addition to the return of the natural growth of the woodland and the insects, what else has changed?

Parrot: Well, for example, during the period prior to the program there was an infestation of garlic mustard, which is an invasive species of plant. I do not personally think that it does a great deal of harm, but it was something of concern to many in the Church, whether it was a problem or not. In the ten years since then, indigenous species like jewel weed have returned and have crowded out the garlic mustard. It is just nature restoring the balance as long as we get out of the way and do the right thing. Jewel weed is a wildflower that is very popular with hummingbirds, so we have hummingbirds now in the grove. There are jack-in-the-pulpits, trillium, evening primrose, mayapples, spring beauties, toothworts, and bellworts, and a whole spectrum of wildflowers has returned. All these things come about in sequence in the spring. Each flower has its brief period in the sun, perhaps a couple of weeks and then another flower gets its turn. So we have wildflowers of all varieties, and right now we
have the late summer and early fall flowers. We get another indication about the health of the forest from the indigenous species we see and the environment we know that they grow in. Many of those species require moist fertile soil to live, so the fact that they are in there and have returned is an indicator that we now have moist fertile soil in the grove, and that is what we need.

**Enders:** Bob, please tell us your perspective about the early spring of 1820 and how that may relate to the First Vision. Tell us about the variability of the season. What is the situation of most of the trees and the ground coverage at that time?

**Parrot:** Well, it is usually depicted in artists’ depictions as being lush green forest as Joseph kneeled and prayed. But if he went as early as we think he probably went, the forest was at best just beginning to green up. There may have been apples beginning to poke through, there were leeks (wild leeks are one of the first things to come up), and some of the trees may have been just starting to leaf out. But it is a very pretty time of year in the early spring before the leaves come out. The bugs have not arrived yet. The sun is very strong. It highlights and shines on the trunks of the trees and silhouettes the canopies of the trees against the blue sky. We have many beautiful sunny days with blue sky.

**Enders:** Truly the colors and textures of the tree trunks, branches, and canopies and the different species stand out very noticeably.

**Parrot:** It is no less beautiful than later in the year when everything is lush and green. It is a transition period, and it is alive and birds are singing, and it would have been a beautiful time to go into the forest.

**Enders:** What might the temperature range have been?

**Parrot:** It could have been as warm as the mid-seventies on occasion, but probably more likely in the fifties at that time of year—maybe low sixties. I also had a thought to follow up on your question, Larry. It is interesting because we tend to think of the grove, at least in the earlier years of the Church owning the property, as being just the part that was on the hundred-acre farm. We think, “Well, that must have been where Joseph went.” But, as I said, he went to a large forest. Perhaps it was to a specific spot, but it was part of a large forest, and as we have expanded the grove and expanded the trail system, and as you walk around through all the portions of the grove, the Spirit does not leave you. You do not suddenly cross a line and say, “Whoops, I am off of the sacred part.” The whole forest is sacred. Again, the objective of the Church
was to restore the original size of the forest because the whole forest is where
Joseph went and where the experience took place.

Holzapfel: Obviously, this is a special place for Latter-day Saints. However,
does the restoration of these particular woodlands matter to anyone else? Bob,
what do you think?

Parrot: It is a wonderful opportunity as a forest manager. My basic funda-
mental purpose is to grow forests and to keep them healthy. Of course, I
have worked for many private clients, and you can do everything right for a
private client, but then they die or sell the property and the new client calls in
the loggers and in two weeks they have undone everything you did in fifteen
or twenty years. But the Sacred Grove is always going to be the Sacred Grove.
So here we have an opportunity for a really long-term forest management
project, especially with these regeneration areas. We are starting totally from
scratch here. We will be able to see forests start from their infancy all the way
to maturity. When I take the young sister missionaries through on tours I tell
them that, because in their lifetime they are going to see that transition. They
are going to come back with their grandkids someday, and where it was weeds
when they went through, it is going to be forest. So it is an amazing opportu-
nity and an amazing thing to see.

Enders: What are your thoughts about how this program is progressing?
Are we succeeding?

Parrot: Well, if we stay on course, we are going to succeed pretty well.
But the forest is going to be a little different because of the environmental
challenges. Fortunately, we still have witness trees, and we have trees that are
in excess of two hundred years old. But I do not think we are going to see trees
like that again. Trees will not live that long. Our best hope in preserving the
Grove and maintaining some continuity of appearance is to keep it as healthy
as possible, so it is better able to combat the environmental stresses that it is
likely to encounter, and also we hope to encourage as much diversity as pos-
sible so that we are not putting all our eggs in one basket. We do everything
we can to preserve the witness trees. As you know, I have fought, as have you,
many a battle to safeguard them because we cannot grow new witness trees.
We have the ones that were there, and that is all we have. But we will be able
to grow large trees for future generations that give them the effect of the types
of trees that were present in the Smiths’ time. We have trees now here that are
not witness trees but are very large, and they still give the effect of the sorts of
trees that the Smiths and other settlers would have encountered and would have had to deal with.

Holzapfel: *Let me say in conclusion, thousands and thousands of people walk through this woodland and will never meet you, Bob. They will most likely never know your name. For many, it may never even cross their minds that somebody has been working here in the Sacred Grove.*

I remember coming here for the first time in 1972 when I was driving from my home in southern Maine to the West Coast just before I left on a mission. Since that time I have returned on numerous occasions as a researcher, tour guide, and private visitor on a personal pilgrimage. At first I did not notice the transformation that was occurring, but soon it was apparent. I am amazed at the change that has occurred under your careful supervision. I can only thank you from the bottom of my heart for making this return to the Sacred Grove more meaningful. The Sacred Grove is not only a religious site but beautiful woodland. Your efforts have allowed me, my family, and countless others not only to reconnect with our sacred past but also to reconnect to nature—to the woodlands. You have performed a remarkable and hopefully lasting service to us all. The return to the Sacred Grove is an extraordinary story. Thank you for sharing it with us.*
Thousands of pioneers faced insurmountable odds as they came to America to make a better life for themselves.
Musing on my Shaw ancestors from the Staffordshire Potteries in England, 1840s

How many west winds,
tossing wild,
drown the cries
of a pioneer child?

How many mothers
in birthing travail,
suffer on board
under listless sail?

How many pieces
of hardtack left,
how much water
before they’re bereft?
How many fathers, pacing the deck, plan and pray for a merciful trek?

How many winsome girls brave the foam, crossing an ocean for mountain home?

How many miles of song and shout does it take until all the shoes wear out?
How many promises
heaped with stone
left against wayside
wolves alone?

How many moonlights
comforting boys,
curling for sleep
with rocks for toys?

How many couples
shaping the clay
with straw for adobes?
Determined to stay. RE
Over the years teaching Church history, Brother Merrill has tried to make the pioneer figures painted by artist Carl C. A. Christensen come alive for his students.
Remembering the Pioneer Legacy

TIMOTHY G. MERRILL

Timothy G. Merrill (merrill.timothy@gmail.com) is an instructor at the BYU Salt Lake Center.

Elder Joseph Anderson, in April 1968, announced the death, at age 108, of “Hilda Anderson Erickson, sole survivor of the 80,000 Mormon pioneers who came to Utah before the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.”¹ Hilda Erickson’s life bridged two dramatically different ages, from the Civil War to the Cold War. She alone of those pioneers lived to see Richard Nixon campaign to be the thirty-seventh president of the United States (although as a staunch Democrat, it is unlikely she would have voted for him). As a seven-year-old girl emigrating from Sweden in 1866, could she have dreamed that man would walk on the moon the year following her death? With her passing, the pioneer era passed from living memory. Forty years later, how does the pioneer legacy remain relevant to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? In what way do the pioneers continue to shape the Church’s identity in the twenty-first century?

The pioneer tradition anchors the Church’s identity to another age in order to inform our own. Richard L. Bushman said that history “must constantly be recast to be relevant, the past forever reinterpreted for the present.”² The inherent tension between memory and history put the pioneers
in danger of being forgotten—or, more likely, reduced to ineffectual stereotypes. History is “a bridge connecting the past with the present, and pointing the road to the future.” During Utah’s sesquicentennial anniversary in 1997, Eric Eliason warned that the pioneer tradition had already begun “to slip into popular historical unconsciousness.” President Gordon B. Hinckley wondered, “Can a generation that lives with central heating and air conditioning, with automobile and the airplane, … understand, appreciate, and learn from the lives and motives of [the pioneers]?” The answer lies in fellowshipping the past with more than just a casual handshake. “We need new histories that appeal to our views of causation, our sense of significance, and our moral concerns,” Bushman argued. We embrace the legacy of our forebears in the context of our day, not theirs; the pioneer story must be reinterpreted for each generation.

Recent studies have emphasized the primacy of doctrine in shaping the Church’s identity in the nineteenth century. Charles Cohen argued in 2005 that the “strong force binding Mormon nuclei was not fundamentally cultural, linguistic, economic, or even ecclesiastical but theological.” According to Cohen, the “religious construction” of the Saints emerged from “the certainty that [they] were restoring the House of Israel.” Kathleen Flake also highlighted the dominance of doctrine in her book *The Politics of American Religious Identity*, placing the doctrinal focus on Joseph Smith’s First Vision. The story of the Sacred Grove, Flake believed, “contained the elements necessary to fill the historical, scriptural, and theological void left by the abandonment of plural marriage” and became the cornerstone of “Latter-day Saint belief and identity.” While Flake does mention the significance of the 1847 migration in the epilogue of her book, the influence of the pioneer heritage upon our institutional identity has taken a back seat to other important unifying forces.

**The Mediated Past**

It has been suggested that history most closely resembles cartography. A blue shape on a map, for instance, represents the Great Salt Lake, but does that shape capture the smell of salt or the sound of seagulls? Like maps, history is a representation, not a re-creation of the original. The verb to represent means “to stand for; to symbolize.” Because we cannot recreate the past itself, we recast it in modern molds. “Aspects of the past that fail to match up with our present dispositions,” a scholar noted, “will necessarily seem irrelevant.
When it comes to analogy, . . . the lines of authority run from the present to past and not the other way around.” Our “emotional and moral engagement with the past” is what makes the past matter. Thus the past itself cannot be touched; instead a “mediated past” is born from our search for history’s significance and relevance. Our orientation to the past is not backwards but inwards.

History becomes relevant when we understand the present through the past. In Pierre Nora’s study of memory and history, he described “sites of memories” (lieux de mémoire) that “originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, [and] organize celebrations . . . because such activities no longer occur naturally.” Collective memory plays an important role in shaping a community’s sense of identity. Through memory “human societies can impose order on what appears to them to be a universe whose principle of ordering lies outside their control.”

The difference between history and memory is important. On the one hand, there were stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments (a historical artifact), and on the other there were the effects those commandments had upon a people (effects preserved by their collective memory). History will not forget the pioneers, whose record is traced by wagon trails and secured within the subterranean vaults of libraries, but whether the pioneers live on in our collective memory is a different matter.

Memory is never static but “remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation.” It seems that memory follows the laws of entropy like everything else. We do not want the pioneers remembered by history alone—not in museums full of relics without warmth, not in history books filled with facts shorn of meaning. We need to keep the pioneers alive in our collective and individual memories because (to paraphrase Joseph Smith), “If men do not comprehend [their past], they do not comprehend themselves.”

**Constructing Identity**

The termites of time are constantly eating away at the pillars of the past. Ask a member of the Church at random to name a handcart company, and the answer will usually be, “Willie or Martin.” Why these two companies instead of the others? Eric Eliason explained: “Simplification . . . is a process with
political implications and ramifications. The construction of the pioneer myth is no exception. Simplification raises questions such as Whose experience qualifies them for being reverenced as pioneers? Which parts of the pioneer past have been forgotten, and which events become draped in sacred significance for later remembrance and why? One reason the Willie and Martin companies seem to be singled out is that their tragic story makes them “ripe for romantic remembrance.”

Since we cannot reclaim the past out of whole cloth, we must take it one patch at a time. Richard T erdiman observed that “the most constant element of recollection is forgetting [so] rememoration can occur at all. . . . Reduction is the essential precondition to representation. Loss is what makes our memory of the past possible at all.” What we forget is as revealing (if not more so) about who we are as what we choose to remember. One way to revitalize the pioneer tradition is to widen Mnemosyne’s net to include forgotten narratives. But which narratives deserve remembering? Nora argued that “it is the difference [between then and now, them and us] that we are seeking, and in the image of this difference, the ephemeral spectacle of an unrecoverable identity. It is no longer genesis that we seek but instead the decipherment of what we are in the light of what we are no longer.”

Identity can be defined as the set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group. An important part of identity is formed in opposition to the noncommunity. If someone is a Jew, for example, we know he or she is neither Gentile nor Muslim. One important difference between the pioneers and modern society is the notion of “community.” A social commentator recently noted that a rift is forming in America between religion and spirituality. Religion “is too much work. Religion is potluck suppers, . . . disciplines and dogmas, and most trying of all, pews full of other people.” Spirituality, on the other hand “is lighter on its feet” because it is less concerned with horizontal obligations. The pioneers were, above all, religious in their social structures which emphasized community and consecration. The word “pioneer” appears only once in scripture, in what is now section 136 of the Doctrine and Covenants. While that revelation to Brigham Young demonstrated the Saints’ inspired ingenuity in mobilizing the Camp of Israel, what is most remarkable about the Mormon exodus was that it put the pioneers under priesthood covenant to help each other (see D&C 136:2, 4). This covenant commanded the Saints, “Let every man use all his influence and property to remove this people” to Zion (v. 10) and forbade
anyone from “build[ing] up himself” (v. 19). These cooperative covenants stood dramatically opposed to the notion of “dominant individualism” in the American West. In a day of privatized devotion, the pioneers remind us that Zion is a society built only by common effort.

Often the pioneers are invoked today to remind us not to stray from the path they forged. Elder J. Golden Kimball said in 1902, “I declare to you that we, the sons and daughters of those old pioneers, are becoming effeminate, and we no longer believe that we can do the things our fathers did.”23 The pioneers hereby provide a foil for modern Saints. For instance, Elder Erastus Snow (who was the first to enter the Salt Lake Valley with Elder Orson Pratt) gave an address in 1880 in which he criticized some of the Saints for departing from the old pioneer ways. “There is one feature,” he said, “which contrasts unfavorably today; it is this: that among the rising generation, and even among some of the former generation still remaining, . . . [some] seem befogged [by] the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the pride of life.”24 For the succeeding generations, the pioneers have always served as an anchored reference point to measure our progress or regression, a sextant to chart our course, and a compass to navigate the currents of time.

During the twentieth century, the pioneers became the model Saints. They provided one of the primary didactic tools used to instruct the Saints

During the twentieth century, Mormon pioneers became a powerful example for Latter-day Saints as to how they should live lives of devotion, courage, and faith.
in the ways of godliness. During the centennial year in 1947, visiting teachers shared messages dealing with “Our Pioneer Heritage” that included the following topics: love of God, love of fellow man, faith, courage, industry, self-reliance, dependability, and thirst for knowledge. The pioneers speak from the pulpit of the past to urge us to live up to their finest ideals. “Are these pioneer celebrations academic, merely increasing our fund of experiences and knowledge?” Elder Dallin H. Oaks asked during the sesquicentennial, “or will they have a profound impact on how we live our lives?” He indicated that the way we honor the pioneers is “to identify the great, eternal principles they applied to achieve all they achieved for our benefit and then apply those principles to the challenges of our day.” Pioneers have thus become metaphors. Metaphors powerfully influence our lives by creating “realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. . . . This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make the experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies.”

