



“God Loveth a Cheerful Giver”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

How are we like the Corinthians in our offerings? Dr. Joseph Spencer examines Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians and remembering the poor, giving with love, and the purpose of offerings.

Part 2:

Dr. Joseph Spencer continues to explore the themes of surrendering to grace, the need for broken hearts, and the power of covenants with Jesus Christ.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Joseph Spencer
- 02:09 Introduction of Dr. Joseph Spencer
- 03:22 Background to the letter
- 05:24 Reconciliation after 1 Corinthians

- 06:15 Possible third letter
- 06:57 Paul fulfills Isaiah
- 07:44 Paul asks for donations
- 11:05 Becoming a cheerful giver
- 14:07 N.T. Wright's translation
- 16:28 Jesus's example of generosity
- 19:17 The practicality of giving
- 22:13 Paul's strategy for offerings
- 24:27 Doing what we can
- 27:23 Inspiration vs competition
- 29:43 Parallels to King Benjamin
- 31:31 Hanks shares a personal story about fast offerings
- 34:10 Needs of the body and the heart
- 35:37 God's unspeakable gift
- 36:35 Paul's parodic boasting
- 40:21 Revelation and trial
- 44:39 Parallels to Moroni
- 47:44 Ether 12 connections
- 49:43 Faith, love, and a capacity for pain
- 54:26 End of Part I—Dr. Joseph Spencer

Part 2

- 00:00 Part II—Dr. Joseph Spencer
- 00:07 Love is the law, not the reward
- 00:38 Grace and “after all we can do”
- 04:59 Deserving heaven
- 06:42 The importance of works
- 08:04 Our works show what we desire
- 11:04 Jesus isn't just in the gaps
- 14:15 Brokenheartedness and motivations
- 15:30 Dr. Spencer shares a story about his baby
- 19:45 Surrendering to grace
- 24:23 President Oaks and “The Challenge to Become”
- 26:21 Covenants
- 28:48 Paul's series of promises
- 31:12 How are we in the faith?
- 33:55 Simplicity vs single-mindedness
- 38:14 Elder Corbridge's “Stand Forever”
- 41:06 Alma commanding to teach nothing but faith and repentance
- 43:18 Examine yourselves
- 46:52 A spiritual midterm

- 49:20 Dr. Spencer shares his testimony and personal journey
- 57:03 End of Part II–Dr. Joseph Spencer

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Biographical Information:



Joseph M. Spencer is a philosopher and an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He has degrees from Brigham Young University, San Jose State University, and the University of New Mexico, having earned his PhD in philosophy from the last institution in 2015. He is the author of four books (most recently *1st Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction*), the coeditor of four

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- Hank Smith: 00:01 Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with John Bytheway. Hey, John, we've been studying first Corinthians and second Corinthians for a while now. What have you learned from Paul and these Corinthians Saints?
- John Bytheway: 00:18 Well, I actually got to go to Corinth once, and it was so fun to hear the backstory of what that place on the isthmus that had so much commerce and travel and everything, and you get a sense of, "This was a real gathering place for a lot of people and for travelers and a lot of worldliness there." So, when you read what Paul's addressing, you're like, "Yep. Yep, yep," when you see that. So, I'm excited to see how he finishes in this second letter.
- Hank Smith: 00:45 I've noticed that Paul has a lot of interaction with these Corinthian Saints. He spent 18 months with them as we learned in the book of Acts, and then the back and forth with these letters. There's a letter that we're told is there, but we don't have. There's also what Paul calls a painful visit. This back and forth seems to me like a friendship almost. It has ups and downs. It's, "I love you. What are you doing? I love you. We've got to address some problems." John, we have a Bible expert here with us today. He wouldn't call himself a Bible expert, but I think he is. His name is Dr. Joseph Spencer. I like to call him Joe. Joe, what are we looking forward to today with the last lesson here in Corinthians?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 01:31 There's a lot here. We'll be looking at really two blocks of text, a couple of chapters in which Paul is talking about a collection that's being gathered for the saints in Jerusalem. There are some interesting things to dig into there, but then especially the last four chapters here, Paul's parting words to the Corinthian Saints at least by way of letter, and some really beautiful teachings about weakness and grace. So, lots we can play around with today.
- Hank Smith: 01:57 Good. This sounds fantastic. Sounds like we're going to learn a lot. Hey, John, Joe is new to our podcast. He's not new to me.

We've been friends for many years, but he's new to our podcast. Why don't you tell everybody about him?

- John Bytheway: 02:09 We're excited to have Dr. Joseph M. Spencer. He's a philosopher, associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He has degrees from Brigham Young University, San Jose State, and the University of New Mexico where he got his PhD in philosophy. He's the author of seven books, co-editor of four collections of essays. He serves as the editor of the Journal of Book Mormon Studies, and is the associate director of Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar, a co-editor for the introductions to Mormon thought, and he and his wife Karen live in Provo with their five children. His latest book is called A Word in Season, and the subtitle is Isaiah's Reception in the Book of Mormon.
- John Bytheway: 02:53 That will be published in November. I'm excited to see that. It's like, "Why is Isaiah in there," and how is it perceived among early readers of the Book of Mormon?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 03:04 I mean, the question I'm trying to sort out in the book is just how unique is the Book of Mormon's handling of Isaiah, if you put it in conversation with the larger history of Christians and Jews, and reading Isaiah and making sense of it.
- John Bytheway: 03:16 Well, we may have to have you back next year when we take on the Book of Mormon, right, Hank?
- Hank Smith: 03:22 Absolutely. Joe is an expert there as well. So, Joe, I want to jump right in here, but can we do a little bit of review? I mentioned earlier that Paul spent 18 months, a year and a half, with these Corinthian Saints, basically raised up this branch, leaves, and first Corinthians is his response to all the problems he's heard about since being away. What has happened since then. Why do we get a second letter?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 03:48 More than just a second letter, right? There are letters that he wrote that we know of... well, at least one that we know of that we don't have. Of course, he may have had other correspondence. He's one of the first missionaries there it seems, and helps to found this branch, as you put it, though he baptizes only one person, I think, there, right? He leaves to others that work. He does a lot of preaching it seems, but then he keeps a close eye on the Corinthian saints. So, he has a further visit at some later point, what he calls his painful visit, his tearful visit. That seems to have been very, very difficult. It's not clear exactly what happened.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 04:22 But from First Corinthians, it's clear that things are rocky in Corinth with the saints. There's a lot of factional spirit about it, a tribalism, which isn't at all relevant in the 21st century.

Hank Smith: 04:35 Not at all.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 04:35 I'm sure, and a great deal of trying to figure out novel ways to think about the Christian revelation and in ways that then lead to all these kinds of problems as well as just some straightforward sinfulness that Paul has to address.

Hank Smith: 04:52 I remember going up to some of those Greek temples where they have the prostitution, and saying, "Well, we're free in Christ, so we can do what we want."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 05:00 Exactly.

Hank Smith: 05:01 Then didn't he talk quite a bit about food, if I remember right.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 05:04 Yeah. There's all this battle about, "Well, if we have what he calls Christian license, we have the freedom in Christ to do basically anything, then we can eat whatever we want." He's like, "Well, it's a little more complicated than that." Got to figure out how to get along together, and sometimes your freedom is leading other people into trouble.

Hank Smith: 05:24 Then with Dr. Nelson, last week, we looked at Paul reconciling. It seems to be the beginning of second Corinthians is this, "I was pretty harsh. Let's reconcile. I'm actually happy I was pretty harsh, because it helped you quite a bit, but let's reconcile. I still love you." Does that sound right for the beginning?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 05:45 Yeah, and ties it to a doctrine of reconciliation with us and God, so he can take his own experience, and make it a reflection of the gospel itself.

Hank Smith: 05:55 One of my favorite parts of reading was Where is your letters of recommendation and Paul's responses? I started this branch. You are my letters of recommendation, this, "Are you kidding me?" So, with that background, Joe, lead us into chapter eight. Where do you want to go? How do you want to start this?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 06:15 So, chapters eight and nine form a unit. In fact, many scholars have played with the possibility that chapters eight and nine were from an independent letter, and got sandwiched in here or something like that. There's an abrupt shift at the beginning of chapter eight, and an abrupt shift again at the beginning of

chapter 10. So, what we have going on here, Paul is talking to the Corinthian saints about something that shows up in bits and pieces across his letters. So, scholars have had to reconstruct the situation here, but with some reconstruction, it's really, really helpful to know. Paul, after he began his ministry generally going around missionizing, preaching in all these places, he clearly saw what he was doing and what was happening.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 06:57 That is his mission to the Gentiles as a fulfillment of very specific prophecies in the Old Testament. Here, especially, you might think of Isaiah 60 and 61. You get these prophecies not only of Gentiles coming and recognizing that Israel's God is God, but there's talk of the Gentiles laying their gold and their silver at the feet of Israel. Paul believed he was living through the fulfillment of the gospel coming to the Gentiles. I mean, he was, right? So, when he read these passages, he thought this is the reconstruction. He seems to have thought one thing that might help other Jews who have not yet seen in Jesus Christ the Messiah, who haven't recognized that Jesus is the Messiah. If they can see that those prophecies are being fulfilled, this might provoke them to go, "Oh, something's happening here."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 07:44 Romans 9 to 11 talks a lot about that theme. One thing Paul then does is as he goes around to the various Gentile congregations, he asks them to gather up whatever extra monies they have, and then he will have them all delivered to the Jewish saints in Jerusalem, and this will be this glorious fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. So, you get traces of that at the end of Romans, at the end of First Corinthians, as referred to very directly in Galatians, and then of course in Acts 24, when Paul goes to Jerusalem, it's reported that he brings with him all this wealth.
- Hank Smith: 08:18 Joe, do we know what's going on in Jerusalem? What's happening that the saints there need so much assistance?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 08:25 I don't know that we have a ton of detail except that the Jewish saints are very poor, that they just seem to be very impoverished. Gathering all of this up, at the very least, would just be a question of alleviating poverty. But on top of that, it seems Paul wants to make this symbolic gesture to signal a fulfillment of prophecy. So here in chapters eight and nine, this is what Paul is talking to the Corinthian saints about. He had... Apparently, a year before, they'd made a bunch of pledges about how much they were going to contribute, and then he's gone up to Macedonia, the saints up north. This is places like Thessalonica and Philippi, and said, "Hey, guess what those guys

down in Corinth are doing? They're really leading the way on this."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 09:02 The saints in Macedonia have given a ton, and then he finds out that the Corinthian saints are backing out, so these two chapters. They're not making good on their pledge, and so he writes this strongly-worded recommendation that they get back on their program.
- Hank Smith: 09:19 The other saints, the saints in Galatia, the Macedonians, they're really giving, "What are you guys doing?"
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 09:27 Exactly. He even says... I mean, this is really early in the text, but he says that the saints in Macedonia have given more than they have. They're actually relatively impoverished, and yet they've just given and given and given. You, Corinthians, who have all this wealth are sitting on it. This may be a side point, but I think it might help make some of this matter for latter-day saints, because it feels like, "Okay, there was this historical thing Paul was working on," but this issue of the collection is actually directly talked about in the Doctrine and Covenants. So, in section 42, when the Lord introduces the law of consecration to the saints, the Lord opens it by saying... This is section 42 verse 29 and 30, "If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments, and behold thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate thy properties, et cetera, et cetera."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 10:14 That phrase "remember the poor" shows up in exactly two places in all of scripture, and it's right there in that verse in Doctrine & Covenants 42, and it's in Galatians 2:10 when Paul explains the commandment to gather this collection to take to Jerusalem. Then after the law of consecration gets described in Doctrine & Covenants 42, then this is how the Lord explains its purpose. So, this is verse 39, "For it shall come to pass that which I speak by the mouths of my prophets shall be fulfilled for I will consecrate of the riches of those who embrace my gospel among the Gentiles, unto the poor of my people who are of the house of Israel." That's exactly what Paul was doing.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 10:51 So, sometimes it may feel like these details weird, old historical things don't necessarily matter much now, but this is the Lord himself draws all of this back to our attention, what Paul was doing and says, "This is what the law of consecration looks like."
- Hank Smith: 11:05 I'm going to read a section from the manual here, the opening section from the manual. It seems to go right aligned with what you're talking about. It says, "What would you do if you heard that a congregation of saints in another area was struggling in

poverty?" This was the situation that Paul described to the Corinthian Saints in 2 Corinthians. He hoped to persuade the Corinthian Saints to donate some of their abundance to saints in need, but beyond a request for donations, Paul's words also contain profound truths about giving every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give not grudgingly or of necessity for God loveth a cheerful giver. In our day, there are still saints throughout the world who are in need of help.