How, then, are the pioneers being deployed today to meet the needs of the current generation? The challenge in the twentieth century was to make the pioneer heritage meaningful (and therefore relevant) to the youth of the Church, to new members, and to those who live outside of the Mormon cultural corridor. The pioneers were invoked to decry, for example, the “new” morality, the government dole during the Great Depression, and godless communism. Revitalizing the pioneer tradition for the twenty-first century is a priority because, in the words of George Allan, the “resourcefulness of our traditions lies in their ideality, in the schemata for truth and commitment they provide. We cannot return to the old ways, but through returning to the kind of way the old ways were we may be able to recover the ancient meanings they embodied, meanings from which convincing new beliefs and enabling practices can be fashioned.”

The Mormon Frontier
Frederick Jackson Turner did not mention the Mormons in his 1893 address, but he very well could have. While Western historians have been chipping away at Turner’s frontier thesis over the past fifty years, the idea of Mormon (and not just American) exceptionalism has endured. After all, who was better than the Mormons—to cite from Turner—at “breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities”? The pioneers wrested water from the desert to make it blossom as the rose, but how many
of us irrigate today? This leads to one of the paradoxes of Turner’s thesis (and one we face today) noted by Alan Trachtenberg: “If the frontier had provided the defining experience for Americans, how would the values learned in that experience now fare in the new world of cities?” To paraphrase that question, if the pioneer era was a defining process in shaping the Church’s identity, what happens to that identity if we are no longer pioneers?

Turner saw the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” Where does the frontier exist today? A Latter-day Saint historian observed, “We have usually thought of the ‘frontier’ as an empty place . . . to be cultivated or civilized. But in recent years, scholars . . . have suggested another definition. A frontier is not a geographical space but a social space, an environment in which two different cultures meet and interact. In this sense, Latter-day Saints are at the pushing edge of a new frontier.” On an institutional level, the pioneer spirit is best preserved in creating communities. The young interact in Primary and Mutual activities. Scouting teaches cooperation among patrol members and is, according to President Heber J. Grant, “the pioneer spirit . . . applied in practical, yet romantic fashion to the youth of this later age.” In 1947 President Marion G. Romney highlighted the social aspect of pioneering when he said, “I am persuaded that the Church today is meeting its pioneering responsibility through its welfare program.” A pioneer in modern times is one dressed in the garb of the good Samaritan.

The idea of pioneering on the sociocultural frontier was expanded upon by Elder Oaks, who said that “many modern Saints do their pioneering on the frontiers of their own attitudes and emotions. . . . Modern Saints know that one who subdues his own spirit is just as much a pioneer as one who conquers a continent.” Thus one solution has been to encourage us to all be modern pioneers. President Gordon B. Hinckley said the example of the pioneers “can be a compelling motivation for us all, for each of us is a pioneer in his own life, often in his own family, and many of us pioneer daily in trying to establish a gospel foothold in distant parts of the world.” Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reasoned along the same lines, stating that a “pioneer is not a woman who makes her own soap. She is one who takes up her burdens and walks to the future.” In 2006 members celebrated Black Heritage Month with the theme “Contemporary Black LDS Pioneers.” Such efforts to establish modern pioneers, according to Eliason, are “a way of keeping the Mormon present in sacred time—a situation where Mormons are really the most comfortable—by redeploying a symbol from a previous sacred time. This strategy
helps give the Mormon present a sense of being ‘sacred history in the making.’” However, recasting ourselves in the pioneer mold means little if we do not understand who the pioneers really were, what motivated them, and what they accomplished.

The global expansion of the Church poses a unique challenge to the pioneer story. Eliason argued that the way “Mormons come to conceptualize the relationship between a pioneer heritage and a new world religion potentially tells us much about who we are now and has profound implications for the shape of Mormon culture to come.” It would be difficult to imagine a Mormon identity shorn from its pioneer roots. We may as well attempt to understand the nature of the United States while ignoring the impact of the Civil War.

One way the Church has tried to keep the pioneer story alive has been through celebrations on Pioneer Day. One cannot really celebrate Pioneer Day alone because it is intended to bind the community together. Dorothy Noyes and Roger Abraham noted, “The characteristic element of calendar observances—noise and crowding, music and dancing, masking, eating and drinking, physical risk-taking, and the demarcation of community space—work powerfully on the bodies of participants and, furthermore, impose participation on all present. Unified in practice, the community creates a unity of feeling.” Steven Olsen pointed out that Pioneer Day is used to symbolize “central aspects of Mormon identity and solidarity,” which help “create and preserve a strong consciousness of the Mormon past” and reinforce the Church’s “social organization and cohesion.”

Pioneer Day continues to serve a present need by binding the community together through a shared or adopted past. These activities act as a modern-day circling-the-wagons. The most significant function of such celebrations is to amplify collective memory because “the consensual account of the community past becomes the interpretive authority for present actions and events. . . . They respond to strong contemporary problems and pressures: they are strategically engaged in the defense of the local community.” However, institutional observances like Pioneer Day cannot communicate through bake sales and parades the depth of our heritage. Rather, the act of remembering requires bridging generations through metaphor and shared meaning.
Conclusion

Few voices speak from the ossuary of history as loudly as those of the pioneers. One girl, Lucy Hannah Flake, was eight years old when she crossed the plains in 1850. When one looks at the faded black-and-white photographs of Lucy taken when she was a grandmother (wrinkled by age with her hair pulled back tightly and lips pursed), it is difficult to relate with the young girl who said: “It had always been easy for me to laugh. In fact that was one of my worse faults. I laughed in season and out of season. Not the giggley kind, but a rippling one that came from the toes up.”45 In order for the pioneers to remain relevant, they must first become real people.

As I have taught Church history, I have tried to make the pioneer figures painted by artist Carl C. A. Christensen come alive for my students. Some students have difficulty finding compelling enough reasons to investigate what is beneath the bonnets and straw hats. So long as the pioneers remain abstract they remain inaccessible. When we realize that our identity is welded to theirs on the same family tree, we may understand what Joseph Smith meant when he said, “They without us could not be made perfect. These men are in heaven, but there [sic] children are on Earth their bowels yearn over us. God sends men down for this reason . . . [to] join hand in hand, in bringing about this work.”46 The pioneers can remain relevant in the twenty-first century as members find new reasons to remember. And we must remember, for without our pioneer forefathers, we are orphans.

Notes

20. Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 18; emphasis added.
27. Oaks, “Following the Pioneers.”
33. President Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, April 1924, 156; quoting Oscar A. Kirkham.
34. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1947, 126.
44. Alma asked the Saints long ago whether they had “sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?” (Alma 5:6).
Upon returning from a seven-year mission to South Africa, J. Wyley Sessions (pictured here) was sent to Moscow, Idaho, where he started the first LDS Institute of Religion.
The First Institute Teacher

Casey Paul Griffiths (griffithspc@ldschurch.org) is a teacher at Jordan Seminary.

When J. Wyley Sessions walked into the office of the First Presidency in October 1926, he was sure that he knew exactly what they were going to say. Having recently returned physically exhausted and nearly destitute from a seven-year mission to South Africa, Sessions expected to be assigned to work in the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company. He and his wife, Magdalene, had promised each other that they would not reenter the field of education. So it came as somewhat of a shock when in midsentence Charles Nibley, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, turned to Church President Heber J. Grant and abruptly announced, “Heber, we’re making a mistake! I’ve never felt good about Brother Sessions in the sugar business. He may not like it. There’s something else for this man.” After a moment of silence, Nibley looked directly at Sessions and said, “Brother Sessions, you’re the man for us to send to the University of Idaho to take care of our boys and girls who are attending the university there, and to study the situation and tell us what the Church should do for Latter-day Saint students attending state universities.” Sessions was not immediately enthusiastic about this new call and responded, “Oh no! I’ve been home just twelve days today, since we arrived from more than
seven years in the mission system. Are you calling me on another mission?” President Grant spoke next: “No, no, Brother Sessions, we’re just offering you a wonderful professional opportunity. Go downstairs and talk to the Church superintendent, Brother Bennion, and then come back and see us about three o’clock.” Years later Sessions would recall his conflicted feelings upon leaving the meeting: “I went, crying nearly all the way. I didn’t want to do it. But just a few days later our baggage was checked to Moscow, Idaho, . . . and there [we] started the LDS Institutes of Religion.”

This inauspicious beginning to the institute program typified the career of this unlikeliest of religious educators. Leaving Salt Lake City, Sessions recounted that the only instructions he received from President Grant were, “Brother Sessions, go up there and see what we ought to do for the boys and girls who attend state universities, and the Lord bless you.” President Grant’s admonitions on that occasion echoed advice given when Sessions left on his mission to South Africa and, perhaps just as well as anything, captured the educational philosophy of J. Wyley Sessions: “Learn to love the people, nail your banner to mast, and the Lord bless you!”

Answering the Lord’s Call

The call to go to Moscow was not the first surprising request Sessions and his family had received. Sessions’s role in the educational history of the Church was not one that he sought out; rather, it found him. Time and again, though he sought out professional opportunities in other areas, when the Lord’s call came, he sacrificed his own desires to respond. In the course of his lifetime of unintentional Church service he would serve as a mission president in Africa, found the first Latter-day Saint institute program, found two other institute programs, serve as president of the Church’s mission home, and end his career in Church education as head of the Division of Religion at Brigham Young University. All this from an individual whose original training was in agronomy! Sessions’s odyssey through the educational development of the Church in the early twentieth century not only richly illustrates the dynamic forces shaping the intellectual development of the Church at the time but also records the hand of the Lord in the life of a simple but obedient servant. Through each step in his journey, Sessions proved the far-reaching nature of the Lord’s vision in setting up the institutes of religion, which would shape the lives and testimonies of thousands of young Latter-day Saints. Each insti-
tute around the world owes something to the pioneering efforts of J. Wyley Sessions, the first institute teacher.

**Learning to Answer the Call—South African Mission**

Sessions’s first important call to Church service came in 1918. Working as a county agricultural agent for the University of Idaho, Sessions was preparing for a trip to vaccinate some cattle when his secretary arrived with a letter from the First Presidency of the Church. Sessions was only thirty-two, and he and the men working with him were somewhat suspicious as to the contents of the envelope. One of the men remarked, “Well, they’ve caught up with him now!” Sessions nervously opened the letter and read, “Dear Brother Sessions, We have decided to call you to preside over the South African Mission. . . . Please tell us how you feel about this appointment. Praying the Lord to bless you, we are sincerely your brethren, Heber J. Grant, Charles W. Penrose, and Charles W. Nibley.” Immediately struck by a sense of his own inadequacy for such a call, Sessions “cried about the first week, and swore the second week, and the third week I decided to go down and tell the Brethren that I just could not go.”

On his way to Salt Lake to speak with the First Presidency, Sessions stopped in Preston, Idaho, where a stake conference was being held. The conference was presided over by Elder Melvin J. Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Wishing to avoid seeing Elder Ballard, Sessions deliberately went to the conference late, finding a seat on a staircase where he could see and hear but wouldn’t be seen by the authorities from the stand. He stayed there safely for the entire morning meeting without being noticed. Arriving late to the afternoon meetings, hoping again to remain incognito, he was shocked to find that someone in the crowd had informed Elder Ballard of his presence. He soon found himself being ushered to the stand.

Sessions decided that “when his time came to speak, he would inform the audience bluntly that his call was a mistake, that someone had provided the First Presidency with faulty information, and that those enjoying the ear of the Brethren should be more careful in the advice they offer.” When his time to speak came, as he approached the pulpit, Elder Ballard arose, took him by the arm, and proceeded to escort him the rest of the way. Elder Ballard then announced, “When President Grant nominated Brother Sessions to be President of the South African Mission in our meeting in the temple the other day, I could hardly sit still waiting for President Grant to get through
with the nomination, so I could get up and second it! I think the Lord has some work for this man to do down there.” Elder Ballard offered some other kind remarks, and then it was Sessions’s turn to speak. He declared, “Brothers and Sisters, when any man advises a member of the General Authorities of the Church, he’d better be careful of what he says, for when these men speak after their meetings that they hold in the temple and under the inspiration of the Lord, they don’t make mistakes.” His mind racing, Sessions knew the words were inspired and were provided as a witness to the divinity of his call. With tears flowing, he announced to the audience his intention to go to Salt Lake City and accept the call.5

When he arrived there, his feelings of inadequacy again resurfaced. As he told President Grant that he wasn’t qualified, the Church President shot back, “You think we don’t know that? Of course you’re not qualified. None of us are. You ought to work for the Lord and depend on the Lord and he’ll qualify you.” Sessions later recalled, “That was all the comfort I got out of President Grant for my not being qualified. I was only thirty-two years of age.”6

South Africa, 1919–26

Sessions’s feelings of inadequacy were justifiable. Presiding over the South African Mission presented a number of challenges. His call sent him to the mission most distant from Church headquarters. In later years, he used to joke that any direction he went from South Africa, he would be closer to home!7 Sessions struggled even to gain entrance to Africa, because of the confusion resulting from the end of the First World War and the panic resulting from the worldwide influenza epidemic. After waiting several months for a visa, he was called to labor in California for several months before departing for England, where he again waited several months before finally leaving for South Africa. Having had three different missionary farewells in eighteen months, the Sessionses finally found themselves on a ship headed for their destination.8

During the course of their journey to South Africa, the Sessions family endured serious trials. Magdalene Sessions was several months pregnant, and the hot, oppressive environment of the ship caused her deep discomfort. When the ship was ten days away from South Africa, she lost her baby and became critically ill herself. At one point she was so ill that several passengers asked Sessions if he was planning to bury his wife at sea or take her body back to Utah. Deeply concerned, Sessions asked the captain of the ship to post
a notice that Sister Sessions was not dead and was not going to die. Asked by the captain how he could be sure given her critical condition, Sessions responded, “I know she isn’t going to die, because the prophets of the Lord have blessed her that she won’t die,” referring to a blessing given to Magdalene earlier by Elder Ballard. Magdalene not only survived the journey but recovered fully almost immediately after their arrival in South Africa.9

Even as they disembarked, President and Sister Sessions received a taste of the hostility that existed in that country toward the Church. Before he was allowed to leave the boat, Brother Sessions was required to sign a document stating that he would not preach polygamy, take a plural wife, or break any of the laws of the country during his stay there.10 Missionary work in South Africa was at a low point when the Sessiones arrived. President Session’s predecessor, Nicholas G. Smith, had served in the area since 1914. During the war, only four missionaries remained in South Africa, and in 1919 all Latter-day Saint missionaries were banned from serving in the country. Only President Smith and his family had served in the mission for the last two years before Sessions arrived.11

When President Sessions entered South Africa, he was the only official full-time missionary in the country. He later joked about writing to President Grant that he was having a terrible time disciplining the missionary force. The situation was discouraging, but Sessions immediately set to work, displaying the qualities that would later serve him as an institute director. Seeking to obtain legal status for the Church in South Africa, Sessions used his old connections in the Department of Agriculture to obtain letters of recommendation from the governors of Utah and Idaho, all four senators from both states, two college presidents, and the U. S. secretary of agriculture.12 Sessions began networking, joining scientific societies and even judging Holstein cattle in stock shows around the country. Over the course of his time in the country, he was able to receive official recognition for the Church and gradually increase the number of missionaries from one to twenty-seven.13 His warm, genuine nature won over people throughout the country, and letters from friends in South Africa are sprinkled throughout Sessions’s remaining papers.

Success in South Africa did not come without a cost. Writing home to his brother in 1925, Sessions counted the cost of his missionary service: “We are all well and feel contented to remain here as long as we are wanted. I confess it that sometimes when I look about me and realize that I am 40 years old and that I have less than I had when I was married, it makes me want to
get home and start again. I realize however the importance of this work and other matters sink into insignificance beside it.”

In 1926, when their release came, the Sessions family prepared to return home, expecting to pick up the threads of their old life. After seven years and three months in the mission field, a return to the field of agriculture seemed to suit both of them; however, the Lord had different plans.

Another Call to Serve

While the Sessionses continued their missionary labors in South Africa, momentous changes were occurring in Church education. In 1919, Adam S. Bennion was called as the Church superintendent of schools, and he, along with other leaders such as David O. McKay and John A. Widtsoe, began a radical restructuring of the Church school system. For several decades the Church had maintained a system of loosely associated high schools (called academies) and colleges. Under Bennion’s direction, the Church began withdrawing from secular education in favor of a supplemental system of religious education. Beginning in 1920, the Church began closing the academies or transferring them to state control as quickly as possible. To compensate for the loss of the academies, seminaries, many of which were already in operation, would be built next door to public high schools. In a meeting held in February 1926, Bennion suggested closing or transferring the Church’s junior colleges to state control as well. Some members of the Church Board of Education agreed with Bennion, and some did not. While Bennion saw the virtue of the Church colleges, he felt that the seminary system could be adapted to also serve on the collegiate level. Speaking directly of his own experiences at the University of Utah, Bennion recalled, “In the days when I needed help most that help did not come through any organization, but the two men who helped me the most in the University of Utah were Milton Bennion and James E. Talmage.” Bennion suggested the Church provide mentors who could assist students in navigating the sometimes rough waters of academia while in college. He suggested the value of “a strong man who could draw the students to him and whom they could consult personally and counsel with,” saying that “such a man would be of infinite value.” While no definitive policy emerged from the meeting, the questions raised by Bennion made two things clear. First, the finances of the Church and its continuing expansion simply would not allow for building the number of colleges needed to serve
all the members of the Church. Second, a new system was needed to meet the spiritual needs of the college-aged students. The idea of a supplementary system of education for college-aged students was not new. The Church had long held concerns that some of its brightest students were losing their faith while in college. An annual report of Church schools for 1912 noted that the University of Utah and several state schools saw a need for weekday religious instruction of their students. In 1915, Church superintendent Horace H. Cummings stressed concerns that students at the University of Utah were in need of religious education. He noted that the president of the university and several faculty members had urged the Church to establish a building near the campus for the purpose of religious education. They even offered college credit for such classes. While the concerns were noted, little action was taken for the next decade. During Bennion’s tenure as superintendent, letters began arriving from Moscow requesting a Church student center near the University of Idaho. At a meeting of the Church General Board in 1925, Bennion proposed the possibility of a seminary and social center to be built in the area. During this time a “Macedonian call for help” came from Moscow branch president George L. Luke, a professor of physics at the university. The situation was ripe for the initiation of a new system.

In the middle of all these movements, the Sessions family arrived home from South Africa. As mentioned earlier, Sessions fully expected to receive a position in the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company upon his return from South Africa. Before his meeting with the First Presidency and his call to go to Moscow, Idaho, he had already met with a representative from the company. In later reminiscences, Sessions mentioned he felt the issue was already decided because he had the endorsement of Apostle George Albert Smith and Charles W. Nibley of the First Presidency. All of these factors may account for the shock he received when he was asked to go to Moscow.

Given his background, why was Sessions selected to go to start the institute program? After all, he had no training in the field of religious education. Teachers of religion were in no short supply at the time, due to the burgeoning new seminary system. Sessions possessed no schooling beyond a bachelor’s degree in agronomy—his academic credentials were certainly no reason for him to be called to establish a collegiate program. Sessions wrestled with his own lack of qualifications for the position, later noting, “I could do
something about farm fertilizer, but I didn’t know anything about the Bible and religious teaching!”

At the time, the call must have seemed an impulsive decision. However, looking deeper, there were unique factors that suggested Sessions might be the right person for the job. He had ties with the University of Idaho, having worked for them extensively before his mission call. His experiences in South Africa had demonstrated his ability to open doors and make friends for the Church. The sacrifices that Sessions had made to serve confirmed his deep testimony of the gospel and his loyalty to the leadership of the Church.

**Laying the Foundations—Moscow, Idaho**

In many ways, Sessions’s assignment in Moscow was closer to missionary work than traditional religious education. As a native of the state, Sessions was aware of the cultural issues dividing the parts of the state settled by Latter-day Saints from parts settled by the rest of the population. Moscow was located in the northern part of the state, far from Mormon centers of strength, and the First Presidency had become deeply concerned about the spiritual apathy developing among the students there.

While the members of the Church in the city welcomed Sessions and his family, other factions of the community viewed them with suspicion. The imprecise nature of Sessions’s assignment in Moscow raised the level of distrust. The local ministerial association, some members of the university faculty, and several local businesspeople even appointed a committee to keep an eye on Sessions and make sure that he didn’t “Mormonize” the university.

Realizing he needed community support in the new venture, Sessions set out to become a part of the town. He joined the local Chamber of Commerce and spoke to and later joined the Kiwanis Club, and both he and Magdalene enrolled at the university seeking master’s degrees. Sessions used his affiliation with these organizations to reach out to people who otherwise wouldn’t have been willing to talk to him. At a series of biweekly dinners held by the Chamber of Commerce, Sessions made every effort possible to sit by Fred Fulton, head of the committee appointed to oppose his work. At one of these dinners, Fulton turned to Sessions and said, “You son-of-a-gun, you’re the darndest fellow. I was appointed on a committee to keep you out of Moscow and every time I see you, you come in here so darn friendly that I like you better all the time.” Sessions replied, “I’m the same way. We just as well be friends.”
Sessions later reported that Fulton became one of his best friends during his stay in Moscow.27

Not all nonmembers in Moscow opposed Sessions’s arrival. In fact, a few became instrumental in helping to launch the institute. One of them, Jay G. Eldridge, professor of German language and literature,28 even came up with the name for the new venture. Meeting Sessions as he walked past the construction site of the new building, Eldridge asked him what he planned to name the new structure. In most official correspondence to that point, the new buildings were referred to as “collegiate seminaries.”29 When Sessions responded that he didn’t quite know what it would be called, Dr. Eldridge replied, “I’ll tell you what the name is. What you see up there is the Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion at the University of Idaho north campus.” He then pointed out that when his church built a similar structure it would be called the Methodist Institute of Religion, and so on with other churches.30 The suggestion was forwarded to Joseph F. Merrill, commissioner of education, who sent back a letter addressed to “the Director of the Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion—Moscow, Idaho.” When other institutes were founded, the name remained.31

Another nonmember who played a key role in the creation of the institute was C. W. Chenoweth, head of the department of philosophy. Chenoweth, a tall, pipe-smoking professor, was one of the most popular and respected leaders on campus.32 Before his time at the university he had been a minister in a local congregation and had served as a chaplain during World War I. He became fascinated with overcoming the problem of teaching religious ideals and morals at state universities. Speaking to Sessions privately, he said, “If you’re coming on to this campus with a religious program, you had better be prepared to meet the competition of the university.” Intensely interested in the developing program, Chenoweth offered his assistance to Sessions. Together they studied the problems associated with launching a religion program adjacent to a university. Sessions wrote a term paper for his master’s program on the subject, later puckishly admitting that Chenoweth had personally dictated it to him.33 Sessions later invited Chenoweth to come and speak with him at Ricks College.34 When Sessions was asked to leave Moscow to start an institute in Pocatello in 1929, Chenoweth wrote personally to the Church commissioner of education, asking for Sessions to stay in Moscow.
Developing the Philosophy of Institute

Winning over the community was only part of Sessions's challenge. He was asked to create a new kind of religious education almost entirely from scratch. Anxious to receive some guidance in the venture, Sessions wrote to Brigham Young University, Illinois University, and several other universities. Worried over what the curriculum should be, Sessions wrote to Joseph F. Merrill seeking advice: “I have been working on a plan for the organization of our Institute and the courses we should offer in our weekday classes. I confess that the building of a curriculum for such an institution has worried me a lot and it is a job that I feel unqualified for.” Merrill’s reply two days later became a foundational pillar for the institute program. In Merrill’s mind, the objective of institute was to “enable our young people attending the colleges to make the necessary adjustments between the things they have been taught in the Church and the things they are learning in the university, to enable them to become firmly settled in their faith as members of the Church.” Merrill continued, “You know that when our young people go to college and study science and philosophy in all their branches, that they are inclined to become materialistic, to forget God, and to believe that the knowledge of men is all-sufficient. . . . Can the truths of science and philosophy be reconciled with religious truths?” A scientist by profession, Merrill wanted institute to be designed specifically to allow the reconciliation of faith and reason. To this end, he concluded, “Personally, I am convinced that religion is as reasonable as science; that religious truths and scientific truths nowhere are in conflict; that there is one great unifying purpose extending throughout all creation; that we are living in a wonderful, though at the present time deeply mysterious, world; and that there is an all-wise, all-powerful Creator back of it all. Can this same faith be developed in the minds of all our collegiate and university students? Our collegiate institutes are established as means to this end.”

In constructing the institute curriculum, Sessions freely admitted that he “plagiarized” from several universities. Some of his conspirators were university faculty from English, education, and philosophy departments who were just as eager to see how the new program would come into being. They sought out textbooks and outlines, assisting Sessions as he constructed several courses in biblical studies and religious history. Through an arrangement with the university, college credit was granted for each of the courses. This arrangement meant that Sessions’s classes were occasionally visited by officials from the university. Speaking of this, Sessions would later recall, “If you think
this fellow who had been teaching agriculture was not frightened, you’re mis-
taken!”38 With the curriculum in place and with the support of the university,
Sessions began teaching the first classes in the fall of 1927, roughly one year
after his arrival. His total enrollment was fifty-seven students.39

In devising the institute program, Sessions was not interested just in offer-
ing religion classes. College-level religion courses had already been taught
experimentally by Andrew Anderson and Gustive Larsen at the College of
Southern Utah beginning in 1925.40 What distinguished Sessions’s efforts
was his intention to launch an entire program designed to meet the spiritual,
intellectual, and social needs of his students. To assist him in this endeavor,
Sessions enlisted his wife, Magdalene, who devised a varied program of social
and cultural activities.41 Under the Sessionses’ supervision, the institute
became an all-out effort to bring the scattered students into their own com-

munity at the university.

Reflecting on the role his wife played, Sessions later remarked, “If religion
is anything, it’s beautiful, which is the philosophy that Magdalene worked
with. . . . Nothing is more lovely than the teaching of Jesus, and Magdalene
was putting religion to work. If religion is anything, it ought to serve us here
and now. It ought to make our lives more beautiful, in more harmony. Now
what did she do? She put the life and vitality and the beauty into the basic
thing of religious education.”42 Magdalene would play a key role not only in
institute social programs but also in the decor and furnishing of each institute
the Sessionses supervised.43

This fit in well with Sessions’s own philosophy of religious education. He
wrote, “Religion is practical in life and living. It is not theory, but is absolutely
necessary to a complete and well-rounded education. There can be no com-
plete education without religious training. It must not, therefore, be crowded
out, but a place for it must be left or made in an educational program and
it must be kept alive, healthy, and growing.”44 To Sessions, religion was not
something that could be isolated. It needed to be a fully integrated part of
everyday existence.

The First Institute Building

Sessions’s philosophy was reflected not only in the educational and social pro-
grams of the institute but also in the very design of the building itself. Not
just a classroom building, it also featured a reception room, a chapel, a ball-
room, a library, and a serving kitchen. The entire second floor of the building
held eleven nicely furnished dormitory rooms capable of accommodating twenty-two male students. The exterior of the building was done in the Tudor Gothic style of architecture, corresponding with the other buildings at the university. That Sessions was able to secure the funds to build such a structure was a miracle in and of itself. Locating a site on one of the main student thoroughfares to the campus, Sessions even secured the assistance of the local Chamber of Commerce to help with the cost of purchasing the lot. That Sessions was able to obtain these promises of assistance is a testament to his powers of persuasion, given the difficult economic conditions of the time. The Church elected to pay the full price of the building, but Sessions still had to negotiate with the First Presidency to secure the funds for the kind of building he wanted. Sessions also had to convince Commissioner Merrill, who he later described as “the most economical, conservative General Authority of this dispensation.” Meeting with President Grant, Sessions said, “President Grant, I cannot go back to Moscow and build a little Salvation Army shanty at the University of Idaho.” Grant, cautious, replied, “If we give you $40,000, you will return and ask for $49,000 or $50,000.” Sessions then wryly commented, “President Grant, I promise you right now that I shall never ask you for $45,000 or $50,000, but I will not promise that I will not ask for $55,000 to $60,000.” Grant, smiling, answered, “Of course, the Moscow building must be nice.” A budget of $60,000 was allotted for the construction of the building. When the structure was completed, $5,000 was returned to President Grant, who remarked incredulously, “I did not think it possible or that I should live to see this occur.”

Sessions wanted even the physical appearance of the institute to teach about the Latter-day Saints. He took as his motto, “If it’s the LDS institute, it’s the best thing on campus.” He later reflected on his feelings that he wanted the building to “foster the idea that beauty is a good environment for religious stimulation, association, and general education.” He declared with pride that “the buildings are used daily, almost hourly, by the students who enjoy and respect the privilege. An atmosphere seems to be cultivated which is often mentioned by even a casual visitor.”

The Moscow institute building was dedicated on September 25, 1928, by President Charles W. Nibley. It was fitting that President Nibley dedicate the building, since it was his inspiration that had sent Sessions to Moscow nearly two years earlier.
dignitaries also attended. In just a few short years the institute came to be widely respected on the campus. The program started by the Sessions began a tradition of excellence. During the 1930s, students living at the institute won the campus scholarship cup so often that they were eventually excluded from competition. The institute was visited by others hoping to fashion a similar pattern. Ernest O. Holland, president of Washington State College, visited the building several times and remarked to several gatherings of educators that the institute program came nearer to solving the problem of religious education for college students than any other program he knew of.

In 1929, Sessions was asked to leave to start a new institute in Pocatello, Idaho, while Sidney B. Sperry filled his position in Moscow. The decision appears to have caused a minor uproar in Moscow, prompting Commissioner Merrill to write to George Luke, a university professor and counselor in the branch presidency, to soothe his feelings. “Our request that Brother Sessions go to Pocatello is the highest compliment we can pay him. There is an extremely difficult situation there and we believe he is better qualified to solve it than any other man we have in our system.” Luke wrote back, “I want to say candidly that I am not yet convinced that the move is a wise one.” He wasn’t concerned with Sperry’s coming as much as Sessions’s going. Before the Sessionses left, a community celebration was held in their honor. Several hundred people attended, among them the mayor, all the officials from the university, and scores of local citizens. In four years, Sessions had gone from being viewed as a possible community menace to being one of the most beloved residents of Moscow.