- Hank Smith: 11:50 Sometimes the most we can do for them is to fast and donate fast offerings. In other cases, our giving can be more direct and personal. Whatever forms our sacrifices take, it's worth examining our motivations for giving. Are our sacrifices expressions of love? After all, it's love that makes a cheerful giver. I think we're right in line now to learn about giving to those in need. Maybe there's some listeners who are about to turn it off going, "I don't want to give anything." Don't turn off the podcast. Stay with us here. I think we're really going to dive into what this really means as a Christian.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 12:30 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 12:31 I'm old enough to remember when President Spencer W. Kimball used to emphasize, he called it the threefold mission of the church, proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead. I believe it was during President Thomas S. Monson's time that he added forth was to care for the poor and needy. The most recent way it's been articulated in the handbook, I just love it. It's four verbs, live, care, invite, unite, live the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for those in need. Hank, what you just read from the manual, it didn't say the poor and needy. I like how it says care for those in need, because any of us might be in need.
- John Bytheway: 13:13 There might be a temporary setback or something, or maybe it is more chronic, I don't know, but live the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for those in need, invite all to receive the gospel, and unite families for eternity. I love that President Monson introduced that, and that now it's part of what we are all about and what we're talking about here. What you mentioned in section 42 and in Galatians, exactly, that should be constantly on the minds of a Christian community is how do we care for each other?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 13:44 Part of the difficulty with reading 2 Corinthians eight and nine is that the King James version can feel really hard to read here. Paul in general can feel hard in the King James version, right?
- John Bytheway: 13:55 We've experienced that.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 13:57 Yes. These letters are actually quite forceful in the Greek. So, I was wondering if we might actually just read a couple of these passages in a modern translation.

Hank Smith: 14:06 Sure.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 14:07 Kind of get the feel of it. So, I'll read. This is the first seven verses of chapter eight. This is from NT Wright's translation of the New Testament. NT Wright is an Anglican scholar and clergyman and just an amazing person.

Hank Smith: 14:20 He's been quoted on our podcast before.

John Bytheway: 14:23 He wrote a biography of Paul that we've had lots of people quote from. I think it's just called Paul, A Biography. So if readers want to go deeper, that's a great source.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 14:35 This is how he translates the first seven verses of chapter eight, and you can feel the force of Paul's here. "Let me tell you my dear family about the grace which God has given to the Macedonian churches. They have been sorely tested by suffering, but the abundance of grace, which was given to them and the depths of poverty they have endured, have overflowed in a wealth of sincere generosity on their part. I bear them witness that of their own accord up to their ability and even beyond their ability, they begged us eagerly to let them have the privilege of sharing and the work of service for God's people. They didn't just do what we had hoped. They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us as God willed it. This put us in a position where we could encourage Titus that he should complete this work of grace that had begun among you."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 15:18 "You have plenty of everything after all, plenty of faith and speech and knowledge and all kinds of eagerness, and plenty of love coming from us to you. So, why not have plenty of this grace too?" It's nice to just feel the flow like Paul is writing with force and conviction and very practical concerns as he is talking. But what might be maybe most useful to reflect on together here would be a verse that comes just a little bit later than that, just a verse or two on where Paul, trying to get the saints in Corinth to be a bit more generous, compares their task to Christ's atonement. This is verse nine. Now, I'm reading from the King James, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor. That ye through his poverty might be rich."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 16:06 That's a beautiful description, and a really nice way of connecting our task of consecration and of taking care of the poor to the very act of Christ's atonement. He is God. He has all these resources spiritually, and yet he becomes poor so that we become rich. If that isn't a good motivation to take seriously our task.
- John Bytheway: 16:28 Thank you for bringing in verse nine. I love that Paul would do this. It's like, "Listen, the heart of the whole gospel is generosity maybe of Christ." As he introduced, we must be generous with each other. Look what the Savior did for us, and I'm thinking of Isaiah. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, and with his stripes, we are healed, and he descended below all things. I mean, the heart of that is such generosity and selflessness. Then Paul's asking the saints to do the same for each other. I like that connection you made.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 17:09 I mean, it reminds me of King Benjamin a bit too, right? Benjamin says, "Look, you are begging, and then here's the beggar. You were begging, and God gave you something you completely did not deserve. He's redeemed you, and poured out his spirit and so on. He could have looked on you and said, "You brought this on yourself," but he didn't. Now, you're going to look at the beggar, and say... Similar kind of gesture, he weaves together Christ's over abundant grace toward us, and then says, "Now, can't you get right your relationship to those who need a bit of help?"
- Hank Smith: 17:41 I think, Paul, if I had to sum it up, you think to be a Christian is to become generosity. It's not even enough to be generous. This becomes an integral part of your nature, because you're trying to be like the Savior. Sometimes you might think of, "Let's give of our substance. Let's pry it out of your grip. Come on, just let go and give it away," where I think Paul wants a change of heart, not just giving money. He wants them to become like Christ who is just so openly generous. I just can't see the Savior going, "I don't want to give. I don't want to bless, but they'll pry it out of my hands. I guess I have to give it to them."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 18:29 I mean, that's King Benjamin. Again, in Mosiah 4, after Benjamin's people have had this experience of Christ, they've fallen to the ground, and they cried out for mercy, and they've received it. This is where Paul starts talking about the beggar, but one of the things he says, he says, "So if you can get this kind of attitude right, if you can get this every day, then he says, you will take care of the beggar." He doesn't say, "You had better." It becomes a natural outreach. In fact, that famous

verse where he says, "Now, you might say to yourself, "I'm not going to reach out. I'm not going to help."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 18:59 It's interesting that he says there, "You might tell yourself, "I will stay my hand," which means my hand is already reaching out. Automatically, I'm reaching out at this point. You might try to talk yourself out of it, but if Christ has really worked on you, you can't but reach out and help.
- Hank Smith: 19:17 Joe, as we're going along, I'd love for our listeners to have practical ways of practicing this along the way if you think of things.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 19:28 I mean, asking a philosopher to be practical, that could be difficult, but it is worth saying. I mean, right from the outset here, there's this amazing talk years ago by Elder Holland called Are we Not All Beggars from general conference. Toward the end of that talk, he says, "Now, the problem is enormous. What do we do?" He literally says, "I don't know." Then he says, "But that's why you've got to get on your knees that there's no general program here. You've got to take this up with God. What can you do?" I think that's important that this is the kind of thing we can't program. It's the kind of thing we have to always feel a little uncomfortable with. We can't be at ease in Zion.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 20:07 I like a line from CS Lewis about this when he says, "I often get asked, how much should you give?" He says, "If it doesn't hurt, you're not giving enough," a little uncomfortable, right? Am I giving enough? Am I reaching out enough? If I feel like, "Yeah, I'm doing great" the question's-
- John Bytheway: 20:26 You're probably not doing great.
- Hank Smith: 20:29 That's interesting, because I often hear from general authorities a generous fast. That's never given an amount, right? It's never given, "Here's what a generous fast is. It's a generous fast."
- John Bytheway: 20:42 I'm fascinated when the widow threw in her mite that Jesus didn't say, "Oh, give it back to her." He let her do that, which is amazing. That was all she had.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 20:56 It's, I mean, maybe important to emphasize that Paul is writing to a community. I mean, he's asking them to gather up what they can to send outside of their community, which of course we have that responsibility. Often, that's what fast offerings end up doing. They help locally, but then the extras head off and can

help elsewhere. I mean, last time I read statistics, a billion people go to bed hungry every night in the world. We have serious responsibilities on that score, but he's also writing to a community. In so many ways, this is the practical reality of what it looks like to take care of one another is the kind of simple everyday work that can only happen in a community. So-and-so is struggling, and it's their neighbor that actually reaches out and recognizes that something's going on.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 21:40

I'm lucky and that I live in a ward in Provo where our whole ward is seven blocks big, but the result is the neighborhood is the ward. The ward is the neighborhood in a lot of ways. It allows you to see way more clearly the kind of work a ward community can do for each other than sometimes when you're spread out as more geographically. You can just see completely intertwined lives, and when someone's in any kind of difficulty, what the saints are willing to do for each other. I think that's very much a manifestation of the same kind of thing.

Hank Smith: 22:13

Joe, let's keep going on this. I don't think this is all Paul has to say on this, right?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 22:17

He has a lot to say, and I mean, a lot of it can feel very practical and focused on what's happening there in Corinth. But one thing that I think is interesting here, there's a strategy Paul uses that we might pick out of a couple of verses that might feel a little weird in some ways, but I think is actually really intriguing. This is actually jumping back a verse to chapter eight verse eight, and then we'll actually jump ahead to a verse in chapter nine. Chapter eight verse eight, he says, "I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 22:49

Then jumping to chapter nine verse two, he says this, "For I know the forwardness of your mind for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia, which is where Corinth is, that Achaia was ready a year ago, and your zeal hath provoked very many." Those two verses show that part of Paul's strategy in trying to gather this collection is to create a contest to try to get the saints in Macedonia to be like, "Nah, we're going to beat the Saints in Achaia, and the saints in Achaia-

John Bytheway: 23:16

It's like a telethon.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 23:18

Right. It really does feel that way a little, and that feels a little strange. We're like, "Is that really the way you want to-

Hank Smith: 23:23 Go about this?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 23:25 Yeah. Do we want this to be competition? But I don't think it's quite that Paul is trying to create competition, but he does want to use each other's successes to build up the other, the one successes to build up the successes of the other, and to say, "Look, it's possible. There's more that you can do, because look over here, that's going on." That may be a helpful thing and a healthy thing to think about. Sometimes we can hear success stories in the church, and just be like, "Oh, then that means I'm terrible. Here we go, right?" Someone else did something, "Oh, that Relief Society President did all those things, which shows me that I am not doing anything like I was supposed to do."

Hank Smith: 24:00 I'm a worthless non-giver.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 24:03 Right, but there's also the version of it where if we have the right spirit about it, hearing the successes of others can make us go, "Oh, hang on, there's work that can be done here. There is more that we can do. I need to get over myself a bit here." So, the fact that Paul is playing these two regions off of each other, interesting and suggestive in certain ways, I think.

John Bytheway: 24:27 I believe it was the woman of Bethany that anointed Jesus's feet. Jesus just has this wonderful phrase, "She hath done what she could." I love that phrase, because I can't do as much as that person did. I can't do as much, but rather, that comforting phrase, she did what she could, and we can have peace in that. I did what I could.

Hank Smith: 24:50 The woman who anoints Jesus' feet, that's the same story that Elder Holland brought up in the talk we mentioned previously, "Are we not all beggars?" He talks about that phrase. She has done what she could, and then he says this, "What a succinct formula. A journalist once questioned Mother Teresa of Calcutta about her hopeless task of rescuing the destitute in that city. He said that statistically speaking, she was accomplishing absolutely nothing. This remarkable little woman shot back that her work was about love, not statistics. Notwithstanding the staggering number beyond her reach, she said she could keep the commandment to love God and her neighbor by serving those within her reach with whatever resources she had.

Hank Smith: 25:35 'What we do is nothing but a drop in the ocean,' she would say on another occasion, but if we didn't do it, the ocean would be one drop less than it is. Soberly, the journalist concluded that Christianity is obviously not a statistical endeavor. He reasoned

that if there would be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 who need no repentance, then apparently, God is not overly preoccupied with percentages. So as much as we'd love to eradicate all poverty, that's probably not within one person's reach." So, we can't say, "Well, because I can't get rid of all of it, I'm not going to do anything."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 26:14 It's so easy to feel like we aren't doing what we can, and we alternate between extremes. We tend to either think that we're not doing anything like what we should do when we're actually doing all right, or we tend to think we're doing everything great when we're not doing anything at all. I was speaking at a fireside recently up in the Salt Lake area, and a woman asked a question during the fireside about, "I just feel like I don't do enough and so on." We talked about it a bit, but she came up to me afterward to talk and said, "So, here's my situation. I'm from Zimbabwe. I'm just here visiting."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 26:47 She said, "Back home, I'm in the stake relief society presidency. I'm in the ward primary presidency, and I run all the music for the ward. I just don't think I do enough." You're doing... My heavens, my heavens, my heavens, you're good, right?
- Hank Smith: 27:02 You're doing a lot.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 27:04 But then at the other extreme, we can feel like, "Oh my heavens, you can't really ask that of me, right? So yeah, we tend to alternate between extremes, but if we can see the kind of work that others are doing, not as competition, but as encouragement and a collective spirit, then there's something I think good that could come out of this kind of thing.
- Hank Smith: 27:23 So, maybe Paul's not wanting them to compete as much as he wants them to be inspired by these other congregations. In chapter 9:7, Paul says this, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity for God loveth a cheerful giver."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 27:44 I'll go ahead and read from N.T. Wright's translation again, so we get the flow and feel of the larger passage. Starting in verse five, "So I thought it necessary to exhort the brothers that they should go on to you in advance, and get everything about your gracious gift in order ahead of time. You've already promised that after all. Then it really will appear as a gift of grace, not something that has had to be extorted from you. This is what I mean. Someone who sows sparingly will reap sparingly as well. Someone who sows generously will reap generously. Everyone should do as they have determined in their heart, not in the

gloomy spirit or simply because they have to since God loves a cheerful giver, and God is well able to lavish all his grace upon you so that in every matter and in every way, you will have enough of everything, and maybe lavish in all your own good works. Just as the Bible says, they spread their favors wide. They gave to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 28:39 He's quoting from the Psalms at the end of that. So yeah, the context I think makes quite clear what's going on there. He's worried about these saints in Corinth getting a bit stingy and not quite coming through on what they had pledged, but he says, "Look, I could have just shown up and told you all off, or something like that, but I thought I'd write you before I get there, and see if I could encourage you to set something straight so that when we come and when these brothers show up to get the collection, it'll have been done out of the goodness of your heart, and not regretfully and not resentfully." So that the way, again, it's translated here, everyone should do as they have determined in their heart not in a gloomy spirit or simply because they have to since God loves a cheerful giver.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 29:22 This ought to come right out of the abundance of your heart. I don't want this to be extortion. I don't want this to be the kind of thing you do, because you white-knuckle your way through giving, right? I want this to be something where you have been genuinely transformed by Christ. You get this clear in your mind, and then you give, and God can celebrate that in every way.
- Hank Smith: 29:43 Thanks, Joe. That was fantastic. John, what do you have for us?
- John Bytheway: 29:47 I'm back with King Benjamin still, how he said, "Okay, what if you see the beggar, and you don't have anything?" He talked... King Benjamin says, "I would that you would say in your heart, "If I had, I would give." So, he's talking about where your heart is in all of this. That ultimately is the doing what you could thing. I appreciate that King Benjamin is talking about not just the amount, but where's your heart. I think it probably pains some people like King Benjamin said that they can't give more. That makes me think of the person you mentioned, Joe, from Zimbabwe that was doing all this stuff, and still didn't think they were doing enough.
- John Bytheway: 30:31 I'm reminded of something that really blessed me from President Henry B. Eyring. I'll have to paraphrase, but in this talk he mentioned someone who might have a calling that feels overwhelming. I'm shifting gears a little bit here, and maybe like that person in Zimbabwe that's got three callings, and he said, "You might even feel resentful, even might want to complain,

but the Lord has given you not demands on your time, but opportunities for service." Then he said this, and I just thought, "Oh, thank you for saying that." So, when you approach the Lord, just you can't do it all. Just ask, "What should I do next?"

- John Bytheway: 31:07 I thought, "Oh, that's perfect. I can't..." What's the game? Whack-a-mole or something, you can't get it all. So, ask the question, "Lord, what should I do next?" That blessed me a lot when I was a little bit overwhelmed. What's the next best thing I can do? Then I can try to be at peace with that.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 31:29 That's really nice.
- Hank Smith: 31:31 I'd like to put myself in the mind of our listeners, and saying, "Okay, I want to help. I think my heart's in the right place. What do I do?" Well, one thing that's very simple to do is to give a generous fast offering. We've already mentioned this before, but I'll tell you a little story. I was a financial clerk. It was a long time ago. It was probably 20 years ago now. This is back when people used checks. I don't know if either of you remember this time but-
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 32:00 Phase of our history.
- Hank Smith: 32:01 People wrote out checks, and it was my job as financial clerk to open those tithing envelopes, and count everything up. I remember one person specifically, a very wealthy man in our ward. He gave a... It was a very large tithing check, but then I always noticed that at times, his fast offering was more than his tithing, which shocked me. I remember pointing that out to my bishop, Bishop Wade Sperry. I remember I said, "Bishop Sperry, this is pretty incredible." He nodded and said, "That's who he is," and yet maybe I can't do that. Maybe I can't give all of that. So, maybe on a smaller scale, this is from an article written by Mindy Raye Friedman back in 2014. It's called Giving More Than Just Money.
- Hank Smith: 32:56 Now, lest anybody think, "Oh, okay, I'm not going to give money. I'll give other things." Giving money is, I think, central to this message. It's, "You have resources. Give them." Are there other things we can give though? This is what she writes. She writes, "One young woman deciding after reading her patriarchal blessing that she wanted to do something grand to help the poor and needy, after unsuccessfully trying to give aid to some people she saw on the street, she thought she'd failed. Then she got home, and found her brother crying, because he'd been teased at school. After taking him out for some ice cream,

and listening to his troubles, she learned a lesson. The poor are just as likely to be in your home as on the streets."

- Hank Smith: 33:41 She says, "There are all sorts of needy people in the world, those who need food and shelter of course, but also those who need love, counsel, and encouragement." So, there's two things we can do. One, we can give a generous fast offering, increase that fast offering. Then second, just look around you and your family, and then look in your neighborhood, like you said, Joe, those seven blocks of your ward. You're bound to find someone who needs your help.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 34:10 The older I get, the more astonished I am at just how much hurt there is in the world in big ways, but also in small ways, and just how much of it is hidden behind the front walls of a house, or how much of it is hidden in the heart. The impoverished is a much bigger crowd when we take into account things beyond just what's physically necessary though also my heavens, what's physically necessary.
- Hank Smith: 34:36 I frequently joke with my students that latter-day saints get together a couple times a week to lie to each other about how they're doing. How are you? I'm doing great. How are you?
- John Bytheway: 34:46 Fine.
- Hank Smith: 34:48 Fine. Doing really well. Can't complain, right? When everybody is struggling in some way.
- John Bytheway: 34:54 Hank, I remember hearing a bishop say that he figured everybody was okay. Then when he became a bishop and started hearing what was going on, he'd sit on the stand and go, "That family's going through this. That family over there is going through this. That family over there is going through this," and then I got to sit there too. That's exactly right. Everybody's going through something, and it really softens you up to let you know everybody's dealing with something, and you're so glad that they're there, and pray that they'll feel that outpouring from being there, and taking the sacrament to feel the Savior's love, because everybody's going through something.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 35:37 Let's hit one more verse in chapter nine, and then... All of this really leads well into what we're going to find in chapters 10 through 13, but this is the way that Paul ends these two chapters about the collection. It's just beautiful in the King James. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." So, all this grace we've been talking about how much God is giving us

and then what that means for us and so on, we want to talk about a cheerful giver, a grateful giver, right? Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Paul has spent two chapters speaking about gifts, but the gift that God gives us is the unspeakable one. So, I like the way that that juxtaposes again, Christ's unmeasurable bounty and what he's given us, and then the measurable but so hard for us, but the measurable gifts we're meant to give.

- Hank Smith: 36:21 The contemporary English version of the Bible says, "Thank God for His gift that is too wonderful for words." I look at that word unspeakable like, "What does that mean?" The gift that is too wonderful for words.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 36:35 Probably a good place to settle here to start would be in chapter 12. Chapters 10, 11 set up some things, and I think we'll want to circle back and look at that a bit, but Paul really gets going here. What he's been doing for a little bit in chapter 11 is fake boasting. What's going on in these chapters? He's upset about some people that he actually calls super apostles, these people who are claiming to be they're not just missionaries. They're the best or something like that. He's fed up with what's going on in Corinth there, and really starts going after them. So, in the kind of parody of them, he boasts a bit. For example, in verse 21 of chapter 11, "I speak as concerning reproach as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, I speak foolishly. I am bold also."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 37:22 "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more, in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I 40 stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 38:09 So, Paul does a little bit of parody boasting, parodic boasting here, kind of making fun of these supposed super apostles who are claiming that they have so much spiritual authority. But all of that sets up what he contrasts with that attitude, and that I think is what we really want to spend some time on. So, this is

now chapter 12. He opens chapter 12 with a little further fake boasting, but he talks here about revelations.