The Pocatello Institute

Sessions’s success in Moscow led to an assignment to open a new institute at the University of Idaho–Southern Branch in Pocatello. In keeping with his philosophy of practical gospel application, Sessions quickly established a regimen of classes. In addition to traditional courses in the Old and New Testaments, less conventional courses were offered, like “Problems in Modern Religious Thinking” and “Church Practice and Religious Leadership.” The first of these two courses was open to all students of the university. The course description advertised it as a forum for students “to discuss and, if possible, solve their own religious difficulties.” The second course was described in the institute circular as “a laboratory course with actual experience in church work.” Students were given specific assignments at the institute, local
seminaries, and wards in the Pocatello Stake. On a weekly basis they consulted with Sessions about their progress in each area.

While Commissioner Merrill’s letter indicated an “extremely difficult situation” in Pocatello, Sessions recalled the problems he faced there were largely similar to the ones he had tackled in Moscow. For the most part the problems facing the Moscow program would have only been magnified in Pocatello, where there was a larger LDS population and greater fears about the university being “Mormonized.” Once again Sessions opened doors through his affiliations with prominent figures of the community, most of whom were not members of the Church. F. J. Kelly, president of the University of Idaho, became a strong supporter of the institute, similar to Dr. Chenoweth in Moscow, and even gave a series of addresses to Latter-day Saints. As much as Sessions wanted to win respect for the institute, he also felt strongly that the local Saints should know that there were some “awfully good men at the University of Idaho and at Pocatello.” To this end, he went to great lengths to give Latter-day Saints a positive impression of school officials who were of other faiths. At the dedication of the Pocatello building, Kelly, unable to attend, sent a letter to be read during the service. In it he called on “all the great churches” to provide religious education for their university students and called such institutions “an intrinsic part of the educational scheme.”

Sessions’s existing correspondence from the period gives a window into his relationship with his students. To one returned missionary he advised, “You must be big enough now to reach out into the avenues of life and make wholesome contributions in every one of them.” Not only did Sessions continue to advise past students, in some cases he was required to intervene for the well-being of prodigal children who were hundreds of miles away from their families. One case might serve as an illustration. In 1935, Sessions received notice of a BYU student who had been involved in a series of infractions beginning with petty theft and finally leading up to a series of stolen automobiles. While visiting a friend in Pocatello, the student was arrested and put into jail. Alerted by a call from one of the boy’s professors at BYU, Sessions went to visit him, though he had no prior knowledge of the boy or his family. Learning that the boy was the only son of a widowed and ailing mother, he offered to serve as the boy’s parole officer, took him into his own home, and used his connections with the Pocatello Rotary Club to find work for him during the summer months. During this time Sessions and the young man became so close that the boy took to calling him “Dad” in his letters.
Sessions's correspondence from the period reveals a caring, sometimes stern relationship as he guided the student through the peaks and troughs of his recovery.\textsuperscript{66} The final two letters in the collection, dated several years later, are from the young man, then serving a mission in the eastern United States.\textsuperscript{67}

**The Laramie, Wyoming, Institute**

In September 1935 Sessions found himself in the office of John A. Widtsoe, who was then serving as Church commissioner of education. In the meeting Widtsoe asked Sessions if he would be willing to go to Laramie, Wyoming, to start another institute. Sessions's response indicates his growth as a disciple since his call to Moscow, nearly a decade earlier. He replied, “Oh, dear. Oh, I wouldn’t like to go, but if you say I should go, I’ll go. You know my ability better than I do. And if there’s where I can serve best, that’s where I want to go. I don’t care where it is.”\textsuperscript{68} Widtsoe then showed him a letter from A. G. Crane, president of the University of Wyoming, personally requesting that Sessions come and establish an institute in Laramie. Sessions had been recommended by President Kelly of the University of Idaho, a close friend of Crane’s.\textsuperscript{69}

The arrival of Sessions and the construction of the institute were a major boon to the Saints in Laramie. Prior to the construction of the institute, Church members had been meeting in a local hall that had to be cleared of cigarette remains every week before services. Members were unable to donate much financially, but they contributed many hours of labor to its construction.\textsuperscript{70} Supervising construction of an institute for the third time, Sessions directed the effort confidently, emphasizing the need for “utility, beauty, and adaptability” in the building’s design.\textsuperscript{71}

The dedication of the Laramie institute featured an impressive array of guests. Present were President Heber J. Grant, the governor of Wyoming, the state commissioner of education, chief justice of the State Supreme Court, President Crane, and a host of officials from the university. Dr. Crane held a dinner in honor of President Grant and the other officials who had come. Sessions remembered, “President Grant was so elated over it that he got humorous and told a number of very interesting stories which won the admiration of all the people who attended.”\textsuperscript{72} Grant was so moved by the occasion that he mentioned the occasion in his opening address at general conference a week later, stating “there was a spirit of fellowship and good-will existing there the equal of anything I have experienced in my life.”\textsuperscript{73}
Developing interfaith relations was one of Sessions’s hallmarks in Laramie, as it had been in Moscow and Pocatello. Referring to the institute, one local nonmember remarked, “Three years ago, very few people in Laramie were aware that Mormons live here, and if they did know they had no idea what the Church really stood for. . . . As one man said to me, ‘I didn’t even know there were any Mormons in Laramie, and suddenly they spring up all over the town.’ He was exaggerating, of course, and yet the importance of the Church had increased one-hundred fold with the building of the institute.”74 After a chilly initial reception in Moscow and Pocatello, the institute program was welcomed in Laramie with open arms. However, Sessions was only to remain in Laramie for one year. His next call would remove him from the classroom and place him in a different environment altogether.

The Mission Home

At the end of the 1935–36 school year Sessions received notice from Church Commissioner Franklin L. West that he would be relocated again, this time to start another institute in Tucson, Arizona.75 While in the midst of preparation for the move, a letter arrived from the First Presidency calling him and his wife to serve as the heads of the mission home in Salt Lake City.76 The call came as a major shock. After ten years of single-minded devotion to the institute program, they would be leaving almost as suddenly as they had come. After writing his acceptance letter, Sessions wrote down a few reflections upon receiving this call. “Our hearts are sore today as we contemplate [the] severing of our connection with this great work. If I would consult my own feelings at this moment, and if I dare say so, I would say that it is a mistake to move us, but I shall follow the teachings of my Father and place myself in the hands of God’s service and say that I am willing to serve wherever and in whatever capacity my feeble efforts can most effectively be used.”77 While he may have entered reluctantly into the institute program, Sessions was now heartsick at having to leave it. However, his reflections on leaving the system should not denote any hesitance on his part to take on the challenge. On the same paper in which he recorded his feelings of doubt, he also outlined a seven-point plan to improve the function of the mission home.

The mission home in Salt Lake City grew out of efforts to prepare young people leaving to serve as full-time missionaries. The training was meager by today’s standards, with all missionaries staying for roughly ten days, regardless of their call. The rigorous schedule, combined with his frustrations over how
the training was conducted, prompted Sessions to call his time in the mission home, “the hardest job we ever had.”

The regimen at the mission home was intensive, with the day starting at 6:00 a.m. and running throughout the day with little free time. Sessions’s initial plans to change the training for the missionaries were surprisingly similar to missionary training today. He wanted missionaries to have “more ability through experiences in logical thinking and discussion, instead of memorized, hackneyed terms, quotations, and passages.” To this end he established a regimen of classes that included “public speaking,” “social demeanor,” and “harmony of science and religion.” In many ways, the curriculum implemented by Sessions was similar to his regimen for the institutes. Sessions’s ambitious agenda proposed lengthening the missionaries’s stay from two weeks to six months, a request that was not granted.

Despite his frustrations, there were many rewarding aspects of the calling. Sessions cherished his affiliations with the young missionaries. Among the hundreds of missionaries who passed through the mission home during Sessions’s time were two future Apostles, Joseph B. Wirthlin and Marvin J. Ashton, arriving within a few weeks of each other in March 1937. Ashton even wrote back to Sessions en route to England, saying that he “learned more, and was influenced by a finer spirit” during his stay at the mission home than during any other time in his life.

The mission home also afforded Sessions a marvelous opportunity to build relationships with the leadership of the Church. Missionaries were usually set apart personally by members of the Quorum of the Twelve. High-ranking Church officials frequently taught at the mission home. Records from the time show that members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve often taught the missionaries personally. Associating with many of the General Authorities allowed the Sessionses to experience life in the heart of Church headquarters. It would also play a vital role in a future assignment the Sessionses would receive. While their time at the mission home was productive, it was also brief. As had been shown, the Sessionses’ varied talents meant they would never stay in the same place too long.

The Division of Religion

Even during their stay at the mission home, the Sessionses were never completely withdrawn from the institute program. In spite of the rigorous demands of their calling, they still found time to travel to Arizona several times to
supervise the construction and decor of several new institutes. They were never officially “out” of the department of education but were merely on leave to the mission home. After two years, the Sessiones were released from their call at the mission home and sent to the Logan institute. David O. McKay of the First Presidency explained that their call was originally intended to be for three years, but conditions in the department of education warranted his early release. What exactly these conditions were remain unclear.

Upon his arrival in Logan, Sessions found himself in what was to him a novel situation. For the first time in his career, he was not pioneering a new institute; instead he was serving in the well-established program that had been headed by Thomas Romney for nearly a decade. Instead of serving alone, he was placed with three other capable teachers. The move must have seemed like a vacation after his former labors. However, it would prove to be more of a short sabbatical before Sessions was sent to the final, and perhaps most controversial, phase of his odyssey in Church education.

During a campus visit to Logan in March 1939, John A. Widtsoe called Sessions and asked if he would join him for a drive. While they were in the car, Widtsoe informed him that the Church Board of Education was meeting that day, and while he would be absent, he knew what action they were about to take. The board had chosen to send Sessions to Brigham Young University to head the religion program there. Sessions would later call this position the “top assignment” of his life.

Arriving at BYU, Sessions experienced an entirely different kind of opposition from what he had faced in his prior assignments. Instead of having to win over a community, Sessions would have to win over his colleagues in the new Division of Religion. Most concerns raised were not with Sessions personally, but with his academic credentials and the decision to place him at the head of the division. Most of the men in the division already had doctoral degrees, something that Sessions lacked. He had obtained a master’s degree during his stay in Moscow and had spent several summers at the University of Chicago working toward a PhD, but his intensive work with the institutes and other assignments had simply prevented him from advancing any further. Sidney B. Sperry, one of the professors at BYU, wrote to John A. Widtsoe, expressing his dismay that “another man is to come in as the head of the department of Religious Education who has had little or no real rigorous training as a number of us have. He is a fine fellow and we give him our support despite our personal feelings, but it hurts the morale of the department to have men
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hoisted over our heads when we have gone through the heat and labor of the day.”90 Sperry’s feelings may have been injured because he felt that the Brethren were questioning the orthodoxy of the religion department by sending an outside man in. He may also have harbored legitimate concerns about the university’s accreditation with a non-PhD heading a university division.

While Sessions’s academic credentials were not insignificant, the question does beg to be asked, why was he sent to BYU? The answer in part lies with the complex development of the religion department at the school. From the beginning of the school until 1930, religion classes were taught by faculty members from all disciplines, with no specific teachers in the field of religion. While Joseph B. Keeler, George H. Brimhall, and others had borne the title of “professor of theology,” a review of their teaching load and other assignments reveals that they were not full-time religion teachers. The first full-time religion teacher at BYU was Guy C. Wilson, who arrived in 1930, just nine years before Sessions’s assignment. He was joined two years later by Sperry, the first religion teacher with a doctoral degree.91

Throughout the history of the school, the problem of how a religion department should operate was particularly nettlesome.92 While allowing members of the different departments to teach religion demonstrated the integration of gospel principles into everyday life, it also prevented the Church from developing its own experts in the field of religion. Efforts to remedy this began in the 1930s, when Commissioner Merrill sent some seminary and institute teachers to the East for advanced training. Elder Boyd K. Packer offered his assessment on the effect of this training on some of the young men sent. “Some who went never returned. And some of them who returned never came back. They had followed, they supposed, the scriptural injunction: ‘Seek learning, even by study and also by faith’ (D&C 88:188). But somehow the mix had been wrong. For they had sought learning out of the best books, even by study, but with too little faith.”93 Not all of the returning teachers were affected. Sidney Sperry and T. Edgar Lyon, two of their number, were among the most dedicated educators in the Church. Concerns over orthodoxy among Church educators even prompted President J. Reuben Clark Jr. to give the classic address, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” just a year before Sessions was sent to BYU.94

These issues were colliding with other concerns among Church leadership that BYU students were graduating with little serious scriptural or doctrinal study.95 Consideration of these factors gives two possible explanations for
Sessions’s sudden assignment to BYU. First, Sessions’s long record of accepting difficult calls, combined with his close affiliation with Church authorities during his tenure at the mission home, would have made him a trusted asset. Second, the questions surrounding how religious education should be conducted at BYU may have prompted Church leadership to consider trying to adapt the model established in the institute program on the campus. Sessions was the most experienced at this, so he was given the call.

Despite these factors in his favor, the transition to BYU was difficult. A sense of inadequacy in his academic credentials had nagged at him throughout his career, and at no time was it felt more intensely than his arrival at BYU. He later recalled, “I didn’t have a doctor’s degree. Most of the men at the head of the Religion Department are up in the upper brackets. . . . They had a difficult time.”96 There were a few heated discussions about how the new division would be managed. Sperry wrote to a friend of a “terrific battle” a few months after Sessions’s arrival in which “the commissioner and his ally down here [presumably Sessions] took a terrible beating, the likes of which I have never seen in my life.”97 Still, the battles fought in the department were productive, and a plan was hammered out for how the division would be organized. Sessions was appointed head of the division, with Sperry directing the Bible and modern scripture section, Wesley P. Lloyd heading Church organization and administration, and Russel B. Swensen leading the Church history section.98

When the Division of Religion was fully organized, its work was much different than that of the current School of Religious Education. The university’s Board of Trustees directed it to be “a general service division to all university departments in the field of religious education.” In addition to this, the department was responsible for “all religious activities on campus,” including devotionals, Sunday School, and the Mutual Improvement Association.99 During his time there, Sessions’s work at BYU was very similar to what he had carried out in the institute program. He later stated, “My institute experiences in other institutions where I had been had fixed in my mind rather positively at what an institute program should be and I was insisting on that.”100 Sessions and his wife also organized a chapter of Lambda Delta Sigma, the LDS fraternity, on campus and initiated another series of cultural programs.101

Perhaps the most important duty Sessions carried out during his time at BYU was to build a permanent home for religious education. Sessions was initially asked by Commissioner West to design an institute building to serve
thirty-five hundred to four thousand students. Sessions, still consulting on the construction of various institute facilities, originally thought the building would serve the University of Utah. Shortly after his arrival in 1939, construction began on the original Joseph Smith Building. Construction of the building was conceived as a massive Church welfare project, with bishops from local ward securing the necessary workmen. When it was completed, the building adhered closely to the pattern established at Sessions previous posts, complete with an auditorium, a ballroom, a banquet hall cafeteria, even a “club room” for members of the faculty.

The design for the building reflected Sessions’s earnest desire to provide a home away from home for students. Sessions would later relate that the source of his greatest anxiety during his time at BYU was “the absence of an ecclesiastical unit to serve students as a religious home.” The Division of Religion found itself in a somewhat awkward position, finding itself in charge of the religious activities of the campus, but with no ecclesiastical structure for the students, who attended local wards. Sessions grew deeply concerned that students without local ties were engaging in almost no religious activity. In a survey conducted at the time, only eleven out of ninety-two students attended the First Ward, and conditions were similar or worse in the other wards. An investigative committee recommended an institute be organized with a full priesthood structure to engage the students. A few years later, student branches were organized on campus, a move applauded by Sessions.

In 1947, Sessions submitted his resignation to Howard S. McDonald, president of BYU. His reasons for doing so were always fairly vague, though he later pointed to his concerns over President McDonald’s efforts to establish a “College of Religion,” something Sessions was opposed to. Defending his opposition, he related, “We don’t have to have a degree in Mormon theology. Every man ought to have that… Religion needs to be taught everywhere and it needs to have the support of everybody.” When Sessions realized that the program would change to a college, he chose to leave the university. Sessions was replaced by Hugh B. Brown, who took over as head of the Division of Religion. In 1949, the position was discontinued when the new student branches took over the social programs of the division. Sessions’s recollections of leaving BYU were bittersweet, but he always retained warm feelings for the school. Nearly fifteen years after his resignation, he reflected, “It was evident that it needed something more than I could possibly give it, and it got it, and it’s going on.”
“A Church Home away from Home”

Sessions spent the remainder of his life working in private enterprises. Though he no longer taught professionally, he retained a close affiliation with BYU, even participating in the search for a new president for the university after McDonald departed.112 He found some measure of financial security, working mostly in real estate. In 1965, nearly eighteen years after his resignation from BYU, he made the decision to retire in Southern California. Before he departed, Richard O. Cowan, a member of his Provo ward and a religion professor at BYU, asked him to sit down and record his story.

In his interview with Cowan, Sessions’s warm teaching personality shines through. At age eighty he still retained a sharp memory of events. On the recording, his voice was still strong, modulating pitch and tone as he shifted from one moment relating a humorous anecdote to sharing a family tragedy. One can imagine what a student would have experienced in his early institute classes, with the witty aphorisms mixed in with deep spiritual insights. Sessions’s voice almost always sounded as if he were on the edge of laughter except when he bore testimony. Throughout the recording he can hardly be kept from transitioning naturally into his witness of the gospel and its power in his life. After two decades outside of the classroom, he was still passionate about the subject. “All that we teach—if we don’t get off on ritualism, and emotionalism, and extreme dogmatism, and make Latter-day Saint theology phony and thin and ludicrous—if we stay with the basic things, and teach the great principles of the Gospel, that will sustain the student when he goes out into this rapidly changing world.”113

Today over 150,000 institute students are taught at over five-hundred different locations.114 The mixture of spirituality, social interaction, and service pioneered by Sessions is still present. Institute was a key factor in the outward expansion of the Church, allowing Latter-day Saints the peace of mind of knowing that wherever their children chose to receive their higher education, it would be supplemented by spiritual learning. Sessions brought the right blend of teacher, missionary, and community organizer that the institute program needed to find success. His legacy today is found in the thousands of institutes providing exactly what he set out to give in Moscow in 1926, “a church home away from home.”115 These homes are perhaps the greatest tribute to one who frequently gave up the security and comforts of his own homes to answer the Lord’s call.  


Notes

1. Sources for this study came primarily from the J. Wyley Sessions Collection (Papers, 1911–1978, UA 156), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, and sources at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City. Sessions documented his story in several oral histories, which can be found at BYU and in Church Archives. In addition to this, I am deeply indebted to Dr. Richard O. Cowan of BYU Religious Education for graciously allowing me the use of an audio interview he recorded with J. Wyley and Magdalene Sessions in June 1965.


4. South Africa Mission History Sketch, Sessions Collection, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections; spelling and punctuation modernized.

5. South African Mission History Sketch, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


7. Sessions 1965 oral history, 3.

8. In his 1965 oral history, Sessions reports waiting eight or nine months for a visa before going to California, then staying in England for ten weeks before beginning his journey to South Africa. While the dates may not be exact, the Deseret Evening News reports Sessions receiving his initial call in late July 1919 and his call to California in April 1920. His departure for Africa is mentioned in the Improvement Era in March 1921. If these sources are accurate, it would mean that Sessions’ wait to arrive at his field of labors was even greater than the nine months he recalled between his call and his departure to California, and eleven more months before his departure for South Africa. “Elder J. Wiley Sessions Going South Africa,” Deseret Evening News, July 30, 1919; “Can’t Get Passport, So Missionary Will Labor in California,” Deseret Evening News, April 30, 1920; “South Africa and President Sessions,” Improvement Era, March 1921.

9. South Africa Mission History Sketch, Sessions Collection, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

10. South Africa Mission History Sketch, Sessions Collection, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


12. South Africa Mission History Sketch, J. Wyley Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


14. J. Wyley Sessions to Elden Sessions, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 5, 1925, in Papers 1911–1978, Sessions Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


18. During the February 1926 meeting, President Heber J. Grant perhaps best summarized the situation driving these changes. He said, “I am free to confess that nothing has worried me more since I became president than the expansion of the appropriation of the Church School system.” See Bell, “Adam Samuel Bennion,” 91.


22. Sessions 1965 oral history, 8.


30. Sessions 1965 oral history, 12.


33. Sessions 1965 oral history, 11.

34. Sessions 1972 oral history, 7–8.


36. Sessions 1965 oral history, 12.

37. The arrangements in full may be found in J. Wyley Sessions, “The Latter-day Saint Institutes,” *Improvement Era*, July 1935, 412–13. Among the arrangements was a provision that “no instruction either sectarian in religion or partisan in politics” be taught in the courses. With similar arrangements made for other early institutes, this may help explain why such prominent LDS subjects as the Book of Mormon were not taught in the early days of the institute program (Noel B. Reynolds, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century,” *BYU Studies*, 38, no. 2 [1999]: 28–29).

38. Sessions 1965 oral history, 12.


41. *Sixty Years of Institute*, 5.

42. Sessions 1965 oral history, 16.
43. Sessions 1965 oral history, 14.
46. J. Wyley Sessions to Ward H. Magleby, Jan. 6, 1968, Laguna Hills, CA, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
47. J. Wyley Sessions to Ward H. Magleby, January 6, 1968.
52. “Sharing the Light: History of the University of Idaho LDS Institute of Religion, 1926–1976,” 3, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
55. G. L. Luke to Joseph F. Merrill, June 3, 1929, Moscow, Idaho, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
58. Pocatello Institute Circular, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
60. Sessions 1972 oral history, 9.
62. J. Wyley Sessions to Lorin D. Daniels, Pocatello, Idaho, December 12, 1931, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
63. William Anderson to J. Wyley Sessions, April 25, 1935, Pocatello, Idaho, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
64. J. Wyley Sessions to John A. Widtsoe, May 17, 1935, Pocatello, Idaho, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
65. William Anderson to J. Wyley Sessions, May 9, 1935, Boise, Idaho, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
66. Nearly the entire folder of Sessions papers from the Pocatello Institute consist of Sessions’ letters to William Anderson and his legal dealings on the young man’s behalf. See Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
71. J. Wyley Sessions to Frank L. West, April 17, 1936, Laramie, Wyoming, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


73. Conference Report, April 4–6, 1936, 11.


75. J. Wyley Sessions to Franklin L. West, April 17, 1936, Laramie, Wyoming, Sessions Papers, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

76. First Presidency to J. Wyley Sessions, May 9, 1936, Salt Lake City, Sessions Papers, UA 156, Box 3, Folder 2, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

77. This letter is attached to Sessions's copy of his reply to the First Presidency. Apparently it was not sent and it addressed no one except Sessions himself (Sessions Collection, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 2).

78. Sessions 1965 oral history, 14.

79. Missionary Preparation Training Course, Sessions Collection, Box 3, Folder 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

80. Sessions letter, UA 156, Box 2, Folder 2.

81. Mission Home Register, March 1, 1937 to March 18, 1937 (Wirthlin) and March 29, 1937, to April 15, 1937 (Ashton), Sessions Collection, Box 3, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


83. Mission Home Agenda, Sessions Collection, Box 3, Folder 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

84. Sessions 1965 oral history, 14.


86. Logan Institute Circular, 1938–39, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 9, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.


88. Sessions 1965 oral history, 17.

89. Sidney B. Sperry to Joseph F. Merrill, May 2, 1939, Provo, Utah, Sidney B. Sperry Collection, UA 618, Box 1, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

90. Sidney B. Sperry to John A. Widtsoe, September 2, 1939, Provo, Utah, Sperry Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.


92. Boyd K. Packer offers a prophetic perspective on the struggles to develop a successful model for the Religion Department in his address, “Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith,” in That All May Be Edified (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982).

93. Boyd K. Packer, That All May Be Edified, 43–44.


96. Sessions 1972 oral history, 11.

97. Sidney B. Sperry to Daryl Chase, December 6, 1939, Provo, Utah, Sperry Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
100. Sessions 1972 oral history, 11.
101. Sessions 1965 oral history, 16.
102. Sessions 1965 oral history, 15.
105. “Suggestions for Providing Spiritual and Religious Activities for Out-of-Town Students of the Brigham Young University,” Sessions Collection, UA 156, Box 3, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
106. Cowan, *Teaching the Word*, 12; “Questions and Answers on Harris’ Administration.”
107. J. Wyley Sessions to Howard S. McDonald, July 3, 1947, Provo, Utah, Sessions Collection, Box 3, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections; J. Wyley Sessions to James R. Clark, February 15, 1974, Sessions Papers, UA 156, Box 3, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
108. “Questions and Answers on Harris’ Administration.”
110. Sessions 1972 oral history, 12.
111. Sessions 1965 oral history, 18.
112. Joseph F. Merrill to J. Wyley Sessions, November 29, 1949, Salt Lake City, Sessions Collection, Box 3, Folder 7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
113. Sessions 1965 interview, 18.
115. J. Wyley Sessions to Ward H. Magleby, December 29, 1967, Laguna Hills, California, Sessions Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
The lesson of repentance and forgiveness is repeated numerous times throughout Church history, including in the famous vision in the Kirtland Temple in April 1836 when the Savior appeared to Joseph and Oliver.
Holzapfel: What do you think is an important topic, incident, or scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants?

Baugh: Two important themes from the Doctrine and Covenants that really stand out for me are the Zion community Joseph Smith hoped to create, and then his efforts to create that Zion, including the element of consecration, in terms of bringing about temporal equality.

Holzapfel: Why do those two come to your attention?

Baugh: The first thing that stands out in the early revelations is Joseph Smith’s focus and effort to complete the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. Once that was completed, the Saints needed an organizational structure. They pushed forward to get the Church organized. But then the next major focus was on a revision of the Bible. What was Joseph Smith doing during the summer of 1830? He was translating the Bible. What did he find while translating? Among other things, he produced revelatory information about Enoch. There are eight verses in Genesis chapters 4 and 5 of the King James Version of the Bible that mention Enoch (Genesis 4:17–18; 5:18–19, 21–24). Joseph Smith added 115.
What did Enoch do? He created this Zion community. What was Joseph Smith’s goal from 1831 to 1838? To establish a similar city, a Zion community of the Saints. I think it really devastated him after 1838–39 when he and the Saints were expelled from Missouri. He must have thought, “What should I do? Is Zion forsaken? Are we going to still be able to go with that program?” He came to Nauvoo with an idea of eventually establishing and returning to Zion, returning to Missouri. But then he received section 124, in which the Lord said that Zion was on hold. He required the temple no more at their hands (see D&C 124:48–51). So they decided to build a temporary gathering place in Nauvoo and hope that in the future the establishment of Zion would take place. The word Zion is mentioned 210 times in the Doctrine and Covenants in 192 verses. Now, that means some of those verses have the word two or three times. It appears in fifty-seven sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. If we add the term New Jerusalem, that is seven more times. I think that was Joseph’s focus and the Church’s focus in 1838. He was trying to do what Enoch did—create a Zion society. In fact, Joseph even used Enoch as one of his code names. Joseph was fascinated with Enoch, who was able to do it. The Lord had revealed the principles on how to create Zion, so Joseph thought, “Maybe we can do it in my lifetime as well.” I know that was his hope.

Holzapfel: Section 21 was received the day the Church was organized, “Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen” (D&C 21:8). So already, by the time the Church is organized, Joseph Smith was obviously dreaming, praying, and weeping for this Zion.

Bennett: The expulsion from Missouri and the travel to Quincy and then eventually to Nauvoo were not the end of Zion. In fact, it was a refinement of Zion. We may not have been able to stay in the place of Zion. Like you said about section 124, Nauvoo was going to be the cornerstone of Zion; they were going to reclaim Zion. They were still a Zion people on a Zion mission. I love section 124, verse 6: “For, behold, I am about to call upon them to give heed to the light and glory of Zion, for the set time has come to favor her.” And even though they were driven out of that place of Zion, the Saints redeemed and reclaimed and rescued the concept of Zion. Section 124 is a reclamation of Zion. Even though Zion might not be this place, we are still Zion’s people on a Zion mission. And it kind of goes with that foundation that you talked about, established there earlier. The Doctrine and Covenants never absolves us from that great hope of establishing Zion.
Baugh: Zion is still there in his mind when he writes the Wentworth letter in what is now Article of Faith 10: “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel, and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; [in] Zion (the New Jerusalem).”

Hedges: You could say he replaces the focus on Zion with the focus on the temple, with Nauvoo, but the temple was all preparatory to, and feeding into, the idea of Zion. In section 105, when he calls off Zion’s Camp, he says, “It is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion—that they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience. . . . And this cannot be brought to pass until mine elders are endowed with power from on high” (vv. 9–11). The whole focus on the temple, with the idea of Zion in mind, is preparatory. We are going to get people their endowments and become prepared to do what we were not able to do the first time.

Baugh: Absolutely. Joseph Smith clearly ties in the temple with becoming a Zion people. The centerpiece of Zion is the temple.

Bennett: Yes, it is the centerpiece when we look at the plat of the city of Zion.

Baugh: “Okay,” they probably thought, “if we cannot build a temple in Jackson County, we can build one in Kirtland. It is not the temple, but it will do what we need it to do in the meantime to prepare the Brethren—particularly, of course, for Zion.”

Holzapfel: Elder McConkie gave a conference address years ago in which he talked about the covenants we make, and one of them was that we would, basically, consecrate our time to build Zion [see “Obedience, Consecration, and Sacrifice,” Ensign, May 1975, 50]. And so whatever language of the Church, whether it be Tongan, or French, or an African dialect, or Spanish, or Portuguese, wherever Saints are to go to the temple, that word Zion is repeated as a covenant, a central covenant. It is always striking to me that, no matter where you live, that word becomes part of your vocabulary.

Black: In fact, we use the phrase “the stakes of Zion.”

Baugh: I see the concept of Zion in several elements. Enoch’s city was Zion. We see the New Jerusalem, the holy city Joseph Smith hoped for and envisioned, as Zion. Joseph Smith definitely referred to the Church in Missouri during the Kirtland-Missouri period as the Church in Zion.

Black: And in Brigham Young’s time it was also a government. In the state of Deseret, Zion was a people, place, and government.
Baugh: And we often refer to the stakes of Zion, the whole element of the Church, as a Zion body. And then the scripture that we always refer to, section 97, verse 21, says that Zion is a condition. It is a pure-hearted people—people with pure motives, pure gospel intent. And so it is broad and yet it is narrow, but you look at the Book of Mormon and most of the verses or passages about Zion are Isaiah quotations. We get some in the Old Testament—again mainly Isaiah. Not a lot in the New Testament (seven verses total), but the Doctrine and Covenants is full of Joseph Smith’s vision of a utopian community of Saints.