- Hank Smith: 38:37 Whenever I boast, I'm going to say that from now on, "This is just fake boasting."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 38:40 This is fake boasting.
- John Bytheway: 38:43 Don't take me serious.
- Hank Smith: 38:44 Don't take me serious, but but let me tell you how great I am.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 38:46 Right, because one thing... I mean, back in chapter 11, all the boasting is, "Look, I have all the same credentials as any of these people. On top of that, look at all I've gone through." But at the beginning of chapter 12, he focuses on revelations, and he puts it in the third person. He's like, "I know a guy. I know someone who..." Of course, he's talking about himself, but what he does here I think is really interesting in a lot of ways. So, 12:1, "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above 14 years ago, whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth. Such an one caught up to the third heaven, divine vision. And I knew such a man. Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell. God knoweth. How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 39:42 "Of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I will not glory." So, he's playing this little game, right? "But I will glory in mine infirmities." So, he's built up this whole story, all these things he could boast of, could boast of, could boast of. Even to the point of, "Look, I had a vision, something like section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. I was carried up into the heavens. I saw all this." He's like, "Of all of that, who cares? None of that is worth boasting about." Presumably, the people there are claiming they've had revelations and so on, but he's like, "All of that, meh. This isn't the thing. I want to talk about my infirmities." That's really quite a thing. He's going to spell this out further.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 40:21 A thing to note before we go further, notice that he can't say anything about that revelation that he had in heaven. He says that he heard unspeakable words. It's not lawful for man to utter. He can't pass that on, but he goes on to talk about another revelation, and he can utter it. So, this, I think, is very

interesting. This is jumping to verse seven, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me, and he said unto me..." Here's a revelation. "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Then Paul adds, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 41:13

So, this I find very interesting. The chapter opens with, "There's a revelation I had. I can't utter it. I can't explain it, I can't pass it on. All I can say is that it happened." But he can go on immediately to talk about his weaknesses, and he says, "Here, God spoke to me and this I can share. This is the kind of thing to boast about. God spoke and he said, "Yeah, you're pathetic, but my grace is enough." This, I think, is a passage really worth dwelling on some here. Then verse nine, the language there should sound familiar to Latter-day Saints, not just from Paul but from the Book of Mormon. This is the same language we get in Ether 12. What we have happening in Ether 12 of course is it's Moroni. He's been telling this Jaredite history, and then pauses to talk about faith, and he gives a long series of examples of faith from Nephite history, and how witnesses come after our trial of that faith.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 42:04

But at the end of that long history, that long series of examples, he mentions the brother of Jared and his ability to write and so on, and loses his mind. Moroni just starts going, "Yeah, I can't write. I've read the book of Jared. He's a good writer. I'm terrible," and eventually seems to just cry out to God, and say, "Fix my writing." God's response to him is very like this. So, this was Moroni's thorn in the flesh. Paul's, we don't know exactly what it was, but whatever it was that kept him humble. The language is really remarkable here. So coming back to verse nine in chapter 12, what God says is my grace is sufficient for thee. You could translate that more humbly, I think.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 42:44

N.T. Wrights is very nice, I think. He just translates it as my grace is enough for you. So, how do we hear sufficiency or enoughness here? To say my grace is enough for you is just to say, "Why do you want more than that? Why are you trying to be something I haven't made you to be? Why are you trying to reach beyond that when I have given you everything you could possibly need here? Why do you need to do this on your own? That's a hard but also a really beautiful thing to hear. This is what Paul can reveal that he's heard. Grace is enough. "Even if

there are good things we can do, my heaven's fine, whatever. Grace is enough. God is enough. Why do we want to somehow be beyond that, above that? better than that? What on earth are we thinking?"

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 43:34 He goes on to say... This is just to finish the words of the Lord there, and then we can dig into it further, I think. The Lord goes on to say, "For my strength is made perfect in weakness." That might sound strange for God to say that His strength is made perfect in weakness, but there are a couple of obvious ways to hear that. One, of course, if this is Christ speaking to Paul, then that's exactly how it happened. His strength, his divine strength was made perfect in that he came down in the flesh, and was nailed to a cross in utter passivity, utter weakness. My strength is made perfect in weakness. Why are you any better, Paul?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 44:11 But the other way it can be heard of course too is that God's power, God's strength is made perfect in humans embracing their weakness. If human beings are strong enough on their own, if they're somehow good enough to do it all on their own, then where would God's strength show up? We wouldn't need it. We wouldn't ask for it. Only inasmuch as we are weak and we stop running from the fact that we're weak can God's strength be made perfect, show up in the world.

John Bytheway: 44:39 Joe, I love that you brought up Moroni. I have... It sounds to me when I read Mormon chapter eight that his father's death was a surprise, was not expected, and all of a sudden, the Book of Mormon, the whole Book of Mormon fell into Moroni's lap. It's like, "This is my father's work. I have no ore. My father's been killed in battle, all my kinsfolk. I don't even know how long I'm going to live." All of a sudden, he has to finish it. It's an amazing moment when later in Mormon chapter eight, Moroni says, "I make an end of speaking concerning my interpretation to past. I am Moroni. I am a son of Mormon. I'm going to finish this record," and has this amazing transition, but he still keeps confronting his own weakness.

John Bytheway: 45:37 I just feel like when Nephi said, "Oh, wretched man that I am," that was one of his greatest moments, and maybe for all of us when we see our weakness. That's the Ether 12:27, right? What would prevent you from seeing your weakness? Well, pride would, but that could have been one of Nephi's greatest moments when he felt wretched, and Paul used the same language. So, this whole message, I think, sounds like when we can see our weakness, that's when God can do something with us.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 46:09 That's beautifully put. Thanks for bringing up Mormon eight. I think that's exactly right, that Moroni is just crushed. By the way, this has played out a detail that's way too easy to miss in that chapter in fact. When Moroni... When he actually puts a date in there for the first time, it's maybe verse six or something of Mormon eight, it's the year 400. The final war when his father died was 384. It takes Moroni 16 years to write six verses, which I think makes us feel the weight that he apparently felt like he just was crushed under this burden for years. But when he finally comes out of the fog by... It was verse 12 or so when he's like, "Okay, I'm Moroni. Let's do this thing."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 46:50 He's still... Boy, there's anxiety, right? He comes out of what seems to be a really serious bout with depression and probably PTSD, but he's not unscathed. He comes out anxious and worried about whether he's good enough, whether he's strong enough, wrestles with that for the rest of his life as Ether 12 makes clear.
- John Bytheway: 47:07 Thank you. I think of how different the Book of Mormon would be if he were not there, if he didn't come back in Moroni chapter one, and say, "I had not supposed to have written anymore, but I'm not dead yet. So, I'll write a few more things." Boy, imagine without Moroni 10, without his father's letters. I mean, there are some great stuff in those last 10 chapters. Thank you Moroni for persisting in times when you felt weak. Anyway, I love... It's going to be fun to talk Book of Mormon next year about that very thing.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 47:44 Well, and maybe we should dwell with Moroni a little further too on Ether 12.
- John Bytheway: 47:48 Yeah, because it's footnoted there. Footnote 9C, you've got your Ether 12:27 reference there. Made perfect in weakness, right?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 47:56 Exactly. There's actually a line in Ether 12 that I think we often read poorly if we don't read it with Paul. Ether 12:27, there are actually a lot of things in this verse we read poorly, I think, in everyday ways. The Lord's speaking to Moroni here, and we're seeing very similar language to Paul. "If men come unto me, I will show unto them their weakness. 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." I think we have a tendency to read that last line as meaning something like I have things that are particular weaknesses to me, and yet I can

replace those with strengths. But I wonder if that's the right way to hear it when the wording is, "I will make weak things become strong."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 48:50

That's not necessarily replacement. It could be that once we recognize that weakness is in fact a gift, which is how the Lord talks about it there, then those weak things embraced as weak things are strong. At least that's the way Paul talks in the very next verse back in 2 Corinthians 12 in verse 10. "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distress for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." It's not that the weakness has to be replaced with a strength. It's when I finally stop resisting the fact that I am weak, oh, wretched man that I am, that's the very moment that I'm strong. It may be then weak things becoming strong is not at all replacement. Weak things are strong in their weakness. I'm struck, Ether 12 just going on, verse 28, this is still the Lord speaking.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 49:43

He promises to show the Gentiles their weakness. That might feel like it's unconnected from what he says next, but I think it's actually directly connected. So he says, "I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope, and charity bringeth unto me the fountain of all righteousness." So, what does showing the Gentiles their weakness have to do with showing them that faith, hope, and charity brings to Christ? I think the answer has to be that faith, hope, and charity are perfect examples of something that is profoundly weak and profoundly strong. If I have faith, it means I don't know. I can't prove. I can't just knock everyone over with it. It's weak. It's a position of weakness, and yet, faith is what moves mountains. Faith is the strongest force we can have in Christ.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 50:27

Hope. The future could turn out different. I could be hoping for the wrong thing. My hope could be completely misplaced. The future is unknown. It's always a position of weakness to be in a position of hope. As we all know, hope is the kind of thing that makes us strong enough to keep going through very difficult things. Charity or love, there's no more vulnerable or weak position than being in love, whether that's romantic or whether that's just fraternal or whatever. Love opens you up to abuse and hurt and sorrow and sadness and so on, and yet nothing moves the world like love. So, I think these are perfect examples of we don't need to take weak things out of us, and get strong things instead. It's when we get weakness right, it is itself strength.

John Bytheway: 51:15 Well, I never thought of that before. That is great stuff. I knew where you were going with faith and hope, and then I thought, "Where is he going to go with charity?" But you're right. I remember Truman Madsen, I think, saying, "When you truly love someone, you have doubled your capacity for pain." Aww.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 51:33 Right. It's so true. It's so true.

John Bytheway: 51:36 Because you hurt for them or you worry about them, and that makes you vulnerable, because you love and care for them. But then when they go through hard times, you go through hard times too. That's great stuff. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 51:50 Weakness is a gift. Weakness is a gift. I mean, to concretize that a little, my own experience as a missionary years ago went along these lines. I spent the first year of my mission trying to be everything as a missionary. I was going to do all the things missionaries do right and well. A couple of experiences about a year out just humbled me to the dust, where I just realized I had no idea what I was doing. But then as a result, somehow over the next year, I began to realize, "Well, there are some things I seem to have a gift for, and there are other things that I'm just really, really bad at as a missionary." Instead of then trying to like, "Okay, my job is to take those things I'm bad at, and just work on those all the time," I thought, "Well, what if I leave to others who have those strengths, that stuff, and I work on the thing God seems to have given me certain gifts for?"

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 52:42 I got over my weakness. I stopped trying to be good enough. I stopped trying to do all things. The transformation in my experience as a missionary was night and day, immensely more success, immensely more happy, and just completely different. But my heavens, if I continued trying to make sure I do all the things, this is not talking about obedience, right? I was still obedient, but I didn't have to be the perfect tractor, and the perfect discussion giver, and the perfect leader, and the perfect companion, and the... I just had to find a couple of things where God could work through me really clearly, and give myself to that, weak and then strong.

John Bytheway: 53:25 Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:01 Welcome to part two with Dr. Joseph M. Spencer, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 through 13.
- Hank Smith: 00:07 Joe, a couple of weeks ago we had Dr. Adam Miller come on and talk to us about how we had the gospel kind of backwards, that love is the law, not the reward. I'm looking at some of these different translations of Second Corinthians 12 verse nine, contemporary English version. "My Gift of undeserved grace is all you need," God's word translation. "My kindness is all you need." Good news translation, "My grace is all you need." I could keep going.
- Hank Smith: 00:38 How do I balance that with Nephi saying in Second Nephi, "It is by grace that we are saved after all that we can do," that I need to earn my salvation, that somehow I need to earn celestial glory. How would you help our listeners balance that a little bit?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 00:57 So, I think the key to this is that it's not a balance. We should be completely out of balance toward grace. But let me see if I can explain what Nephi is up to.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 01:07 Yeah, I think this is an absolutely essential thing to get clear because it does, at first glance, look like Second Nephi 25:23 says you have to do all you can and then grace kicks in and saves, right? The very first thing to notice is that we can only make it say that if we mangle the words a bit. It doesn't say, "It's by grace that we are saved after we do all we can." It's, "We're saved by grace after all we can do." Nephi doesn't actually refer at all to us doing anything, he only refers to what we can do. And I think that's an important distinction.
- Hank Smith: 01:38 Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 01:39 After anything I even could do, it's grace that saves. And that feels to me like, again, King Benjamin. King Benjamin says, "Imagine if you were to give all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess to God." And then he says, "And in fact, let's say you served him with all your whole soul."

- Hank Smith: 01:57 Perfection. "Yet."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 01:59 Yeah, exactly. "If you did it right," he says, "... You would yet be unprofitable servants." And I think sometimes we can read that and be like, "Oh, I guess he just thinks we're pathetic." But no, he's telling you, if you did it right, if you did everything the way you were supposed to, you would still be unprofitable servants. So, it's not that we're pathetic, it's that it's literally impossible for us to do this. Even if we could do all the things, it's grace that saves. So, the simple way to, I think, just clarify the verse is that way. It's just say, "No. What he's saying clearly is, 'Look, after anything you even possibly could do, it's not you, it's grace. It's grace that saves.'"
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 02:36 And I think we can make it even clearer though. And that's by looking at what Jacob says a few chapters earlier. Nephi is actually kind of copying this from his little brother. So, Second Nephi 10, this is verse 24, so 15 chapters earlier Jacob says this, and I think Nephi is just restating it but not changing it. Jacob says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, not to the will of the devil and the flesh. And remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 03:08 So, a couple of things are really clarifying right there. First of all, it is only in and through the grace of God that you're saved. That makes that perfectly clear. We've got no hope, no hope outside of grace. But two, notice he's got an after clause just like Nephi does. And what the after thing here is reconcile to God. That's what the after is about, right? All we can do, it seems, is be reconciled to God. That's it. And being reconciled to God isn't me doing much, it's me getting over myself, right? Reconciliation is what we need when there's something wrong in a relationship. And if there's something wrong in the relationship between me and God, we can guess who the problem is. It's not God.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 03:50 So, if I have to be reconciled to God, it's because I have been running from him. And what Jacob seems to be saying, now taking all of that and backing up a step, so he says, "Remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved." If he has to tell us to remember this, apparently we have a temptation to forget. So, once we are reconciled to God, we start going, "Man, I'm awesome. Look at what I did. I stopped running from God." And he's like, "No, no. Second you have reconciled with God, remember, don't you dare forget this was grace. Even your reconciliation was grace."

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 04:27 And I think if we hear Jacob really clearly, then it's really easy to hear Nephi saying the same thing. He says, "We labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God" Same language. We've got to be reconciled to God. Why? Because we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. I think it's exactly the same message, be reconciled, all you could do is be reconciled. And the second you are "My heavens, don't you dare forget that it was grace that did it."
- Hank Smith: 04:59 It's interesting to me that we focus in on that verse in the Book of Mormon when there's so many others that can help us understand. I remember once I was in a class with Stephen Robinson and he said, "I think most Latter-day Saints feel like their works are going to save them." So, he said, "They feel like they deserve heaven. Let's go look up 'deserve.'" So, he took us to the Topical Guide and he said, "Let's look up 'deserve.'" And it wasn't there. There is no 'deserve; in the Topical Guide. And he said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I meant 'earn.' So, let's go to earn in the Topical Guide," and we went there and it wasn't there again. And he said, "Oh, 'deserve' and 'earn,' those probably aren't scriptural words. Let's go to 'merit.' That sounds like a scriptural word." So, we went to 'merit' and it is there. And then, he had us read the four references-
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 05:48 All merits of Christ.
- Hank Smith: 05:50 ... That are in merit and it says, "Here's the four references. Second Nephi 2:8, "No flesh can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits of the Holy Messiah." Alma 22:14, "Man could not merit anything of himself." Alma 24:10, "God will take away the guilt from our hearts through the merits of his son." And then, Moroni 6:4, "We rely alone upon the merits of Christ." The message of the Book of Mormon is, "Grace saves."
- Hank Smith: 06:24 Joe, I love what you've taught us here. I can hear some listeners at home, not that I can actually hear them, that would be pretty incredible, but I can hear maybe some of those listening at home saying, "Well, don't my works matter? Doesn't what I do matter to my salvation?" What would you say to them?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 06:42 Yeah. I mean, there's a bunch to say, but maybe the first place to start here is we have a temptation to think, "I've got to earn my salvation by my works, but of course I'm never quite good enough. And so grace kicks in and then-"
- Hank Smith: 06:57 Makes up the difference.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 06:58 Makes up for the rest, yeah. We often talk that way. I think if you could take that picture, that picture we sometimes have in our heads, and make a slogan out of it, it would be something like, "I'm saved by my works, but I'm judged in grace." Right?
- Hank Smith: 07:11 Okay. Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 07:12 The irony about that, of course, is that's literally the opposite of what scripture says over and over and over again. Every time it talks about salvation, literally every time scripture talks about salvation, it says, "We're saved by grace." And literally every time it talks about judgment, it says, "We're judged by our works." So, we tend to flip those around. So, our work's doing something in this picture. Yeah, we got to figure that out. But it's not salvation that the works are key for. That's, I think, the key thing. So, how do we understand what it means to say, "We're saved by grace and yet judged by our works"? Well, two options. One, we might just go, "Well, if we're judged by our works, then our works are somehow going to..." Yeah, we're saved from sin or something like that by salvation. But then, works are like they decide just how high we go or something like that. That would be one way we might understand that.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 08:04 But I think a far better way, and I think this is what Section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants points to, would be to say, "It's grace that saves us. What our works show God, what it means for him to judge our works is that our works show God what our relationship to grace looks like." He can read our works, so to speak, and then say, "Oh, I see how much you've resisted," so to speak, or, "How much you've given in to the grace that there is." And that's what I hear in Section 137, that we'll be judged by our works and the desires of our hearts. Our works reveal the desires of our hearts. And I think we sometimes view that as we'll be judged in terms of our works, "Did you do enough?", and your desires, "I wish I could have done more." But I think that the better way to hear it is, "Our very works show what our desires actually look like."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 08:54 So, let me see if I can't spell that out a little more. So far as I can tell, there are maybe three ways we could respond to grace. Our natural temptation, this is what Benjamin calls the natural man. Paul also uses that phrase, the natural man, in First Corinthians, in fact. But our natural temptation is, of course, to resist. Everything in us wants to be fully good, completely on our own terms, "I want to have been good. I want to have been sufficient, not God." So, we can resist. But resistance can look like two very different things.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 09:29 The kind of obvious form of resistance is to say, "I do what I want. I run in the opposite direction. So, God gives me grace and I just reject it." But the other form of resistance is actually to try to prove that I am good enough in myself. So, another way of resisting God's goodness toward me is to try to prove to Him that I am good. I don't just reject all goodness and run in the other direction. I try to prove that I didn't need him to be good toward me in the first place. And then, a third option, of course, is just to give in, "To yield to the enticing of the Holy Spirit." That's King Benjamin again. To yield to what God gives in grace. So, if there are three ways of responding to grace, then it might be that we need, say, three degrees of glory, that we in fact might think of the version in which I run from God in every way and I just say, "I don't want to have anything to do with you," call that telestial.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 10:24 But there's a version in which I try to be good on my own. This is not about Jesus making things possible and me working with him. This is about me trying to show that I'm good enough, so I do good things in the world, but I haven't quite ever sort of valiantly grabbed hold of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Call that terrestrial. And then, there's a version in which I let the grace of God overwhelm me and make possible every good work he's trying to do in and through me. Call that celestial.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 10:52 I think that's one way of thinking about what's at stake there. It's not that if I do X number of works, I get telestial glory, and if I do Y number of works I get terrestrial, and Z number of works I get celestial. But instead, in my very actions, the things I do, God can say, "I see whether you ran from me in the other direction, whether you tried to somehow prove that you were inherently lovable and that I didn't need to help you, or whether your works show that you gave in and we did this work together."
- Hank Smith: 11:21 That was just wonderful.
- John Bytheway: 11:23 I mentioned, I think on a previous podcast, a time when I sat by an evangelical minister on a plane and he said, "You guys believe in the Jesus of the gaps," and that, "You'll do all this and then God will make up the gap in the end," which is kind of what you had addressed there. And I did my own thing and Hank I found seven, I found seven in the index, not the Topical Guide, in the index under merits, and went through all of those. And I mean, I did later. I wish I'd had them on the tip of my tongue when I was sitting next to this man, but that was really helpful to me. But one of the things I think our listeners might bring up, and we're not there yet, is, "What about this phrase in

Philippians, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling'?"

- John Bytheway: 12:09 It's one of those verses where you have to read the next verse, where that's Philippians 2:12, the end of it, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And then Philippians 2:13, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will, he's going to change our hearts and our desires and to do of his good pleasure." And when I think of that phrase, "After all we can do," I sometimes love to go to the Book of John where Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches, and without me you can do..." How much can we do? "Nothing." And there's no gap. From the very beginning, it's all about Christ. And that helps me too. But what a wonderful discussion when we hear that phrase, "Work out your own salvation," but it's God that's working in us. And thank you for saying that we think we're saved by our works and judged by grace when it's literally the opposite.
- John Bytheway: 13:18 I feel like... And help me with this, I feel like... And maybe I've oversimplified it but works are not a formula for salvation but are more kind of a fruit of salvation.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 13:33 Exactly.
- John Bytheway: 13:33 They're a result of... The way you said it is the way that we relate to grace, the works kind of flow naturally. And I don't ever want to discount the idea of striving, but I think striving to get our hearts right with God, then the works just kind of flow and it's more natural. Now, you know what, you guys? Sometimes I'm not there. If I wanted to say, "I'm going to wait until my motives are perfect before I do this good work," I might never do anything, right?
- Hank Smith: 14:03 Right.
- John Bytheway: 14:05 So, I don't want people to think, "Well, as soon as my motives are perfect, then I'll give a fast offering or something." We can't stagnate. So, I think there's something to be said for trying and asking God to help us have the best purest motives for things. But some of us aren't there yet. I'm one of them.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 14:24 Yeah. I have a bunch of thoughts in response to what you were saying, John. I love it. I'll respond to the last thing you were saying there first. I'll talk to my students so I teach at BYU, right? And I'll say to my students as we talk through grace, "Once we get clear what's actually at stake here, there's some sense in

which this picture is actually in a lot of ways harder," because it's not like, "Oh..." I mean, if I just had a list, "Here are the things I have to do." Okay, great. Even if it's really long or really hard and so on, I'm good at getting things done. But it's not that. What I have to do is get over myself and that is so much harder. I genuinely have to get out of the way for God to do his work and that... I have to break my heart again and again and again.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 15:10 So, there's some sense in which the picture here is actually way harder. Salvation is not harder because that's God's work. He does that, right? But getting over myself and giving myself to him, yeah, my motivations are not always pure. They're constantly off and I have to come back, be reconciled to God again and again and again.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 15:30 The other thought that I thought I'd share here is, yeah, Philippians 2:12 and 13 is really nice, and I think one way to hear Paul's language of fear and trembling is something like this. So, when we had our fourth child, she came very fast, scary fast. We'd gone into the hospital and my wife wasn't progressing, they sent us home. We'd been home 20 minutes and my wife's like, "We're going now." "Okay." So, we're in the car and she's climbing up the seat in pain and we're racing to the hospital. We get there, one step out of the elevator and her water breaks. They put us in a triage room and the baby was born seven minutes later. I mean, it was like a, "Okay, so everything is fine, right?"
- Hank Smith: 16:10 It would have been... Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 16:11 Yeah. So, as soon as it's all over and they're weighing the baby and so on, I suddenly have this wave hit me of, "I could have delivered this child in the car."
- Hank Smith: 16:20 Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 16:21 Right? And I started to pass out and they're like, "Oh, do you not do well with birth? I'm like, "No, that's not it. I can do births. It's that I might've been the doctor." So, they had to get me apple juice.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 16:34 But that moment was really kind of a striking one. It was a moment of fear and trembling, but not because I had to do the thing. It was because I realized what it would've been like if I had. I was delivered purely in grace from having to deliver my daughter, right? But in the moment there with real fear and real

trembling, I saw retroactively what it would've been if it hadn't been God's work that got it done.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 17:00 And I think that's the kind of thing Paul's got in mind here. With fear and trembling, you realize what it would look like if it weren't God doing his will and his good pleasure in us. Fear and trembling here doesn't mean I have got to fear and tremble about whether I'm good enough to do the work I've got to do to earn salvation. No, it's that I fear and tremble because, "My heavens, look at what God has made possible."
- John Bytheway: 17:24 I cannot recreate myself. And that's why I love that Paul uses the idea of a new creature. He is the creator and he can work in us and make us a new creature. And I feel like we've come to Christ and now we're trying to become like Christ because he asked us to, but I'm not going to make it, I'm not going to make it without him. But he asked me, "What manner of men and women ought ye to be?" And that's a really tall order.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 17:54 Yeah. Really, really appreciate what you were saying about striving because yeah, when we start talking about grace, it can start to feel like, "Oh. Well, great. I could just coast for a bit or something," right? But no, striving I think is exactly it. The trick is that I'm not striving for my salvation. I'm striving because Christ saves me. I'm thinking here... King Benjamin is just running through everything we're talking about, right? But I'm thinking here again of King Benjamin. The people have fallen on the ground, they've cried out for mercy and Christ has given it to them. And then, Benjamin says, "Okay, we got more to talk about." And you almost want to say, "Well, no. We're done, aren't we? They cried out, they got grace, we're done." But then he goes on to say, "Now, can we do this every day? And if you do, here's what this is going to look like."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 18:36 And he ends that chapter in Mosiah 4 by saying, "Now everything has got to be done in wisdom and order, but you've also got to run earnestly, fast, to win the prize." He describes striving, but the striving here comes after the experience of grace. It's not what gets us the experience of grace. So, once grace overwhelms me, he says, "Now. Now you can see how big the problem in the world is. You can see the suffering that we were talking about in chapters eight and nine. You can see how much poverty there is. You can see how much hurt and sorrow there is. You can see where people are struggling spiritually. So, now the work finally begins. So, now you strive like mad." But you're not doing it for selfish purposes, "I've got to somehow deliver myself." You've been delivered, you've been delivered.