Holzapfel: I would like to add that the New Testament talks about building this type of kingdom. Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, and he prays, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth” (Matthew 6:10). Often Christians think about “going” to heaven. But Mormonism teaches the opposite, because of what Jesus said. “Thy kingdom come” suggests bringing heaven here on earth. Of course, the Pharisees had a countervision of the kingdom. They saw it in terms of a militant political action, thinking, “We are going to kick out the Romans,” but Jesus had a totally different view of how the kingdom was going to come.

Bennett: The meek shall inherit the earth.

Holzapfel: Instead of the meek going to heaven, the meek inherit the earth.

Bennett: What stands out to me in the Doctrine and Covenants is the foundation of the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the laying of the foundations for the concepts of Zion. Section 1 contains what I call the DNA of the Restoration. Some wonder why the account of the First Vision is not in the Doctrine and Covenants but in the Pearl of Great Price. Well, if you look carefully, the First Vision is in section 1. But it is the Lord’s perspective on the First Vision, not Joseph Smith’s. Verse 17 in section 1 says, “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments.” This is not the calamity of the past apostasy but rather the calamity of the forthcoming apostasy. It is the message that the Lord is going to have to inoculate and prepare his people for that which is yet to come: the calamity of the loss of faith, the calamity of the loss of the sense of sin, the calamity of the loss of priesthood or regard for the priesthood.

Look carefully at these next few verses in this preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. Note carefully that they contain such phrases as “that every
man might speak in the name of God” (v. 20), which refers to a restoration of the priesthood, “that faith also might increase in the earth” (v. 21) in a time when faith declines. As a church, we are heading upstream, aren’t we? We are going against the current of a world declining in faith. “That mine Everlasting Covenant might be established” (v. 22). Here the Lord is speaking of the fulness of the gospel but also such specific and beautiful doctrines as eternal marriage and priesthood ordinances. Look at verse 27: “And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent.” And you go down through all these things, and I have counted, carefully counted these verses, there must be ten, twelve, fifteen reasons why the Lord called upon his servant, Joseph Smith, and laid the foundations of faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost upon which the superstructure can be built.

As I have gone through and taught carefully the first half of the Doctrine and Covenants, it just keeps coming back: teach nothing but faith, repentance, baptism, and so forth. Parents in Zion, what are you to teach? Teach faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost to your children or the sin will be upon you. And it lays this wonderful foundation. And then the second half of the Doctrine and Covenants really gets into temple work: sections 76, 110, 124, and 132.

The foundation needed to be put in place, and I love the way the Doctrine and Covenants opens up to it, right from the beginning of the First Vision. You know why the Lord called upon Joseph Smith? These are the reasons why. And then you build upon that. And as I have taught Doctrine and Covenants carefully, I see that foundation laid over and over again. Moroni taught Joseph these first principles because the message of the gospel had to be lived by the messenger of the gospel, and Joseph cannot teach that which he has not been taught. So you see great instruction about the first principles and ordinances
in these early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. This is how the foundation is laid.

Holzapfel: Richard Bushman and Terryl Givens have suggested the idea that once Joseph Smith had translated the Book of Mormon, he left it alone. It did not have an impact on the Restoration; people did not really read it. Based on Grant Underwood’s studies of talks given by early Church leaders, the Saints were quoting more from the Bible than they were from the Book of Mormon. I am struck by two things. First, there is the account of Parley P. Pratt consuming the Book of Mormon. And second, Alexander Campbell read it and said the important thing about the Book of Mormon is that it answers many questions about faith and baptism. If a non-Mormon read it and understood it, why would you not suppose Joseph Smith and the early Saints understood it? Do you think the Book of Mormon was part of Joseph’s training? In other words, did the Book of Mormon have a direct impact on what he thought about baptism, sacrament, and other principles?

Bennett: How could the Book of Mormon not be instructive, when on the first week or two of translation, Joseph and Oliver started their Book of Mormon translation with the first four great sermons of the book of Mosiah? King Benjamin’s address is the first sermon, which is all about believing in God, believing that he is, believing that he has all power to do all things in heaven and earth (see Mosiah 4:9) and about faith and service (see Mosiah 2–5). Abinadi’s great sermon is the second sermon of the book of Mosiah: repent, repent, repent (see Mosiah 13–16). The third great sermon of the book of Mosiah is Alma speaking at the waters of baptism (see Mosiah 18). So the very translation of the Book of Mormon is instructive. It reveals principle after principle. The principle that takes Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the banks of the Susquehanna River is the Book of Mormon’s teaching on baptism. To say that the Book of Mormon is not instructive to the Restoration is to misunderstand the Restoration. It was not anything else but the Book of Mormon that caused the restoration of baptism, the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood and later the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Black: To add to this point, the original members baptized into the Church typically had biblical names like John or Mary and English names like William or George. But children born to Latter-day Saints—the second-generation Latter-day Saints—had names like Joseph Mormon Harris. The early Saints often named their children after Book of Mormon prophets. It is hard to find a family of second-generation Saints that did not have a child with
a Book of Mormon name. It was not just Mahonri Moriancumer Calhoun. He was not the exception; he was the rule. So when people say, “Well, the Saints do not seem to have embraced the Book of Mormon like Parley P. Pratt did,” I question if they have done any family history work on the early Saints. The most popular name given a second-generation LDS child was Alma. The second most popular name was Moroni. I think it is a fallacy to say that just because scholars cannot find many Book of Mormon verses quoted by early Saints, the book did not permeate their personal lives.

Holzapfel: The idea that the first principles were being taught to the Prophet is accurate. Campbell got it right: the Book of Mormon answers the important questions about the gospel.

Bennett: I do not think it is very productive to completely separate the Book of Mormon from the Bible. I think they are a continuum in one. We have already seen that the Book of Mormon had a great impact on the Restoration—the history and the theology. Well, so did the translation of the Bible, as Bob Matthews has clearly pointed out. The Bible is the launching platform for so many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph was translating the Bible when section 76 came, when section 132 came, and when scores of other revelations came. The Bible gave birth to much of the Doctrine and Covenants, just as the Book of Mormon did. The argument about which book of scripture gave more is a little bit strained. They both come together to influence the Restoration. All scripture is made of the same fabric.

Holzapfel: Another problem with concluding that the Saints did not quote the Book of Mormon is that we have record of only about 10 percent of Joseph Smith’s discourses. And for most of these we have just a few lines, such as “preached on faith.” So to analyze these sermons when we have record of less than 10 percent may be misleading.

Bennett: Remember that the very last scripture they studied in Carthage Jail, like Elder Jeffrey R. Holland pointed out, was not from the Bible; it was from the Book of Mormon (from the book of Ether). And they were willing to give their lives for that book—it was not a sort of sideline issue. As missionaries, they were teaching by the Book of Mormon, though perhaps they were more familiar with the Bible.

Holzapfel: It takes a generation to become familiar. Andy, what idea has come to you that you feel is significant?
**Hedges:** I am struck with the emphasis the Lord places on obtaining knowledge. Perhaps the best-known charge is in section 88, where he commands the Saints, “Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine” (v. 78). Then the Lord takes the lid off and says he wants us to study things in the earth and under the earth; things that were, are, and will be; things at home and abroad, and winds up by basically saying, “I want you to learn everything about everything, and it is a commandment so that you can do a better job in fulfilling the missions that I have called you to do, and then you can be a good representative of me as you are out there preaching” (see v. 80).

The Lord reiterates this charge in section 90 when he says to the First Presidency in verse 15, “And set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people. And he continues in verse 16, “And this shall be your business and mission in all your lives, to preside in council,” and to preside in an informed way, in an intelligent way. And when Oliver Cowdery shows up on the scene, one of the first things the Lord tells him through Joseph is basically, “Start knocking and start asking, and I will give you information.” There are many other promises of knowledge throughout the Doctrine and Covenants. Section 42, verse 61 says, “If thou shalt ask”—again, you have to initiate it—“thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.” Section 63, verse 23 says, “But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life.” And section 93 concludes, “And, verily I say unto
you, that it is my will that you should hasten to translate my scriptures, and to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion” (v. 53).

To the Prophet in Liberty Jail, during the darkest hours of the Church, the Lord said, “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now” (D&C 121:26). And speaking of all that was to come forth, “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 what? “From pouring down knowledge from heaven upon [his people]” (v. 33).

Baugh: Sections 130 and 131 teach that a man cannot be saved in ignorance. And Joseph is the prototype of one who really had that zest for spiritual and secular knowledge. I believe it was Joshua Seixas who said in the Hebrew school that Joseph was like a calf that sucked three cows. He just could not get enough. And of course, Joseph’s zest for learning languages included German and Hebrew.

Hedges: Well, and English, his efforts to improve his English grammar and expression.

Baugh: And in the Wentworth letter, he uses the term “summum bonum,” so he can also throw out some Latin. Joseph fully knew that he had the expectation to gain knowledge, spiritual and secular, as well as imparting that knowledge to the Saints.

Bennett: This idea is backed up in section 1: “And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed” (vv. 25–26). So that it is part of this revelation of knowledge, both secular and spiritual; that is the foundation of the whole Restoration.

Baugh: The whole idea is to become informed, so that we can accomplish what we need to on this earth and later.

Bennett: And knowledge has the power not only to inform, but to reform. It can reform our character and refine our lives. It is that kind of saving knowledge that can bring us into the wholeness of Christ.

Holzapfel: Now an idea you brought up: obedience. It is not just about seeking knowledge and getting a PhD. It is seeking knowledge and obeying once you learn the principles.

Hedges: It includes but goes way beyond formal education.
Baugh: We have all read the *Times and Seasons, Messenger and Advocate, Elders’ Journal*, and *Frontier Guardian*. Look what they include in their newspapers—not only all the spiritual kinds of things we would expect from a church publication but also what is happening in Europe, what is going in other countries.

Holzapfel: *It was an adult education par excellence. How many of them would have engaged in such studies if they had never become Mormons? Would they have continued to live out their lives as farmers or shopkeepers? The Saints were often tired, but they gathered to study by candlelight during the winter, trying to learn. It is amazing.*

Black: I have some strong feelings about the Word of Wisdom. Section 89 is sent by the Lord by way of greeting, not by commandment or constraint (see v. 2). Yet when today’s missionaries are asked, “Why didn’t that person get baptized?” they often reply, “He wants to be baptized, but he is not living the Word of Wisdom. He is a chain smoker.”

The Word of Wisdom contains a suggested list of dos and don’ts. The revelation begins with the don’ts. As you look through the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants, most focus on the dos, such as go on a journey, share the gospel, or build the Nauvoo Temple. These dos are specific and often time-sensitive.

The Word of Wisdom may also be time-sensitive for each individual. It is a guide to temporal health. When the individual focuses only on the don’ts, that individual will miss the important doctrine revealed in the rest of the section—the dos. The latter part of section 89 that I find most interesting is what comes at the end—the blessings. One might say, “I want to run and not be weary, walk and not faint. Can I receive these promised blessings if I live only half of the Word of Wisdom and only follow the don’ts? Can I have marrow in my bones? Can I have health in my navel? For me, the Word of Wisdom has had a huge impact in my life. It has helped me realize the importance of obedience in my daily habits. It has helped me realize the importance of knowing the entire revelation and that blessings or promises come at the end.

Holzapfel: *It really is an interesting revelation because of its history. Today, when we ask, “Do you live the Word of Wisdom?” we are generally talking about the proscriptions, those things that determine whether one can enter the temple. But this does not stop anyone from living the prescriptions that make you a healthier person. The Word of Wisdom is definitely unique. It lets people know*
who you are. Twenty-five years ago if you met somebody who said, “Sorry, I do not smoke” or “I do not drink,” you might privately ask, “Are you Mormon?” Today you cannot do that because there are lots of people who have discovered the great benefits of this healthy lifestyle. There are many non-Mormons who do not smoke or drink, and they might get a little offended if you ask, “Are you Mormon?”

Hedges: Conversations around the Word of Wisdom often tend to devolve into the little gray areas: what to do about chocolate or stimulating drinks from different cultures. One thing I have found helpful to teach my students is this: “The gray areas are there. The Word of Wisdom does not prescribe and proscribe every possible thing. It is not a list at all. But if you look at the blessings that Susan alluded to, look at what is at stake—health, wisdom, treasures of knowledge, and other promises. I tell my students, “If this is what is at stake, the question is not ‘What’s the bare minimum I can do and still get in the temple?’ The question is instead, ‘How can I more fully live this law to obtain the blessings for myself?’” I tell them, “If you’ll sincerely ask that question, all the little gray areas and the little arguments that often take over a Word of Wisdom discussion largely disappear.”

Black: So why do you think it is required that prospective members live the Word of Wisdom when it is our one revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants that is given by greeting?

Hedges: It is the minimum standard.

Black: But do you think what the Lord is really saying is, “If you can control temporal things, you can become an incredible servant in the house of the Lord?”

Hedges: I think the Word of Wisdom introduces that idea.

Baugh: If you cannot control the physical aspects of your life, how can you develop the spiritual character that God expects you to have? My dad always said that if you can control your appetite, you can control anything. Self-control really is a fundamental principle associated with the Word of Wisdom.

Bennett: I think, too, the Word of Wisdom is a wonderful fusion of spiritual and physical matters. And in the Church, we believe the body is a temple and we are to honor it. And a part of honoring that temple is keeping these commandments without becoming fanatic. For example, as the Lord told the Shakers, we are not commanded to be vegetarians (see D&C 49:18). We need not abstain from meat. We just need to be wise. I think the Word of Wisdom is an invitation to be wise.
Holzapfel: Years ago Susan compiled a list of titles for Christ in the Book of Mormon. After reading her research, now I tend to often look for such titles in the Old Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants. This always brings Christ back into the story. It is very clear: I have always appreciated Doctrine and Covenants section 45 in which the Lord says three or four different ways to hearken or listen to his voice. “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified” (vv. 3–4).

In John 14:16, Jesus says, “I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter.” It is interesting that the Greek word can also be translated as helper or advocate. Jesus is the Great Comforter. He is the Advocate. He is the Helper. He is the one who assists us, whether we are learning the first principles of the gospel, looking at this Word of Wisdom. Whether we are trying to build up Zion or seek education, the center of the story has always been, and always will be, Christ. In the Doctrine and Covenants, it is Jesus who speaks. Sometimes students will say, “How come the Doctrine and Covenants is a closed canon? Why do we not add revelations to it?” I remind them that actually every Doctrine and Covenants has 139 sections. I say, “Take your patriarchal blessing and put it at the end of your Doctrine and Covenants. That is your section, that is your revelation, given the same way the Doctrine and Covenants revelations were given. The patriarch hears the word of the Lord and speaks out loud so it can be recorded. The revelation is written, and copies are made. A copy went to Church archives. So how many revelations do we have? Tens of thousands of continuous written revelations. And it is the same person speaking in each revelation—we hear the voice of Jesus Christ.

Baugh: You hit the nail on the head, Richard. If people read the revelations and do not hear the voice of Christ, they have missed the major focus.

Hedges: The Lord himself says, “You are hearing my voice. This is my voice speaking to you. You can testify that you have heard my voice when you have read this revelation” (see D&C 18:35–36).