Now we strive because so many people hurt, so many people need, we've got work to do.

- John Bytheway: 19:29 That was great. That helps a lot. I felt like that was maybe the missing piece is, "So, there's no striving anymore, but..." I love to what you just put it, "This striving is about doing what Jesus would do because look at the problems we're surrounded by." Thank you. You brought it right back to Corinthians 2.
- Hank Smith: 19:45 Joe, I would like to hear a little bit more about this idea of surrendering to grace. I love it, it rings true to my soul. I don't know how to do it.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 19:59 Yeah. It's hard, I think. It's hard to know exactly how to concretize it. So, when Benjamin, he's quoting the angel here very famously, a passage people know very well, "The natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields." "Yields." So, I think if you take the image of 'enemy to God' and 'yield' together, that's very strong, almost harsh imagery. He almost gives you a picture where you've got your sword at God's throat, and then what you finally do is you put your sword down, you yield, you give up. You go from being an enemy to surrendering. And so, that's a weird image to think about of, us putting a sword up to God's throat or something, obviously.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 20:38 But that's the kind of image that the angel is using there and I wonder if that's a way of thinking about it. We are just so on our guard, we're so defensive, we're so sure that if God takes over, if we give ourselves over to God, we're going to lose something essential to us, we're going to lose something of our identity or something of our interests or something of our hopes. Obviously, one can think here of that wonderful passage by C. S. Lewis about God coming in and starting to redesign the house and knocking out walls here and putting out a wing there because he wants to turn you into a palace that he can come and dwell in. And it hurts abominably, we don't want that, we want it to be a cozy little cottage. So, we're on our guard and I think surrendering is just finally giving in, just finally putting our weapons down, putting down our resistances, letting our defenses go and seeing what God wants to do.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 21:27 So, maybe a couple of ways we could make that concrete. I mean, sometimes that really is just like we stop resisting a commandment. A commandment's a grace. That's a gift. God didn't have to give us good guidance in how to live well and we put up a resistance like, "You can't tell me what to do. You can't tell me that..." As if I didn't know how to live well myself," or

whatever. And surrendering there just looks like humbling yourself enough to go, "What if maybe God all-knowing is all-knowing and actually has a sense of what I ought to do here?" Sometimes it might look like getting over ourselves enough that we can be weak and humble around others instead of saying, "I'm fine on Sunday," as you were saying, we come together to lie to each other instead of lying, I'm humble enough to say, "Yeah, life is really tough right now and I have no idea what to do." That's I think a way of giving in so that God's work can get going.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 22:21 It could be as simple as finally listening to others instead of just making sure everyone's hearing what I have to say or think or whatever. In a lot of ways it's always just a getting over of the self. The problem is always the ego. The problem is always that we are sure we've got it. And, my heavens, in an age of social media and smartphones, that disease is rampant, just rampant. It's so easy to get trapped in our self-perception and to think that our opinions can't be questioned and that, if anyone even questions them, we're being somehow traumatized and so on. But God is bigger than our self-perception. He's bigger than our ego.

John Bytheway: 23:07 A phrase that has helped me is that, before the Savior even appears in person, this voice to the righteous in the New World says, "No more animal sacrifice. The to-do list. I want you to bring a broken heart and a contrite spirit." And when you think of a broken heart, as a teenager, that's all those songs on the radio. A broken heart is a romantic thing, "Don't go breaking my heart." It's all that. But somebody explained it once that I thought, "Oh, okay. A broken heart." If you're taking a horse out of the wild and taming that horse, they call it breaking the horse. A broken heart is a heart that's submissive to its master. Maybe that's a way to look at the surrender.

John Bytheway: 23:53 So, a broken heart is, as you said, "I am submissive to the master. I can't do this myself. I know I can't do this myself. I need the Savior, I need his Atonement, I need his grace. I'm a broken heart and a contrite spirit," helps me Hank to kind of how do I do that? What did you call it? Surrender thing. My heart is broken and I realize I'm just as needy as everybody else with his grace. Sometimes we're just overwhelmed and we go, "Well, just tell me what I need to do. Show me the checklist."

John Bytheway: 24:23 President Oaks' talk, The Challenge to Become, it's not even about what you're doing. What kind of person are you becoming? What are you letting God remake you into? Are you letting him make you a new creature?" Harder to quantify.

"When do I check the box of being a good husband? Am I ever done? Or being a good father?" Maybe that's why it's easier to go to, "Well, show me the list."

- John Bytheway: 24:48 I'm so glad though, Joe, that you've brought up, "How do you read King Benjamin and not get that we're all beggars? Do we really believe that?" I think Benjamin's so good at that. And then, he says, "Ye will not have a mind to injure one another." He's not giving a lesson on, "Be kind." He's saying, "No, after you are saved, the rest of this stuff will come naturally. You won't have that same mind anymore." And we should be kind, but that's not the order of events here.
- Hank Smith: 25:19 Elder Maxwell says, "This is a gospel of grand expectations," and it is. And one reason why members are so hard on themselves is because they have such high expectations of themselves. The first thing to be said about this feeling of inadequacy is that it is normal. There is no way the church can honestly describe where we must go and what we must yet do without creating a sense of immense distance, following celestial road signs while in telestial traffic jams is not easy, especially when we are not just moving next door or even across town. So, Joe, another clarifying question would be where do commandments, and you've hit on this already, but where do commandments, ordinances, covenants, obedience, like you said when you were in the mission field, where does that fit in with grace? John sometimes refers to, "We don't want to embrace some sort of cheap grace because that diminishes what the Savior wants to make of us." So, how would you answer that question? Where do all these things come in?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 26:21 Maybe it's worth focusing on covenants in particular because, when we talk about grace this way, it can start to sound like, "Well, then I don't even have to get baptized." Right? I mean, it's covenants, right?
- Hank Smith: 26:29 Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 26:32 And I think that may be one that, if we clarify, a lot gets clearer. So, I'm going to lean on King Benjamin one more time here. I think Paul would endorse King Benjamin pretty straightforwardly. So, the order of King Benjamin's discourse, the whole experience, I think is actually really quite significant and easy to miss because we tend to sort of be focused locally, a verse at a time. So, he begins by laying out our indebtedness to God. He created you, he blesses you. All of this indebts you to God. That's in chapter two. Then in chapter three, he lays out the Christian atonement. He lays out Christ's coming and blood

and how it atones, and so forth, and talks about the natural man being an enemy to God and so on.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 27:12 So, he's now, "Look, you are completely indebted to God. But, boy, you've got a temptation to do something awful, to run in the other direction from God. But Christ is coming. There's atonement, there's reconciliation, and so on." The beginning of chapter four is where the people are all now on the ground and they cry out for mercy, and the Spirit comes on them and they feel cleansed. And then, Benjamin, surprisingly... We mentioned this earlier, Benjamin surprisingly says, "There's more. There's a remainder to talk about."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 27:40 And what he says there, those next handful of verses are absolutely crucial, verses 11 and 12 maybe do it clearest. He says, "Again, I say unto you, as I have said before, that as you have come to the knowledge of the glory of God or if you have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love and have received the remission of your sins, which cause that such exceedingly great joy in your souls," this is what they just experienced, right? They were just on the ground crying out to God. And he says, "Okay. So, if you've done that, even so I would that you should remember and always retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness and his goodness and long-suffering toward you unworthy creatures and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 28:25 So, he says, "Okay, you just did this. What I want to know is, can you do it tomorrow? And can you do it the next day? And can you do it the next day? Can you remember God's greatness and your dependence on him? Can you call on his name daily, not just this one time? Can you stand steadfastly in the faith of what's coming, not just believe in the angel's words now?"
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 28:48 And then he makes a series of promises starting in verse 12, which we've been talking about. "If you do this, you'll always rejoice, you'll be filled with the love of God, you'll retain a remission of your sins, you'll grow in the knowledge of God and so on, you'll take care of your families, you'll watch out for the beggar and so on." He talks all the way through chapter four making promises. Chapter five, the people respond to this injunction, right? He says, "I want you to do this daily." In chapter five, this is their response. They say a couple of words about, "No, we believe what you've been saying and so on." But then, in verse five they say this, this is Mosiah five, chapter five,

verse five, "And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do His will and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that He shall command us all the remainder of our days." The placement of covenant in this I think is really crucial.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 29:32

So, Benjamin says, "Look, it's grace. You're created in grace, every blessing is a grace, every commandment is a grace but, man, you run in the other direction. But Christ, Christ atones. Reconcile yourself, come back." And they all do it. And he's like, "Good. Now, can we do that whole thing tomorrow? And the next day? And the next day? And the next day? And the next day?" What President Nelson keeps calling daily continual repentance, right? "Can you do this over and over and over again?" And the people go, "Ah, covenant." Their way of committing themselves to the daily task of coming back is covenant.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 30:07

So, I think the picture we're getting from King Benjamin's speech is not one where, "I make a covenant and then grace kicks in because I've got a covenant," nor is it a picture in which, "I have grace so I don't need a covenant." It's a picture in which, "As soon as grace overwhelms me and I get it and I feel I want to make that my daily life, I want that to be the shape of my existence, covenant is the way I bind myself to that task."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 30:32

So, I understand Benjamin would be saying something like, "What we're doing in baptism or any covenant we make is we are committing ourselves to reconciling ourselves to God again and again and again. I have publicly bound myself to the task of coming back to grace, to stop running from God again and to stop again and to stop again, and to get back into this right position so that God can propel me into his work, so that I won't turn away the beggar, so that I'll be filled with the love of God and I'll retain a remission of my sins and so on, rather than this just being a one-time shot."

Hank Smith: 31:08

Joe, thank you for that incredible discussion on grace.

Hank Smith: 31:12

There's a part of the manual that brings up a new topic. It's under the heading, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." Let me read what the manual has to say, "Today, as in Paul's day, there are those who seek to lead us away from the simplicity that is in Christ. For that reason, it's crucial to do what Paul suggested, examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. You could start this process by thinking about what it means to be in the faith. How do you know if you are in the faith? Look for opportunities to examine yourself."

Hank Smith: 31:43 And then, the manual brings up another quote from Paul, "As part of your examination, you might also ponder the phrase, 'the simplicity that is in Christ.'" And then, a couple of questions. "How have you found simplicity in Christ in his gospel? How might your mind be corrupted from that simplicity?" And then a quote from President Uchtdorf, "If you ever think that the gospel isn't working so well for you, I invite you to step back, look at your life from a higher plane." I don't think he means plane on this one, but I'm glad he got that in there.

John Bytheway: 32:15 Which he has literally done. He has literally done. He's looked at the whole earth from a higher plane.

Hank Smith: 32:22 A very high plane. "And simplify your approach to discipleship. Focus on the basic doctrines, principles, and applications of the gospel. I promise," says Elder Uchtdorf, "... That God will guide and bless you on your path to a fulfilling life and the gospel will definitely work better for you."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 32:40 Yeah, simplicity is a good thing to pause over here because, I mean, anyone who is a convert can tell you that there's very little that's simple about the Latter-day Saints' faith, right? 10 million callings and one is general conference and-

Hank Smith: 32:55 The meetings.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 32:56 ... People and this many scriptures. And if we were to take all of our scriptures seriously, everything from Ezekiel to... I mean, this is not simple in a lot of ways, right? But also, in the midst of all of that, are these simple things. So, I think we have to be a little careful because we can sometimes just be like, "Look, the gospel is super simple." And if we beat someone over the head with that, they can just feel lost.

Hank Smith: 33:18 Yeah, like, "It doesn't look simple to me. What am I doing wrong?"

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 33:21 Exactly. And we can oversimplify. There are times where we need to make sure we're clear about the simplicity of the gospel, but if we oversimplify, we can actually make things really disastrous. I think in a lot of ways oversimplification looks like that crowd that Lehi describes, that tries to obtain the path, but they have nothing to do with the rod. They're like, "Look, it's a simple road. That's all it is." And as soon as it's dark and obscure, they wander off. We can oversimplify in a way that we

actually under-represent the gospel. So, I think we've got to get the right balance here.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 33:55

A couple of things might help us there, I think. So, first of all, when Paul says this in chapter eleven, verse three, the Greek word he uses that's translated as 'simplicity' is maybe helpful. It's a version of the Greek word 'haplous.' So, that's translated to simplicity, which is a straightforward translation. In a certain way, haplous literally means without fold. So, that at the beginning of it is a primitive alpha, they call it, which means it's like a negation, and then 'plous' is like our word ply, which means to fold, so multiply many fold or whatever, right?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 34:27

So, literally the word translated to simplicity here means without fold, it's not folded, it's not complex in that sense that there are multiple layers and so on and so forth. It's the same word that is translated as single when Jesus talks in Matthew 6 about, "Your eye." You have to have an eye single. It has to be unfolded, it has to be without fold, without complexity. And in fact, translations will often render this, not simplicity, but single-mindedness. The kind of thing that Paul is calling for here, sometimes we think of simplicity and we just think, "I just need four basics." But simplicity here actually means a kind of singular focus, a recognition of what matters most so that my eye isn't unhealthy, the kind of thing I can look straightforward from, because this gives me the right vantage point, which is the kind of image that Elder Uchtdorf was using.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 35:20

So, I think simplicity, we can miss here if we think it just means that, "I ought to be able to build a very straightforward system out of the gospel." What it actually means is, "Can I get the position from which I can stand and see perfectly clearly? Can I have an eye single?" That, I think, is a nice way of talking about the simplicity of the gospel. What is the core...? And I think this is what Elder Uchtdorf is trying to talk about when he says, "Come back to some basics."

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 35:46

If I can say, "Okay, there are a lot of complexities. Fine, fine, fine. But here's where I know I stand. This is my faith in Christ. Or this is the kernel of repentance I need to do. Or this is the covenant I've made." It's not that I'm denying that there are all kinds of complexities in the gospel, it's I'm regaining my orientation, regaining stability and saying, "Here are the things I'm clear and sure about. Now I can see clearly again. And with my eye single, I can start to look at those things that are darker, complex, more difficult or whatever it is." It's a passage we can misuse and I think we want to be careful about that, but it's also

really crucial kind of recommendation, "Man, if we can just get our orientation clear, we can start to sort out the rest."

- John Bytheway: 36:29 I was thinking about first principles of the gospel because sometimes, if everything seems so complex out there, you just want to go, "Well, what are the first principles then?" And then, you've got faith in Christ and repentance. But I'm not sure that sounds like a list too, so I'm not sure if I'm on the right track here. I like that explanation of simplicity.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 36:51 Well, I think those first principles, that's precisely the kind of idea that we come back to those precisely because, boom, "I can get my bearings again. Okay, okay, okay. This is the covenant I made at baptism. That's where I stand. I can take my next steps again." It can feel kind of, like earlier, John, you mentioned this like, "Sometimes I would think of all the things I've got to do, but the real question is what do I do next? What's the very next thing to do?" I think of this as something like breathing. If you think of all the breaths you've got to take in your life and try to take them all now, one, it would kill you, and two, it wouldn't allow you to go on living. The breath that has to be taken now is this one, and then after that there's another one, and after that, there's another one.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 37:35 Simplicity looks something like that. I mean, there's a reason that we talk about counting your breaths and meditation when you're trying to simplify, come back to, "Okay, I'm a body, I'm breathing, everything else here I can work through. I have to kind of get back to square one. Where do I stand? What am I? Okay." And I can take my next steps. The complexity of the gospel is seldom because it's this big massive, complicated system I've got to get my head around. It's that I can start to lose sight of where I'm standing. I'm trying to take on everything. I'm trying to take on the whole picture and make sure I understand everything, and I've done all the things instead of what's next? What's needful? What right now?
- Hank Smith: 38:14 Perhaps this is what Elder Lawrence Corbridge was after in the BYU speech he gave.
- John Bytheway: 38:21 Stand Forever?
- Hank Smith: 38:22 Yeah, Stand Forever. If any of our listeners haven't listened to that talk, I hope you will. And Joe, maybe you can comment on this and how it might fit. Elder Corbridge says that, when you feel a little lost in all of the complexity on all there is to know, it's just unending things that we'd like to know. He says, "Begin by answering the primary questions. There are primary

questions and there are secondary questions. Answer the primary questions first." Or almost I can hear you saying, Joe, Come back to the primary questions. "Not all questions are equal, and not all truths are equal. The primary questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate. There are only a few primary questions. I will mention four of them." I don't think he's giving an exhaustive list here. I think he's saying, "Here's four primary questions that can help you get your perspective back."

- Hank Smith: 39:16 "Is there a God who is our Father? Is Jesus Christ the son of God, the Savior of the world? Is Joseph Smith a prophet? Is the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the kingdom of God on the earth? By contrast, the secondary questions are unending." And he goes through a list of secondary questions that I'm sure we can make pages and pages of secondary questions. But he says, "If you answer the primary questions, the secondary questions can get answered too, or they pale in significance, and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't, and things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship altogether." Is that sort of this idea of coming back to your center, coming back to your core so you can see everything else in perspective?
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 40:06 Yeah, I think that's exactly it. I'm struck that his list of four questions there sound like a slightly expanded version of what J. Reuben Clark called the latitude and longitude of education in the church. There are really just two things, right? Jesus is the Christ, Joseph is a prophet. And he says, "Come back to that. And if you know where you're at latitudinally and longitudinally, you know where you're at on the globe." That seems very right. The rest of it, yeah, we can work that out. We can work that all out.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 40:36 I'm a philosopher by training, which means I like things to be ridiculously complex. I enjoy it if they're ridiculously complex. But also the best philosophy, even there, the best philosophy is work that says... And part of the reason everyone hates philosophy is because it tends to take things that are very, very foundational and say, "Do we really understand even that?" So, you want nice complexity and so on, but you also want to come back to really hard kernel foundational things.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 41:06 I'm thinking here, as we're talking, about Mosiah 18. So, Alma the Elder is launching the Nephite Christian Church, organizing it under these priests and so on and so forth, and when he gives instructions to the priests, he tells them to preach nothing but faith and repentance. And I think if you told a ward all of the

talks are going to be about faith and repentance, people would stop coming after three or four weeks like, "The same topic? We heard that last time." Right?

Hank Smith: 41:29

Right.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 41:30

But I think what Alma has got to mean is that, no matter what the topic, no matter where a thing goes, it gets re-grounded in those two things. Comes back to the simplicity. Does the thing that's being taught or the thing that's being talked about, increase the faith of those there? Do they believe more? And does it drive them to reconcile themselves to God again? And that might be a talk about Kolob and it might be a talk about something as simple as the definition of faith. But the complexity rooted in simplicity is probably the way to think about it.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 42:02

I'll touch on another verse here. This is back in chapter 10, but it might be a way of thinking about all of this. Here's how it's rendered in the King James version, he's talking about the weapons of their warfare and he says, "We use them to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." That last line is what draws my attention. "We take every thought prisoner," is how N. T. Wright renders it. "We take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah." And it feels to me like that's something like the simplicity we're talking about. No matter what the thing is, no matter where the complexity is and so on, I can bring it back under this one overarching point of faith. I can see it from that vantage, and then it'll be all right. Everything has to be consecrated to the one true God and then all the complexity can be worked out.

Hank Smith: 43:02

I was looking for a quote from Elder Oaks. He just said he loves hearing a talk when a speaker can take an old topic and make it new.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 43:13

Yeah, that's good.

Hank Smith: 43:15

Sounds like a philosopher, right?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 43:17

Yeah.

Hank Smith: 43:18

Joe, this is fantastic and I feel like I could keep you here all day and we just keep talking about this. Let's get towards the end of Second Corinthians here. What does Paul wrap up with?

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 43:31 Yeah, one of the verses in the last chapter here is one that you mentioned earlier, quoting from the manual, what the manual recommends is, "Think about this question of simplicity as you're trying to do what chapter 13 verse five talks about." So, that might be a good thing to settle in here for a moment. Paul says this, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" and he goes on in the next verse to say, "I trust you're not." Here's N. T. Wright's sort of more fluid translation in modern language, "Test yourselves to see if you really are in the faith. Put yourselves through the examination. Or don't you realize that Jesus the Messiah is in you? Unless, that is, you failed the test. I hope you will discover that we didn't fail the test."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 44:17 That examination is nice after all of this, right? This is what simplicity might help us to grasp. "Examine yourself. Do you stand right? Do you stand in the faith? Is that the point of orientation you've got? Test yourself to see." I mean, this is him coming right up to the end. He's going to finish just verses on, but this is where he wants to make sure all he's been through with the Corinthian Saints, my heavens, right? The several visits, the lots of letters, the painful experiences, the factions and so on, everything he's tried to do. But this is a kind of... It feels a little like Jacob's, "O be wise. What more can I say?" And like, "Test yourselves. Be self-critical. The person you should be the most skeptical of in the whole world is probably yourself. If you're pretty sure you've got it all right, boy, you should maybe wonder. Test yourselves. Are you really there? Prove yourselves."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 45:09 I think that's a beautiful recommendation on his part. We've got to be careful because some of us have a tendency, of course, to try to prove ourselves in bad ways or to test ourselves and think we fail when we're doing okay. So, this language can be dangerous if used badly. But he's asking for honesty, I think is the best way to put it. Sometimes honesty will reveal, "No, I'm doing all right." And sometimes honesty will reveal, "No, I'm not doing so hot." Honesty is a vanishing virtue in the modern world, and I'm glad Paul's calling us back to it here.
- Hank Smith: 45:42 Maybe there's something about, "Check to see if you've deceived yourself." And this is from Elder Oaks, "The Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthians to 'examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith'. All of us should answer these challenges for ourselves. Where is our ultimate loyalty? Are we like the Christians in Elder Maxwell's memorable description who have moved their residence to Zion but try to keep a

second residence," like a vacation home, "... in Babylon?" Maybe we've convinced ourselves, I know I do this, I've convinced myself that I am doing the right things, that my loyalty is there, and then something happens. A talk is given, I hear a podcast episode, one of our guests says something and, all of a sudden, I examine my own life and go, "Wow, I was much further off than I thought I was. I need to have that course correction." Not necessarily shameful, "I'm bad. I'm awful. I'm the worst." It's what Elder Uchtdorf would say, John, just adjusting a few degrees to make sure I'm heading in the right direction.

- John Bytheway: 46:45 Or that verse, Second Corinthians 13:5, kind of sounds like Alma 5, right?
- Hank Smith: 46:51 Mm-hmm.
- John Bytheway: 46:52 I've heard that called a spiritual midterm. He's just kind-of like, "Where are you at? There was a time when you felt to sing the song of redeeming love. Can you feel that way now? Where are you? What's happened?" Those are good questions to ask ourselves. It keeps us humble if we do because, like you said, Hank, you hear something and you think, "Oh, I'm a slacker."
- Hank Smith: 47:15 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 47:15 I mean, I think we have those "wretched man that I am" moments, and I suppose that's probably a good thing when we have those moments.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 47:25 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 47:25 But then we got to go to, "But I know in whom I have trusted."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 47:29 Exactly, right? Yeah. In fact, the way Paul ends the whole letter, I mean, it's a beautiful final formula, the very last verse, verse 14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all," concludes with an amen. It's a beautiful little formula, it borrows from the baptismal formula, it's very clear evidence that all through early Christianity, from the very beginning, they're being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son, of the Holy Ghost. Jesus, of course, tells them to do that in Matthew. And of course, famously at the baptismal scene, the Father's voice is heard, the spirit comes down as a dove, and there is Christ in the water.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 48:06 There's something about baptism that is just tied up with the Godhead, and here Paul ends with a kind of reminder of their baptismal covenant then. And for any early Christian to hear anything that says, "Father, Son, Holy Ghost," would be like, "Remember. Remember your covenant. Remember baptism." So, for him to end there and what he associates with each member of the Godhead, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. Wrap yourself up in the Godhead. The Spirit is trying to talk to you. God loves you, and Christ is just offering so much grace. So, examine yourself, but recognize, man, God is reaching out in every way he can here."

Hank Smith: 48:45 Beautiful. Joe, this has been a great day.

John Bytheway: 48:49 Absolutely.

Hank Smith: 48:50 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 48:50 Lots of notes.

Hank Smith: 48:51 I feel like I understand, after these last five lessons we've had in Corinthians, I see Paul taking a very difficult situation with the Corinthians kind of going off the rails and he's going to help them get back on track. But not just, "Get back on track, you guys." But, "What do I need to teach you? What do you need to understand in order to get back on track and hopefully stay there?"

Hank Smith: 49:20 So, it's been fascinating to watch these two letters, and obviously there was a third that we don't have. So, thank you, Joe, for helping us understand the second half of this last one. Such compelling ways. I think our listeners would be interested, Joe, in just your own journey. Here you are, a scholar, a philosopher, a PhD, and a believing Latter-day Saint. What's that journey been like for you?

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 49:45 Yeah, actually, it's kind of easy to explain my journey in some of Paul's own language. We read that passage where Paul says, "We take every thought prisoner and submit it to Christ. We bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." I came to conviction pretty early, found a testimony and just a deep spiritual conviction, not only that God was real and that Christ saves, but that all of this had something to do with the Restoration. And so, for me, from the very beginning, my academic pursuits were a way of trying to build out what I had

found spiritually. It was a kind of take every thought and bring it into subjection to Christ.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 50:31 So, I went into philosophy originally in the hopes of learning to read better. That may sound like a strange thing, but it's the closest thing you can get to getting a PhD in reading, I think. But I was deeply interested, when I got my very first tastes of philosophy, in just how incredibly gifted philosophers were at taking a text and taking it apart and showing how its pieces work and how arguments unfold or how one part gets to another and so on. And in a way that it looked to me like a really obvious tool for trying to understand scripture better. That's why I studied philosophy. I wasn't planning to be a scholar when I went on and did a PhD. It was the same kind of thing for me. Everything I was trying to find in philosophy was something I could put in the service of the Kingdom.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 51:21 That said, I mean, it's not like it wasn't without challenges. When I was in graduate school, I was the only person in the philosophy department, faculty or student, among the grad students at least, who had any kind of religious belief or commitment. People were very respectful, mind you. It wasn't like I was under attack all the time or something like that, but it wasn't exactly a faith-promoting atmosphere in that sense. And I had to read all the things, right? I had to read quite widely then and still do now. And yet my faith, in terms of simplicity, right? That's the place I was standing. And then, I can look at all of these other questions from that position.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 51:55 So, how do I make sense of Freud if I'm standing here with Christ? And the answer is not always simply like, "Oh, well then, Freud was wrong, because Christ," right? Sometimes it's like, "Oh, there are interesting things going on in Freud that might actually help me make sense of Roman 7 or something."
- Hank Smith: 52:09 Yeah.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 52:10 And there are other parts of Freud that I kind of go, "All right, whatever." And here I'm looking at Plato and there are parts of it that, "Wow, okay. You can do some interesting things there." And there are other things where you're like, "Okay, yeah. That's not so useful."
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 52:25 So, part of it for me is just that. I come at these things that way. But I also, I mean, I try to be... It's part of what it is to be a scholar, it's to be so completely honest with what's in front of you, which means you do come up against challenges to your faith. But my experience has been, 10 million times over, that

really serious honesty always leaves space open for the Restoration. Every dismissal I've heard, every criticism I've heard, there are things there that can give you pause, but it's not a fully honest picture.

- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 52:56 Hugh Nibley is my intellectual hero. What I love about Nibley, I think he's often misread, we often treat Hugh Nibley as if he were just piling up evidences for the claims of the Restoration, but I don't think that's actually the best way to understand what he was up to. I think the best way to understand what he was doing was he was trying to point out over and over again that, when someone is trying to tell you that the Restoration can't hold up intellectually, they're trying to sell you something. That's what Nibley was showing over and over and over again. He would take an argument against some aspect of the Book of Mormon or whatever it was, and show that, if you're fully honest with all the sources, there's still room, there's still room, there's still room. And I think he's absolutely right about that. And if someone says, "All the evidence makes perfectly clear that blah, blah," nonsense, nonsense, that's dishonest.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 53:45 So, that's at least what it's looked like for me. Over and over and over again, I find that there's always space, there's always space, and that I have been standing in a place that's secure. And as a result, I feel rooted and I can keep looking at whatever there is in front of me in the world without fear or a spirit of fear.
- Hank Smith: 54:03 Beautiful. John, you mentioned a couple of books that Joe has written. I want to highlight two of them. One is 1st Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction, and then another one is called The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record. Really bless your life in understanding the Book of Mormon, First Nephi, of course, and Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, which Joe is an expert. John, what a great day we have had today.
- John Bytheway: 54:34 So glad I was here. Thank you so much, Joe. Thank you, seriously.
- Hank Smith: 54:37 Yeah. I have to pinch myself often that this is really happening, that I get to spend time with these incredible minds. And I'm grateful that I've had this incredible mind, Joe, in my life and now finally on the show. He also loves a good dad joke, by the way, John.
- Dr. Joseph Spencer: 54:52 I do.

Hank Smith: 54:53 He and I share dad jokes often.

Hank Smith: 54:57 We want to thank Dr. Joseph Spencer for being with us today. Joe, it's been a treat. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Spencer: 55:03 Yeah, happy to do it.

Hank Smith: 55:04 We want to thank our Executive Producer, Shannon Sorensen, we couldn't do it without her. We're grateful and want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. And we always remember our founder, Steve Sorensen.

Hank Smith: 55:17 We hope you'll join us next week. We're heading into Galatians on followHIM. Today's transcripts, show notes, and additional references are available on our website, followhim.co, that's followhim.co. You can watch the podcast on YouTube with additional videos on our Facebook and Instagram accounts. All of this is absolutely free, and we'd love for you to share it with your family and friends. We'd like to reach more of those who are searching for help with their Come, Follow Me study. If you could subscribe to, rate, review, and comment on the podcast, that will make us easier to find.

Hank Smith: 55:50 Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew, David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilson, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, and Annabelle Sorensen.

President Russell M. Nelson: 56:02 Whatever questions or problems you have, the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Turn to him. Follow him.

HOW CAN I FIND SIMPLICITY IN
CHRIST & HIS GOSPEL?



- Hank Smith: 00:02 Hello and welcome to another FollowHIM Favorites. My name is Hank Smith. I'm here with the incredible John Bytheway. Welcome, John Bytheway.
- John Bytheway: 00:09 Hi, Hank. Thank you.
- Hank Smith: 00:10 We're going to have a great FollowHIM Favorites today. You know the routine, John, we're going to take on one question from this week's lesson. We're in the latter half of 2 Corinthians, and in the manual, this question comes up, "How have you found simplicity in Christ and his gospel?" Because often, John, there's a lot, right?
- John Bytheway: 00:31 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 00:31 As you get to know the scriptures and the church and the policies and doctrines, it can be a little bit overwhelming at times, but yet we're supposed to find simplicity in it. So, how do you do that?
- John Bytheway: 00:42 Well, we can get into our Sunday school classes or elders quorums, whatever, and really have some spirited discussions about this or that, or so many principles, so many doctrines. If only somebody would've just said, "Well, here's the first principles and ordinances of the gospel."
- Hank Smith: 00:59 Here's where you should start.
- John Bytheway: 01:00 Thankfully, that Wentworth letter, Articles of Faith, Joseph Smith says, "Here's the first principles," and I just love it, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in Christ. That is the first principle, second repentance. And then he gave us some ordinances, but when you get overwhelmed, go back to that. How's my faith in Christ? And am I learning of him and listening to his words? Thankfully he said that it can be overwhelming.
- Hank Smith: 01:28 I remember Elder Uchtdorf talking about airplanes. You might remember Elder Uchtdorf talking about airplanes at sometime, John, but he talked about turbulence. Do you remember this?

He talked about turbulence and he said, "Often the best thing to do when things get turbulent as a pilot is to slow down," just slow down a little bit, and I think that may be what we're talking about here, to find simplicity and you're feeling overwhelmed, slow down a little bit and come back to basic beliefs, and I like what you brought up with the Articles of Faith because you can start in Article of Faith 1, I believe in God, I believe in his Son, I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe I can be saved through the atonement of Christ.

- John Bytheway: 02:11 What's that hymn, be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side? That's faith in Christ. You're, okay, I got you. Be still, know that I am God. All that other stuff, we'll figure it out together, but start with first principles, I'm right here and I'm with you.
- Hank Smith: 02:27 I love that, John, and we've talked about this many times on the podcast. The Lord says, "My role is to save and I am mighty to save-"
- John Bytheway: 02:27 So good at it.
- Hank Smith: 02:36 "... And I can do my own work." I'm pretty good at this job. You can trust me.
- John Bytheway: 02:40 You're not, but I am, so rely on me because I got this. I got you and I got this.
- Hank Smith: 02:46 And then try to learn all you can, try to experience all you can, but come back to the idea that I save.
- John Bytheway: 02:53 I hope that's a good answer, that's simplicity.
- Hank Smith: 02:56 That's simplicity. I hope so too. We hope that you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called FollowHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. We're with Dr. Joe Spencer this week and he is just a fabulous philosopher. I think you'll love what he does with these chapters and then come back here next week and we'll do another FollowHIM Favorites.