Baugh: There is no greater evidence of that than these revelations. When you hear Joseph Smith speak as a man, you know he is speaking as a man. When you hear his revelatory voice, the voice of Christ communicating through the Spirit, it is elevated. It is above and beyond what Joseph could produce as a normal human being, just like any of us.
Black: The scriptures are truly a road map. And I love the idea of adding your patriarchal blessing as part of that map.

Bennett: Section 1 says, “Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high.” And it starts with Christ: “The voice of the Lord is unto all men” (vv. 1–2). So you have from the beginning to end a Christ-centered book.

Holzapfel: The Doctrine and Covenants is an amazing book. This discussion has been very insightful. Thank you very much for joining me today.
Having a child in college can be as much of a learning experience for the parent as it is for the student. Parents can best support their children through college as they listen to, encourage, and advise them during these important years.
When our children entered college, they were very independent and had confidence in their own abilities, but they welcomed—or at least tolerated—our advice and were pleased that we were interested in them and their college studies. They were surprised that the parents of most of their roommates and friends seemed to be uninvolved in the educational process at college—apart from finances and social updates. Here are some ideas that worked for us as parents in giving guidance to and showing support of our college students.

1. Be a good listener. At this stage of your children’s lives, there is no one else in the entire world that is more interested in what and how they are doing. Listen to their review of classes, teachers, roommates, ward events, callings, parties, and extracurricular activities, and then let your children know how much you care about them. While parents want to be good listeners and actively involved, they should not impose their choices on their children or annoy them with overly frequent contact. They should strive to find the right balance of giving support and helping children develop independence, realizing that needs vary from child to child. In trying to help, parents should

Guiding College Students to Success

DON AND ANN PEARSON

Don and Ann Pearson (donandannpearson@gmail.com) are the parents of six children and recently returned from the Canada Toronto East Mission.
avoid choosing their children’s majors, careers, or spouses. It is important to express our parental love and interest while recognizing that our children are at college and are responsible for their own choices.

2. Keep in touch. This amazing age of instant communication has given us valuable opportunities to provide appreciation, support and guidance to our adult children in timely, meaningful ways. How does a parent help from a distance? Think about your own strengths. For example, Ann enjoys proofreading papers, and with e-mail our children can have her instant attention on a paper due that week. The first few weeks of a semester are an important time to be involved in making the semester a success. We call to discuss each class, the subject matter, and the teacher. We enjoy learning about the class material and listening to our children’s views of the strengths and weaknesses of the professors and course material. We encourage our children to be aware of different classes they might like and to attend a class and experience the subject matter and teaching style. The first few weeks are critical because this is when changes can still be made. Four weeks into the semester is generally too late to advise a student who is not enjoying a class. All you can say then is, “Do your best. Tough it out. You can’t drop this class now.”

Sometimes, particularly when students are living off campus, parents can be particularly helpful with issues concerning recipes, meals, shopping, and health. Parents should always be sensitive to health considerations. Sometimes parents will need to say, “I don’t care what it costs in time or money, get over to the health center. You need to see a doctor.”

3. Encourage the use of the university catalog and class schedule. Surprisingly few students access the online university catalog. It contains the traffic signs for driving through college. Ignoring the catalog may require u-turns and unnecessary detours along the road to graduation.

We suggest that parents also keep their own copy or use the online catalog. The catalog sets forth the requirements for graduation. It describes colleges and departments, and has course descriptions, course requirements, and postgraduation options for every major. When students are thinking about what classes to take, parents can be meaningful guides if they understand the university catalog. The catalog also contains the university’s mission statement, including the academic skills of successful students. For example, BYU’s educational aims for students, as set forth in the catalog, are thinking soundly, communicating effectively, and reasoning proficiently in quantita-
tive terms. The university catalog will enable parents to be effective advisers to their college children.

The class schedule contains the traffic signs for that semester. It tells a parent and a student what the classes are offered each semester, who teaches them, and when they are available. The class schedule and the university catalog are the documents that any informed adviser needs.

4. Remind them to balance their schedule. Especially in the first semester or two, parents can review their child’s class schedule to see that it is balanced. Balance includes class times, course subject, and time demands (number of credit hours).

Help a first-year college student ask, “When are my very best study times? Where is my very best study location?” The level of performance in college is a result of quality study. Often the best time to study is in the morning and the best location is in the library at a private desk. A dorm room where people talk and listen to the radio, watch television, or play computer games may not be the best study location. For some students, an hour is barely enough time to begin studying. For others, two hours is the maximum time they can sit and maintain concentration. As they schedule their classes, it helps to allow time for study at appropriate times during the day.

Sometimes students will proudly say that they have been able to schedule all of their classes between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. They should not be deceived into thinking that this is a good schedule. Five consecutive hours in class can be grueling rather than interesting. Consecutive classes do not allow time for last-minute studying. When the five hours are finished, the student is ready for a break, not more study.

An occasional evening class may be a good idea in balancing time and schedule; evening classes are time effective and often less demanding overall. We would probably not encourage more than one evening class in a semester unless work or registration restrictions require it because evening activities may conflict with class and possibly encourage a student to skip class altogether. Ideally, students should balance a class’s subject matter and time slot when considering their schedule.

Variety in a semester’s work is appealing and generally more palatable to students; the approach and study demands of math, language, humanities, sciences, and religion classes are very different and add variety to a schedule. Especially in the first college years, some classes should be selected because the student truly believes he or she will enjoy them. Hopefully, a student
will enjoy every class, but some classes will be fun, while others will be enjoyed because of the exhilaration that results from working very hard and accomplishing tasks at a personally satisfactory level. Having both fun and challenging classes each semester will create a well-balanced, challenging, and enjoyable educational experience.

Particularly in their first semester, students should be encouraged not to over-schedule. Even if they are bright, are hardworkers, or were exceptional students in high school, students will probably fare better with twelve credit hours during the first semester than with fourteen or fifteen (for scholarship students, however, a higher minimum credit-hour level may be required). Students can structure their schedule so that they can achieve their best performance.

College grades often become more important than we would like them to be; we go to college to learn, and unfortunately grades can get in the way of learning. Despite this, grades are important for future scholarship consideration, employment upon graduation, graduate work, and, to a certain extent, grades can act as a personal measurement of an individual’s college success. But grades are not everything; relationships, knowledge, and skills are sometimes more important than grades when applying for jobs and graduate programs.

In the first semester, and throughout one’s college experience, parents should encourage their children to participate in a wide variety of campus and ward activities to broaden their university experience. We found that having our children live on campus without a car during the freshman year helped eliminate some of the distractions that can interrupt a good balance in activities.

No student can have a balanced schedule without paying attention to exercise (every student has the option of registering for a physical education class), nutrition, and sleep. These are very important to a successful college experience. Encourage your children to make good decisions to be healthy, thus keeping their minds alert while at school.

5. Help students select a major. Most students change their major during their college years; many do so more than once. Don changed his major from chemistry to political science when he returned from his mission and recommenced his studies at BYU. A primary objective of the first year or two of college is to explore areas for a major. Encourage first-semester students to take at least one class in the department that they think might be their college
major but also to take at least one or two classes in other areas of interest. These areas might be widely different in academic content, such as computer science and English, or zoology and economics. However, this does not mean that a student should register as a general education or an open major. A student should designate his first choice when he registers; then he can change it the next semester if he changes his mind. When a student has designated a major, the department considers the student theirs. This means the student will get the attention and benefit of having declared a major. If the student changes majors, the new department will take over; previously being in another department will not restrict student benefits.

Sometimes students will think that if they haven’t decided on a major, they should complete the general education (GE) classes to get them out of the way. Students need to realize that the key decision of their first years in college is to select a major field, not to complete the GE requirements. Students can take some GE classes, but should be careful not to overdose by taking only GE classes. Possibly, one or more of those GE classes will provide the exposure a student needs to select a major, but students should use GE classes as a way to help select a major, not simply to fill GE requirements.

While selecting a major is important, students should select a major that they enjoy. Going back and choosing another major, even after several years of college, is better than going forward in a less enjoyable field and career. That may mean exploring many avenues of interest, even taking courses that do not fulfill major or GE requirements. Seemingly unnecessary classes can provide a broader educational experience. These classes will be of particular value in helping students decide what their primary interests in college will be. By taking a broad range of classes, students will gain skills in many areas. Especially in competitive job markets and limited-enrollment graduate programs, students who have unusual knowledge or skills may have an advantage over the other similar applicants.

After our son Tom returned from his mission, he changed his mind about what his major should be three different times in a matter of months. It was fun for us to talk about each potential major area with him. The university catalog was of immense help. It described not only the required coursework for each major, but also the professional opportunities for students who graduate in different disciplines. *U.S. News and World Report* and *Newsweek* magazines periodically have articles regarding hot employment fields and opportunities for employment and compensation in various categories. A
discussion of choosing a major should include not only what the student likes about the subject and why, but also a consideration of where the career path will lead. Some humanities or social science majors may want to consider graduate school or a double major to provide more employment opportunities. None of our children selected accounting, computer science, education, engineering, or nursing as a major or as a second major—which are areas that provide good employment opportunities immediately upon graduation. Consequently, our children had to continue their education past an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

After Tom had selected computer science as a major, he almost immediately changed to microbiology and registered for several midlevel microbiology classes during the next semester. He enjoyed them and did well, but when we talked about it during the summer he stated that he really enjoyed the classroom and the lectures, but not much of the laboratory work. Many students might say the reverse. At the same time Tom was also a teaching assistant for the introductory anatomy class in the Zoology Department, which reaffirmed his preference for teaching and textbooks over laboratory work. He was also taking some history classes that he loved. He was planning to minor in history, but he realized that majoring in history would not produce many immediate employment opportunities upon graduation. We discussed many questions: What do you like most about microbiology? What do you like least? Who are the great teachers for you in the Microbiology Department? Can you pursue graduate work in microbiology without an intense focus on laboratory work and research? Are there employment opportunities if you exclude laboratory work? What do you like most about history? What do you like least about history? Who are the great teachers for you in the History Department? What can you do with a history major? Which subject matter do you enjoy the most? In which are do you perform the best? Tom thought and talked about the differences and the options.

Students should talk about what they like and dislike about different majors and employment opportunities and why. With Tom, we tried very hard not to push for an outcome, only to ask good questions. Frankly, we only want our children to make the best decision for them, and we can’t choose what they will do for their life’s work. Tom decided to change his major to history, minor in microbiology, apply to take the GMAT, attend a graduate business school, and take additional courses in accounting, statistics, and economics in the next two semesters to meet coursework requirements.
for business school. He carefully scheduled time to prepare for the GMAT before taking it, which made a huge difference in his test results. His history and life science background along with those basic business courses served him well in his MBA program and in job opportunities.

6. **Encourage them to choose a variety of classes.** In the first two semesters, in addition to taking classes in a wide range of interests that may become a major area, we encouraged our children to take a class for fun. Steven had a wonderful experience his last year of high school working with his friend’s father. This father was a senior fellow with the American Bible Society and was working on translating the Bible into languages with few users (for example, Eskimo and certain native American dialects). Some areas of translation focus on the difficulty between exact translations and cultural feelings or background meanings, and this is the area Steven experienced. From this work, Steven’s interest in language translation motivated him to sign up as a first-semester freshman for an upper-division linguistics class covering problems in translation.

We encouraged him, but closely monitored his situation during the first few classes. Could he perform at an acceptable level? Did he have sufficient linguistics background and language skills to compete in that class with upper-division students? Steven had four years of Latin and four years of Spanish, and he was conversational in Spanish from having lived and attended school in Chile for a summer, but most students in this class had better foreign language skills, especially in spoken languages. The class turned out to be very exciting and rewarding for him, and he performed well. He decided on linguistics as one of his double majors.

7. **Select teachers, not just courses.** In the first years of college students have an almost unlimited choice of teachers and of classes. In approaching graduation, students’ class schedules require primarily the completion of specific courses to finish GE or major requirements. Under those circumstances teacher selection may be impossible, especially if only one professor teaches a needed class. But teachers have a huge impact on class learning and memories.

We told our children that they should choose some of their classes based on a professor’s reputation at the university. If the professor is outstanding, students will enjoy and learn in the class, regardless of the subject. So how does one determine the great professors and great thinkers on any college campus? One way is to look at the list of professors of the year. Another, perhaps better,
way is to ask friends and other students what classes and teachers they have enjoyed most. We kept track of responses in a separate notebook and in the course catalog. Another helpful way to determine a professor’s reputation is to visit http://www.ratemyprofessors.com. This site provides students’ opinions on how difficult the class is and how helpful and exciting the professor is.

The focus should be on learning about professors who teach classes that a student plans on taking. Every student will have experience with GE teachers, and students in the same major take classes from professors in the same department that new students may not yet know. If a student is planning to take Biology 100 next semester, he or she can ask other students taking that class now about the professor and about the class in general. Students may attend a class period to observe a teacher to determine if they really like the teacher’s style. After attending a class, making a decision will be easier.

Our son Eric had a good friend who strongly recommended a professor in the History Department. Eric took the class on American Indian history and felt it was the most exciting and most interesting class he had ever taken. He loved the professor. But this system doesn’t always work perfectly. Eric so enjoyed this professor that he signed up for his American colonial history class in the fall. We encouraged Karen, who was entering BYU, to take this great history professor’s class with her brother, a senior history major. The class was okay according to Karen, but never quite what Eric had found. Karen later wished she had not taken that class.

Once students have selected a professor, they may want to visit periodically with the professor to enhance their school experience. Many professors love working with students. Help your sons and daughters have the courage to meet with a professor when they have questions or expectations where a few minutes of the teacher’s time would be justified.

8. Encourage them to go out of their way to make friends. Getting to know roommates, classmates, ward members, and other students at the university will produce rewarding lifelong friendships. Encourage your son or daughter to participate in the wide variety of campus activities with other students, including intramural sports, campus service organizations, department-sponsored clubs or groups, theater, the arts, and so forth. The variety of opportunities offered is remarkable. Your son or daughter should consider that the friendships they form will often last long after their college days. Having these friends will enrich their own lives. Invite the friends of your
son or daughter to your home when they are in your area, and encourage your child to invite friends to your home anytime. Help them to feel welcome there. If you have the opportunity to visit campus, invite your children’s friends to lunch with you and your son or daughter.

9. **Be straight with finances.** The cost of a university education is significant. Many students must work. Paying living costs and tuition can be a constant drain on time and energy. Students deserve to know explicitly what financial help they can expect from home. Maybe you plan to help with a mission, but cannot also provide financial assistance for education. Whatever the case is, tell them. Then they can complete part-time and summer work and financial-aid applications, as required. As much as possible, help them to be cautious with debt; carrying major debt out of school becomes overwhelming.

Often students are not well informed about scholarships. Working hard in school to get good grades may result in scholarships that can eliminate or reduce the need for debt. Many institutions offer merit-based scholarships. A scholarship may secure more time for study and activities than will part-time employment. Many times funds are also available for mentored research or focused study in a given area of interest. Doing research is good preparation for attending graduate programs, and may lead to better scholarships in graduate school.

10. **Help them plan for missions.** Attending religion classes or institute will place a student with a group of other similarly focused peers, which may keep strong their enthusiasm for the gospel. For young men, selecting a major may follow a mission. Most upper-division courses will not be taken until after a mission. Coursework before a mission can be general and somewhat exploratory in terms of academic programs.

Of course, with young women, the timing is different if they choose to serve missions. In our family, Laura graduated before her mission, and Karen and Marianne each returned from a mission and completed a final year of school before graduating. We found it especially difficult to help Laura apply for graduate school (even at BYU) while she was still in the mission field. We had a difficult time requesting references and completing applications and essays while Laura was in the mission field. Daughters who go on missions and plan on graduate school after can plan to take the graduate record exam (GRE) or other required tests before their mission.

11. **Give praise and validation.** As much as college students want independence, they also want their parents’ help, encouragement, and praise. It is
so easy to say, “We love you and appreciate and admire your hard work,” or “Congratulations on a great semester!”

Commencement provides a time for parents and family to congratulate and honor a son or daughter who is graduating. But we shouldn’t wait four or more years to let them know how much we appreciate their efforts as they move along the university highway toward graduation. Their university experience is life changing, and we should be grateful for the opportunities and blessings that it will provide them throughout their lives.

Finally, we are grateful that shared university experiences have brought us and our children closer to each other. RE

Notes

Following are Religious Educator articles discussing the Book of Mormon. In addition, nearly every issue has at least one article focusing on the art of teaching. You will continue to improve your skills as a teacher by implementing the suggestions provided in these articles.

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Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer

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Joseph and Hyrum—Leading as One

Joseph and Hyrum Smith exemplified leadership as they worked together organizing and operating the Church, teaching, speaking, and building temples and towns. As leaders, they held firm to their convictions, roused the hearts and minds of men and women in varied walks of life, and left legacies sufficient to stamp them as two of the most remarkable and influential men of the nineteenth century. Their stories and examples of shared leadership illustrate how they honored agency and exerted righteous influence, grew through adversity, forged bonds of obligation and love, governed conflict, and organized through councils. The authors and editors examine the leadership characteristics of Joseph and Hyrum and offer expert insights using modern leadership training. These principles can help create more edifying leadership in our homes, our Church service, and our professional lives.


In Harm’s Way: East German Latter-day Saints in World War II

These are the compelling accounts of thousands of members of the Church in East Germany who found themselves in a precarious situation during World War II. They were compelled to live under the tyranny of Nazi Germany and participate in offensive and defensive military actions. The story of how they lived and died under those conditions has never before been told. This volume brings together the accounts of hundreds of Church members who survived the war—preserved in hundreds of personal interviews, journals, letters, and photographs. Their stories of joy and suffering are presented in this book against the background of the rise and collapse of the Third Reich. Readers will be amazed at the faith and dedication demonstrated by these Saints, young and old, military and civilian.

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The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament: The 38th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

We cannot be true students of the Book of Mormon or Doctrine and Covenants without also being students of the Old Testament, for Jesus declared that the Old Testament scriptures “are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Often students of the gospel fail to see the Old Testament as a witness of Christ and his gospel. Yet this book of scripture serves as the First Testament of Jesus Christ. The frequent quotations and allusions to the Old Testament by later scripture writers in the New Testament and Book of Mormon certainly demonstrate its applicability to their understanding of the gospel. This volume features papers delivered at the most recent annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium held at Brigham Young University.


John Taylor: The Champion of Liberty

This book is a compilation of selected presentations from the annual BYU Church History Symposium, hosted by BYU Religious Education. The purpose of this book is to remember the legacy of John Taylor. The Prophet Joseph Smith told John Taylor, “Elder Taylor you have received the Holy Spirit and if you heed promptings of the same it will become within you a Fountain of Continuous Revelation from God.” President Taylor’s words found in this volume, can become a continuous fountain of revelation for its readers. On the flyleaf of the Improvement Era, John Taylor wrote, “What you young people want is a book that can be bound and kept with something in it worth keeping.” Certainly the essays about the life and teachings of John Taylor bound in this volume are worth keeping.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2736-1, Retail: $24.95
Oliver Cowdery: Days Never to Be Forgotten

Besides the Prophet, no one was more involved in the key events of the Restoration than Oliver Cowdery. This book is a compilation of selected presentations from the annual BYU Church History Symposium hosted by BYU Religious Education. Oliver Cowdery was a primary character in the early days of the Church, both before and after its organization. The events he was involved with are significant to the history of the Church. This book explores his life and the many important roles he filled. He was the principal scribe for the Book of Mormon, and he witnessed the heavens opened and the gospel of Jesus Christ restored. As Oliver himself described, “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom!”

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2742-2, Retail: $24.95

By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator

BYU Religious Education initiated the publication of the Religious Educator (TRE) in 2000 to provide an additional quality venue for scholars and students of the Restoration to explore our rich Church history, plumb the depths of ancient and modern scripture and doctrine, and highlight approaches in understanding and teaching the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In celebration of its tenth year, the editors have selected some of the outstanding contributions. Among the authors are Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Elder Jay E. Jensen, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Richard E. Bennett, Thomas A. Wayment, and several others. Since the release of the first issue, hundreds of thoughtful, well-researched articles and essays have been published in TRE by dedicated scholars, teachers, and Church leaders, creating a remarkable library of historical, doctrinal, pedagogical, and devotional resources.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2718-7, Retail: $11.95
Teach One Another Words of Wisdom: Selections from the Religious Educator

In 2000, as dean of Religious Education, Robert L. Millet initiated the publication of the Religious Educator (TRE) to provide another venue for teachers and students of the Restoration to explore our rich Church history, examine the depths of scripture and doctrine, and highlight approaches in teaching the principles of the gospel. The collection of essays included in this volume are just a sampling of the numerous articles published over the past decade and are a part of Religious Education’s overall mission to help build the kingdom of God by teaching and preserving the sacred doctrine and history of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This volume features outstanding articles by Elder Robert D. Hales, Elder Richard G. Scott, Elder Tad R. Callister, Brent L. Top, Kathy Kipp Clayton, and others.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2717-0, Retail: $8.95

To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration

Easter is a good time to recall Jesus’ mission to the least, the last, and the lost, for he said, “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” Not surprisingly, we discover that he sent his disciples to the “lost sheep,” and thus their mission of finding the lost is a natural extension of his mission. Some of Jesus’ most memorable teaching moments have to do with finding the lost. This volume contains the papers delivered at the 2008 and 2009 Brigham Young University Easter Conferences, which celebrate the life and atoning mission of Jesus Christ. We are honored to include articles from Elder Merrill J. Bateman, emeritus member of the Seventy, and Bonnie D. Parkin, former general Relief Society president.


This book examines such themes as the Atonement, grace, gifts of the Spirit, the condescension of God, and calling and election within the pages of the book of Acts through the Revelation of John. Using scriptures of the Restoration and teachings from the presiding authorities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it illuminates and clarifies these and other topics so that we might find sweetness therein and see wondrous things to our understanding and establish godly conduct. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “We are a biblical church. This wonderful testament of the Old World, this great and good Holy Bible is one of our standard works. We teach from it. We bear testimony of it. We read from it. It strengthens our testimony.”

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2725-5 Retail: $25.95

A Land of Promise and Prophecy: A. Theodore Tuttle in South America

This book is the winner of the prestigious Geraldine McBride Woodward International Mormon History Award. Though this book is not a biography of Elder Tuttle, it focuses on his activities in South America. Elder Tuttle’s work was key to the evolution of the Church because it represented a significant adjustment in approach and direction during a pivotal and defining period in Church history. Each mission in South America is discussed in relation to Elder Tuttle’s efforts and some of the issues and concerns of the time. This history focuses on the personalities and programs of the mission presidents and their wives with particular emphasis on Elder A. Theodore Tuttle because the changes that occurred during the time he was there were the product of these men and women.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2713-2 Retail: $25.95

A good deal has been written about prominent Church leaders, but so little has been written about the pioneers who quietly participated in Church history—until now. James Henry Martineau’s journals present the life of a Mormon convert, a pioneer, and an individual who dedicated his life to the service of his family, his country, and his Church. Martineau’s contributions to the settlements of northern and southern Utah, southern Idaho, southeast Arizona, and the Mormon colonies in northern Mexico are monumental. He was a civil engineer whose survey work left a lasting impression. Although not a prominent religious leader, he was a patriarch and was often in contact with or serving with those in authority. This volume offers a reflection of this common, yet uncommon, Latter-day Saint pioneer.


The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context, The 37th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

As the capstone of our religion, the Doctrine and Covenants provides insights to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ not found in any other of the standard works. It is easy to forget that the revelations that make up the Doctrine and Covenants were received in response to specific questions asked by real people at specific points in time, placing it in the larger historical and cultural backdrop of nineteenth-century America. Just like the New Testament or Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants has a rich textual history, and the form in which we find the revelations today is the product of a complex process of revelation, recording, editing, publication, and prophetic revision that continues today. This book will help readers to gain a better understanding of its background.

ISBN: 978-1-60641-015-8, Retail: $24.95
Upcoming Publications

**Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults**

Many scholars have claimed that religion has little or no effect on the lives of young people today; some have even asserted that religion is harmful to teens and young adults. This book emerged to provide scientific evidence that shows how religion plays a significant role in the lives of LDS youth. The authors undertook a groundbreaking study that spans 17 years and three countries. Truly the first of its kind, this study demonstrates how LDS youth with a high level of religiosity are not only less likely to participate in harmful delinquent activities but also more likely to have healthy self-esteem, resist peer pressure, and excel in school.


**Within These Prison Walls: Lorenzo Snow’s Record Book, 1886–1897**

The leather-bound record book was a perfect place for Snow to preserve his outgoing correspondence while incarcerated in the territorial penitentiary. The record book’s significance lies in three areas. First, the record book sheds light into the thoughts, personality, and personal life of Lorenzo Snow. The deftness with which he puts his thoughts into verse, his vocabulary, as well as his humor and compassion all reveal facets of Snow’s intellect and character unfamiliar to many Church members today. Second, the record book is significant for its doctrinal content. Finally, it is an important primary source for students of the antipolygamy crusade. His poems and letters are invaluable for understanding how the Saints viewed their persecutions, justified their resistance to the laws, and found the will to carry on.

BYU Religious Studies Center

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A Resource for Gospel Students, Teachers, and Scholars

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See for Yourself

Take a look
rsc.byu.edu

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER
Established 1975 by Jeffrey R. Holland
The Religious Studies Center Turns Thirty-Five!

In 1975, Religious Education dean Jeffrey R. Holland formed the Religious Studies Center (RSC) to facilitate religious study and serve not just the university but the entire Church. Now, as the RSC turns thirty-five, let’s review the RSC’s impact on the university and the worldwide Church.

Conferences
The RSC helps sponsor important conferences and symposia at BYU. In addition to the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, the RSC has added the Religious Education Student Symposium, the BYU Easter Conference, and the Church History Symposium. These are held annually and are free to the public.

Research and Publications
The RSC funds research and publication of scholarly research, regularly publishing about ten books a year, a journal titled the Religious Educator, and a biannual magazine, the Religious Education Review. “While many people do not recognize the RSC by name,” says Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, publications director, “they recognize many of the books we have published” (see http://rsc.byu.edu/rsc_rec_pub.php).

Global Impact
A major step in establishing a global audience was the creation of the RSC Website (rsc.byu.edu). This site offers a blog of recent events, news of upcoming conferences and symposia, a list of our most recent publications, a searchable database of past articles, and translations in German, Portuguese, and Spanish. The RSC is committed to sharing its resources with a worldwide audience.

The Future of the RSC
While serving as president of BYU, President Holland said, “With the horizons expanding at an unprecedented rate for the study of what is ancient and what is modern, it is fitting for us to look to the resources, scholarship, and leadership of the [Religious Studies] Center.”
Upcoming Conferences

The Thirty-Ninth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Scheduled for October 29–30, 2010, this Sperry Symposium focuses on “The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture.” The keynote speaker will present in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium Friday, October 29, at 6:30 p.m.

Student Symposium
The 2011 Religious Education Student Symposium will be held Friday, February 18, 2011, in the Wilkinson Center on BYU campus from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Church History Symposium
The 2011 Church History Symposium, sponsored by Religious Education and the Religious Studies Center, will be held Saturday, March 5, 2011, in the Harmon Building on BYU campus. The Brigham Young University Church History Symposium was established to explore annually a topic of special interest in the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each year historians meet to share the fruits of their research with each other and with a general audience of interested Latter-day Saints and friends. The symposium has become the premier symposium for scholarship on Church history. Selected papers from each symposium are published in a book by the Religious Studies Center. Hundreds of people attend each year to be enlightened and edified. This symposium is free to attend, and registration is not required.

The BYU Easter Conference
The 2011 Religious Education Easter Conference will be held on Saturday, April 9, 2011, in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium on BYU campus at 9 a.m. Presenters will speak about the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. The conference will feature notable Church leaders, historians, scholars, educators, and authors. The conference also features special instrumental and vocal presentations. Attending the BYU Easter Conference is an ideal way to celebrate Easter Sunday. Visit easterconference.byu.edu for more information.
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Editorial Board Member
Randall L. Hall currently serves as the associate administrator for Seminaries and Institutes of Religion. He began his career teaching seminary in 1973. Other assignments in S&I include assistant administrator, area director, preservice director at BYU, manager of seminary curriculum, and seminary principal. He served a mission to Brazil and has enjoyed the opportunity to travel to over forty countries and many states visiting S&I programs. He received a BA from BYU in history followed by an MA in American literature. He has published poetry, short stories, and several novels. He enjoys time with family, reading and writing, and running, cycling, and swimming. He and his wife, Lloya, are the parents of eleven children and live in Orem, Utah. They have eight grandchildren.

Student Editorial Intern
Kate Lindsay is a senior from Cottonwood Heights, Utah. She will graduate in August with an American studies major and an editing minor. Kate grew up playing the cello and performed with BYU’s Symphony Orchestra for three years. She currently works as an editor for the RSC and helps to coordinate student involvement in RSC-sponsored conferences and symposia. Kate spent a semester abroad studying and traveling in London and several countries in Europe. During summer 2009, she participated in BYU’s Washington Seminar program and worked as an intern for Senator Orrin Hatch in Washington DC. Kate has a deep appreciation for the performing arts, foreign films, and national parks. Upon graduation she plans to pursue an MPA.

Electronic Project Coordinator
Bethany Elizabeth Malouf is a senior from Plano, Texas. She is studying biology with an animal emphasis, specifically mammals. Since coming to BYU, she has taken American Sign Language classes and enjoys using her skills by volunteering at the Missionary Training Center. Bethany has worked at a veterinary hospital as a veterinary technician for the past four years and interned in summer 2009 at the Dallas Zoo, where she worked with giraffes and rhinos. She started working at the RSC in fall of 2007 as a research assistant and has loved every minute. She enjoys playing sports, snowboarding, watching movies, and spending time with family and friends. After graduation, she plans to stay in Provo, get married, and keep working with the animals she loves.
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Submission Guidelines
The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The contributions to each issue are carefully reviewed and edited by experienced teachers, writers, and scholars. The beliefs of the respective authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Complete author guidelines, including suitable topics, are provided at tre.byu.edu. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted but not encouraged. Send hard-copy submissions to the editorial office at the address listed below.

Manuscripts must be word processed in double-spaced format, including quotations. A minimum of embedded word-processing commands should be used. Authors should follow style conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition, and the Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3rd edition, as reflected in a recent issue of the Religious Educator.

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 used quotations highlighted.

Editorial Questions
For questions or comments, e-mail us at rsc@byu.edu or write to Religious Educator, 167 HGB, Provo, UT 84602-2701.
“We must never forget what He did for us, for without His Atonement and Resurrection life would have no meaning.”

—ELDER D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON