



# Finding Jesus Christ

## IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

INSPIRING SOUNDBITES  
FROM THE PODCAST



COMPILED BY ANNABELLE SORENSEN

Finding Jesus Christ in the New Testament

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# Finding Jesus Christ

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In this book, every mention of “the Church” refers to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All quoted scholars included in this book are members of The Church of Jesus Christ. However, the contents of this book is not limited to its members — it is meant for any and all who seek Jesus Christ. Please refer to <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/> for Latter-day Saint doctrinal references and vocabulary explanations.

Quotes have been modified for reader experience. Original transcripts can be found on <https://followhim.co/>.

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This book is dedicated to the listeners of the followHIM podcast. Thank you for keeping us inspired, motivated, and uplifted. Thank you for your examples of discipleship, and thank you for helping us carry the words of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all corners of the earth!

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# Matthew 1; Luke 1

Gaye Strathearn

| ***Luke 1:37*** *With God nothing shall  
be impossible.*

The lesson that I take from this is *God promises us great things, but He doesn't always promise that they're going to happen immediately.* And sometimes people can have really, really righteous desires, but the blessings of those righteous desires aren't always fulfilled immediately. But *in God's timetable, the blessings come.*

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I think that it's hard sometimes, to wait and think, "Why is God blessing other people and not me? My patriarchal blessing said this, but it hasn't happened yet." Why does God wait so long sometimes? *Why does He force us to wait?* Why is waiting upon the Lord so important? And I don't know, I can't speak for Zacharias and Elisabeth, but *I wonder whether there are things that we learn in the waiting. Sometimes the waiting forces us to our knees in ways that we haven't done previously. With a prayer that's not rote, but is coming from the depths of our soul.* And I believe that God sends us angels. It might not all be Gabriel, but He does send moments to us to have experiences where we know God knows us.

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Even though Zacharias or Elisabeth may have thought otherwise, this story shows that *God's in control. He's in charge of what's going on.*

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The law of Moses was meant to help people progress, and we should be grateful for that. So people were trying to do the best they could with what they had. And I hope God does look after them, because I hope He thinks of me and works with me and my imperfections as well, so that I can become what only He really sees and understands. I'm making mistakes all the time, just trying to do better, but I fall regularly. And so that's what this message is all about: *taking us in our imperfections and helping us grow.* And that's just as true in Judaism as it is in Christianity.

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This story is outlining the experience of Mary, but I think it also gives us some really, really interesting clues of *what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I would argue that Mary is the first of Jesus's disciples in mortality.*

---

When do we think about Mary? December?  
But how often do we think at other times about her and what she's doing and what we learn from her? I think *we miss out because we don't take the time to really think about this young woman and what she teaches us.* And again, I'm going to ask the question about discipleship: *What can I learn about discipleship and my personal discipleship by thinking about Mary and her experiences?*

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It's not a shock to me that Mary asked, "How shall this be? Seeing I have not known a man?" She's saying, "I'm not married yet. How is this going to happen?" So, here's my first principle of discipleship: *disciples of Jesus Christ ask questions, and questions invite revelation. Questions help us to learn more than we know now.*

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Even sinners can do things to help move along the kingdom of God, *because God is Omnipotent and He uses imperfect people like me to help this work.*

---

*God asks His disciples to do things that we can't even conceive how they're possible to do.* I don't think Mary's the only person who's asked, "How will this be?" I read my patriarchal blessing and some of the promises there, and I sit there thinking, "How is this going to be?" My patriarchal blessing says that, "You will have a priesthood holder who will desire to take you to the temple, you'll have children, da, da, da, da, da..." and I go, "*How will this be now?*" I just turned 60." The answer here, I think, from Gabriel, is really, really important, and it's for all disciples: "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.*" *That's how we get through all of the trials and the tribulations and the difficulties of life, because the Holy Ghost will be with us.*

---

If we are disciples of Jesus Christ who ask questions but have the faith to move forward, *nothing, nothing is impossible for God.* And believing that is, I think, a really important part of, "That's what disciples do." *Because God can do the impossible. Because He's not like us.*

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Who are the first disciples of Jesus? We have a very young Mary, and we have a very old Elisabeth. And we even have somebody who hasn't been born yet, John the Baptist. So now we've got men and women involved in this disciple experience of witnessing who Jesus is, *even before He is born*. For me, this sets up, again, Luke's gospel, how *this gospel is for all ages across the spectrum, and for people who live in small, podunk towns or in wildernesses, out on the periphery. This gospel message is for them. And in fact, it starts with them.* And while we might reasonably assume why Mary, who on earth would know that Mary? Who would pick Mary from Nazareth? *But the message is God knew Mary. God knew who she was, and God had a calling for her that nobody in her village, I would imagine, would ever have thought was happening. But God knew her, and He reached out to her and invited her to be a part of one of the greatest stories in eternity.*

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Now, in both Hebrew and Greek, the word "fear" is not like a Halloween fear, but it is the fear of entering the presence of God because *we understand and revere that He is something so much more than us.*

---

I've heard it said a couple of times or more that the God of the Old Testament is a God of justice, and that the God of the New Testament is a God of mercy. And I don't like that, because if you read the Old Testament carefully, what did the people there think of him? *Repeatedly, they're talking about His mercy.* And Mary, as young as she is, is acknowledging that *God is a God of mercy.*

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As I think about, “Okay, what am I going to learn from Mary about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?” the principle of discipleship I think about here is, *how do I praise God of all for the great things that He has done in my life? Are there ways that I sing His praises from the rooftops to all who can hear?*

---

Maybe I should sit down and write down or declare publicly to anyone within the sound of my voice that *God is good. That He knows me*, even though I’m a nobody, and that He has a plan for me. And if I can just have faith in Him and His omnipotence, and that He sees things in eternal ways that I can’t get my head around, *am I willing to step up to the plate and be like Mary, and say to Him, “Here I am, Lord. If you need someone to help in some way in this kingdom of God, pick me.” Am I preparing myself to be able to do that? Declaring to all that I draw my line in the sand. Here I stand. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I choose Him, even though I don’t know all of the answers.*

---

I have lots of questions, but it’s that stepping up and saying, *“I’m willing to be a part of this kingdom. I want to be a part of this kingdom. And use me in whatever way you can, even in just minuscule ways, to help the kingdom move along the kingdom of God here on earth.”* I can do a better job at finding ways to praise God for all the blessings that have come into my life.

---

When Matthew is writing, He is also responding to those who are saying, “God’s abandoned us. Where is He? Why isn’t He with us?” Matthew is writing His gospel, at least in part, to say, *“God has not abandoned His people, and the evidence that He has not abandoned His people is that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ.”* Everything in Matthew’s gospel is to reinforce the coming of Jesus and to show that God continues to be with His people. Even as He says at the end, even though He’s resurrected and He’s leaving them in mortality, He’s still not going to abandon them. He will continue to be with them, *even when He’s left mortality.*

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Sometimes in Christian dialogue, we have this tension and this struggle. Where do we put our emphasis? *Is Jesus God or is He human? We want Him to be God because of all of the things that He can do as a God to enable the Atonement to work, but we also want Him to be human because it's His humanness that allows us to connect with Him in a powerful and important way.*

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Jesus, even as God, has experienced the difficulties of mortal life. And if I take the time to read, trying to appreciate that aspect of Him as well, there's a connection there that I think is really important for me as an individual as I struggle with the things of mortality as well.

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I hope that as we study the New Testament, that we absolutely look for Jesus as the Son of God. That's fundamentally important, *but I hope in the process that we don't lose the Mary side of this Son of God that we have and see in Him.*

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It is because of Jesus's mother Mary, that, in a very real way, we have a connection with Him. He knows us. *He doesn't just know us intellectually, but He knows our experiences because He has experienced us — all of the trials and the difficulties of what a mortal life is all about.*

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One of the things that I love about the Apostles is seeing people, imperfect people like me, who still have a place in the kingdom of God. Peter — how many times was Jesus pulling his hair out at Peter? Look what Peter became because Jesus saw in Peter not who he was, in my opinion, but who he could become. I take real hope from that, and whether it's Peter, or Thomas, or Judas, or whether it's Paul doesn't matter. *These are people like me, people that I can relate to and see them work through their struggles to come to know and understand and apply their knowledge of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice. For no other reason, for those two, I think it's well worth the time and the effort to do it.*

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# Matthew 2; Luke 2

Brad Wilcox

***Luke 18:22*** Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

It's interesting that Bethlehem means "house of bread," but also, if you go over to Jerusalem, you find out that Bethlehem is one of the sources of water for Jerusalem. So I've always thought it's interesting that in Bethlehem we have the "house of bread," and from *that* place comes the *Bread of Life*.

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It's a beautiful thought that *God governs so closely the crossroads in the intersections of our lives*. And the older I get, the more I can look back and see the truth of that. Not just hope that it's true, but *I can see* the truth as I see the people that God has woven into my life, and the lives that I've been able to interact with in ways that have been so impactful.

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Isn't it beautiful to think that God is an intentional parent? That He's *very intentional* in what He's doing in our lives?

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This story isn't just about wise men going home changed, but *this story is about how we can go home with a testimony of Jesus. We can move forward another way because we've encountered Christ*.

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We stand in the center of that continuum and must choose which way we are going to head. Are we moving to be more like Joseph, or are we moving to become more like Herod? It's a big wake-up call for all of us as we read these scriptures.

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All the world celebrates the wise men and the shepherds, but very few go where President Oaks has taken us. He said, "It wasn't just the wise who sought Jesus, it wasn't just the humble — the shepherds, the Wise Men, — *but it was the holy who sought Jesus*."

---

When most Christians think of Jesus, they think of that manger scene. When we think of Jesus, *we need to let Him grow up. We need to realize that He is still alive.* We need to realize that we can find Him in the temple, in *His* house. We usually stop reading Luke 2 when we're done with the manger. But as we continue to read, then we also are seeing the importance of living in this last dispensation, where Jesus leads His Church, and He is found in the temple.

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Years ago, people would say, "Look at the Scout book, or look at the Personal Progress book, and find out what they want you to do." And now we don't want young people reading a book to find out what they need to do. *We want them to turn to God. We want them to be "about [their] Father's business."* And as they are, then God will help them to know what He needs them to do. And that's the growth, that's the personal development that we want young people today to experience.

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Grace is not a gift that we get once a year, and we just have to open it and then we've got grace. *It's a power that as we receive it, then more is given. And as we receive that, then more is given.*

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It's not that He's expecting perfection after we have repented. It's that repentance is a process that helps us through this perfecting process in which we are engaged. *Repentance is part of this perfecting process.* And we can improve and grow as Jesus did, from grace to grace, from this gift of power to another gift of power, to another gift of power.

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Sometimes we need to step back a little bit, be a little more patient with ourselves, a little more patient with each other, and *acknowledge the grace that will help us grow in grace.*

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The only way I can take His name upon me, the only way I can remember Him always, the only way I can strive to keep His commandments and bless others, the only way I can endure to the end, is because *He gives me the same thing He gave Jesus: He gives me grace.* God gives me grace. And with that help, with that enabling power, that divine assistance, that endowment of strength, then I can keep going on this journey and I can keep returning to that sacrament table week after week and weakness after weakness.

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# John 1

Eric D. Huntsman

***John 1:39*** *He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.*

As our Heavenly Parents are our spiritual Parents and gave us spiritual life, and our earthly parents gave us physical life, *Jesus Christ comes to us as our covenant Father and gives us eternal life.*

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I use the beloved disciple figure as the binding model. No matter what your personal walk is like, these are the things we need to all share: *the love of Christ, testimony that He died for us, hope in the Resurrection, and a commitment to follow Him.*

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Why is John so hesitant to say who he is? Is it modesty? What is it? Well, I'm convinced, as many scholars are, *it's because he doesn't want to distract. If he's Jesus's best friend, he doesn't want to take any attention away from Jesus.* It's about Jesus, not himself. *By preserving his anonymity, it allows readers to see themselves in his experiences.*

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One of the things you have to understand in John is that things are always conceptual. We mentioned earlier that it's very symbolic. So when you say life, you think of biological functioning. When you think of light, you think of electromagnetic illumination. *But in John, it's always more than that.* So it's not *just* biological life, it's life in a spiritual sense. It's not *just* light from the sun or from an electric lamp, *it is illumination. The word is much more than what we experience in this physical sphere.*

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As we see in the water into wine story, *the elements obey God.* They obey the Word, the divine. *They obey Jesus.* But people have their agency and sometimes don't. *We know the elements will respond, but how will people?*

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With the gospels, it's a chance to really join the world of Jesus, to imagine, even if you can't come to the Holy Land, to imagine what it was like *to be with Him and talk with Him.*

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A disciple is both a learner, but *it's also an apprentice; someone who's not just learning from the Master, but someone who's seeking to become like the Master.*

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You can't be in the presence of the Father in a mortal state. You have to be literally transfigured to be in His presence. And once again, *that's done through the agency of the Son.*

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We've got fallible but faithful disciples, impulsive but devoted disciples. So if any of our leaders say or do something we think isn't perfect or is a mistake, well... guess what? Our leaders are in great company. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Peter, they're fallible, sure, but they're faithful.

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You can never have too much Word of the Lord.

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I hope you embrace this gospel and in these characters can find soulmates and kinsmen and kinswomen. But most of all, *you will find Jesus in this gospel.*

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*I just hope that people will make the Lord real in their lives.* For instance, when you get to the Last Supper, when we get close to Easter, it's not Jesus and the Apostles with the Last Supper, it's all of us. When the beloved disciple John is leaning in the arms of the Savior, I mean, that's you. *That's you in His arms.* And I do that a lot of times when the sacrament is being passed. I try to imagine myself in the upper room, and walking the Kidron Valley, and in Gethsemane, and following Jesus to the cross, just like Peter and John were following Him when He was arrested, and John and mother of Jesus and the other Mary were there. I'm just kind of talking in abstract terms here. *I just hope the scriptures can become real to people.*

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# Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3

Shon D. Hopkin

***Luke 3:5*** Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be  
brought low; and the crooked shall be  
made straight, and the rough ways shall  
be made smooth;

Jesus was sinless, and He had to grow grace to grace. *He had to progress. There had to be movement, there had to be learning. He had to be improving and gaining increased knowledge.*

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Christ is *sinless* and is *learning* at the same time. *That's a pretty joyous way to think about mortality.*

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When God is involved, *everything changes.*

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The evidence of yesterday *is not* an accurate indicator of what God is able to do in your life and my life today.

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Those of you, *of us*, who are feeling a little bit weighed down today, mortality tends to do that. *Let your heart see it again. Let your heart spring forth and hope again that you will go out with joy.*

---

Think of the baptismal waters almost like a veil and you're going into them. And Paul says it symbolizes death of the old man, and then the new man is reborn. And then we emerge, and the very next thing that happens at Christ's baptism that happens at Latter-day Saint baptisms is the gift of the Holy Ghost is given. *You enter into the presence of God. It's powerful. It's sacred.*

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Notice that when Satan comes tempting, he often does so just before spiritual experiences or just after them. His goal is not just to erase the spiritual experience, it's to turn it upside down. There are those who, when that happens, all of the sudden their early spiritual promptings begin to feel sinister to them. "Oh, that was false. It wasn't just not true, it was a lie." And Satan tries to come and turn it upside down for Christ.

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It's really beautiful to see Christ own His "sonship," so to speak. As the Father points to Him, He consistently points back to the Father. It's a beautiful father-son relationship that's there.

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Being asked to do something that's hard, *it changes us.*

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As I think about ordinances, I think about Christ's baptism and then the Holy Ghost descending upon Him. And then, as I think about ordinances in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I just want to share my witness that these things from my own experiences are real. *That they have power to change us, to call us into greater paths of holiness, to encourage us, to comfort us, and to challenge us to be better.* And these are not just nice things to talk about. There is power in the ordinances of the priesthood. I'm so grateful for the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the difference it has made and continues to make, and I desperately need it to continue to make that difference in my life. This is real and it has power, and it continues to give me joy and to challenge me to be a better man.

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# Matthew 4; Luke 4–5

Jan Martin

***Matthew 4:4** But he answered and said, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

The Holy Ghost leads us to higher spiritual environments. It helps us be sanctified, it helps us elevate. And so, you see that important thing right off the bat with Jesus's ministry, before He even starts anything, He's being raised, He's being elevated, He's coming close to God.

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When you start thinking about 40 days and 40 nights and ask, "What is this really teaching me?" It's about self-examination, transformation, task fulfillment, nourishment, growth, and a new generation of a new life. *Jesus is about to embark on a new life.* He's going to come out in public and He is going to be doing things He hasn't really been doing. *We need to think about this fasting and what it does for us as we enter into new periods of our lives, or new challenges, or want to change something.* So, that really helps us see what the symbolism might be with these 40 days and not just read it as 40 days. *There's more to it here.*

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Many prophets and apostles point out that when Jesus is fasting, He is doing it to gain inner strength and spiritual power. He's utilizing fasting so that His mortal body might be subjected to His Divine Spirit. And you just see this repeated theme that *fasting helps us discipline our bodies to do hard things. And so, when we're faced with some hard things in our own lives, it's worth really thinking about, "How could I utilize fasting to help me be able to discipline myself, who may not want to do hard things, to be able to do hard things that my spirit wants me to do?"*

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It is easy to become a habitual faster, someone that fasts once a month because that's what you do, so it loses its meaning. But if you can take that focus from Elder Cowley and just think, "What am I doing here? I'm allowing my spirit to feed on God, which it needs. And I'm focusing on that and not letting my body and its needs detract from my spirit and its needs."

---

When I'm tempted, *what's the priority?* Is doing what I know to be right the priority? Or doing what I want that's easy at the moment the priority? Jesus is clearly teaching that *the spiritual priority takes precedence over the physical need*, and He's quite happy to wait to eat until it's appropriate and not let that spiritual focus be overtaken.

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Are you going to let "*those*" people define you, or *are you going to let God define you?*

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Of course we're going to have temptations. Of course we're going to have thoughts come in from somewhere, but we don't need to entertain them. We don't need to keep thinking about them. We can just reject them and move on.

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He's been rejected by His own people. Sometimes the most painful type of rejection that we have in this life is to be rejected by the people that are closest to us and that should know us the best.

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Sometimes the people that we know the best kind of limit what we can be and do. Sometimes they don't want to let us be seen differently. That's kind of important to think about when we're dealing with our own families and friends. *Let's try and maybe not limit them to their past or limit them to what we know about them.*

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One of the things about Jesus that I appreciate as a teacher is that *He was willing to teach anyone, anywhere, in any way.*

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One of our biggest pieces of adversity in mortality is forgetting who we are and what we came here to do. So I appreciate President Nelson's reminders of those identities. And *we need to really cling to those eternal identities and not apologize for who we are and what we came here to do*, and push through the adversity that comes against those things and not let them dissuade us from that. It's so easy.

---

We all do and say things that are not helpful sometimes. It can be really difficult to be a member of an organization with imperfect people, but this is where we have to apply the gospel and say, "We're all disciples. I can forgive. We can work things out." Just because something unkind happens, which happens, it doesn't mean I have to leave the organization and be offended by it. *I need to expect that people are going to do things that aren't great, and I need to find a way to work it out and continue being a disciple instead of leaving the clinic and going elsewhere because I was bothered that somebody didn't do the right thing*.

---

That's such an important thing for us to do when we're tempted to point fingers at the weaknesses and sins of others, is to really just stop and say, "Well, maybe I don't do that particular thing, but there's other things that I do." The minute you start doing that, you can be humbled and then get off the judgment pedestal and be like, "Maybe I didn't like that that person did that, but these are my weaknesses. *I want someone to be merciful to mine, so how can I find it in my heart to be merciful to someone else's problems?*" That then allows that unity you were talking about to happen. *Humility is a major component of being able to be unified. We all just have to be humble, and then it's easier to connect.*

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Jesus is always inviting people to come study with Him, "Come and see, come and follow me. Come and forsake everything, and *come, come, come.*" Again, *that makes Him an unusual rabbi.* Normally you had people coming and asking to study *under* you, which is the typical academic way.

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I've had so many times in my life where unkind things have been said or people have complained about something. It can really devastate you and make you question, "Why am I even doing this? Why am I even trying to teach the gospel? How come I'm even up in front of those people?" when sometimes it just feels like you're a target for the complaining, or the misunderstanding, or the whatever, and that can really undermine you. Every time that happens, it's a real temptation to cave into self-doubt and to say, "Well, maybe I am in the wrong place. Maybe I do need to find another job." But when you come back to those spiritual moments and you're like, "No, this is what the Lord has asked me to do. And as I focus on that, I can overcome any of the pushback," we're all going to get it. It gives us the strength to be comfortable and confident, like the Savior is. *He's so confident, and He never deviates from His purpose.*

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## John 2-4

Robert Millett

***John 4:14*** *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*



If it strikes you as a testimony of the Savior, then it's a healthy experience.

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Remission of sins comes not through the water. We speak figuratively of saying "having our sins washed away," but that isn't really the case. You're baptized by water and the second part of the baptism is the baptism by fire, the Holy Ghost. And *it's the Holy Ghost that cleanses us of sin.*

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A person who knows the gospel is true because it makes good sense or I hear people say, "It works for me." Well, that's good, but *there better be something in the soul. There better be something in the heart that God has touched.* In fact, so much so that *I know it's spiritually true even though I can't give you an intellectual explanation for this or that.*

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*We can't program, we can't produce, and we can't manufacture a spiritual experience.* We can't use emotion to produce a spiritual experience, it doesn't happen that way. It works in the reverse. You may have a spiritual experience which brings with it deep emotion, goes where it will, And *you can't program it.*

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It's one thing to *have* the Spirit of the Lord, and it's another thing to *feel* it. People can have the Spirit and not necessarily be overwhelmed spiritually. We can't always rely upon, "Do I have overwhelming feelings of spirituality?" We can't wait for that before we can sense that we have the Holy Ghost. *The Holy Ghost can come and go.*

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Sometimes circumstances in life, in this case a physical condition, a horrible physical ailment, can keep us from feeling like we wish we would feel spiritually. *But it doesn't mean we don't have the Spirit, because we very well might and probably do.*

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We can't wait for some prompting to get us to do things. I just think there's some things we have no control over except putting ourselves in a position to enjoy the Spirit.

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Jesus didn't come to condemn the world. He didn't come to catch the world in sin, *He came to help us.*

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From the Greek perspective, truth is something you learn and you know; it's cognitive. But from the Hebrew perspective, it's something you do; *it's something you are.*

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And at a certain point, you just say, "You know what? *Sin is sin. Everybody needs Jesus,* and I don't care whether you're in the depths of sin or if you are a hyper-religious person."

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I think being spiritually born again, *it sort of defies physical birth. Because in many ways we're spiritually born again, and again, and again.*

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Personally, the reason I can bear testimony of the power of Christ to forgive sins is He's forgiven my sins. I think that's where most of us have to begin and say, "I know what it's like to feel awful. I know what it's like to feel dark. I know what it's like to feel like I'm never going to make it, I've been there. But I also know what it's like for that to be lifted like a film and to feel clean, to feel strengthened, to feel edified again. *I testify of Christ's Atonement because I've experienced Christ's Atonement, and I continue to again, and again, and again.*

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# Matthew 5; Luke 6

Lincoln H. Blumell

***Matthew 5:48** Be ye therefore perfect,  
even as your Father which is in heaven  
is perfect.*

A facet of this word “meek” is the Greek word “*praos*,” which can mean fashionable, meaning *you can be molded because you’re gentle and you’re soft*. So, I think disciples are blessed if they say, “You know what, Lord? I will let you fashion me. *You can mold me. I can be an instrument in your hands.*”

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God chastens those whom He loves. It might be hard sometimes, *but if you’re moldable, He can make something more of you.*

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Jesus is not saying, “Get rid of emotion,” He’s saying, “You’re going to have this, but you will find peace and comfort in hard times, and you’ll be blessed.” I think that’s very *powerful and timeless. Our challenges may be different from Biblical times—certainly not as physically challenging—but, spiritually and emotionally, we might say they are very challenging*

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“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” *This is the idea that it’s not going to be easy to be a disciple. It’s certainly challenging at times.*

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We’ll have a lot of hard times—some persecution, some derision. It is going to take some tenacity, but it is well worth it, right? It says *the reward is monumental.*

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If you really want to be disciples, it’s going to require some hard things. But wow, *think of the blessings.*

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“Ye are the salt of the earth.” I think originally it meant yes, you bring flavor, but you also *preserve; you save things*. How do you do it? Well, you do this by your keeping of the commandments, not losing your savor.

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Jesus is trying to say, “Look, marriage is sacred. Not only should it not be entered into lightly, it should not be dissolved lightly.” Although, it does grant that there is a ground where it could be dissolved.

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We might not always follow the exact practice, *but what is the principle?*

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Now going back, think about this: Who are the children in the Beatitudes? *The peacemakers. You don't fight fire with fire, you fight with water; you try to put it out. And in fact, you even go beyond that. You actually show them love.* This can be a really challenging thing, but I think it's, again, *the cost of discipleship.*

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What is perfect? Well, it's the end or purpose in something. It's the purpose that you are to become. It's not something that just happens all of a sudden, *it's a process.* Even Jesus, only after the Resurrection, says, “Even as I or your Father is perfect.” And of course, the question that begs is, “Well, was Jesus not perfect?” Well, yes. *Jesus lived a perfect life in the sense that He followed the will of the Father. However, it's very clear that when we think about perfection as becoming like the Father in every way, for Jesus there was progression.*

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You are a light. *People should see you and see something different.*

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We define ourselves by our potential.

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It's very clear that Peter's process to become "teleos," or to be refined, is a long process. *And if that's for Peter, it's for all of us as disciples.*

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There's that statement I've heard, that *the path of discipleship is not always a straight path*. Sometimes there are detours or there are things, but I say just keep going in the right direction every single day. Do those little things. Just every day, "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass." And if you do this over time, cumulatively, you will see a big, big difference. This is my takeaway from the Sermon on the Mount, and really, *it's the essence of the gospel. I can say you do get peace from it. I, like all of us, have some profound struggles in my own life, personal struggles. But the peace and the comfort have come through the gospel. And if it works for me, it works for you.*

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## Matthew 6–7

Lili De Hoyos Anderson

**Matthew 7:24–25** *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

There's only one law to the celestial kingdom  
and that's *Christlike being, not just Christlike behavior.*

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What separates me from being more celestial,  
or being like Him, is that integration of the  
heart with the behavior so that I'm not just *doing*  
the right thing, *I am motivated by the right thing and*  
*I am feeling the right things.* This isn't like, "Okay, I  
want to say a mean thing to you but I'm going  
to hold back," it's, "*I don't even have a desire to say*  
*anything mean to you because I am learning to see you*  
*the way the Lord sees His children and to see their value*  
*in their worth.*"

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What characterizes the movement from the  
terrestrial to the celestial is *the sanctifying power*  
*of the Holy Ghost that changes our hearts, that writes*  
*God's law in our hearts.*

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You might be pretty good people, you might not  
be causing a lot of trouble. I hope that's true  
for all of us, but there's something more. *There's*  
*something that helps us conform to the image of the Son,*  
*Christ himself.*

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We're not just clenching our teeth and biting  
our tongues, *we are changing our hearts through the*  
*power of the Spirit, and that is one of the great roles*  
*of the Holy Ghost.* I think that's really important  
to see in this Sermon on the Mount. This huge  
sermon that is loaded with celestial living, and  
He's saying, "*You are capable of becoming like God.*  
*Don't get complacent.* Don't stay at a terrestrial lev-  
el where you're just not a big problem anymore  
to the planet."

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He's not kidding when He says He wants us to  
be like Him, and that *He will facilitate.*

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I'm no longer just doing the right thing because I don't want to do the wrong thing, *but I'm doing the right thing because I am becoming like the Savior.*

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*God doesn't settle for the leftovers of our hearts* after we're done worshiping all these other important things to us: mammon, the world.

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We're all members of different groups, but the reference group is the group to which we refer for approval. "Who do I look to for approval to know if I'm doing what's right? Whose opinion do I care about?" And that's what God's saying: *"I want to be your reference group, and get rid of the others. Just get rid of them. Look to me and do these things for love of me."*

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But I do want to mention this line that I think is so important just before that begins in verse eight: "For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask Him. After this manner therefore pray ye." In other words, *don't think you have to bring a grocery list to God, or your entire wish list, or everybody that you love and care about that you are hoping He will bless and be mindful of. . Can we just understand the Lord for who He is, and how good and merciful and gracious God is, and that He is omniscient? He already knows what we need.*

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Invite the Lord and trust Him. *It's not a game, He's playing with us.* He's not saying, "Oh, you missed that hoop. So, no blessings." Let's not go there, though sometimes we're tempted to.

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You put your treasure here, *and you become my treasure. I will choose you because you have chosen me.*

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Life becomes much more important than God is telling us it needs to be. Not that we should be careless about our lives, not that we should be cavalier about this stewardship, we should take care of ourselves. Nevertheless, we should not be afraid of the inevitability of death.

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We should recognize *God's got it covered*. *"I have chosen you. If you have chosen me, that is not a problem."* *Stop governing your life by fear. Fear is a lousy way to live, and it makes us make stupid decisions when we make them fearfully.*

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*Satan has no power over us if we don't grant it to him.* And how do we grant power to Satan? By not repenting. *God is so generous.* It's not even sin that we need to be afraid of, it's unrepented sin. I think how generous the plan is: *"I know you're going to make mistakes, but that is not your defeat."*

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"Say nothing but repentance unto this generation," (D&C 6:9) because the only thing that we should be afraid of is unrepented sin. Let the rest of it go, and you have total control over whether or not you repent. It's such a generous plan. *God is so kind.*

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We need to trust God more than we do. We need to be unafraid. If we have chosen Him, He has chosen us and He has made us incredible promises about His love.

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I knew the Lord would honor His promises because *He is a promise keeper, that's who He is.*

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Mercy won't rob justice, *but mercy will temper it, and God will get it exactly right in every case.* I am so grateful for that. We can leave that aside and never condemn, but we must judge.

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He tells us, “If you choose me, *I have chosen you and I will take care of you*. It may not look the way you want it to look, it may not be at the time that you want it, because *I’m going to stretch your faith while I can*. If you’ll let me, I’ll help you grow it to proportions you didn’t understand previously and that will bless your life eternally.”

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But once we have secured that terrestrial self-reliance where we are obedient to the laws of work, then the Lord wants to make us higher and holier. And sometimes that can only happen when our hardworking, obedient arms fail, when even our best efforts to do what is right are met with some betrayal or sabotage — not because of our own sins, but because of the sins of others.

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People don’t know what righteous judgment is, so they say, “I’d rather be safe and not judge at all because I don’t want to judge unrighteously.”

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I can tell you as a counselor, it continues to do terrible damage to the Saints, and to our children, and to our families, and to our communities, *to not judge. We are sitting ducks for Satan if we don’t judge.*

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Let’s start with verse 15: “For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge.” Please, can we accept this once and for all? That we are commanded to judge? *Try to explain to me, if you can, how you can use your agency without judgment.*

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If it leads you to Christ, it’s good. If it leads you away from Christ, it’s evil and it comes from Satan.

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We really want to change our partners sometimes, *but we need to change ourselves* and use that opportunity to grow in ways where the Lord can help us be refined in whatever circumstance.

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No matter what the storms of our lives, we can be a better advertisement to our children and others of the fruits of gospel living. We can find that calm in the midst of the storm if we seek it, if we trust in it, if we know the end. Remember, *God has told us the end. Christ has already won the victory. All we have to do is stay on that team, stay on the Lord's side, and the victory is ours as well.*

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If we set our feet on this gospel path and we pursue it diligently, the Lord promises that we can complete it. If we fault or not, if we endure through whatever our life journey is, *He will consecrate that for our gain.*

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Don't become miserable; maintain a bright hope in Jesus Christ because *He is the conqueror. And we can conquer in His victory too* if we overcome our fears, our doubts, our despair, and exchange them for the hope of the gospel living in Christ, because He is our hope.

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That's what He wants from us: *to come to know Him, to become integrated, and to become not just Christlike in our behaviors, but Christlike in our being through the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.*

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We have to stop thinking, "My works will save me. My callings will save me. My temple recommend in my pocket will save me, or my tithing donation slip." No. It's, "*How are we conforming to the image of Christ?*" and, "*Do the people around us feel it?*" What would they say of us in that moment of judgment where the secret acts of men are revealed and shouted from the housetops?

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God has given us agency, *but it is not free; it is not without consequence.* We choose the beginning of the path, and we choose the end of the path. Boyd K. Packer in one of his speeches said, “Let’s stop calling it free. *It is moral agency, and there is a consequence attached to the use of our agency.*”

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If we don’t judge, we’re fooling ourselves. I mean, we’re just not making the right judgments, and we’re avoiding judgment where we should and probably judging where we shouldn’t.

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If we supplant in an effort to be kind, in an effort to not judge our neighbor, then we throw God and His gospel under the bus. We end up ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it makes people feel bad if they’re sinning. *Don’t cast aside the gospel of Jesus Christ and the sacred atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf in order to not offend our neighbor by defending the truth.*

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I testify of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He does stand supreme, and He invites us to be lifted up to become co-heirs with Him. The mercy, the generosity, the grace of that astounds me every day. I am willing to follow in His path. He is love, but it is His love and His way. And if we submit to it, nothing can stop us from gaining the victory with Him.

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# Mark 2–4; Luke 7

Joshua Sears

| ***Luke 7:50*** *And he said to the woman,  
Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

There's such power in truly understanding that our Heavenly Father really loves us. And if we can lock this in our minds — that God is our Father, He's good, and He loves us — we therefore have the ability to understand that anything He does with us, including the painful experiences we go through, is ultimately for our good. It's for our progress. It's for our eternal benefit, because a loving God would otherwise not subject us to those things. It helps us make sense of so much of what's going on.

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Being born in the covenant is *not* an automatic ticket to heaven; it's your *faith in Jesus Christ that ultimately is the determining factor*.

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In each case, the message is ultimately the same: "If you're going to follow me, be sure you're going to follow me. You can't do this half-heartedly, you need to be all in. You need to be invested."

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I think there's an important lesson here with the centurion and the woman. If you just had one healing story, you might be tempted to think, "Well, God loves people in this kind of situation," or, "God is going to respond in these circumstances." But by showing the complete opposite, it breaks that down. *God doesn't just love him because he's a man, or he's rich, or he came with this humble request. God is willing to heal and help us in all the opposite situations as well.*

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He really does know about our individual situations. We're *all* significant to Him.

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What we need when we feel like God doesn't care is peace, and the source of that peace is Jesus Christ.

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First, above all else, *you've got to remember that we're children of God. He loves us. Remember God's goodness.* If you don't keep those things foundational and at the front of your mind, then the terrible things we go through and the suffering we experience is going to overwhelm us because nothing will make sense. It will seem like He's punishing us, or like the suffering serves no purpose, or like He doesn't care, all these other things that we're not going to understand unless we cement ourselves on those foundational truths.

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This is where we do have to understand we absolutely have to seek out medication, therapy, professional help, all those things, *but ultimately the only way we're going to make it through this particular storm is by faith in the Son of God.* He can heal us and it's hard when we have to wait for that healing to come, but the peace He promises is very much real.

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So in Mark, we talked about exercising faith and looking to Jesus for peace. But Matthew has this added dimension that you don't just vote with your heart, you vote with your feet. *Being close to Christ isn't just a matter of trusting Him in your heart, it's being with Him in that boat. It's staying true to not just Him but His Church, and doing all you can to be faithful to His gospel, being where He is, even when being where He wants you to be means that you're going to end up in storms.*

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*There is a cost to discipleship.* And if we want to truly receive all the healing that Christ offers us, we need to not just do our best to trust in Him but to also keep His commandments, stay true to our covenants, and be loyal to the Church of which He is the head.

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I do know that *God is not messing with us*. I do know that Heavenly Father cares, and all of this suffering we go through is for a reason, and that Heavenly Father has everything in His hands. I know we can trust Jesus Christ and look to Him for the peace and calm that we need in these storms. Ultimately, every malady will be healed completely, all suffering will end, and He's going to wipe away every tear off every face. And that's what I look forward to in faith, knowing that we need to stand still and wait for the arm of the Lord to be revealed.

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## Matthew 9–10; Mark 5; Luke 9

Ryan Sharp

***Matthew 10:7*** *And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*



The invitation of Matthew's gospel here is that Christ has power to heal and help anyone, *regardless* of the ailment, disease, challenge, struggle, any of those things. *He can heal.*

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I think the man with palsy is an interesting story where we can draw the principle that *my* faith can have an impact on *their* experience. It says, "When Jesus saw *their* faith," *He was able to perform the miracle.*

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One of my favorite attributes about Jesus is that *Jesus is never rushed.*

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Ultimately, the blessing for the individual and for the family *is going to come in following Christ.*

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The Lord is willing and able to use fallible disciples anciently. And, I sure hope that means He can use us; obviously not in an apostolic capacity but as disciples, as ministers within our respective callings.

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The call of the Savior is a call of consecration.

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The more I've studied intellectually and academically, the stronger my faith has become spiritually. It really is this symbiotic relationship, and as my testimony is deepened, and my faith is deepened, that leads to more questions, and that leads to more searching, and more research, and more writing. It's an incredible journey. My experience has been that immersing myself in scripture and scholarship provides me more of those experiences with the Savior, and that's been transformative in my own personal journey of faith.

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# Matthew 11–12; Luke 11

John Hilton III

***Matthew 11:28*** *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Even if we're struggling, He's not like, "Scratch you off the team." He is like, "Okay, you're still on my team. I still welcome you. I reach out to you." And He doesn't want us to be offended by Him. He's reaching out with words of kindness.

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Sometimes we focus on the fact that Jesus loves us, and that's true. Jesus does love us. He also really wants us to keep His commandments. *That's a requirement to be a part of this family.*

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Remember that Jesus Christ *is* the strength of youth. And if He's at the center of whatever these fence laws are that we are inspired to create, then things are going to go well.

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The idea of mercy, not sacrifice, is really important to Jesus Christ. When He says that, He's referring to the sacrificial offerings of the law of Moses. So Jesus is saying, "I want you to prioritize mercy over rituals." He cared less about the strict observance of Pharisaic fence laws, such as prohibitions against eating with sinners or plucking grain on the Sabbath. What He really wants is us *to be filled with mercy*.

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Sometimes we create these extra structures that I think we could maybe liken a little bit to the law of Moses, right? Like, I'm so focused on having a reverent sacrament meeting that I miss the mark of mercy, love, and outreach. I do think that we can see these same kinds of things, even today.

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It's so interesting that rather than giving this lengthy complicated title, Jesus says "Father." And probably for us, we're used to praying "Dear Heavenly Father," or something like that. We don't even think about that. That just seems normal, rather than potentially being a *revolutionary teaching*.

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A key lesson that I think we can learn from Christ's exorcisms, these miracles, is that *Jesus has power over Satan, period*.

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Sometimes in our lives, it might feel like the forces of evil just can't be defeated. But through Jesus Christ, they can be. They are right now. They will be.

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I found that in my own life sometimes, if I'm not careful, I can become a "box checker" *rather than a "come unto Christ"*. Did I read my scriptures today? Check. Family scriptures today? Check. Prayed? Check. Went to the temple? Check. But in all of these things that I'm doing, if I'm sitting in a sacrament meeting, am I sitting there coming unto Christ? So for me in my own life, I found that it's most important that I'm centering myself in Jesus Christ. There's so much that's in the periphery. There's all these fence laws. There's other things. But as I focus on Jesus Christ, even as I'm doing really good things like studying my scriptures, if I can focus that on the Savior, then I find that invites peace into my life.

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# Matthew 13; Luke 8; 13

Matthew Becerra

***Matthew 13:44*** *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

My point here is that the kingdom of heaven is really multifaceted. It's very hard to define concisely, but if I were to kind of draw out some prominent themes in Jesus's description of it, it would be this: *The message of the kingdom is that God has a great work to accomplish, and that He wants you to be part of this great work. In doing so, this is where true joy, flourishing, and purpose are to be found.*

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It's important to recognize *how integral women were to Jesus's life and ministry.* They were there at His birth, they were there at His crucifixion, they were the first to see Him resurrected and testify that He lives, and they were there all throughout His ministry. In this case, they seem to be supporting Him temporarily, whether it was financially, with meals, or helping out with logistical things. But they were there as an integral part of His ministry, and I think it's important that we point that out as well.

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We do know from other passages that periodically Jesus often kind of seeks out solitude to go into the wilderness to be by Himself, whether it's to pray or to collect Himself. So perhaps this is what's happening here. I have to imagine sometimes He felt maybe physically or emotionally exhausted and maybe just took some pleasure in taking some time to appreciate the beauty of His surroundings.

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There's more in scripture that suggests disciples are going to go through some stuff than there is to say that discipleship means your life's going to be all peaches and cream.

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If you look in Mosiah, *everything that you have belongs to God. We are not owners of our riches, we are stewards, and as such, we are accountable to God for what we do with those things. They're not ours to do what we want with them. They're ours to act as a steward over, and God is the master of them.*

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We all respond differently to the call of the gospel and bear different fruit, and that's okay. Jesus doesn't say that the more fruit, the better. Some of you are going to do 100, some of you are going to do 60, some are going to do 30, and that's fine. *That's the plan, that's not our weakness — that we don't bear as much as the other person.*

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The idea that we can have faith, not in what's going to happen but in Him and in the fact that whatever He does it's going to be for our benefit, is a beautiful idea.

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We can have faith in God being with us in our suffering and the fact that He wants the best for us, the fact that He knows what's best for us. And in His love, justice, and mercy, even if we can't have faith, *He's going to deliver us from every trial that we have.*

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The Greek word sometimes used to describe Jesus's miracles and what He is doing is "*semeia*." A way to translate this word is "*sign*" or "*token*," meaning it's something that reveals, signifies, or demonstrates something about Jesus in addition to helping those who receive them. Jesus's miracles are signs — they're tokens, they're demonstrations of something.

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And I would suggest that in each case, in each miracle that Jesus performs, these miracles signal something beyond themselves. They can teach us something about Christ and His gospel. So, we might keep that in the back of our minds as we go through some of these stories. And I'll periodically ask, "*What does this story teach or signal about Christ in addition to just being kind of a cool power that He has?*"

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Jesus doesn't seem like the kind of guy who wants to hide truth from people. I think Luke 8:17 allows us to see what His intent is here. It's like well, maybe the fact that you don't understand this should spur or spark your desire to learn differently. It should spark your desire to want to know more. Everything I'm saying is going to be made clear at some point, *but you have to learn how to listen.*

---

And I just kind of love the juxtaposition between the powerful God of the universe we encounter in scripture as well as this kind of more "mother hen" trying to care for her chicks. Scripture has a really good way of showing us the spectrum of the multifaceted nature of Christ, and I think it does it in a way that allows us to relate to Him in different ways according to our different needs. Sometimes we need the powerful God that calms the storm, and sometimes we need the mother hen. Sometimes we need to see Christ as vulnerable and like us, and in solidarity with us in our own vulnerability.

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Graduate school didn't do anything to challenge my testimony. If anything, *it strengthened me.* It gave me additional tools to be able to bring to scripture and to understand it better, to ask new questions. And just the more I learned, or even when I learned things I didn't agree with or that didn't sit well with me sometimes, those were opportunities to be intimate with Christ; opportunities to reach out to him and say, "Look, this is something that I might struggle with a little bit," and, "Help me out," and He stepped in. And I didn't always have all the answers, obviously, but I felt Him there and that was enough. I think *the more you learn too, especially about the scriptures, the more you realize that you don't know.* And it's that kind of hunger, motivation, and curiosity, these gifts that I've seen God give me, they kind of keep me going and keep me reaching. And whenever I mess up, which I do fairly regularly, they keep me turning back to God.

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# Matthew 14; Mark 6; John 5–6

Jason Combs

***Matthew 14:27** But straightway  
Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of  
good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

I think the message here is not that we are commanded to be of good cheer on our own, we're not commanded to summon that on our own.

*We're commanded to be of good cheer because Christ has come, because He has come to us in our toil.*

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When Peter walks on water, even if in the end he still needed to rely on the Savior, it is still absolutely an example of his faithfulness. I think that's a message for all of us, *to whatever faith we have. Ultimately we are dependent on our Savior*, and that's where our faith needs to lie.

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I've been describing all these seven miracles as miracles, but John doesn't call them that. John doesn't use the word "miracles," he calls them signs. So for John, each one of these is a sign that Jesus is performing something miraculous. It's a sign that points us to Jesus, *that helps us understand more about who Jesus is.*

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I really like this symbolism of the sacrament as *literally taking Jesus into ourselves*, of taking into ourselves that which gives us life, becoming one with Him as He is one with the Father.

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I think there's a tendency in modern culture to spiritualize things, *to dismiss the importance of the material, and yet we are material beings*. I think it's really important that we have these moments in our religious life where we connect with God through material actions, whether that's being immersed in water, whether that's eating some food, or whether that's going through the process of the endowment in the temple. All of those are very tangible, physical actions *that help us as material, physical beings to make a connection between ourselves and the divine, to connect with something beyond ourselves.*

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Mark is trying to show us that the stakes of discipleship are sometimes incredibly high. Sometimes it's not just giving your life, meaning committing your life to Christ; *sometimes it can even be literally giving your life.*

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I feel like God had called me to do these things, and I was feeling like, “Why, Lord, have you called me to do this? And yet, time and again, I’m failing and I’m not feeling like you’re helping me.” And I started not only to get mad at God but to feel like maybe this is all just in my mind. Maybe I’m making this up. Maybe it was just my own wish to do this, and maybe even there is no God. It was at that point John 6:66-69 came to me one more time. I felt the blessings I’ve received from the gospel. *I know that there is a God, and I am confident that God has inspired me and guided me in my life and called me to do these things, and I felt once again to say, “Lord, to whom should I go? Where else could I turn? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and I believe that thou art the Christ.”*

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# Easter

Anthony Sweat

***1 Corinthians 15:55-58***

*O death, where is thy sting?*

*O grave, where is thy victory?*

I think there's a fundamental human question that we all have to ask ourselves. Is Jesus a superhero? Is He someone who comforts? Is He a great moral teacher? Is He a myth? Is He a legend? Is He a prophet? Is He a philosopher? *Or is He the Son of the Highest? Is He my Redeemer? Is He my Lord? Is He my God?* And I just love that question: *Who is Jesus to me?*

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The very first thing He does is He cleanses the temple, and it shows that Jesus is not going to be the kind of Messiah that the people necessarily wanted Him to be. *He's going to be the kind of Messiah that His Father told Him to be.* He's here to cleanse hearts, not to cleanse Romans out of the city. *He's here to make God's house a holy house, not to make our houses perfectly comfortable.*

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*Are we really praying for God's will, or are we just praying to be in the Garden of Eden?* Everything is, "Bless me to be safe, bless no bad things to ever happen, bless nobody to ever get sick, bless nobody to ever get hurt, bless me to get A's on all my exams, bless me to succeed at my job, bless everything to be fine all the time." Even my own kids when they say their prayers, I think the phrase "bless that we can all be happy and all be safe" is said about a hundred times per prayer, and it makes me wonder. *The point of life isn't to be back in Eden, the point of life is to learn to be celestial.*

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I think people might lose their faith when Jesus doesn't turn out to be who they want Him to be, which is a deliverer from metaphorical Rome or making the external life perfect. But what He wants to do is *make our internal life holy through His holiness. That's so crucial for us.*

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As we progress in our own spirituality and are really coming unto Christ and really hearing His voice, our prayers go from, “*Make everything in my life perfect,*” to, “*Help me internally to become more holy, help me to become more like Thee, help to change my heart, help to mold my character, help not deliver me from the difficulties of life but deliver me from sin.*” We shift from, “*This is everything I want,*” to, “*What is it that you want for me?*”

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I think those who stay with Christ — the disciples who do testify of Him, are there with Him, rejoice in Him, and love Him — they’ve made that shift from the external, “*Deliver me from the Romans,*” and, “*Heal my broken bones.*” They’ve had an experience with the Lord where He’s *healed their hearts, changed their lives, and made them more godlike people who can therefore testify of His divine grace and of His divine sonship, not just as an external miracle worker.*

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Learn of who He is *saying* He is, *not* who we *want* Him and are making Him up to be. What’s He teaching? What’s He saying? What does He want us to understand? “*Walk in meekness.*” What is He wanting us to therefore do? How does He want us to behave? And then what’s He promising? “*You can have peace in me.*”

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When we partake of the sacrament, we’re celebrating His sacrifice for us *but also* His conquering and triumph for us.

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I think that might be the greatest definition of being Christlike, is *learning how to submit to the will of the Father in our own personal bitter cups.*

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The interesting thing about consecration is *we're dedicating our lives to God*. In essence, we're saying, "Thy will be done," our whole life. Elder Maxwell said that perhaps the only thing we have that's truly ours is our will. That really is one of the mortal tests of life: *learning to know God and then learning to submit our will to His*. As we celebrate Easter, I think it's a great celebration of *Jesus showing us how that's done despite the difficulty of it*.

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It is important that we recognize that Jesus *gave* His life, nobody took His life from Him. He is voluntarily going to *give* it.

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To paraphrase a talk by David A. Bednar, not only has Christ suffered it all, He overcame it all. And so He knows how to help us overcome and carry our difficulties, because He's carried them before.

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We're talking about difficult pain here, but what is it that carried Him forward? It was His deep love for God and His deep love for God's children that carried Him forward. We would call that charity, by the way. Charity is the love of God and the love of His children. *Maybe that's why it is the greatest gift of all, because it's the one that makes it so that we can bear all things as well and have hope despite our difficulties*. "Beareth all things, hopeth all things, believeth all things," even if all things are less than hopeful and seem less than bearable.

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Every one of us in this life are going to face deep pain, deep sorrow, deep anguish, fear, and dread. To know that our Savior Himself faced that and felt that on levels unimaginable, I actually think makes it so that *He becomes a God — not just of sympathy, but a God of empathy*.

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I think sometimes as Latter-day Saints, we don't emphasize enough the power and beauty of our doctrine that *all will resurrect, all*. And that *all* will inherit a kingdom of heavenly glory because of the grace of Jesus Christ and His conquering of sin and death. We believe that *all, all* mankind who have been on this earth, with the small exception of the sons of perdition that I'm not even going to talk about, *all your friends, all your neighbors, all your loved ones, all your children, all your parents and grandparents, everybody* is going to be delivered from the grave and bodily resurrected into a kingdom of heavenly glory. They will receive an immortal body that surpasses all understanding.

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The holy temple is inviting us in a dramatization and a sacred ordinance *to come to know the Lord* and to be able to have our own witnesses of Him.

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There is more than one way to see the face of God, but it's my deep testimony. If we will live the gospel of Jesus Christ, if we'll come to know Him, if we'll submit ourselves to His will, if we'll strive to be aligned with His teachings and His commandments, *and to live them and implement them out of love for Him, not out of trying to earn heaven, but to learn heaven as it's been said*, I really think He will reveal Himself to us. And in our own way this Easter season, *let's all be witnesses*.

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As we know, Christ is not a last name. *Christ is a title*; it means the Anointed One, the Anointed One to save. What's He anointed to do? Well, *He's anointed to cleanse us, heal us, restore us, identify with us, strengthen us, and transform us*. Let me say those again, and you can see the word Christ in there if you take the first letter of each. **C**leanse us, **H**eal us, **R**estore us, **I**dentify with us, **S**trengthen us, and **T**ransform us.

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Jesus has the power to change us. *He can change our very natures and our very dispositions.*

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That's the gift of Easter, that "*God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" That's the miracle that we're celebrating, and, we are not diminishing the difficulties of mortality.

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The gift of faith might be "God loves His children," but the gift of hope is "*God loves me.*"

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I testify that Christ has the power to strengthen us *beyond our own natural capacities*. He can give us strength to overcome sin. He can give us strength to bear our burdens. And He can give us strength to do and become greater than we could become on our own. That is just a truth. I'm grateful that Jesus has changed me, and continues to change me, and my very nature into hopefully becoming a better person. He can take bad to good, He can take good to great, and *He can take great to making somebody like God*. That's His divinity. I testify that these powers are real. That's how I personally know of His divine sonship and His divine nature, because I've seen these at work in my own personal life.

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# Matthew 15–17; Mark 7–9

Kerry Muhlestein

***Matthew 16:18*** *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Jesus is a good Jew, but He's also not afraid to challenge the normal thing that is being established by hierarchy in leaderships. *He's not afraid to go against the grain.*

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The Savior always finds teaching moments, but *I think the Savior can do things we can't do.* I don't know that it would be my place to gather a large group around if I'm going to tell someone what they've done wrong, right? That's not my place, *but it is the Savior's place.*

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Anyone could be near to Christ in a way, but, as President Nelson has been teaching so powerfully, *when you're in a covenant relationship with Him, you have greater access to His power.* You have a closer relationship with Him. So He will interact with you and get you to get others to come to Him.

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Part of the reason that effort is required for all good spiritual things is because, to use President Oak's phrase, *we're a gospel of becoming*

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We have to ask ourselves, "What from the world around us is good, taken in little measure, but we just keep letting it ferment in our lives and it becomes corrupting?" And my guess would be that the answer is just about everything. *Whatever you're taking in from the world, if you do too much of it, it's a problem.*

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It seems to me that, often in life, *the Savior doesn't answer our prayers all at once.* It can be a process, and that process *is still miraculous*, but it's harder to see the miracles when it's a process, right? And I've thought and believed that for a long time.

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Sometimes you just have to stop and see the miracles that are there while you're waiting for the full miracle, like this man who was at Bethsaida, and take joy in the process even though there's still pain. Or as President Nelson describes, we can have this in the midst of our most vexing problems. *There's still joy from the little bits of miracles that we see as we are healed and made whole in stages. I would guess that a number of people are feeling that in their lives right now.*

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I want to get rid of the saying, "You do you," and I want to change it to the saying, "*You do God's you.*" Look at what God can see in you, and become what God wants you to be instead of being the limited you that you are right now.

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Where are you getting your information? From God or the world? *You will not and cannot get the most important information from the world.*

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I think that this is something that we probably all have felt at times and something that we all need to feel: "I have faith right now. I'm not sure I have faith enough for this, and I still have enough faith to ask for more faith."

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*Who is Jesus?* We can study all we want. Nothing in the academic method can prove or disprove that Jesus is the Son of God. It's not equipped to do so. It's like using a shovel to cut down a tree; it's the wrong tool. You need to use an ax if you're going to cut down the tree, or a saw. *The correct tool is the revelatory method, and that absolutely answers this question, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

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The world or the gates of hell will not prevail, even though Christ and His Apostles are a small group with this big, big massive thing of worldly power behind them. This small group, because they have revelation and power from God, will be what prevails. And let's be on the side of that small group.

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I hope people are able to feel how much God and His Son love us, and how much They're willing to do for us. Whether that is to heal us by stages, to take our faith where it is and move it somewhere else, whether it is to reveal their full glory to us, to have people translated 1,000 years before so that they can then come and bestow keys that we need, whether it be taking us in stages, we recognize Christ as a prophet, then we come to understand he's a Messiah, the Son of God. They take us where we are. *They love us so much, they will take us wherever we are and slowly bring us to be the beings that one day will be as glorious as what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, where we will be full of light, truth, and glory and have joy beyond what we can even comprehend.* And all of that is because they love us enough to covenant with us, be connected with us, and then suffer, for Christ to suffer and die for us, so that we can be transfigured or changed permanently into something better. God loves us. He just loves us.

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## Matthew 18; Luke 10

Krystal Pierce

***Matthew 18:4*** *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

I think [children] are more recently physically close to God. As we get older, we have more life experience. So, it's beautiful when you think of a child and how they get things sometimes more than we do.

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If you look at the Greek word here, the root, the literal meaning of “converted” means to turn in the opposite direction. *That really makes me think about, “How do I need to turn in the opposite direction of what I’m doing right now and go back toward God or go back toward Jesus Christ?”*

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He says, “If you receive one such little child in my name, you receive me.” So, *the way we treat children is almost the way we’re treating the Savior, because His nature and what He tells us about Himself is very much like a child in terms of humility and these things.*

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Sometimes I think we can come on a little strong with new people in the Church. We want them to know everything all at once, and sometimes it's like a fire hose, and we put obstacles in their path. *Give them time to learn, to grow, to develop, and really get their own personal testimony and understanding of Jesus Christ* before we start bringing in, as Joseph Smith says, all the appendages — all the things outside of Jesus Christ that can be hard to understand sometimes.

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When you think about it, we will all be lost at some point. Every single one of us will be that one lost sheep at some point, and I think we all hope that when we are, that *someone will come get us — someone will come find us and do the will of the Father*. When He says He's rejoicing in the one, *that's everybody*. Because everybody's going to be the one at some point in their life, and you want to be saved.

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Jesus, He comes back and says, “I say not unto thee seven times, but until seventy times seven,” and so He says 490 times. Of course, there’s more to this and these numbers. We know the number seven has a lot of importance in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Hebrew word is related to the root for completeness, wholeness, fullness... being satisfied. *So Jesus is saying, “You forgive completely. You forgive wholly.” He is not saying, “Chalk up 490 forgivenesses, and then 491 is where to stop.”*

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The word for forgive in Greek means to let go or release. Well, many times I think we think forgiveness is about the other person, but more often *I think it’s about us. Not necessarily letting them go or releasing them, but releasing ourselves from the pain that comes from holding onto things that people have done to us.*

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We all have an unfathomable amount of debt when we think about sin. 60 million working days of debt, and He comes in as our kinsman Redeemer, our brother, our family member, and just releases it. He releases it for us. It’s incredible when you think about it.

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*The law of mercy comes first, always.* If we refuse that mercy through our actions, then the law of justice comes in.

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How many times should we forgive? *As many times as we want to be forgiven by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. That’s how many times.* I love that He kind of puts it in your hands, right? Forgiveness is a power you have. You can’t necessarily change the other person or force them to do anything, but you have the power to *release yourself from that pain* through forgiveness, and you want your Heavenly Father to forgive you unlimited times.

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We have a lot of work to do, because the field and the harvest is not just here and now but on the other side of the veil as well. So for the Restoration, the field is even bigger; the harvest is even bigger. President Nelson talks about the gathering of Israel. *This* is what it's about: *gathering on both sides of the veil*. We have a lot of work.

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I think sometimes we think we're safe because we live in Capernaum, or we live in Utah, or we're born in the covenant, or we were born into a testimony, or something like that. He's saying, "*No, you have to work for those things*. If you have seen these things, if you have had these blessings and opportunities, then you need to take advantage of them and realize what you have."

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When we see someone who needs help, do we pass by on the other side? Do we have excuses like, "It's too dangerous for me to pull over. I'm really busy. Someone else will come along and help them. I don't know how to help them. I don't have the means to help them." All of the excuses we can come up with for this Levite and the priest we've probably said ourselves, some justification for not helping somebody.

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I always think of King Benjamin who says, "Sometimes that's our reason for not helping someone. They brought this sin on themselves. They did it to themselves." He says, "Nope. *We're all beggars. We all need help. We're all trying to seek forgiveness and redemption.*" I think that's part of the point of the priest and the Levite here.

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Sometimes service is just sitting and listening. It's not necessarily bringing over cookies, sometimes it is, or helping clean a house or something like that. But sometimes it's just sitting with the person and listening to them and helping them spiritually, emotionally, or mentally rather than physically.

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We get pulled between so many of our different identities. We want to be good at our calling, we want to be good at our work, we want to be a good parent or a good friend. But Christ is saying, *"Your most important identity and role is as a disciple of Jesus Christ,"* and I would add, *as a child of Heavenly Father.* That's what you should focus on. Christ is giving Martha permission to do that, and we should feel the same way, that sometimes we just focus on that.

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*He's here because His message is here,* because we're here, because we're building the kingdom of heaven right now. He will come back again. So we can take all of these things that they're working on and do it for us here now — including when we think about Mary and Martha and choosing priorities, and where we're going to put our energy and effort. It's all preparing for him to come back, and gathering the harvest and the sheep on both sides of the veil so that we're ready when he returns, and His kingdom is ready for Him to be the King.

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# John 7–10

Jenet Erickson

| ***John 10:27*** *My sheep hear my voice,  
and I know them, and they follow me*

He has come in mortality and pitched His tent, so to speak, *with us — living among us in a tabernacle of flesh.*

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The Son submitting perfectly to the will of the Father, and that this being of perfect obedience in that process would have complete power, teaches us a lot about where power comes from. *It comes in submission to the divine will.* He wants us to know over and over and over again, “I do nothing, save what my Father has told me to do,” and that’s what gives Him power over everything. *His submission to the Lord is what enables Him to be the great Redeemer.*

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We judge with such skewed vision through a glass darkly, and He’s inviting us into His way, which is to judge righteously, to make things right, to respond with goodness.

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These people here at the time, they’re replacing religion for God Himself and not seeing the being who is their God before them. And so there is something about coming to experience God — *knowing Him, feeling Him — that is essential.*

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Here He says, “Ye cannot come,” but then, by His crucifixion and Resurrection, He rents the veil and makes it possible for us to enter into that sacred place. *Our eternal purpose for coming was to return again, changed into beings who are like Him.*

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What comes from the temple is deeper and deeper covenant connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. That covenant connection is never stagnant, it takes us where we are. *The Lord binds Himself to us where we are, however small we are.*

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He is so good to us. He will expose us in our dishonesty to ourselves and unveil our hypocrisy *so that we can be healed.*

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So often I'll think about my own weaknesses and feel tempted to go into a place of shame, and *I can hear His voice say, "Where are your accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?"*

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And then He says, the only one who could have, from a place of judgment, condemned her because of His own purity, the only one who could have, says, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go." And He gives just beautiful liberation. He is the great liberator liberating us from shame, from the entrapment of sin, bearing it Himself, in a sense, with us overcoming it and making us free.

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He's saying the law is to be used in the work of love. He is judging, but He's not judging who's worthier and who's not of His love. He's saying what is needed. *Sin uses God's law to ask what is deserved. Grace uses God's law to ask what is needed.* Here is Jesus Christ, always returning good from evil.

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His work is to set things right, to advocate for those who can't take care of themselves, to defeat death and hell. That is the work He is doing, and His work will not stop until all things have been made right.

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There's just no other way but the path of truth in order to be free to become and experience all that we need to, all that we yearn to have. And He frees us in every way. *He frees us by enabling truth. He frees us by taking us from shame. He frees us by opening the gate to heaven in all the ways. Christ is the great liberator, and He is the Spirit of Truth.*

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We all end up in this broken place where *Christ alone can reconcile the irreconcilable.*

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How real it is that all of us are in need of the Liberator, all of us are in need of what He alone can do, *all of us are in bondage.*

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Here's Jesus Christ, *who rather than seeing the blind man's suffering as a punishment sees it as an occasion for Him to enter in and bring healing. He doesn't accuse, He just judges what is needed and offers that to Him. He doesn't cause suffering, He responds to it. And it feels like he's always inviting us into that work of love, His work of love, to respond to the reality of suffering.*

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When He comes, *we want to run to Him and follow where He leads.*

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We don't know the answers to all things, or the how, *but we know who. We know who we can go to, who is the way and who is the life.*

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All the difficulties in our lives *can be repurposed in His hands* for growth and progress, for strength and empowerment. That is just to know who He is. It is such a miracle.

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Jesus Christ has power even over the things that we “inherit,” so to speak, like that we bring into this life — the traumas and difficulties that we bring in. *He has power to transform us and to heal us.*

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In covenants, we grow. In covenants, we experience conversion. In covenant power, *we're changed to be able to see and receive evermore of the Redeemer's light, power, and influence in our lives.*

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Can't you hear the beautiful language in the hymn Amazing Grace? How many of us know the miracle of the fruits of Jesus Christ in our lives, being blind and then we can see?

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We may not know the way, how all of this stuff can be reconciled or figured out, but what we can know is he says, "Lord, I believe in you." Here, he's meeting the Savior, and the Savior says, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." And he says, "*Lord, I believe thou art the way.*" *Such an answer to the issues in our lives.*

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There's strong clarity that He is the only way. That redemption is only through Christ. That we must all enter through that narrow space of honesty in receiving the covenant power of Jesus Christ in our lives to be changed.

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So, here's the Savior. The last verse is, "For judgment, to make things right, I am come into this world that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." He's pulling out *when we think we see, which is how our natural pride can be, how blind we truly are. And yet when we recognize our blindness, we create space for the Redeemer of the world to help us see.* That's what His work is — *to liberate us into the truth that we might see.*

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*He has done all that is needed for every single one of us for full redemption, and there's nothing outside of that.*

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So, this gospel of John is not only a gospel teaching us of the divinity of Jesus Christ, but as Eric Huntsman has said so powerfully, "*This is a gospel about discipleship.*" *It's about how we respond to the reality of this divinity.*

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John is trying to teach us how we can all stand there and choose. He is the Light, as He's testified. He is the door for the sheep. He is the Good Shepherd. He is all of those things. He is the one who frees us from shame. He is the one who forgives. *Will we receive him? Will we believe in Him as the blind man does?*

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I think for me, it's been so powerful to just study deeply all He is. And I'm so grateful for the testimony of John who witnessed His life and then goes back and writes and pulls together all these testimonies of the Lord Himself when he says, "I am the Light of the World. I am that I am. I am the door. I am the Good Shepherd. Before Abraham was, I am. I was the one who said, 'I will go.' I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the vine." And He is trying to help us know, "*I am, I will be, I was for you, all of these things that you so yearn and need.*" I am so grateful for that truth. I know that is truth. I know. I know He is that, and he yearns to be all of that for us.

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## Luke 12–17; John 11

S. Michael Wilcox

***Luke 15:7** I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

We can lift people up — *are we?* We can loose them, we can make them straight, we can help them glorify God, we can help to remove their bonds. We can heal, *we can pull them up.*

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Everything Jesus did on a physical level, *everything*, all the miracles that He did for an individual, was His way of saying, “*What I’m doing for this individual I can do for everybody on a spiritual level.*” And we have to look at the miracles always that way, saying, “*How does that apply to me and to my life on a spiritual level?*”

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There are prides that come out of different things. We’re warned of pride, being of wealth. We’re warned of the pride of learning, but that’s not the most dangerous pride Jesus says we need to be aware of. *It is the pride of righteousness. Isn’t that interesting?*

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He is saying, “*I need to be the priority.* If I am, things will probably be better with your spouse, children, brothers, sisters, etcetera, and so forth.”

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*Your real self is you at your best.* I truly believe that.

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He is going to ask Peter, “Lovest thou me?” Well, He asks all of us that question all the time, and we want to be able to say, “Yes, Lord, I love you. And I’m in for the whole journey, and I’m not going to walk away, and I’m not going to quit. Even if it costs a lot.” Verse 26 suggests it might cost you, even your own life.

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God’s job isn’t always to stop unpleasant things from happening, or suffering. *God’s job is to get us through it and to make it good eventually* in the end in some way, and He always does.

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We're all prodigals in our own way, and all need to know there is, at least with your Father in Heaven, the robe, the ring, the shoes, the kiss, and the embrace *are waiting. He'll run to give it to you. That's our Father in Heaven.*

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We worship a God who is so merciful, so forgiving. He's a seven times a day God. He's a 10,000-talent forgiver, a 500-pence forgiver. He's a scarlet to snow white forgiver. He's an as far as the east is to the west forgiver. Sometimes I need seven times a day in my life.

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*It's when you don't expect something and get it that the gratitude goes deep.*

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*Celebrate the good and forgive all the rest.*

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We never want to be one of the nine. *We always want to be that one who turns back, maybe because you got more in life than you ever expected.* “I can’t think of anybody on earth more blessed than me, just can’t think of it. Maybe you don’t have troubles and problems, but I just can’t think of anybody who’s been given more with his bowl of yogurt than I’ve been given.” That’s what I think Luke 17 is all about, that gratitude.

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There is something very human about all of us. Occasionally in our lives, we may find ourselves saying, “Lord, if thou had been here, something wouldn’t have happened. Where were you? You could have fixed it. You delayed. You waited two days.” But this story of Lazarus teaches us that He’s going to make it good. *And He’s going to make it good sooner than we think*, just like He did for Mary and Martha, and *better* than we think, like raising Lazarus from the dead.

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Sometimes the answer to our prayers is simply the acknowledgement and understanding that *God has heard us. That's all I need.* I just need to know that He heard me, and I know that He hears me always.

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And the Lord says He didn't want them to stop. He doesn't want us to stop halfway. *He wants to get us all the way into His kingdom. "Don't take half the journey."* In this case, "Don't build half the tower, but understand that as you build — and I'm going to give you a whole lifetime to build, and I'm going to give you even after this lifetime to build — *I'll give you every chance you need. But understand that there may be some very difficult choices if you want to be my disciple. It's not easy.*"

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That's what Easter's all about. It's that question, *"Is the joy of Sunday at the Garden Tomb worth the pain of Friday in Gethsemane and on the cross?"*

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# Matthew 19–20; Mark 10; Luke 18

Matt Townsend

**Matthew 19:16** *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

In a lot of these stories, you're going to see their vulnerability make some fight or flight. And what the Lord's telling us to do is, *"Don't do either. Just stay with me, and trust me, and have faith in me, and I will deliver you. Stay with me."*

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The only thing to really bring lasting happiness is to seek at-one-ment with Christ. Not just Atonement, but also at-one-ment. Meaning, *don't just obey the commandments, become alive in Christ and literally connect with Christ. And let him be not just the guide, but the comfort, and the peace, and the insight, and the direction.*

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I'm not sure that we're on this earth to just avoid sin. I think we're on this earth *to become like Him.*

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When we're living in "the family model," we don't see each other as better or worse. We see each other as brothers and sisters. In the family model, *Christ is the big brother, and He's coming to get us.* And the goal is to return home and to be like Mom and Dad.

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The goal of marriage is the process of creating a loving relationship with your spouse, not just the existence of the covenant.

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When Christ comes, He's not checking our marital status, He's checking what we've become as we've joined into this covenant relationship. What have we become through it?

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The reality of our existence paradoxically is that a lot of marriages don't work, for a variety of reasons. And because they don't work, it leaves us in the middle of a paradox: Am I supposed to stay and be hurt emotionally or whatever? Or am I supposed to divorce and move on? And *that is a decision that has to be between you and the Lord*. I have seen people make the most incredible decisions to stay, and over time the Lord worked the relationship through the Spirit, which is one member doing it, and it eventually saved a marriage. I've also seen the Lord, even in my own family life, prompt the marriage to end, and my mother made a hard decision. And when she ended it, it ended up being seriously blessed for me, and it created a space where I would be in the gospel and I would be able to become what I've become in my life.

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God will provide and take care of us.

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With Christ in the mix, in the promise and the covenant with you, *nothing will be wasted*.

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And instead of thinking of an outcome of the marriage working or not, what we probably ought to be thinking is the means of “What are we becoming in our marriage?”

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The problem with this world is the paradox of we're competing, we're comparing, we're contrasting. And if one person gets ahead and we have a zero-sum mentality, then we are actually getting behind, *where with God, it's abundant*. When you then hold this parable [of the vineyard] up as an image of what our Heavenly Father will do for us, it teaches us that *it doesn't matter when you show up, just show up and He'll pay you the full blessing*.

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Lesson number one from the Lord's vineyard is coveting, pouting, and tearing down others does not elevate your standing, nor does demeaning someone else improve your self-image. So *be kind and be grateful that God is kind. It is a happy way to live your life.*

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I think God loves us. If it was about us being perfect, then they would drop the veil. "Just drop it and I'll show you how good I can be." But if it's about *us figuring it out and working it from the inside out, I think we're in the perfect situation.*

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I think he's begging us to *become alive in Him* so that we can experience a happier life.

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It just seems like *the Lord is always going to push us to our highest obstacle so that we can then take it on and overcome it with Him.* That's why it is probably difficult for any of us to dare ask, "What lack I yet?"

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"Beholding him, Jesus loved him." I love that idea, that no matter what, every rebuke, every correction the Savior makes will start with a really strong swelling of compassion and love. And I really believe that when the Savior approaches us with love, and He is looking in our eyes, our body and our mind will start to pick up that love. I think the Savior uses that as a way to help convert us to this change. It's powerful.

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What we have for some of us is more imposter syndrome, where we don't think we're good enough and we wouldn't be strong enough to go ask the Savior the question. And we would just watch the Savior pass and long to say something, like the woman that touched the hem of His garment that had to sneak in for her variety of reasons. But either way, *whether you do the "over" behavior because you're too confident or you do the "under" behavior because you're not confident enough, either one of those could keep you from God.* And we don't want to be kept from God with our "over" behavior or our "under" behavior, so we want to start noticing, "Do I go too over? Do I play too hard, or do I play too little? Am I risking enough? Am I trying enough? Am I asking enough?" It's powerful.

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If I'm not choosing a relationship with Christ in the moment, it doesn't matter what I've chosen.

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I've seen everything destroy relationships. I've seen success. I've seen jobs. I've seen people say they wanted a divorce over lettuce. That caused a fight and that turned on the natural man. I've seen pride. I've seen anxiety. I've seen depression. I've seen mental health. I've seen ADHD. I've seen self-righteousness. I've seen controlling. I have literally seen everything, which is why money is an easy one to beat up. *I think what the point is, is it's the love of anything but Christ. It's the love of anything but God. It's the love of anything but one another.*

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So, if us not being able to love each other, ourselves, and God enough to make this work in this paradoxical world we're in, that's what makes our God cry. *To know that we have a God that weeps is powerful, and then to know that someday, He's going to run and chase us down like that prodigal son, and He's going to kiss us on the neck and we're all going to be able to be there with Him, it's going to come back to love.*

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Whatever it is that we love the most *will become the thing we are becoming, and everything will follow that lead.*

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As soon as we have the eyes to see, we'll be able to feel what we need to feel to become more Christlike. Then we'll be able to be motivated to do what we need to do, and then we can actually become what we need to become.

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I don't think we need to think that eventually God will redeem us. *I like to think that He'll redeem us all day through the day.* He'll come back and pick us up through that next situation, and through that next situation, and I think He actually longs to be there with us.

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The greatest validation you could have, I think, *is to know that you're known by God and know that you're being moved and influenced by Him*, and to know that you can connect and feel Him. If I could feel the spirit of God's Atonement and feel it consistently, Henry Eyring, Elder Eyring, taught us that that is a sign that the Atonement is working on us. When we're feeling that spirit, that is the greatest connection we can have to validate us.

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The key is the spirit of connection that's created in the process of doing the actions. It's that conversion, It's through the Spirit, that I gained the traits and the gifts of God. *It's through the Spirit that I become more like Him, and I'm healed, and I'm cleansed.*

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A lot of us sit on this earth. We seem to be alone and feel lonely a lot, and we don't seem to have the at-one-ment as much as we want with the Savior. But there was a moment where the Savior, on the cross, had to suffer the "*alone-ment*," and He had to suffer it in a really big way. And it was devastating to Him because He was one who had always lived with it, lived with His father, and been with His father. The idea that that suffering hit Him so hard tells me *I can live in it daily without it bothering me as much. If we strive to do anything, what if we could just start to become even more used to it so its absence does impact us? And one way to do that is probably to be looking more to the Savior and finding Him in everything. As we go through these stories, the Savior is in every part, and He is the only thing that will bring peace in all of the tragedy and trials and issues that we're going to face in our life.*

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# Matthew 21–23; Mark 11; Luke 19–20; John 12

Keith Wilson

***Matthew 22:37*** *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

We all, in life, really thrive on positive reinforcement. Sometimes we don't get as much as we'd like, but when we get encouragement from those that we love and trust, it just makes all the difference in the world. It's the whole essence of community, family, and loving other people. And I'd like to suggest to you that the triumphal entry is really one of those touches in Jesus's life where He gets encouragement. *The Father seemed to build in some events right close to when He would do the hardest thing of His whole assignment that built in some reinforcement. I just love that.*

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The triumphal entry was a huge tender mercy for the Savior Himself.

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God's not going to force any one of us to believe. It's all about us having agency and choosing a path of faith.

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There's these three symbols: the donkey, the clothing, and the palm branches. And here's the symbolic interpretation of those. Remember, they're putting their clothes down because He's royalty. So, for the Prince of Peace, the donkey is the domestic animal of peace, and He rides into the city victorious. Nike was the athletic kind of God, and Nike was symbolized by a palm branch. So it became kind of the sign of victory in competition and things like that. Isn't that cool, to see the convergence of these three symbols?

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Most of the time, Jesus doesn't ever get to be the guy that the crowds cheer for and things, because there's not crowds. But in the triumphal entry, the crowds are cheering for Jesus — maybe a hundred thousand people *cheering for Jesus*.

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The historical significance of the Hosanna shout is that anciently, *people were accepting Jesus into their lives*, into their city, acknowledging Him as their Messiah. So when we have our hanky and do the waving, it is to say, *“We welcome You into our lives, into our hearts, into the center of our city.”*

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That’s the function of human memory, we remember things differently, and that’s the beauty of it. To me, four different accounts say, “This really is a real event,” because people remember it differently and they’re not just copying the same text.

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I like to also think that God is saying, “You are not going to understand all of the details in the Resurrection because we don’t live in that realm, the realm of the dead if you will. But we live now. And so, *you can only understand things according to your current framework and concept.*”

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I’ve often wondered, long after you and I are gone from this earth will our witness, *will our deeds and our examples, still be working in God’s favor? Will people still be believing and following because we chose to remain a disciple, and things like that?* I love the fact that John here is deceased, long since deceased, and yet *he’s still protecting the Savior.*

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Really, for each one of us, *can you say in your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten?* That He is *your* personal Savior?

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And then the Savior turns to them and says, “You know, folks, the real issue here is, do you believe that I am not just somebody that does miracles, not just somebody that has a big crowd, *but do you believe I’m the Messiah?*” What a penetrating question for each one of us.

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I think I've come to realize in life that *faith is a choice*, and you can find evidence for truth in your life for whichever perspective you want to take. Elder Holland referred to the Book of Mormon, and a witness of the Book of Mormon is the greatness of the evidences. That's because you're looking for the evidence to corroborate that faith, and I believe that God has intended it that way. *He doesn't want to force any of us to believe. But when you believe and try to apply and live, then you shall know.* "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." And it's not reversed. And so, it's almost like in life, you have to make a decision as to whether or not you want to accept the Lord in your life and you want to accept the Restoration. And then you will find if you continue to honor that desire, you'll find all kinds of corroborating evidence, both internal and external. For me, there's no question, because I keep receiving evidence that this is God's path and that He is in my life.

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## Matthew 24-25; Mark 12-13; Luke 21

Avram Shannon

***Matthew 25:40*** *And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

You and I can go through our life every day eating, drinking, getting dressed, getting other people dressed, getting other people fed, doing our work, doing every day what Korihor calls “the management of the creature.” We can spend every day *just living without a thought for our eternal nature, our destiny*. And of course, *that’s not what God wants. He wants us to think about higher and more eternal things*.

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The presence of God is disruptive — *it changes things*, it moves things, it makes things different, *it disrupts*.

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In many ways, *our lives should be a constant preparation for Jesus Christ’s Second Coming*, because He’s going to come for the whole world and fix everything. It’s going to be beautiful, but in the meantime *He can come in our lives. He can come and He can visit us, we can be with Him*.

The Second Coming is necessary to our understanding of Jesus Christ, of the Messiah. It is a necessary part of what it means to be a Christian and to accept Jesus as the Messiah, because that’s how He fulfills all the prophecies. Because He did not fulfill them all in mortality, but He’s going to in His Second Coming.

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One of the distinctive things about being a Christian *is that we wait for Jesus. Jesus wants us on the edge of our seats*.

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The great privilege of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is *you can learn for yourself. You don’t need my testimony*.

It's not so much what you're given *as it is what you do with it.*

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God's like, "Stop looking around. Just do your thing. Stop comparing yourself to somebody else." The great message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is actually that it's not fair.

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Whatever else the gospel of Jesus Christ is, it's not fair; it's just. It's good. It's wonderful, but I am not getting what I deserve. What I deserve is to go to hell.

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This is part of our Christian obligation — *we are obligated to help people.*

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Sometimes, as we talk about ministering, helping each other, or things like that, we're like, "Oh. Well, it's more than just giving a meal," and that's right. But I think Matthew 25 reminds us *it's not less than giving a meal.*

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That's what it means to prepare the world. It means to go out there and help people, not for money, but for God and His glory, *to make the world the kind of place that He wants to come back to.*

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Jesus Christ is going to make everything better, and we have the privilege now to do *our* best to make things better as we wait for Him to come.

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# Matthew 26; Mark 14; John 13

Camille F. Olson

***Matthew 26:22*** *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

John says in his revelation that in the celestial kingdom, there will be no temple there *because Jesus Christ is there. And everything in the temple is to help us see Him, and to find Him, and to follow Him.*

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I learned from Mary of Bethany, *there is tremendous power in being silent and listening, and truly opening our hearts and souls to be taught.* What does President Nelson remind us? To truly hear Him, we need to button the lip and listen.

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He teaches us the level of love we have for Him is manifest by the way we serve others.

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That word, “serve,” the noun form of it in Greek is “diakonos”, which is sometimes translated as “minister” or the verb form “ministering.” It’s a wonderful reminder, again, of something that happens as we make covenants and renew covenants. I think that we recommit to minister, and *that’s what makes a true follower of Christ.*

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Those administering the sacrament to us, they are His servants and are *bringing us Him to renew our covenants with Him.* That’s asking a lot, especially when we’re talking about these young teenage boys. When they do that, and I’ve seen it, oh, in so many different ways, I am so touched and empowered to recognize that *with Jesus Christ in His strength, I can do all things and keep my covenants with Him that week.*

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Don't get high minded. You have One over you.  
*You are not in charge, but the Lord is.*

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We are tainted. This is a fallen world and we are part of it, and we think we can clean ourselves. We think, "If I just do this and this and this, I'll be okay and I'll be clean." I think what the Savior could be teaching is, "No, *there's certain things you cannot do*. I could give you power so that you can go out and feed the 5,000. I can give you power and you can heal the sick. *But you cannot clean yourself. I am the only one who can clean you*. And if you won't let me do this, you have no part with me."

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How we show we are true disciples of Christ is that we show Christlike love, which is charity, right? The pure love of Christ.

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We live in fiery times. With what we're studying this week in Come Follow Me and the Savior's tremendous example and teachings — the love He showed, not only in giving the sacrament, but in what He taught in washing feet, including Judas Iscariot's feet — it was with as much kindness and love, if not more so, than even any of the others. And His teachings to come follow Him, to love others as He loved them, what we have is His spirit and His gospel to strengthen us and enable us to do that. I just want to commit. *I'm going to be better. I am trying to be better, a better disciple, by loving better and more closely the way the Savior has loved me and all others.*

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## John 14–17

Robert Eaton

***John 15:10*** *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*



John just talked about in a world that says keeping the commandments is not freedom, Jesus says the exact opposite. “I can give you true freedom. Follow my commandments, and I can expand your freedom in ways you never thought possible.”

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If you follow Jesus Christ, you believe in absolute truth. Heck, we believe He is the absolute Truth with a capital T. And that’s quite a different approach than saying, “Find your own way. Find your own truth.”

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Anytime I see the word “way” in the scriptures, I like to think, *what if I capitalize that W? What does that do for me?*

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It’s not a one-time thing we do of having faith in Christ, or repenting, or even ordinances. *It’s an increasingly rewarding pattern of living an upward virtual cycle as we live the doctrine of Christ.*

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I feel like when we really follow Jesus Christ, even in mortality, He’s the source of joyful living, a joyous life.

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This is a relatively distinctive truth of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that we understand there will be all sorts of wonderful people who acted in this life according to all the light and knowledge that they had. They’ll continue on that trajectory in the next life, yet they won’t be able to get in without Jesus. *He is the way. He is the only way. There is no other way, but they will have that opportunity, millions and millions of people, in ways that they didn’t in this life.*

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We can simultaneously disagree with others but love them, learn from them, and work together with them. I think that's all part of how we teach these truths with love.

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For me, the final, kind of the bottom line for these first few verses of John 14 are that *there's not limited seating in heaven. Salvation is not a zero-sum game. In fact, we're better off trying to help other people get admission to heaven if we want a seat there ourselves. But the seats aren't all the same.* There are varying degrees of glory. How we live, what we believe here, matters. And mercifully, some people will get chances in the next life that they might not have gotten in this life.

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The only reason any of us can get access to any seat in heaven is because of The Way, *the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.*

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Here Jesus tells us His love language is obedience, keep His commandments. Not perfection, but wholeheartedly, earnestly striving.

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He's not going to leave us without a *teacher, guide, or guardian.*

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The trust in Jesus that comes from real faith leads to peace. We have to worry about so much less when we really trust His promises.

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When we follow Christ, we let all sorts of things go. People cutting in front of us in traffic, things that become the source of irritation, frustration, and squabbles, and thus a lack of peace in our lives, become non-starters if we'll just *walk in the meekness of the Spirit.*

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When we live life with an eternal perspective,  
we have greater peace.

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I have found the more I ground my teaching,  
my service, my thinking in the Savior, the more  
power, the more effectiveness, and the more joy  
there is for me.

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When I do stuff for Jesus, I do it more joyfully  
and more effectively.

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Abiding change comes from tapping into Jesus  
Christ and His doctrine.

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The question is, what's my soundtrack? What  
do I read or watch that sticks with me? What  
am I choosing?

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I don't mean at all to minimize legitimate ques-  
tions and concerns and confusions and doubts  
people might have, but for me, *I find the better my  
relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, the  
more stuff that once concerned or troubled me just seems  
to fade into the background and not be that important.  
The better my relationship is, the more plugged in I am  
to the vine, the more likely I am to abide in them and  
walk their path.*

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In John 14:7–12, 28, and 31, the message is,  
“My Father is greater than I. I do what He  
asked me to. I do what He sent me to do.” That  
is how we achieve unity with Him and the Fa-  
ther, is that we submit to Him in the very same  
way that He has submitted to the Father.

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If we're to realize our greatest potential as children of God, our latent divinity to become one with Him, one with His Son, there's only one way to do it and *Jesus is that way. We follow Him. We have faith in Him. We come to think, and feel, and act like Him.*

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This is a reminder, because sometimes when life's hard and you encounter some conflicts, there's a natural man, natural woman tendency to withdraw, to say, "Fine, I'll just take my ball and go home." Jesus needs us to stay and play, to help make the world a better place.

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Jesus wants us to be standing with Him in turbulent times and always.

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"Do you think people overestimate how much inspiration there is in leading the Church, how much the Lord is involved?" I said, "Well, I met this one guy in Mexico who testified that the First Presidency met daily with Jesus in the temple." I said, "I think they might." I haven't heard that or anything to suggest that, but I said, "*I think most of us underestimate it.*" As I've worked closely with the Brethren, I think we underestimate that we're too quick to assume, "Well, that's just a relic of their social upbringing, of their culture, of their biases." I have been amazed at those two men, the late Elder Hales and President Eyring. And then I got to interview all of the Twelve and everyone but President Monson. With each of them, I felt the same thing that I feel and that anyone can feel listening to them in general conference. *They are chosen and ordained. They are sent from Christ. Even when there are questions I don't have the answer to, I know where I want to stand. I want to stand with Jesus and those He's called and ordained.*

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# Luke 22; John 18

Daniel Belnap

***Luke 22:42** Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

The book of John establishes Christ's divinity well, but there is a mortal element of this. And part of it is Christ is going to be alone, very much alone here, moving forward. *And having support from His friends and His family, that would be important to anybody.* So the idea of having this final meal, I think one element of it is like, "Listen, I'm about to do something that's really difficult. I'd like to just have a meal with my friends if that's possible before I do."

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One of the primary symbols used in the scripture to describe that oneness or unity that can emerge thanks to the Atonement of Christ are meals — *eating*. You can see different variations of those meals scattered throughout the scriptures, and the Last Supper is one of them. From Christ's perspective: "I'm going to be by myself, can we be one together one last time?" *I think that's kind of beautiful.*

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The sacrament is a communal ordinance — we do it together. Even as we sit in silence, we're sitting next to our family, next to our friends. *It's very much a communal experience. And I think sometimes we miss out on the sacrament if we don't recognize its communal nature.*

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For the Nephites, the sacrament wasn't a memorial of Christ's broken body *but of His resurrected body*. And I always think, *how different would it be if I thought of the sacrament as a reminder of Christ's resurrected body?* How does that change this ordinance

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The word "sacrifice" is a Latin word, and it really means "to make holy" or "to transform." *Sacrifice, then, is an act of transformation. It's an act of change, not loss.* I think sometimes we mistake those two. It's an active agency by which we transform something from one state to another.

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We sometimes see a sacrifice of time as, “Oh, I’m going to lose an hour, or I’m going to lose two hours.” But what you’re really doing is *you’re changing the way you use that time. It’s a transformation.*

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What makes charity the pure love of Christ is *He knows us for who we are, not the way we appear to be; not the way things may seem to be, but the way things are.*

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If we truly recognized the divine nature of everyone around us, that implication would be that *we’re in the presence of divine beings. How would you not want to serve someone like that?*

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We are sustained not just by our faith in Jesus Christ, *but by His faith in us.*

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What all the gospels want to say is *nothing surprised Christ*. Nothing at all, outside of maybe what happened in the garden, came as a surprise to Christ. This was ordained. This had to happen. *Christ knew it.*

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We’re going to fail. The challenge is that the adversary wants you to believe that once you’ve failed, you’ve failed and there’s no coming back from that. Whereas, *just because you failed in this instance doesn’t mean that your faith is a failure.*

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There’s a cosmic scale to this Atonement. We tend to look at it egocentrically: “The Atonement fixes the corruption, the pain, the suffering, the entropy of my life.” But Paul gives a glimpse into its cosmic scale. *“All matter is redeemed through the Atonement of Christ.” I don’t think we often think about the cosmic scope of Christ’s sacrifice, and yet it transforms everything.*

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How do I know that Christ has faith in me?  
*Because He gave Himself for me.* That's my proof.  
 That's my evidence that Christ has faith in me.

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*You're going to fail, but that doesn't mean your faith has failed.* In fact, odds are it probably hasn't because Christ prayed for you. We could rely a lot more on Christ if we gave Him the chance. I think there's something liberating and freeing to know that Christ has faith in you.

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He's the one person who has truly ever, ever been alone — cut off, isolated. That is a normal emotional feeling that we have as human beings, *but we've never experienced it like Christ. Christ's aloneness, His isolation, makes it possible so that we never are and never have been.*

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I know we call it Gethsemane, that He's oppressed. We have this idea that He's being pressed and squeezed. There's elements of that in Isaiah 53, that He'll be bruised for our iniquities. That word in Hebrew is "daka," meaning to crush. "He'll be crushed for our iniquities." *It's the same root that lies behind the translation of "contrite" in the Old Testament. "Contrite" is a Latin word which means "to crush."* So, *the sacrifice that Christ goes through to be "crushed for our iniquities," we experience it as we offer a broken heart and a crushed spirit. So there's a similarity in the type of sacrifice.*

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I've always wondered, in the case of Mary, who ends up doing something unlike any other mortal human being on this earth, if one of the reasons why was not just because that's the way it had to be done, but because *Mary can relate to her son in a way that nobody else can.* Mary, as a mother, can go, "I don't know what you went through, my son, *but I know exactly how it feels to have to do it by yourself. I know.*"

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Christ is going to pay for all suffering, but He's also going to pay for all death. So what that suggests to me is that Christ pays for *all* forms of entropy — *any form, any type, anywhere*. So death, suffering, pain, decay, etc.

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We're going to have moments when we fail, *but that doesn't mean we failed. Certainly not from Christ's perspective, who paid a price, and in that price was able to see all of us for who we really are and paid the price for that.* That's how He sees things. That's how He sees us. That's how He understands us. It's what allows Him to have faith in us, which in turn allows us to have faith in Him. I think that's huge. I think that's got to be an important element of our relationship with Christ, *recognizing that He has faith in us as much as we might have faith in Him, and that is what allows us to be His friends.* He really does want to be friends with us. *Not just disciples and Master, not just Father and children, but friends — friends who help each other out.* I think we helped Him out, and I think He helps us out.

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# Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19

Jack Welch

***Matthew 27:46*** *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Jesus saw it all, and I think that can be a great point of reassurance. Yes, He loves us, but why is He doing this? He's doing it for a lot of reasons. To do the Father's will, *but also because it just comes perfectly natural to Him to do what we need Him to do for us, and He's willing to do that at all cost.*

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Jesus knew what He was doing, and He knew the power by which He was doing it. And then it just becomes a question: *Are you going to accept His powers?* And that's what John especially emphasizes: *We do not have the power of the world, but the power of God.*

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When we get afraid of something, when you're afraid of taking a test, or when you're afraid of some challenge that you have in your life, fear is not your friend. *Fear wants to drive out rationality, it wants to drive out faith and hope. It leads to people feeling incapable of dealing with things.*

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How do you know that Jesus is the Christ? There is a way that it comes through the Spirit, and you have to ask for it and live in a way that will allow the Spirit to manifest that to you.

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When it says "forsaken," I think that "why have you left me alone" doesn't mean that you're completely abandoned. I think you *feel* completely abandoned, *but you're not really*. I think Jesus is recognizing, "I have been left alone because I have to fulfill this mission myself." I think, in our lives, when we're going through really tough times, and we're wondering why we are being asked to go through this, we also can say, "Where can I turn for help? I've been left alone." And sometimes we even feel Jesus isn't quite ready to just jump in and bail us out. It takes time. We have to work it through ourselves. "*Why have you left me alone?*" "*So that you can actually become who you are going to become. You will be glorified by descending below all things.*" *And in our lives, sometimes overcoming the toughest challenges are the places where we rise to the greatest heights.*

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Jesus as *the Son of God* helps us as *children of God*.

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Music is deeper than just conversation. When you hear the Tabernacle Choir, when you sing the hymns of Zion, you can be touched by deeper feelings that resonate with not just your mind, but your voice, your body, and your whole soul as you embrace these truths and share them with other people. And I think that's what Jesus is modeling for us, encouraging us to do. These sustained Him through His greatest trial and turmoil. And the scriptures, especially the Psalms, will always do the same for us as well.

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What the Greek says is a little different. It says, "He was in an agon." What's an "agon"? We get the word "agony" from it, but an "agon" is "a battle or a struggle." What Jesus is doing there, *I think, is fighting the powers of evil. He is overcoming all of the wickedness and the problems.*

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It is so easy to be distracted and discouraged, and give up on a lot of things when things don't seem to be turning out the way you thought they would. But, *stay the path. Hold on. And you do that by caring for each other, recognizing each other, and taking care of each other.*

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I have come to appreciate the goodness of the cross and the goodness of the gospel. I hope that everyone can feel that Jesus understands us better than He did in the spirit world. That we all learn things that we can only learn in mortality, and we shouldn't be discouraged by these things. *Jesus is our great model. He loves us. He will be there to do whatever He can, knowing that He can't do it all for us.* We must also accept Him and do His will, and keep His commandments. He says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." He will then be able to reciprocate that love even more than He already does.

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# Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21

Ross Baron

***Luke 24:5*** *And as they were afraid,  
and bowed down their faces to the earth,  
they said unto them, Why seek ye the  
living among the dead?*

I think what Satan tries to do is convince us that not only is there not an answer to our questions, but maybe that we can never know the answer. And the ringing testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, modern prophets and apostles, and the Prophet of the Restoration, Joseph Smith, is that not only is it true that we do have life after death, and that God lives, and that there is a Resurrection, but *we can know it too. We can absolutely know it.*

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Anybody who thinks, “Man, I’ve gone too far. I’ve done too much. There’s no redemption for me. There’s no repentance for me,” remember Mary Magdalene. I think we’ll one day get the great full story, but what we know is she went from a woman out of whom came seven devils *to being one of the closest associates of the Lord Jesus Christ.* So whatever that entailed, I believe it’s like the message of Alma: “*If they can repent, I can repent. If Mary can, I can.*” And I think that’s a powerful message.

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I’m asking all of us to think clearly, or maybe to think a little bit and ponder in prayer, “Heavenly Father, help me get what I’m supposed to get.”

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I think the stone is a symbolic idea. Again, the stone closes things off; the stone seals the tomb. The women aren’t going to be able to move the stone. We all have these kinds of sealed off things in our lives. We think that’s going to be impossible. And then what does it take? *It takes angels. It takes priesthood power and authority.* Because the stone gets rolled away, right?

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Let’s let the Holy Ghost do what the Holy Ghost can do. We’ve got to get out of the way. Give room for the Holy Ghost to work. How’s the Holy Ghost going to work? He’s going to testify of truth — not of my favorite story or of my favorite application, but of truth.

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We have to remove distractions. And I think in home-centered Come Follow Me, a lot of parents love the idea, but they're like, "How do I do it?" And I always just say, create the environment for the Holy Ghost to be there. "Well, how do I do that? Well, what do we do?" We're going to sing a hymn. We're going to have a prayer. We're going to be focused on text. We're going to try not to be distracted. That's going to allow us to see, in a way that maybe we wouldn't have otherwise.

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The Savior expounded unto them in all the scriptures. He didn't use just one verse. I think sometimes we'll use one particular verse, and I love that He expounds all the scriptures. All the scriptures are one in His hand, Ezekiel 37. He's going to take it all. He's going to take the Torah, He's going to take the Navi'in, He's going to take the Ketuvim, and He's going to weave them together. And I think we, as Latter-day Saints, need to be careful to not violate that principle.

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What field has every answer to every question? But if you're a Latter-day Saint and you don't have every answer to every question, then somehow you're deficient. Lame. That is not true. Sometimes you have to be like, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*" "This is my work, and you can know that personally." I'm not trying to skirt hard issues, *but sometimes we have to wait on the Lord.*

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We can have Christ revealed to us when we go participate in ordinances and covenants where we are at one with Him. We never want to break that opportunity.

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We took our first son to the MTC, and we cried because we were going to miss him. But we wouldn't have wanted him anywhere else. *We were mourning because we would miss him, but we weren't mourning because he wasn't where he was supposed to be.*

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Christ is telling the Apostles here, “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth.” So no matter what your calling or your situation, in your family or whatever you’re commissioned to do as a dad or a mom or as a teenager or whatever, you’re right. You can’t do it, *but God can. He can do it and work with you.*

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The Resurrection isn’t just a cool doctrine, it’s just not an abstract idea; *it’s real*. But with that reality brings a responsibility upon me to act in faith according to the knowledge I have and *to bear that witness to others, unapologetically, absolutely, devotedly, and with the Holy Ghost. That’s what we’re to do.*

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With faith in Jesus Christ, because all power is given to Him in heaven and earth, *we now can overcome even our personal predicaments*. But the human predicament, which philosophers and existentialists are always wringing their hands about, that part’s done. *The Resurrection is the absolute witness that that is done.*

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I just unashamedly, devotedly, unapologetically testify of the reality of the Resurrection, of the Gospel accounts, of the Latter-day accounts, of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s accounts, it is real and *it is power*. And we can all know it. We can have the Holy Ghost bear witness to us that it’s true. May the Lord bless us all that we can get it, whatever things we’re not getting, that my eyes will be opened, that my heart will be soft, and that I’ll get it and then act in accordance with that.

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I'm a happy guy. It's not that I don't have trials, but I try to be of good cheer. Sometimes students will ask me, "Brother Baron, what's your problem? Why are you so upbeat? Why are you so happy?" I'll say, "*Because the Resurrection is in place.*" They'll be like, "What?" I'll say, "Because *there's nothing you can do to not be resurrected.*" That's a funny way to put it. I go, "You just try and not be resurrected. You're coming out of the tomb, you're getting resurrected." I go, "*Jesus is the Christ, the Resurrection is in place, and the plan is true. And that's why I'm so happy.*" Because *there are ups and downs of the days — the stock market goes up, the stock market goes down, or there's different issues in our family — but in the end... in the end, the Resurrection is real and Jesus is the Christ. That's what gives me joy and happiness.* So to the guy mowing the lawn, or taking a walk, or folding laundry: *This is real what we're talking about. This is real.*

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# Acts 1–5

Stephan Taeger

**Acts 2:38** *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*



When we're led by the Holy Ghost, that doesn't mean we're led like a puppet or it erases our individuality, our creativity. But the kinds of decisions that lead us *toward* those things, *we can be confident that we're being led by God. And so, the Spirit mixes with our own individuality and creativity to then do good in the world.*

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The Savior will continue to manifest and minister to us through the Holy Spirit.

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Faith, following the Savior, keeping baptismal covenants, and receiving the Holy Spirit are not just nice little, cute little principles; *they're absolutely transformative in our personal lives and every aspect of our lives when we actually take upon ourselves the mission to become like Jesus of Nazareth.*

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I sometimes wonder if we could ask for priesthood blessings more. If we could ask people who minister to us, or anyone else, and say, "Hey, it's a new year. It's a new job. I'm going through a trial," or whatever it is, and *have the faith that the Savior can work through a priesthood blessing*

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Sometimes even though we've studied conference talks and we sought the discernment of the Holy Spirit, we still feel unclear about something. The Lord and His mercy have given us bishops and other leaders of the Church who can speak in the name of the Lord and give us inspired counsel, healing, and direction.

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If there are authorized people who can do miracles in the name of Jesus Christ, just as Peter did, then *let's seek them out and receive God's blessings at their hand.*

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The Savior provides *the only* sure rock and foundation upon which to build a life.

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So, how can we allow the Savior to continue to minister to us, *even though His mortal ministry is finished?* We've identified seven things: One, we connect with living apostles and prophets. Two, we receive the Holy Spirit. Three, we focus on the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. Four, we connect with priesthood power. Five, make Jesus the foundation of our life. Six, be completely honest and open with God. And seven, receive our worth from what the Savior did for us — make that the foundation of our security.

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When we have that type of security in Christ, when we've been changed by the Holy Spirit that much, *we'll share the gospel fearlessly, just like Him.*

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If we get our sense of worth and identity from anything *other than the name of Jesus Christ as Peter has just taught us*, we'll have a weak foundation.

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How do we stay in good connection with Him? *We have to be completely honest with God.*

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We don't believe in a Christ that only lived 2,000 years ago. He is alive, and He does the same things He did anciently in His mortal ministry. *He heals, teaches, and forgives.* It's my deepest hope and prayer that every single one of us connect with that and invite that into our lives. What I have found is that as I try my best in my own broken way, try to live the gospel, that's really when the gospel begins to make the most sense. It's through practice, by actually trying it and living it in this world. The Restoration celebrates learning and the world comes together.

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# Acts 6–9

Casey Griffiths

***Acts 9:15** But the Lord said unto him,  
Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto  
me, to bear my name before the Gentiles,  
and kings, and the children of Israel*

Holy places can exist *everywhere*.

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Even a temple or the scriptures can become idols if we see them as the end of the law. *The end of the law is to connect with God*, to always have the Spirit to be with us and to receive direction, counsel, and guidance that helps us when we're not in the temple or when we don't have the scriptures present, or when we have to make decisions based on how the Spirit directs us to do certain things.

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Sometimes even something that seems unsuccessful, can have profound, long-lasting effects on a person and their life. *You never know* exactly how your actions are going to affect others. *You do what you think is right, and sometimes those blessings are multiplied in the lives of the people around you.*

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It is easier to live the gospel than it is to not live the gospel. It's harder to not keep the commandments than it is to keep them. The Savior said, "My yoke is easy, my burden is light." Yeah, it's a burden, *but the burden is lighter than it would be otherwise. Our lives are easier when we follow Christ.*

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I'm grateful that the Lord sees potential in people like me and people like Saul, where sometimes we really don't. Even the best of us.

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It seems like the book of Acts is saying, "Hey, *there are miracles of healing, there are miracles of revelation, and there are miracles of conversion.*"

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Small and simple things, tiny miracles multiplied, *lead to great miracles.*

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The Lord sees us *as we can be, not necessarily as we are.*

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Don't make snap judgments about people and who they are and what their potential is. There's sometimes a tendency for us to look at people, especially those that believe differently from us, or those that are struggling with their faith, and say, "That's it, I've seen the end of their story. There's nothing more I can do." The message here seems to be that *even a person who seems to be the worst of the worst, like Saul, can become the best of the best.* They can become the best and the brightest. There's a chosen vessel before God, and God sees all those potentials. It's not really our job to judge. Our job is to be like Ananias and be ready when the call comes, no matter how difficult it is, to do what the Lord intends for us to do so that we can bring about his work.

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## Acts 10–15

Michael Goodman

***Acts 10:35** But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

The core of the gospel, the doctrine and the principles, *will never change*.

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God is continuing to do His work.

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We all have Corneliuses in our life, good people that are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. People that are just salt of the earth goodness that *the Lord's waiting for us to see as He sees and be ready to invite as Peter's about to invite Cornelius*.

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All of us are going to be asked to sacrifice and be asked to do things, which sometimes, to be very frank, don't make a lot of sense. And it's going to take the spirit of God to help us.

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What God is desperately trying to do, as Elder Holland so clearly teaches, is He will take you exactly where you are, *just don't plan on staying where you are because He's going to continue to ask us to grow. He's going to ask us to honor Him, to respect Him, to fear Him, to use this language, and He's going to ask us to work righteousness*.

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God does not play favorites. So you've got no one by virtue of who is disqualified from exaltation. *Every person we ever meet is a child of God that God is seeking to save. But He can't save us if we don't come to Him*. So, He's going to require us to come to Him and to work works of righteousness — in other words, to become like Him. But we start, all of us, with the reality that *God loves all of us. We all belong. God wants to save all of His children*.

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God is purposefully trying to save.

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We tend to believe the Lord will give us a big answer quickly and all at one time. However, the pattern repeatedly described in the scriptures suggests that we receive line upon line, precept upon precept — or in other words, many small answers over a period of time.

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There's great power in us realizing that *God loves us all and He's trying desperately to bring us all in.*

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We can trust God. *You don't have to question whether His promises will be fulfilled,* but He does not promise us a carefree, problem-free mortality.

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The Lord wants us to come to Him. He wants us to seek help, and He wants us to seek guidance.

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I don't always get what it is I'm asking, *but I always get Him.* He's the one who said it. He's the one who invited us: "Abide in me, and I in you... Therefore, walk with me." That's what the Lord is asking us; to stay covenant-connected to Him.

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*Mortality is not fair. Life is not fair. But God is always fair. He will always give us "fair plus." But it comes back to, "Is my faith in outcomes or is my faith in Christ?"*

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It takes great faith to trust that the Lord truly loves us and knows us. And I think it's important that we not twist that the wrong way and say, "Therefore, every bad thing that happens to us is what God wants to happen to us." *Mortal life is mortal life. It's not fair, and hard things are going to happen. Again, God's promise isn't that hard things won't happen, it's that He'll walk that path with us and that ultimately, all things shall be for our good.*

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*God's work is not going to fail*, and it's not just a blind positivity. *I know who the master is*. It's this tremendous faith that *God is in charge*, and we don't have to fear that somehow the world is going to frustrate God's work that it's not going to be able to be brought to pass.

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Whether He is going to remove the challenge, whether He is going to strengthen us, tender the challenge, or whether He is just going to sit with us or walk with us, *He always promises relief. Relief doesn't always mean that all problems go away, but that the Lord is on our side and that He'll always help us if we'll simply learn to turn to Him*, learn to stay covenant-connected. Don't let our challenges pull us away from the love that God is offering.

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I do think that the Lord has a way of helping us deal with our own challenges in a way that then helps us to be able to help others work through *their* challenges and *their* difficulties.

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We're seeking to bring people to Jesus Christ so He can save and exalt them.

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I think this pattern in Acts chapter 15, which Elder Christofferson used as a model and President Nelson is trying to help members realize, isn't just 15 nice, kind, old Christian men who are doing their best with their own reasoning and logic. *They're not trying to come to a simple consensus. This is a process of revelation*. They act based on revelation, and they don't act until there is complete unanimity and the witness of the Spirit.

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The Lord gives a commandment or gives a doctrine, but He doesn't often tell you, "Now, this is exactly how you implement that." *He lets us grapple and lets us work. And it's through that grappling and through that work that we often grow closer to Him and grow closer to each other.*

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If I can remember that God is at the helm and that I don't have to fear — He's at the helm, not just of the Church, *but at the helm of my life* — if I'm willing to lay my heart on the altar, *He'll do with me what needs to be done.* I don't have to fear, I don't have to worry. He's going to do that as I come to the Savior and *allow the Savior to do for me what I otherwise couldn't do myself.*

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## Acts 16–21

Susan Easton Black

**Acts 17:29** *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*

Remember that the Lord is in charge and *the Lord has prepared the people.*

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*We are in the hands of the Lord, and He will guide us.* We just have to have courage like Paul to go forward.

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Notice the next verse, verse 10 in chapter 18: “For I am with thee.” *How would you like to hear that?* You’re out there as a missionary, you’re frustrated, you’ve tried your best, or even as a parent, and the Lord’s saying, “*Hey, I’m with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.*”

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Do you realize we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? I mean, *that’s phenomenal.*

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When you’re going to do something good, you know you’re on the right path when you’re getting some opposition along the way.

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# Acts 22–28

Scott Woodward

***Acts 23:11** And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

Paul is, I think, the epitome of a disciple of Jesus Christ: *intrepid, undaunted, knows the Lord's will, and is willing to do it at all costs*. I think his example, it's actually kind of intimidating to me, but inspiring at the same time.

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As a follower of Jesus, *prepare to be misunderstood, prepare to be misrepresented. It's bound to happen, so prepare to forgive a lot*. You're going to have a lot of opportunities to forgive. Paul knew that firsthand. Jesus will say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake." It's going to happen. It's part of the beatitudes. And not even eloquent, powerful Paul, who's such a good speaker and writer and explainer, *not even he could avoid being misunderstood with his words*.

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We've just got to learn to slow down and challenge our initial assumptions about each other, *and listen to each other in love*.

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God's trying to help us become one family. And this is the way, the surprising, shocking way, that God had always planned all along. That through Abraham's seed, especially Jesus, *all the nations of the earth will be blessed*. And so, Paul is trying to help everybody see that (both Jews and Gentiles) *this is what God meant all along, and it's up to us to now participate in that and work out the details*.

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Usually, we act angrily or violently against people when we believe the false stories that we tell ourselves about them. Usually, *the truth is much softer*. Usually, the truth will bring about compassion, not this kind of reaction. It's just a human thing. We've got to work on that. All of us do. I feel it in myself. I've got to check myself, be like, "Okay, is that the real story though? I've got to go deeper into this."

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What was happening with Paul *was bigger than Paul*. What was happening *through Paul* was bigger than Paul.

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When I've been given a promise by God that doesn't seem like it's coming to pass, there's a few different approaches. Sometimes the Lord will say in scripture, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." Other times He'll say, "Why don't you cheerfully do all things that lie in your power to bring about my promises to you, and then stand still." *We've got to pray to be wise enough to discern the difference when it's a "I need to do this myself" or a "I need to act in a way that's going to help bring about the Lord's promises" versus "I need to trust God."* We've got to be very wise and discerning.

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I think the book of Acts, for me, *is like a little microscopic view of how Christ, the resurrected Christ, leads a church.* We still believe this about our Church today.

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*Throw the seed, and let God do what God does. Let the Spirit do what the Spirit does.*

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When people follow Jesus's way, *their stories might begin to look like His story. This is the cost of discipleship in some ways, the meaning behind the metaphor of taking up your cross to follow Jesus. This is how the kingdom of God is built: by people who are willing to sacrifice.*

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This is the Church of Jesus Christ. You hear apostles testifying all the time that He leads this Church, that He's at the head of this Church. If we want to ask, "What does that look like? What does that actually look like up close," the book of Acts is showing us a little peek into what it looks like when Jesus works with weak and simple servants, like Peter and Paul. Sometimes they have tempers, sometimes they have problems. *They're not perfect servants, but Jesus works with them. He works with them great.* Through them, this message is going to the whole world. If we come away from the book of Acts more impressed with Jesus, I think Luke will say, "My job here is done."

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# Romans 1–6

Adam Miller

***Romans 1:16*** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

Love is a law, *not* a reward.

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What we do as sinners is we try to use God's law to earn or deserve God's love as a kind of reward. We turn it around, we get it upside down, we get it inside out, we get the whole thing backwards. *We try to use God's law to be loved rather than to love*, and that I think is a good description in general of what it's like to be a sinner.

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I think in this backwards way about myself, about other people, also in particular about God, as if God were waiting for me to do something to prove that I deserved to be loved by Him instead of waiting for me to join Him in the work of loving others.

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If you are anything like me, then you may have spent the better part of your life trying to obey a commandment that God never gave. There is no commandment given in any scripture, by any prophet, from any pulpit, in any age, to make myself into someone who is perfectly lovable. There is no such commandment. There is always, and only, and forever, the unconditional commandment to love my enemies, even when my enemy is myself, in the same way that God does. And at the end of the day, a lot of what's at stake in redemption is just about my learning to stop trying to keep a commandment that God never gave and learning to start trying to keep the commandment that God actually did give, so that I can understand Him and join Him in that work.

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At the end of the day, *grace is the revelation that love always was a law and it never was a reward* in the first place.

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The law isn't a means to some other end. I don't obey the law to get love, obeying the law is the work of loving. And by loving, I've found the thing that I'm looking for, but I can't do it if I'm trying to be loved. That's not the right project. I have to engage in it as the work of loving others, and then I find it.

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What God is doing through Christ's Atonement, through His death and Resurrection, is displaying the truth about Himself and about His law — that *He both loves His enemies and is willing to sacrifice everything to save His enemies, and that only that kind of love is law rather than reward. Only that kind of love, which is also what Paul calls "grace," can save us*, especially given what it means to be a sinner in the first place.

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We make the law about us and whether we are loved, *rather than about God and joining Him in the work of love.*

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If my relationship with God is about me getting what I want, that's what makes it an idol. Whereas if my relationship to God is about doing what God commanded regardless of what I want, that's actual worship.

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Love is the thing that you join, or do, or share, or make. But *it's not even the kind of thing that you could passively receive as a reward. It's not even the kind of thing that you could deserve.* And if you think that it is the kind of thing that you can deserve and spend your life trying to deserve it, you'll never find it, because that's not even what it is.

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If a friend comes, I'm commanded to love them. If an enemy comes, I'm commanded to love them. That's the work, not the reward.

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What characterizes God is the fact that He loves His enemies. He doesn't hate His enemies, He loves them. And He demonstrates this love for them by sacrificing Himself and His son.

*He gives what we need, before we deserved it, while we were still His enemies. This is both the expression of His grace and His own, and an expression of His own willingness to abide by that imperative to love friend and enemy.*

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I think God hopes, He trusts, that His love for us can help save us. But I think it's clear here that *He would do it even if it didn't save us, because that's who He is. That's how He works. That's what He does. God loves friend and enemy, regardless of whether or not the outcome is what He hoped for.*

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How do you love your enemies? You sacrifice yourself. You give yourself up. You allow yourself to be crucified on their behalf. You die for them. That's what it looks like to fulfill the law.

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God is demonstrating here, I think, what the law is and how it gets fulfilled. Because the law commands us to love our enemies, and this is what it looks like when you love your enemies: *The Atonement.*

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The law of faith is what God's law demands. Faith itself, grace itself, love for the enemy itself, is the law.

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God already loves you, and *He's not waiting for you to earn it.*

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There's no quicker way to end a marriage than to think that your marriage is about being loved. If you constantly ask yourself, "Am I being loved the way that I need to be loved?" Your marriage is over. The only thing that can sustain a marriage is the shared project of asking, *"How do I love?"* Because again, love isn't even the kind of thing that you can get; It's the kind of thing that you join and you share, or it's the kind of thing that disappears in smoke because you thought it was something that it wasn't. *You can't get it, you can only do it.*

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Instead of limiting love just to friends, you unleash love as a law that includes everybody. *The law becomes universal instead of selective.*

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You have to use the law to judge how to love, *but you must never ever use the law to decide who to love.*

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When I no longer live my life under the cloud of fear and worry about whether I'm going to get what I want (which is God's love) but in fact believe what God asked me to believe (that He loves me already) and join Him in that work, *then* I find what I'm looking for in the work itself. *Then* I'm liberated. I'm set free, Paul says, from all of that shame and fear and doubt, and I find myself empowered in Christ to live a totally different life that sees the world in an entirely different way — myself included.

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My weaknesses are not calling for condemnation. *God doesn't condemn them. God sees them as an occasion for offering what is needed for the good that the law itself requires, for the love that I need to be changed and transformed.* And we have to see ourselves that same way.

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It's a dangerous moment when you discover that the law of works is impossible. Because if you think that's all there is to the gospel, then you think that the gospel is over. It's also potentially a necessary moment, a potentially redemptive moment, because *that is the passageway to discovering what the gospel of Jesus Christ actually is. That's the passage to discovering the law of faith, in which you discover that you were trying to answer the wrong question the whole time — that you were trying to obey a commandment that God never gave, and that you were trying to find love in a way that's impossible to do.* And it opens the door then to being saved, to being redeemed, to being resurrected, to finding a new life in Christ. You can't get to that new life without dying first in the old law. And that's a difficult and painful thing, but it's also potentially liberating, redemptive.

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Trying to obey a commandment that God has never given is what prevents me from obeying the commandment He actually gave, from actually being obedient. *Trying to be loved rather than loving is what's trapped me in the first place.* And discovering this, as Paul describes it, and as I've experienced it, is liberating. The revelation is liberating, to discover that that love, that grace, is a law — the law. Loving your enemies is the law that God Himself follows, and not an exception to the law, not a loophole or a backup plan to be resorted to when we fail to be lovable. That's redemptive. It's empowering, it's enlivening, it's a whole new kind of life, and it's a life lived in the presence of God, here and now, not just in the hope of something later. And I think that's not just Paul's message; that is, in many ways, the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. *It's the good news.*

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# Romans 7–16

Joshua Matson

| ***Romans 12:21*** *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Paul is wanting to emphasize, you're doing good things, *don't be discouraged*.

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Paul's emphasis to the Saints is *you need to be more like the Savior*. Where is your grace, or where is your loving kindness, that is intended to be given to others?

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We cannot repay what the Savior did. We can't make up and we couldn't have done what He did, *but we can walk faithfully*.

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But for those who don't know the law, the Atonement makes up that difference, because you can't hold them accountable for something they didn't know.

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We often have to-do lists, but we rarely have to-become lists. That is what Paul is trying to say here, is the law was a to-do, *but Jesus came to help us to be something better than what we are in our temporal state*.

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This is something for all of us, that if there are times in our lives where we have lost commitment or maybe fallen away — and Paul is another example of many, many people who have felt a revival to come back — *it's never too late. It's never too late to say, "No, I'm going to recommit."*

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If there is anything we're doing in our lives or we're trying to do without the Spirit, *it's not going to be as successful as if we try to do it with the Spirit*.

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Why can the Spirit quicken our lives and help us? It's through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

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You need to have your eye set on the glory of God rather than focusing just on worldly and temporal things.

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Why not turn to Paul's words and say, "Okay, we may be divided over different issues, we may be divided over different questions, but *Jesus Christ can unify us just like He unified them*. We can find that." And one of those first steps is, for myself, to look introspectively and say that I am being carnally minded about this subject and I can become better.

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We need to be those *who seek* to welcome the Spirit and to especially welcome the Savior into our lives.

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I sometimes get frustrated with my students when we talk about the Second Coming, and they look at me and say, "Brother Matson, how bad does the world have to get before Jesus comes back?" And I turn that around and say, "Can I ask you a question? *How good do we need to get before Jesus comes back?*?" And one of those things is to understand our identity and understand that we're all in this together, that we as Saints need to join arm in arm and build the kingdom in preparation for that.

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Why do we enter into covenants? Why do we participate in those things? Because we're expected to help others, like Christ has helped us. We participate not because the ordinances or the works that we do do anything that Christ can't do. *It's because we are participating in the work of salvation.*

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God can utilize even persecution, distress, nakedness, peril, and sword *for our good* if we trust in Him.

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We are not those who should judge who is worthy of the covenant and who is not. And no matter their background, God has a role and a purpose for them.

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You're doing the best with what you have. And looking around at those in our congregations today, I think we can say something similar. Those who are sitting in church are doing the best that they can. How can we not help but be proud? But too often, we let the natural man take over and we try to judge and look at them through our lens rather than through God's lens.

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If we have righteous intentions, if it's really to move the kingdom of God forward, not for our own self-aggrandizement, *God will want us to be part of that.* And the whole section here is talking about foreordination — the idea that we're foreordained to do a great work — and maybe part of that has to do with our own agency. What do we choose to want to accomplish? I think that that for me is so exciting, that we can read the scriptures in a new way by saying, "That's a prophecy. I want to see it fulfilled. God, how can I do this?"

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*I think God wants to give us more of our wants than we sometimes allow Him to participate in, and He'll magnify us as we do it with an honest heart.*

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*No one is too far gone.* No one is forgotten, and no one is completely disconnected from the nourishing power as a branch to the vine, which is Jesus Christ. We are not beyond His reach.

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We might not know where we might benefit by being humble and subjecting ourselves to that will, because *God may be able to use that for our benefit sometime down the road.*

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The Savior is at the center of everything that we do. And because the Savior is at the center of everything that we do, *we should do it as He does it.*

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The expectation is *we receive help when we need it and we give help when we can give it.* That is, in essence, what the entire covenant that we make at baptism is: that we're going to help each other. Well, if we all refuse help, if we all refuse to receive anything, then how can people give it and fulfill their covenant? And so, in verse 1 where it says, "Receive ye," that phrase is so important to me. Because in Greek, it's not just to receive, but to bring in, to fetch, to take hold of.

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When somebody comes and says, "I know you're having a hard time. I'm here to help," we cleave to that person. We hold tight to them. That is what Paul is trying to encourage, is *don't always think of yourself as the strong one. It's okay to be weak at times and to accept that help.*

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With Jesus Christ, we can move forward, and *He can fix that which we cannot fix.*

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*Salvation isn't going to care about whether you were right about an argument. At the judgment bar, God's not going to ask, "How many arguments did you win with your neighbor?" or your brother, or your in-law, or anybody that way. That's not what God is going to tally at the end. He's going to tally whether or not we were willing to simply put that aside to be persuaded and live unto the Lord. And if the Lord wants us to love one another, that's what it is.*

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Do I intentionally seek peace? Do I tell myself when I get in the car and drive down the freeway, I am not going to get contentious with anybody no matter what happens? And I think on the days that I intentionally do things like that, I don't find myself falling into that carnal, natural man tendency to want to respond, but I keep myself spiritually-minded because I've already made up my mind what I'm going to do. So, let's *intentionally* choose to make peace with everyone that we interact with.

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I hope that we come away from this with a desire to be a little more kind and to be a little more accepting and compassionate. And whether it's the person on the road that we drive by that maybe doesn't have the gospel in their life, or any religion. Maybe it's our neighbor who believes differently than we do. We can still join together as one, whether they're in the Church or out of the Church. That's what Paul is ultimately saying, is our destinies, in the end, are inextricably linked. And whether we have the law or we don't have the law, talking now about the law of Christ and the new and everlasting covenant, there's a place for all of us together. And I hope that we walk away saying, "I'm going to be a little bit better at loving and following the example of the Savior to love my neighbors as myself. And that will help me to walk with this spirit, to be able to do what God would have me do."

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# 1 Corinthians 1–7

Teresa Bell

**1 Corinthians 1:10** *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Think about area presidencies when they speak, general authorities who speak, and then when the Prophet and Apostles speak. *They bring the greetings that make you feel like they really know you and care about you.* But they bring love from the Savior really, and that's what Paul's doing here.

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Keep your eyes on Jesus.

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If people are not in the right frame of mind and do not have the Spirit, they really cannot understand the things of God, *no matter how they're presented.*

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Make sure that we do everything we can to stay close to Christ, *no matter what is going on in the world or around us.*

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We are so worried about how other people will perceive us. I mean, I think about Instagram — letting other people judge, looking around to see what other people are going to think — and worrying about that rather than knowing that *only the Lord can judge.* And so, if we're doing what we need to be doing to stay close to Him and keeping ourselves in line with His teachings, we really don't need to worry about that other stuff, even though it's difficult.

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I think the basic important thing here is that we don't defile our bodies and that *we take care of our bodies as temples, and that it has to be a place where the Spirit of God can live and dwell.* And if it is not really a temple of God and we don't treat it as such, we won't be able to have the Spirit with us.

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I mean, the most important thing to me, I think, is *knowing that Heavenly Father knows me personally, individually*. And if there's something wrong in my life, something that's not working right, the Savior, because of the Atonement, takes care of it for me. It's the most amazing thing to know that.

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For me, keeping the Spirit with me and helping me continue to study the gospel is what has been the most important thing in my life and continues to be. And I'm really thankful for that. *I know that Heavenly Father lives and loves us. I know that Jesus is our Savior. And I know that He suffered for our sins and that we can overcome everything through Him*. I also know as we study the gospel, especially this year with the New Testament and Corinthians, learning about different cultures, different people, how to stay in the Church and still be able to help people is something that's really important for all of us.

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# 1 Corinthians 8–13

Mary Jane Woodger

**1 Corinthians 12:13** *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

So, even in the Church, Paul would say, “Be sensitive if someone’s not on your level.” What’s the principle? It’s *love your neighbor as yourself*.

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Submissiveness is not gender-based, nor does it demean the one who is presided over. I would ask, *is Christ lessened by being submissive to our Father in Heaven? Is a bishop who’s submissive to a stake president less than? Every Latter-day Saint is voluntarily submissive through common consent with an understanding that the person who presides over them is going to serve them.*

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I would suggest that *you’ll change your world as you learn about spiritual gifts* and become confident and secure in owning those gifts. And notice verse 70 says, “But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit with all.” In other words, *every member of the Church has at least one spiritual gift.*

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You’re going to have those other awful Ds — depression, doubt, darkness — *until you can rediscover what spiritual gifts you had premortally.*

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So, what’s the difference, I would ask, between knowledge and information? I believe the difference is the Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of Truth. And I think *if you have that gift of knowledge, you are able to understand through the Spirit what is truth, and that is the difference. It isn’t that you have a high IQ.*

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You look at Joseph Smith. He determined he lacked *wisdom*, he didn’t lack *information*. There was plenty of information, plenty of knowledgeable people around him. What Joseph wanted to know was, “How should I act?”.

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A lot of people think wisdom comes from age. A wise person is old, wrinkled, and has white hair. *But wisdom is not just acting your age; it is acting according to our better nature.*

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I would say in our generation, there's a relationship between faith and the priesthood — gifts to have faith to heal or be healed. Increasing our faith, *the Lord is willing and able to heal us through the administration of the priesthood.*

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How do you covet the spiritual gifts? How do you lay hold of them? *You just ask for them.*

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With those spiritual gifts, once we've discovered them, *we gain confidence.*

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You would think as different people exhibit different spiritual gifts that exhibiting all these spiritual gifts would divide us. Instead, amazingly, they unify us *even as the different body parts become one whole human being.*

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I think that's what Paul's saying to our congregations. In the Church of Jesus Christ, every member is necessary and brings something unique that unifies us rather than divides us.

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Charity is not something that we develop. *Charity is a gift that comes through earnest supplication.*

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*Charity is a gift.* It's not an achievement. You can achieve an MBA. You can work for a commission. You can have a nicer yard than your neighbors through your own efforts. But *you cannot achieve charity on your own.*

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When Paul says, “If I have charity, I am nothing.” *I don’t think he meant that we are worthless.* Even the wicked, most vile human being is valued by our Heavenly Father. “The worth of souls is great in the sight of God.” Paul meant, I believe, if you do not have charity and only think about yourself, *you will feel like nothing*

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Our Heavenly Father is in it for the long haul, for all the right reasons, with all the right motivations, and with the right methodology, which is charity. *Charity is the most reasonable way of dealing with the human family, including dealing with our own families.*

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I think we have to pray for [charity] and ask that it be bestowed. And then when you have received it and you witness, “*Oh, that wasn’t me today. That was charity,*” then we express gratitude.

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# 1 Corinthians 14–16

Daniel C. Peterson

***1 Corinthians 14:33*** *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

*Seek to speak inspired utterances* — to have the Spirit with you for utterances in your language — that you're benefiting the other people in your ward because you love them, because you have charity for them.

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Jesus, He wants you to be a Christian with charity. But other than that, *He wants you to have love*. He wants us to be loving to one another.

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The idea of the temple is to *lovingly remember everyone who has ever lived* and act on those people's behalf in service.

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This message of deliverance from death was part of the really good news of Christianity to all those people — that *there is hope beyond the grave*.

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If you grant the possibility that *there is a God and that He has tremendous power*, including the power for the Resurrection, then everything else makes perfect sense. But you have to accept that first premise.

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The great thing about the gospel is that we have the assurance that we will see our loved ones again. I love the line from Joseph Smith about how the same sociality that exists with us in this life will exist there. It's not going to be fundamentally different, *it'll be glorified*. We'll be free of all the little quirks, and the biological tics, and the illnesses, and defects that we have here, but it will be this *warm, loving, perfected embrace of people on the other side*.

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If there's no Resurrection, everything we're doing is in vain. But at the end, Paul says it's not in vain because the Resurrection is true.

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If you could see that person as God sees that person, or *as that person may be in the future*, you would probably change the way you treat that person, and you'd change the way you act.

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The other side really matters.

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What Paul wants to get across is to be charitable to one another. *Don't fight with one another.*

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What we're doing here will have eternal ramifications. And frankly, developing the charitable character here will go with us into the life to come. *If you want to live in heaven, then you should try to live a heavenly life.*

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I think charity and the Resurrection are fundamental to Christianity. If you are not charitable, if you're not loving, then you are falling far short of the teachings of Christ. I don't want to cause people despair. We all fall short, obviously, and there are times when I've thought, "Man, I did not handle that as well as I should have." That's going to happen to every one of us. But then with absolute rock-solid faith in the Resurrection and in the eternity of things, *the things that matter most will continue*. They won't just die out with our deaths or with the heat death of the universe, or something like that. Humans are eternal.

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## 2 Corinthians 1–7

Larry Nelson

**2 Corinthians 2:4** *For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.*

Kittens grow up to be cats, and puppies grow up to be dogs. *Children of heavenly parents, as “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states, grow up to be like them.* And understanding that is the plan, that’s the process, is so important.

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To become as God is, *we need to do as He does and live as He lives* — not just doing something because we’re supposed to. It’s important that we do those things, but it’s because that is how God lives. And therefore, by doing as He does, we become as He is.

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Paul is teaching us that *your overall approach to caring for those who are poor and in need is how you will prove the sincerity of your love.* We don’t prove that by giving a dollar and thinking we’re good. It’s our daily, overall approach and awareness of all those around us who may stand in need of something that we can offer.

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There’s big things that we can be involved in. *But there are individuals in our midst* who these types of acts can help alleviate their mortal condition of hunger, need for shelter, clothing, and protection. We can strive to help God’s children with that which we have by giving.

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It’s essential to understand who God is. Is He the one slashing my tires? Is He the one heckling from the sidelines? *He’s not. He’s there for us.* “Come to me. I love you. Let me help you make this better.”

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Because He knows what we’re going through, He knows how to get us through it.

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He can turn everything unimaginably painful and hard into something for our sake and our benefit, meaning for our becoming like Him.

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We see it over and over again, that healthy development isn't just the absence of negative things, *but the presence of positive, healthy things that lead to healthy developmental outcomes — becoming*

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*God does not now, nor will He ever, do to you a destructive, malicious, unfair thing. Ever.* It is not in what Peter called “the divine nature” to even be able to do so, by definition. And in fact, *God is perfectly, and thoroughly, always, and forever good, and everything He does is for our good. I promise you that God does not lie awake at night trying to figure out ways to disappoint us, or harm us, or crush our dreams or our faith.*

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Am I involved daily with those who are around me in alleviating the challenges of their circumstances with that which I have to give, just as when I was in need? The Savior gave so abundantly and gave so abundantly to me.

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Our pains, our sorrows, and our afflictions are from our own bad choices, the bad choices of others, and the condition of mortality. *And all of those can be for our good because of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who's been through it all so can help us grow from these experiences. He can help us let go of the injustices done to us and move forward. He can help us as we turn around our lives. He's there.* We're never alone in any of these things that bring us sorrow and tribulation.

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Caring for those who are poor is of *temporal* importance to them, but it's of *spiritual* importance for us.

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Fighting poverty is a way in which we defend the family. Because when we're experiencing poverty, economic hardships, it affects the marriage negatively and thereby also affects children negatively. So, *fighting poverty is defending the family.*

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We are the beggars. We're coming to Christ saying, "I can't do it without your atoning blood. I have nothing. Please give me." *And He freely gives.* He doesn't say, "Well, Larry, you brought it on yourself," even though I did. He doesn't withhold because of that. He doesn't say, "Well, if I give it to you, you're just going to go and squander it. You're just going to go and sin again, so why should I?" *He gives.* He doesn't say, "Do you know what I did to earn this, and you want me to give it to you?" *He doesn't do that.* *Over and over, He gives to us in a way that is free and loving, and He says, "So if you want to become like me, you've got to do the same." But then, after being given so freely by Him when we don't deserve it, when it comes to giving of what we have, we now start putting up all these markers.*

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*The Savior got up and left the garden, and we need to move forward with Him at our side. Because He can succor us and help us become like Him through these very things that we're experiencing.*

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Just try, in whatever way is presented before you today, to do as God does and live as He lives. *Be loving. Be kind. Be a little more honest than you were yesterday. Forgive someone today. Help somebody's situation become a little bit better today.* And over time, that mark on the wall will increase until, line by line, we reach our potential to become like Him.

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You're not alone. And I hope you feel that *this life is a process*, rather than a list of things you need to do. Be kind to yourself. Offer yourself some grace. At times you're that four-year-old child just learning how to ride a bicycle, and we don't scold him or her when they don't get it right the first time. And *neither is our Heavenly Father scolding you when you don't become like Him on the first try, or the second, or the third, or the fourth. It's a process of becoming. It's not about the things that we are doing, but who we are becoming — and that's like our Savior and our Heavenly parents.*

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Because our Savior was willing to suffer for our bad choices, in the pain that we experience from the bad choices of others that affect us, and in the conditions that we experience here in a mortal fallen world, *He's with us*. He can help us as we act, rather than be acted upon, to forgive others. He'll be with us every step of the way as we turn around and repent, and get back on the path that'll lead to becoming like Him. And He'll be with us in the midst of our pain and suffering. And just like Paul, who prayed but did not have the thorn in his flesh removed, it may not take away that which is causing our pain and suffering, but will turn it into our benefit for our sake to help us become like our Heavenly Father. *Instead of just doing honest things, we can become honest. Instead of just hearing talks about being patient, we can become patient. And not just forgive somebody, but via that process become forgiving. And we're not alone in that becoming process.*

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## 2 Corinthians 8–13

Joseph Spencer

**2 Corinthians 9:7** *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

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.*

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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.* Weak things are strong in their weakness.

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After anything I even could do, it's grace that saves.

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*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.* 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 how *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.*

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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*. If I have to be reconciled to God, it's because I have been running from Him.

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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 our 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.*"

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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.*

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I have to get over myself and give 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. *I genuinely have to get out of the way for God to do His work.*

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Fear and trembling 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.*

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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.*

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Grace is enough. *God is enough.*

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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.*

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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?

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Everything has to be consecrated to the one true God, *and then all the complexity can be worked out.*

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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 and 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.

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# Galatians

Jared Ludlow

***Galatians 5:1*** *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

We want to have more experiences with deity.

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I think that's what Paul is trying to emphasize over and over again: *follow Christ*. Well, how do we know if we're following Christ? It's through the Spirit.

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When we fully understand bondage to sin, then we really come to appreciate the Atonement of Jesus Christ that can release us from that bondage.

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That's what the gospel is all about, becoming a new creature. And we do that through the Spirit and through that trust in Jesus.

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Fruits of the Spirit help us to reach that meekness.

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The Savior is the Savior. He was, is, and will always be the Savior. Keeping the Sabbath day holy is not the Savior. And reading my scriptures is not the Savior. And going to the temple is not the Savior. *Jesus is the Savior*. And when that's in our mind and that doctrine of Christ, faith in Christ, and repentance, and being born again, those "other things" — I like the way you said that, "other things"... performance, things we want to do, things we like to do — they keep us focused on that *Christ is the Savior*.

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We want to keep the Sabbath day holy, to show our Heavenly Father that we revere Him, and that we honor Him, and that we can set aside a period of time from our other activities to demonstrate that love for Him.

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We sometimes talk about in our Church checklist kind of salvation — if I just do these things, I can check them off. I’ve done my scripture reading, I attend church every Sunday, then I’ll be saved. Well, that’s not how we earn salvation. Now, does that mean we’re not supposed to do those things? No, those things can be good and they help us. *But all of it is to help us in a relationship to Christ.*

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Can we keep all the commandments of the gospel? No, *we need Christ* to provide an avenue for repentance, forgiveness, sanctification, et cetera in order to be back right with God.

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It’s through Christ that we can change and rise above Babylon, or the natural world around us. *It’s through Christ that the world changes.*

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It’s that unity that we also should be seeking within our own communities — whether that’s a ward congregation, whether that’s a neighborhood, whether that’s reaching to the “other” that we normally don’t associate with because they’re not part of our comfort zone — trying to find a way to do that. And I just love the promise of the fruits of the Spirit that can enrich our lives so much and can help illuminate the path, that we know that we’re on the right path when we feel these fruits of the Spirit. And what I love about that is that this is for all — old, young, male, female — *we can all receive the benefit of these fruits of the Spirit.* And I just love Paul’s desire to help others to come unto Christ and to receive all of these fruits of the Spirit so that they can have a better life and learn how to walk in the Spirit. And that’s certainly something I want to do ever better in my own life.

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# Ephesians

Matthew Richardson

***Ephesians 12:13–14*** *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.*

It's not that we make ourselves new creatures, it's that *we make ourselves available to He who changes all things and we become new in Him.*

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Throughout the writings of the New Testament, James will say, "We'll come to know Jesus Christ and you'll be surprised. He's a lot like us, and you're a lot like Him — probably closer to being like Him than you think you are."

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This is one of the things I love about the gospel of Jesus Christ, is that *this was not intended to be a Sunday experience.* It teaches us to become new creatures where we see things differently. It's not our membership. We see people differently. We see ourselves differently. We see life differently.

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And you think of patriarchal blessings, and you think of all the blessings that we receive at the hand of our Father in Heaven, and it's almost like *He's rekindling who we used to become and giving us visions of times forgotten. And He's saying, "Come home. Come home and be who you were foreordained — not predetermined who you would become, but who you choose to become through this wonderful, glorious plan of salvation process — and you will be new. But to me, you'll be the person that I knew you could always become."*

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Conversion is personal. *Everything about the gospel of Jesus Christ is personal.* And conversion is a deeply personal experience, and it changes as we change, and it deepens as we pay the price.

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The question comes, and welcome to Ephesians, *how does God reveal His mysteries?* How does He reveal His secrets? And this is one of the reasons, for me personally, that I love the book of Ephesians. He talks about the economy, or the administration, *the way that He reveals His great mysteries or the great miracles*, and that of course is going to be done through prophets, seers, revelators, pastors, evangelists, and individuals that are not telling people what to do, but they're the great revealers.

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The Lord wants and shall make known unto you *all* things.

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There are things that are not revealed openly at first, but God — I don't know if He's a good businessman — *He shares all the company secrets, and He'll tell you the secret formula for the secret sauce and He will reveal His secrets.*

We must learn what we must learn so that we can do what we must do so we can become what we must be. And *that's* called conversion.

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We get “squirreled” so often in our world today, it's constant. We get “squirreled” in our marriages. We get “squirreled” in the fullness of knowledge. We get “squirreled” in treating other people and bringing them to... it's a squirrel! We can't have a conversation — squirrel! We should love one — squirrel! I wonder what I'm going to eat tonight. And yet, what does Paul talk about here? How do we stay on target. Oh, well, here's the “anti-squirrel” juice: prophets, seers, revelators. They will bring us back to this Chief Cornerstone from where we should be measuring.

I've thought about what "I've had a crisis of faith" means and try to be empathetic or at least sympathetic. And I remember one time reading through, and the word "crisis" *is actually Latin and means "decision."* *Maybe we should step back on the power of the words. A "crisis" is a time of decision. So, don't panic. Don't jump out of the boat. Don't just give up. Don't abandon everything that you've believed in,* whether it's your love in a marriage, like Paul would be addressing here. *Make a decision.* Don't panic. Take some time. Get your bearings. What can you do to get some bearings? Maybe you ought to try some prophetic words. Maybe you ought to try prophets, seers, and revelators. You go see a bishop because he holds the power of God.

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God gave some Relief Society presidents, and He gave some ministers for families, and He gave some bishops and especially prophets to help us — help us what? Through our crises, through our moments of decision, to have faith.

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What do we do with God? We love Him with our heart, might, mind, and strength. We revere Him. We have reverence, which is not just quietness. And some people say, "See, wives are supposed to be quiet." That's not what Ephesians 5:33 is saying. *To revere is to love with almost a deity-esque experience where it's, I'll call it charity, it's God-like love. What Paul is saying is "we're in this together, and we are each other's great gift."*

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How do you know the children of God? How do you know if they're children? By their fruits, you shall know them. "Oh, well, I have to be perfect all the time." No, you don't. No, you need to be the children of light. And what do children of light do? *They do their best to stay in the light.*

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I believe that grace is beyond my comprehension, and how He administers that is beyond me. *That's why I want to be like Him.*

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We all have a whole different set of cards that have been dealt, but it's how we play our hand that becomes different. And the covenant, we should never, in my opinion, never weary in having faith in the covenant because it's, if I understand it correctly, *keeping us close enough that we can always be redeemed*. What is our role? Keep those that you love that are under covenants close to you as well.

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We must change and we must become new creatures when it comes to prejudice and bias. And *we must become like Christ, who just revealed through His prophets, seers, and revelators that we accept all of His children because that is what He has done*.

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When we're at the end of our rope, there are things that can be done, and *God will reveal His secret and He will redeem you*. He will always redeem you by His good grace, His grace.

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Sometimes we can't even forgive ourselves, yet we've gone through and we believe in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Well, *let God do His great goodness*. Let His power His grace work upon you.

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You can't do it on your own. *You can qualify, but you never merit His grace*. But we need to rely on Him. And sadly, what's happening is we're abandoning the very essence. We're abandoning God, Christ, the ability to even exercise faith in temporal things, let alone spiritual things. Prophets, seers, and revelators, "Oh, they're just nice old men. They don't know what it's like to live." *We're abandoning the very thing that will provide us the answers to our great mysteries*.

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He is in everything. God is in everything. Even our good works. *When we are at our best, we have to praise God*.

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He talks about opposition, and we say there's opposition in all things. Actually, read the verse carefully. It says, "There is an..." A-N, "an opposition in all things." So, I don't think God's up there saying, "I'm going to give you opposition to everything. Just wait for me to show up, and here comes the hard part." *I think He's constantly teaching us and gives us the opportunity to understand there will always be an opposite in everything.* There's an opposite of bad, so, when things are going horribly wrong, know deep down there is an opposition, an opposite, and it's called things going well. Things are going great? Please know that there's an opposition and opposite to that.

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Life is mysterious and it's hard. I know some of you are throwing your hands in the air. You're getting pressures from the outside, so you've been trying super hard and things are rough. *Don't you dare give up because it's mysterious. It's a secret that God will tell you.* How is He going to tell you? Through revelation, both personal revelation and prophetic utterance.

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As soon as we start to learn, "It's not about me," all of a sudden we realize, "*This is all about me. He is saving me. He is making me more. He is interested in my happiness and my eternal joys. He is interested in me doing my part for others to find their lives.*" It's that great paradox. How can this come together? It's two sides of the coin. It's not about you, it's all about you. And we will be saved by His good grace.

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*Honor your Heavenly parents,* and it will ultimately bring honor to your parents.

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We are going to have to withstand the world so that we can feel the Spirit to receive revelation and to be able to accept the words of the prophet, seers, and revelators, to understand the mysteries of how we can become new creatures in Christ.

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How do you protect your thoughts as a disciple? You put on your helmet of salvation. What does that mean? Well, read King Benjamin's talk. You know this. We all know this one. As he comes down, he says, "I was salvation. The salvation comes by no other name than Jesus Christ." So, in other words, *put on the helmet of Jesus Christ*. He will help you with your thoughts, to think the right thoughts and to change your thoughts, and to be able to manifest new thoughts, et cetera.

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When it comes down to it, the breastplate *is* righteousness. It's your actions, your obedience. It's your dedication to it. How do you do that? Well, that will protect you. Every time you're righteous, it's like putting on a layer of a sense of a breastplate. It's a layer of the invisible force field, if you will. And the more righteous we become, the thicker our breastplate is.

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How do you protect your objectives, your goals, your movement, where you're going in your life? *Make sure that you're prepared in the gospel of peace*. The gospel will teach you so many things to be prepared. It will cause you to look at things differently.

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Whether you're a brand new convert or you're thinking about joining, or whether you've evolved to the point where you're settled within your conversion and it's deep in your heart, you need to make sure you put on the armor of God. You need to have thoughts and think like Christ. You need to be protected by keeping the commandments, the breastplates of being righteous, or doing righteous things. You need to know the truth to protect your morality and your virtue. And you need to make sure that you are having the gospel of Jesus Christ as your means of movement so that you can retreat when necessary, and know when to retreat and advance, and know when to advance or when it's time to hunker down, and to be able to maintain and stand in holy places.

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Is it possible that sacrament meeting *is the locker room for the Saints where they're readjusting, putting their armor of God back on through the sacrament experience?* If you think through the sacramental prayers, there's some interesting ties on that one. We promise that we'll always remember Him, that our thoughts will be focused upon Him at all times. *Is that putting on the helmet of salvation through our sacramental covenants, and we are promising this week?* My thoughts will be centered and focused on the Savior, and He will determine my thoughts.

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Is there any merit to the fact that we promise when we partake of the sacrament and that we promise that we will keep His commandments? Is that possibly adjusting the breastplate of righteousness and our commitment to be more righteous?

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Is it possible that when it comes down to putting on the girdle of truth, that there's something about our commitment and the process we do, and our sacramental covenants, that we will always have His spirit to be with us because only the Spirit can teach us truth in every circumstance, every situation? And therefore, when you're going to need it the most is if you have the Spirit to be with you. You'll either avoid compromising your morality or your virtue, or it will help you to learn to escape, like Joseph of Egypt.

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I think there's something that might be there. And then, of course, if you look at the feet, shod where the gospel of peace is, we promise that we'll take the Savior's name upon us, and that it will guide and direct us. And the way that He lived will be our guiding force and our motivation.

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There's something special about this. The armor of God is not just for the solo protection of an individual, but it is used when we are strong. Then the one becomes the many, and no wonder we're organized in quorums, and classes, and wards, and stakes, and families, and marriages — we link our armor together in something that protects *not just me, but we*.

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I think God is generous and *He wants things to be in our lives that are like His*.

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It's not "grace is for all of them who are doing everything that the Lord said to do," but every single one of us, all of us, wherever we are in our progression, we all can manifest our sincere love for the Lord, whether it's in trial or triumph.

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This is the message of Jesus Christ for all of his children. And how does that come? Well, I guess we could call everybody and say, "You're doing great," which might be helpful. But when the Spirit calls and we feel the grace of Jesus Christ upon us, is there any wonder why we're striving to have the Spirit with us? To validate those times when we cannot find validations, where we can feel the assurance and confidence in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, *which is far more than just to be able to compensate for our sins. But it helps us to overcome all things, and include our own arrogance, and to be able to understand and frame the good times in our lives. The Atonement is just as valuable then as it is for overcoming the deaths*.

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# Phillipians; Colossians

Lori Denning

***Colossians 2:5*** *For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.*

When I'm having a tough time, when my family's struggling, when I don't know where my next meal's coming from, when my job is at risk, or I am feeling stress and anxiety and illness, or whatever it is, Paul was doing the same thing. We think this is a 2,000-year-old letter, *but it could be written to me today.*

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Christ was sent to liberate the captives, not always physically; *we can be liberated in our souls.*

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The whole purpose for our existence is not to avoid the struggles, *but to have Him with us on our side. With us, understanding us intimately and uniquely when we go through them.*

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When we really embrace the Savior, it starts to change us. Things just come out of us that are better. We're a little more patient than we were. We're a little kinder. I don't cut off the guy on the freeway like I used to. *I start to be more like Him.*

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No matter where we are in our lives, *we can have Him.*

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We don't say, "Oh, I'm sorry you're feeling like that. You'll bounce right back." What we say instead is, "I hear you, brother. I hear you. And that's just like Jesus, and that's just like me. And you know what? *He's going to make it better through the journey.*"

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Paul's saying, "You guys, love each other, serve each other." And then he is going to go, "Oh, and you know actually what that's about? Jesus Christ." This is big theology. The big theology is the fruits of righteousness. Is loving each other, mourning with those who mourn, and understanding where we are and serving being a minister?

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He didn't come to just free me from my sins, or so that I could have faith in Him, but the idea that *He descended below them all so He could understand me when I was in my darkest times.*

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Out there is this community of Saints, this community of people, that believe and are striving just like you. *Don't forget that you're part of something bigger, something bigger anciently and in the future across time, not just around the world.*

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When you're suffering and you're going through trials, it's the same thing that Christ went through, and *it will make you like Him.*

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It's not that God's light just sheds into us, but we reflect it out. We're like a mirror outward, just sharing those kind words, even helping somebody suffering. Mourning with those who mourn. That's powerful, and it's something that I can do.

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You do not need to know everything to be a good member of the Church. What do you need? *Faith, repentance, and baptism.*

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The Lord hears you, and He sends His messengers to them and to us.

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We have stuff that we really align with. It could be our football team. It could be our college that we went to. It could be our political affiliation. And we align ourselves there first. And what Paul would advise us in this new death and new birth is you're now following Him. And in this new walk, you follow Him first. You are Christ followers. You are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first. In a way, that's supposed to guide you. You have to leave that other stuff behind. And he's going to go on quite an example here in a minute, but he's going to talk about how we take our lives and say, "Now, how do we do that then?" And he's going to teach us again how we're going to do this walk through Christ.

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*He picks us up and He carries us in His arms, and He says, "Head back out there and try again." And He says, "In fact, I'll go with you this time."*

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He was the first one to die, and through His Resurrection we will be like Him, and we'll reconcile to God. *You're never too far. There's no sin so great that the Atonement of Jesus Christ can't cover, because He is God Himself.* In this new walk, follow Him. You are in His image, and *everything that He sacrificed is so that you can be like Him.*

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We can take the message of the gospel to everywhere. He was in the image, and so are you. And you are joint heirs, and you are supposed to go and tend the garden and take care of it. And you are Him. *You're His hands, right? You're in His walk. Go do what He would do.*

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This new life in Christ, we're all going to need to pull together and be brothers and sisters. And it's going to be hard, and we're not going to quite get it right. This new life is a challenge.

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I think it's because of that message of Christ that we can say, "Look, *I'm never on my own. I'm never going to quite get it all the way, but He's always going to be there with us.* And I am now like Him, and I can reflect Him out into the world." That, I think, is the core message that Paul is telling us. And he is not saying it's not going to be hard, just like Onesimus and Philemon, but he is saying, "You can do it, just like He did."

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I just want to follow Him. I mean, He is my guy. If He says to do it, *I want to do it. I want to be more like Him, and I want to do what He says.* I love Jesus Christ. And I could not love Him as much as He can love me. Once I've known Him, I feel like there's something there that I just hope to be more like and more to understand — that's what fuels me. The techie part and all that is just icing on the cake to following Him. I believe in Him, and I am His follower. And that's my hope for all of us.

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# 1&2 Thessalonians

Dale Sturm

**2 Thessalonians 2:2** *That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

Perhaps the world doesn't think of love as inducing one to strenuous effort. The world's sort of romantic view of love is that love should make everything easy. Love brings puppy dogs and rainbows. But here, Paul seems to be noting that among you, *love has created a desire to sacrifice, and not quit, and keep serving*

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How do we live in the world as Christians, and how do we share the gospel? *We're bold. We're full of love, and affection, and a desire to serve*, but we're also careful not to allow our message to drift toward things that men want to hear. We're true to what God would have us speak.

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Sanctification is where we not only get forgiven for when we didn't do as we knew we ought to; it's where we're enabled to actually live like Christ, not just get forgiven for when I wasn't like Christ

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Difficulty is actually appointed. *It's part of the deal.* You need to expect it.

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It's easy to be a faithful Latter-day Saint sitting in the chapel hearing a wonderful talk, or at conference time hearing the soaring language of an apostle. But tomorrow's a Monday morning, and we've got to go to work and we've got to deal with neighbors and traffic. And then, sometimes *the affliction of Christianity is just found in the ordinariness of the day to day that it just keeps coming, the relentless regularity of life.*

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Any time the natural man in me feels to pass judgment, I can quickly remind myself that, "You're a mess yourself. You got your own stuff and the Lord's helping you along the way, just like He's helping them along." We're all in this together.

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Your arrival into the gospel covenant is not just about you getting declared clean, it's about changing you. It's about you actually turning into something that you're not yet.

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It's just such a practical hope to know that those that we've loved will be with us again, and we'll be together with them in the Lord.

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I think that we are required to, as the body of Christ, maintain standards. And sometimes it will be uncomfortable for people to hear the standards that we maintain and proclaim. But also as a body of Christ, we have to be loving, and kind, and forgiving. Otherwise, we lose the moral authority to proclaim the standards in the first place. *So, we've got to proclaim the standard, hold fast to it, but also go and love, and try and love people where they are into living as Christ would have us live.*

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You're probably doing better than you think you are, even if your circumstances feel like, "Boy, this is just too hard." The other thing is that prophets and apostles, the Lord's anointed, they really love those of us who are striving in the covenant. That encouragement is real. It's sincere. They get it, they understand it, and their desire is to just help. We have an apostle here who loves these people and is trying really hard for them to feel it. The modern brethren love us. They want to help us be successful.

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# 1&2 Timothy, Tittus, Philemon

Barbara Gardner

**1 Timothy 4:12** *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

At some point, the Spirit will teach the knowledge of the truth if that effort and price is paid, *in the due time of the Lord.*

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They are leaders, not because they have studied leadership; *they're leaders because they have become disciples of Christ. They're full of charity.*

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I'm not going to church on Sunday because I'm being self-righteous, *I am desperate. I'm desperate for Christ.*

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We need to help our youth see and experience service, and help them apply the Atonement of Jesus Christ in their lives so that they can testify and be stronger in the benefit of other people.

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I love that the real mentor, or in this case, *the real Mediator*, is Jesus Christ.

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We are examples to other people. Watch yourself. Know the doctrine yourself, and *the Lord is going to use you so that you can bless other people.* And what you need to do, you need to know the doctrine. You need to watch yourself and then remember that you are an example.

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The more we help the youth get *out* of themselves, the more they're going to *find* themselves because we're helping them come unto Christ.

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*Money can be the root of all evil, but it also can be a great blessing.* Again, it's all about where the heart is. But in the end, the money is still behind. It's still left behind. *Eternal life is what matters.* It's this, "Oh, man of God. Flee these things. Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life."

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*If we love anything more than God, it is the root of all evil.* We build our house upon the rock of Jesus Christ. If it's money, it's sand. The sand is money. *The sand is anything but Jesus Christ.* To your point, we bring with us who we are, and we are disciples. We are gods in the making. The love of anything besides God is the root of all evil.

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Our light and *how we live our lives does influence other people.* Remember your covenants, and teach that kind of understanding.

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An 11-year-old girl who was a class president of her young woman's class has priesthood power and authority given to her. *Let her use it. Let her learn how to be an instrument in God's hand in the most positive and the most powerful way that we can help them.*

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Paul is not just dismissing Timothy's fear. He's saying, let me help you have confidence. It's Jesus Christ who we have confidence in. It's not that he has faith in himself. He has faith in Jesus Christ, and faith overcomes fear. *If we have faith in God and a love of God, we have no reason to fear as we're taught.*

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A true disciple of Christ loves people.

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Sometimes we lay down like the good soldier, but we have to get back up on our feet. We know in whom we have trusted. Get back to the work. Don't let the world overcome us. Remember that Jesus Christ Himself overcame the world. He resurrected. *There's hope in Christ, and we can get up and finish our battle.* But it's okay to lay down and cry for a little while. It's okay to be hurt. It's okay to mourn. And it's actually, it's a beautiful thing to mourn, but we need to continue on — not deny, move forward, be strong.

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We have leaders of the Church that are not just asking women but *pleading* women, directing women, speaking to women and saying that Israel can't be gathered until the women of the Church understand their priesthood power and authority and speak with this power and authority they've been given.

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In my very humble opinion, modesty is not about dress and appearance as it is about our heart, and it is about our covenant and our commitment to God. *How we dress is an outward appearance of the covenant that we have made with God and an understanding of our identity.*

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The question really is, where is our commitment to God? And *are we willing to live in a higher and holier way?* But that also includes not judging in a higher and holier way. It includes loving in a higher and holier way. So, it's us becoming more like Christ, living the covenant, but also not judging according to the covenant. It goes both ways.

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In a world where moral relativity is the answer to most things, *God is not morally relative*. God is absolute in truth. In my case, I want to live my life according to what God would have me be. Because in the premortal world, I wanted the kind of life He had. And so, *I don't want the life that the world gives me, I want the life that our heavenly parents have*. That's what I want.

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The most important thing that we're doing is focusing on a relationship with Christ.

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When I pray in the name of Christ, *I want to ask questions in the name of Christ, too*. I want to ask God the kind of questions Jesus Christ would want me to ask His Father in His name.

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Christ wants us to be heirs with Him. As we continue this path, we understand Christ's teachings. We know who He is. We will receive, as it says in section 84, all that God has as heirs of Jesus Christ. *He is the most selfless, the most gracious, the most charitable being, that being, Jesus Christ. If we continue on this path, we will also be able to share the heir of joy or become heirs of joy and eternal happiness now and in the next life*. That would be my thing: we find joy and hope in Jesus Christ, and we will receive all that he has — which, for me, is eternal life — all the joy, all the beauty, all the love that our Savior can make possible because of Him.

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# Hebrews 1–6

Matthew Grey

***Hebrews 5:9*** *And being made perfect,  
he became the author of eternal salvation  
unto all them that obey him*

Jesus is the *ultimate* atoning sacrifice whose death provides that reconciliation between humans and God.

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The author of Hebrews is going to try to convince his audience that you just don't need to rely on previous structures and institutions *because our trust is in Jesus*. If you see Jesus as the one who created all things, and who is the heir, and who is in the likeness of God, then that's where we can place our trust.

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Here's an eternal rest that we're all looking for: an eternal paradise, an eternal promised land. And that's the rest that we're actually seeking, and that's the rest that Jesus can bring us to if we allow Him to. So therefore, don't backslide. *Don't give up on Jesus. Jesus will bring you into the eternal rest that earlier generations only dreamed of.*

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Jesus supersedes old traditions, old institutions. Jesus has divine power, and Jesus is the one who purged us of our sins and provided the Atonement.

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He had to become a human so He could suffer, so He could die, so that He could then become the captain of human salvation. He could be the one to lead the way — not only die for humans, but lead the way for humans to go through that ultimate perfection process, like He did.

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Jesus needed to become human so He would know what it's like to be you and me. Once He knows what it's like to be tempted like you and I are, or to suffer like you and I suffer, or to die like you and I will die, *that's what allows Him to be the captain of our salvation*. That's what allows Him to be a faithful and merciful high priest who really can understand what it is that we experience and what it is that we go through.

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*He knows what it's like to be you. He knows what it's like to have experienced that temptation. He knows what it's like for you to experience that suffering, and now He's pleading with that knowledge, with that experiential knowledge. He's now pleading for you, as we speak, before the heavenly veil.*

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In His human wanderings, Jesus knows what it's like to cry out in strong tears — really cry out — and He worked through that. He pushed through that. He turned His will over to the will of God, and that's how, through obedience, He became this exalted Son who can make this priestly intercession for us. That's how He became perfect. That's how He became the author of our eternal salvation if we just obey Him. That's how He was called of God, a high priest after this different order of priesthood that we're going to call the Melchizedek order.

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If we come unto Him, He has the power to save us to the *uttermost*. I love that. *To the absolute fullest extent.*

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This is kind of what sets us apart as Jesus followers, and that is that *we have a Heavenly High Priest who brings us that ultimate true mediation*. I love the picture that [the author of Hebrews] has painted. He wants us to envision Jesus dressed in the priestly garments, standing in front of the veil, offering the prayer that would part that veil and bring us into God's presence so that we can have complete confidence and boldly go into the presence of God ourselves through our Mediator, Jesus. We can have complete confidence, complete boldness and assurance, in the salvation process *because of Jesus's one-time sacrifice.*

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# Hebrews 7–13

Phillip Allred

**Hebrews 12:2** *Looking unto Jesus  
the author and finisher of our faith;  
who for the joy that was set before him  
endured the cross, despising the shame,  
and is set down at the right hand of the  
throne of God.*

We've got this supreme power and we've got an unfathomable sympathy all wrapped up in one person, in Jesus Christ. I'm just so grateful that our redemption and our reconciliation require both of those. *We need His potency and we need His mercy. We need His once and for all sacrifice as well as His ongoing ministry in our behalf. Truly, in this way, He is our help and our hope.*

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The Savior knows us so intimately, He gets why we're unrighteous. He gets what we're struggling with and He's saying, *"I want to have a relationship."*

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Because of Christ opening up this new and living way, *we can all enter His house.* His house is open for everyone, and it's because of the gift of His Son.

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*He is pleading your cause.* He's not only this powerful individual, *your cause is His cause and He's pleading that.*

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The only thing I can bring is my willingness to believe because everything else I bring is a problem. It's fallen short. It's a sin or it's a broken law. It's sins of omission, sins of commission. *But I can bring belief in Jesus.*

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I'm actually transforming with His help and I'm doing less sins. I'm doing better. At the end of the day, *if Gods not looking at me and He's looking at Jesus, how do you think my judgment is going to go?*

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This is why Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21 is so powerful. He says that the righteousness of God was made sin for us so that we who were sinful could be made the righteousness of God. It's what they call "the admirable exchange." It's this amazing exchange where *I was the sinner, but now I get to be looked at as if I was Jesus* — as if it's my blood that He's bringing, and it's sinless. It's the beauty of the Atonement of Jesus Christ that says, "I have overcome the world for you. Be of good cheer. Come to me. My blood will open the way."

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This is all about coming into His presence *now* and becoming a person like Him *over time*.

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He did break the veil and it is now done. The question is, will I allow Him to do what He always wanted to do? And that was to be close to me and help me become like Him, and we could be a true family together.

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When I get nervous about my salvation and about how I'm doing and everything, He's saying, "Look, think of me." *It frees me up to have a normal mortal life where I'm here to learn by experience.* I've got to learn to taste and prize the good, because I've experienced the evil and sometimes I've even done evil. And He says, "I got you. I got you covered."

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This is about getting to Jesus, and through Jesus, to the Father. *That's a relationship. It's not a recipe.*

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If we have a relationship with God, *we can do anything*. Because we know Him, we know He's faithful, and He could command us to do anything.

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You have help and you have hope in Jesus. Go forward, be bold.

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This earth, this isn't your home. It's not yet made into its paradisiacal glory.

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If you will engage in the Christ-centered life, where you are looking through the eye of faith of Jesus Christ at all your problems, all your concerns, all your obstacles, you will be able to lay aside the sins that seem to be so easily besetting you. *You can do it. The answer is Jesus Christ. The answer is always Jesus Christ.*

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*We want to take our divine nature and turn it into our eternal destiny.* That transformation Elder Renlund has recently spoken of, etc., what does that look like? Well, part of it looks like suffering.

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There must be something about eternity, something about the celestial kingdom and the kind of life they live, that requires training, tutoring, and becoming on our part. *That it's not just location, it's not just geography*, that it's actually character.

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Whatever it is that the celestial world is like, whatever the cosmic realities of our future existence is, this Father who loves us and is subjecting us to the training is pleading. Like President Nelson, "I plead with you." Over and over, President Nelson, "I plead with you." Come, do the work that God has laid before you. It will bless you. It will train you. It will change you. It will make you happy. You'll be happier because you can go do things.

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That's the real key, isn't it? That even Jesus, when He was facing the most difficult thing that anyone in the cosmos has ever faced, *even Jesus had to submit to the will of His Father. It was not a reflection of God's love for Him.* It was not a reflection of His displeasure with Him. It was, "This must be."

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Jesus Christ is more powerful than anything this world has ever experienced — be it social, military, intellectually, ecclesiastically. *He is God on earth. He is the Lion of Judah. He's now enthroned in the heavens. He's the master of all creation. He's wielding infinite, eternal power on behalf of all of us.*

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Jesus Christ is more merciful and loving than anything this world has ever experienced, be it social, emotional, psychological, even religiously. He was God on earth. He condescended as the sacrificial lamb. He was slain from the foundation of the earth. He got rejected by the so-called acceptable society, and He suffered outside the gate. He was shunned, and He was despised because He bears every one of our burdens in every wilderness we experience. *He continues as the Minister to every child of God. Jesus truly is the hope and the help of Israel on both sides of the veil.* I am so thankful and so grateful, and I love him so much and want to love him so much more. And I'm grateful to the book of Hebrews for helping me see a little more and a little better our sweet Jesus.

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# James

J.B. Haws

***James 1:5*** *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

James can be a model of thinking that *it's worth repeating, and restating, and reframing important gospel truths, because we never know when that reframing or that repetition might be the one that enters with more force into the heart of someone*. That's striking me as something pretty significant to think about for teachers who might worry that, "Am I just repeating the same thing over and over?" *It might be that repetition that's needed on that very day.*

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*Ask in faith because you can trust God.* You can trust what kind of person He is, what kind of a being He is. He is the kind that gives liberally and upbraideth not. So, ask with that kind of faith that you are asking of this kind of loving God.

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Joseph Smith, I think, becomes a model for all of us when we're in those soul-anguish moments, and that the message of the restoration is that *we can ask God*.

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James speaks about this ability to endure as a quality of discipleship. So, maybe there's something about that too, with patience of holding on in that waiting and that timing but not giving up, not stopping the seeking, not stopping the quest. *To keep at it — to keep thinking, to keep studying, to keep reading until that ray of light does break through — until the verse that enters into our hearts with more power or more force hits us till we find that.*

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A number of great thinkers on this have pointed out that too often, *we stop too early*. That's such great advice. Don't study Church history too little, because the more we study, the more we research, the more we go right at concerns or things that we find that are unexpected, the more we dig in. That always goes well.

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It just feels like “hallelujah” to think about all the things that have come through the revelations that came to the prophet Joseph Smith, and that he was this instrument to *open our minds to eternity* and to point us to the Savior Jesus Christ in unprecedented ways and to restore covenants and ordinances that can connect us. I love his own humility, recognizing his own limitations. And yet, *that did not stop him from being a doer of the word. He knew what he had seen, and he knew that God knew what He had seen, as He says so powerfully, and he went forward.* And I think he is a model for all of us when we’re seeking to be disciples and seeking to know what God would have us do.

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So much of our discipleship can be determined by how we treat other people.

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That is a disciple who lives the royal law. We’re going to love our neighbors as ourselves and *not be different based on who is watching us*, who might be judging us, who might be commenting on the way we’re living. And that’s a tough one. *Can we be consistent and not be different based on who we’re associating with?*

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I’ve always thought, what a call to all of us to judge beyond what is just true, not what we can just see, but to think the best of people beyond what we can see — beyond what is true, what is obviously true.

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It’s easy to feel like everything that we do is being judged and being evaluated, like we’re living our whole life in a performance way. And I hear James saying, “Let that go.” Let that go. Don’t you treat people that way. And if you are treated that way, don’t worry about that.

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*The royal law is to love thy neighbor as thyself. If we want to be part of the kingdom, we live the royal law — the law that governs the kingdom.*

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How would we do differently if we just were constantly thinking, *this person with whom I'm interacting is created in the image of God. This person is in the similitude of God and his or her potential. How could I do anything else but try to bless them?*

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It's the Savior's grace that changes us, and enables us, and empowers us, *but He gives us the right to choose.* And we demonstrate our choice, our agency, by the things that we do. That shapes us and then we're becoming something. *Faith without works is meaningless, because we can't become something unless we choose something. The Savior's grace gives us the right to choose to become what He offers us to become.*

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If we expand what we think about our relationships, those that are created in the image of God as being sacred things and being so careful how we speak about them, I think that could be one next step. I can pray that the Spirit will restrain me and constrain me, so hold me back. Then sometimes when I shouldn't say something, it'll push me forward when I should say something and to be more sensitive to those nudgings. That's one thing the Spirit can help us do, is to give us those feelings. I want to be that receptive and to listen.

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We have to be really careful about saying that we have faith if we're not willing to be changed, if we're not willing to be different.

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The admonition of the Lord is for us to be patient and reflect His character. *He is patient with us. Oh, thank goodness.*

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I feel this for me, as I'm coming away from a conversation in the study of James of wanting to have a fervent prayer for some of the things that have pricked my heart, and that *I want to become something different*... James has encouraged us to have faith in the power of prayer, the prayer that starts the Restoration and the *prayer that can change us*. If we offer up fervent prayer, we'll be amazed at how effective that can be. I can't help but think about Mormon's closing words, the Moroni 7, "Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ... that when he shall appear we shall be like him." This idea that a full energy of heart prayer and a fervent, effectual prayer can really change us in our walk and talk to follow the Savior.

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# 1 & 2 Peter

Andrew C. Skinner

**1 Peter 1:7** *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

Trials and tribulations come to all of us. Peter is trying to help the ancient Saints, but in so doing helps the modern Saints to see how we can not just endure our trials and tribulations *but spiritually prosper in them*.

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What the gospel is intended to do is to link us to the family of Israel, whether we're the ancient audience of Peter or the modern audience of Peter, we're all one group of people. And my Jewish friends are right in reminding me that when we talk about the chosen people, it's not a chosenness of privilege or elitism; it's a chosenness of responsibility to help each other and to guide those who may not be so spiritually inclined back to their Father in Heaven and Heavenly Father's family.

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The plan of salvation covers *every* contingency, every aspect of mortality and life beyond mortality.

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The word disciple is different. It has a different meaning than the word apostle. The disciple is a pupil, is a learner. It implies more than just classroom instruction. *It's this continual personal association with the Savior that makes up this learning process.*

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The gospel of Jesus Christ, equals the doctrine of Christ, equals the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

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We may not be much before we joined the Church or committed our lives to Christ, but we are *everything* with Christ. *We are a chosen generation.*

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We mean everything to Heavenly Father. We're not everything unless we commit to the Lord Jesus Christ, *and then* with *Him* we are everything.

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If there's one lesson I have learned in these decades of the interaction with the world and with the world of the gospel, I've come to understand that *the Savior can tolerate many things*. In fact, He says that He's there to help us through these different challenges, but there's one thing that He can't tolerate, and that one thing is contention. The doctrine of Christ develops and blossoms in an environment of unity and an environment of love. Who wouldn't want to have the blessings of grace and peace in their lives?

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Remember who you are. That goes a long way in helping you to persevere persecution, to understand the nature of trials and tribulations. With the Lord's help, work through them, and in the process, prosper spiritually. It's these experiences that test us and try us that move us closer to our Father in Heaven and to the very reason that we're here on this earth: *to learn to serve the Lord at every hazard — to learn to serve the Lord at all costs*.

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*Life just is not fair*, and I think that's one of the reasons why we have the Atonement. Because Heavenly Father knew that life wouldn't be fair, and yet this atoning sacrifice would be not just for our sins, but for our sorrows, our sufferings, for the unfairness of life. And yet the Atonement will overturn, in our eternal existence, the unfairness. That is mercy and love.

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By your actions, you're causing the conscience that we're all born with to well up in them. And for some, they'll realize that you're actually living the way that God wants you to live. So, you'll be an instrument by enduring your trials well. In patience, *you're actually going to be an instrument to help others change*.

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Remember the value of adversity. Because you are moving toward that ultimate goal, which is the salvation of your soul, and you're being refined. You're proving that your conversion to Christ is genuine.

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The goal is to reach the point where, in any circumstance, we can say, “Heavenly Father, I don’t care what I want. I only care what you want,” and that’s part of enduring trials and tragedies.

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We can have perfect confidence in Heavenly Father’s plan because He’s foreseen it and He crafted it in a way that we could be happy, and so I hope that we are.

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The Lord dwells among the downtrodden and the sorrowful. *His presence is with those that are suffering*

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*We can become exactly like our heavenly parents. We can become like the Lord, Jesus Christ. Or, to use a phrase that some people don’t like, we can become as the gods.*

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It’s good news because you know that if you’re going through trials, even if you’re being persecuted, *that God thinks enough of you that you can come off conquerer — that you can endure and be just like the great heroes of scripture.* The other side of it is that if you’re being bombarded with temptations and it seems like the adversary is working overtime on you, that’s also good news, because *Satan doesn’t kick a dead horse.* He knows the great contribution that you are to the kingdom, and he doesn’t want you to be that. He wants you to fail.

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Anybody who wants to become a true disciple and will cultivate those attributes will receive the same reward as the ancients.

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Whatever the circumstances in life, mortality is fleeting, *but God’s promises are eternal.* That’s ultimately the lesson of Peter.

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Peter is saying, if you'll be faithful in the midst of your trials, which he talked about in his first epistle, and you'll continue to grow your faith and add to your faith different attributes that God Himself possesses — the ultimate one being charity, which is the pure love of Christ — that the day will come when the Lord will say you will be exalted. The premortal election that we all experienced to eternal life will be made sure and certain.

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When you find the Messiah, you *drop everything* and you follow Him.

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There's God's time, there's angel's time, there is prophet's time, and there's man's time. Time is one of those things that's kind of relative — depends on the planet where you're residing. So be cognizant of that and be faithful, *knowing that the Lord doesn't give up on His promises.*

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New missionaries, Elders and Sisters, you are called of God you are His disciple. It's not just a position of importance, *it's a position of honor.* Therefore, call each other by that honorific title, Elder and Sister, because that's the way we refer to the apostles — to the Lord's anointed. *You are the Lord's anointed. Your name is on the same name badge as Jesus Christ.*

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The Lord simply wants us to be holy because He's holy. We need to live the way that the Lord lived, make His example at the very core of our being. I know, I testify, that if we do that, the blessings that Peter promised the ancient Saints will be ours. We will receive a guarantee of eternal life. We will have the privilege of being in contact with the Son. We will receive personal revelation that our place with our Father in Heaven and His kingdom is secure.

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# 1–3 John; Jude

Justin & Aislin Dyer

**1 John 4:18** *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

**Aislin:**

I feel like that's Christ's goal for us, *that we understand who He is, and why He came*, and the love of God. And He gives this message to His special witnesses, and the ripples just keep moving outward and we share them with one another. And He prayed for us because we are part of that group who are receiving these words from His witnesses. And what are we going to do with this? *He prays that this will unify us.*

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*That's the glory of the diversity of God's creation, is that we all experience this a little bit differently and there's tremendous richness when we bring it together and we share it. I think that's part of our consecration, is being willing to share ourselves with other people.*

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*God is light.* That's something that permeates everybody's experience. If God permeated our lives the way light permeates mine... if I was connecting with God every time I flipped on a light switch, that kind of frequency, that idea that He's with me — the sun all day long is shining and He's with me — if we're having a feeling of fellowship, *God's light is with us.*

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If we have the love of God in our life, it can push out our fear of repentance. If we know He loves us, maybe we don't have to be so afraid, and so avoidant, and so prone to deceiving ourselves.

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I truly believe that we can receive capacity through God's grace, through the gift of His spirit, because of our anointing through our covenants, that we can be enlarged and enabled to do whatever God asks of us.

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If we abide in Him, we might also take His name upon us. If we are with Him, and we are disciples, and we're following Him, and doing what we can, what does He promise us? Eternal life. And He gives us gifts to help us with that, to teach us and to guide us. I mean, that's our baptismal covenant in a nutshell. We're going to follow Him and take His name upon us. He's going to give us something. He's going to give us the gift of the Holy Ghost and we can learn all things. It can testify of all truth.

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This is that process of becoming that we love to talk about. And it is slow, it is a wrestling match sometimes, but we have a fellowship to help one another within our families, within our other church communities. And as we are vulnerable with one another, we give each other permission to also work, and struggle, and hold each other's hands, and bear one another's burdens as we do so.

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As we have been talking about fellowship, and about the reality of sin, and the gift of a Savior, if we look at it with the assumption that God is loving us, it is really going to change how we see things. The big questions that I've struggled with in my life, when they are seen through the lens of God's love, I don't understand everything, but I have a trust that is going to say, "You know what? It's going to work out."

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He loves us, so *how do we shape our lives to His love?*

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It's that light of God through our anointing that we can rely on *to guide us through what can be really complicated things, and the Lord knows how to do it because every single one of us does things that take us out of alignment with God.* We all, at times, separate ourselves from Him and He loves us through it. And so, He will help us do the same thing.

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Across time, across generations and experiences, He didn't say "Only the rich people." He didn't say, "Only the people who live over here." His goal was that everyone that was willing to be united to Him would be, and they would be empowered, and protected, and guided. And through God's light and through God's love, we can have the trust. We have Christ's prayers for us that one day we can be united with Them and be like Them. And that's what's going to grease all of the tough, rough stuff that is inevitably part of a fallen world. And I have a testimony that that is true, that His light and His love make all the difference.

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**Justin:**

I can't think of hardly anything better in terms of a definition of love than, "Who is this person? What's going on with them in their life? *Let me understand them*, and then let me give them what it is that they need right now."

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*Jesus is the one that saves*, we don't do that. And He's really good at that. We do the very best we can. We get wrapped up in the love of God, and we move forward.

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You cannot contribute more than the Lord will bless you. *You contribute, and the Lord just gives.*

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There are so many decisions we have to make in our lives, and, oh my goodness, how often do we feel in the dark about those? Flipping on that light, or having the light of faith, can keep us from that paralysis that sometimes we experience when we're trying to make a decision. But if we have that faith, you know what? *I'm going to follow the Light of the World*. Maybe I don't know everything, but I do know this: *If I follow the Light of the World, it's going to be okay.*

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We need to make sure that we are not shaming the person by telling the whole truth — that it is wrong and God does love you infinitely, and all things can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. But, again, as a society, one of the worst things we could be doing is to not tell people when things are good or bad because then you're really in the dark, you're really in the darkness not knowing which way to go. We have to be able to do that, and I just tell Church leaders, I say, "You teaching right and wrong to your youth, you're literally saving lives. You're literally saving lives." Obviously let's stay away from the shame. That's something we have to do. We also cannot hide from our youth and adults that there really are some things that are wrong, and we need to avoid those.

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Our level of love for God can really be determined *by the level that we're willing to sacrifice.*

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There are those moments where we are in the dark, where we're not quite sure, and it might be day after day, week after week, sometimes year after year. But the Lord promises us, *and I know that if we stay moving forward, that light will shine again. And we will feel that*, and we will be out of the fear that we're experiencing.

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I think that's one reason why Christ can love us perfectly, because *He knows us perfectly.*

God is love. God loves you. There is a reality of sin, but there's a reality of salvation. Jesus is real. He came in the flesh... Probably what we need to be thinking is *how does God feel about me? How can I experience more of God's love for myself? And then how can I experience that for other individuals?* Almost any problem that you face, those questions are going to help to guide you through that.

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# Revelation 1–5

Nick Frederick

***Revelation 5:13*** *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*



What is the endowment but a chance for not just the prophets but *all of us* to find ourselves transported *into the presence of God* conversing with His angels?

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Apocalyptic literature isn't trying to predict what's going to happen in a few years. Apocalyptic literature wants to show you the big picture from God's perspective with the idea that you will have confidence and trust *once you see He's in complete control*.

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This is what you expect when you get to the book of Revelation. *You're going to be introduced to Jesus Christ*. You're going to understand that He's the one who loves you and saves you, and then what does Jesus want to do? He wants to make you kings and queens, priests and priestesses.

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John's primary direction to us is: as you read this book and you look for a lens of interpretation, you need to ask yourself, "*What does this have to do with Jesus Christ? What does this teach me about Jesus Christ?*"

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God can defend you. He can protect you. God's word is like a two-edged sword.

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Jesus is saying, "I'm not going to break down the door and drag you to dinner. *What I want is for you to invite me to dinner. I want you to want to be my disciple.*"

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Those of you who overcome can become like these people right here, clothed in white raiment with crowns upon their heads because they are part of Israel.

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I think a lot of what the book of Revelation is trying to do is convince somebody that *they can put their trust in God and put their trust in Jesus rather than put their trust in the emperor*. “Where are you going to put your faith?” And what you’re seeing here, is that not only is God powerful, but yeah, there’s this intimacy as well. God understands each of us. He knows these congregations. He knows their strengths and their weaknesses. And it’s not like there’s just seven congregations, there’s dozens, if not hundreds, of congregations at the end of the first century. And the idea is that God knows them all...

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The book of Revelation wants you to understand God, in a sense, as someone who gets you and understands you, and *is therefore worthy of your trust*.

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We start the vision here with the assertion that God is almighty. He is the one who has the power. He is the one in whom you should put your trust.

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Once you leave chapter four, there should be no doubt in your mind that Heavenly Father is the being you want to put your support behind, because what’s going to happen is going to get pretty rough. We’re only a couple chapters from unleashing hell on earth. But you want to know that the one who sits on the throne knows exactly what He’s doing. You can put your trust in Him.

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I can summarize the book of Revelation in two words: *Jesus wins*. That’s the point. Do you want to be on the winning side, or do you want to be on the losing side? If you want to be on the winning side, *then follow the Lamb*.

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The challenge that the book of Revelation faces is, do you want what I show you about heaven, or do you want what's here on earth? *You need to make a choice. Choose which one you want. Don't be lukewarm.* And then if you want to overcome, if you want those blessings in heaven, pay attention to what I'm going to tell you in this vision because I'll lay it all out for you.

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The world is a very complicated place. Satan's very good at throwing things at us and presenting himself in a certain way, and it takes a lot to cut through that, but that's why I love this book. That's why I studied the book of Revelation, because to me that's the challenge. Find the right Lamb. I understand who Jesus is, what His mission is, and I make sure I'm doing what I need to do to be overcoming. That's the challenge every day of my life, to make sure I continue to overcome.

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It's so easy to get lost in the little things in the book of Revelation — locusts and other things like that — that we lose the Lamb, and we don't want to do that. The Lamb is the revelation of Jesus Christ. It's right there in the first verse. *And if we start going in directions and we're not talking about Jesus anymore, we're being distracted by something else, then we need to step back and refocus and find the Lamb again.*

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There's going to be times where it doesn't seem like He's there, that God isn't in the world. Things are going to feel oppressive. It is going to seem like the Lamb has disappeared, *but He's always there behind the scenes. The Lamb is always watching things. God's hand is completely in control. Don't lose that perspective, even when it seems the Lamb might not be there or God may have lost part of the control.*

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Just remember, the Lamb is always there. The Father is always in control, and sometimes that's hard for us to remember because the "dragon" can be pretty persuasive. Babylon can be a pretty persuasive place. The Lamb is always there.

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The path that you've picked as a disciple of Jesus Christ is the right one. The book of Revelation is going to tell us there's going to be a lot of opposition. There's going to be a lot of things that are going to pop up that look like they're the right thing. There's going to be a lot of things that are going to happen that make you question whether you picked the wrong side, but *I hope that what we've done with these first five chapters — give you the confidence to continue on your path as a daughter or son of Heavenly Father.*

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## Revelation 6–14

Christopher Blythe

***Revelation 12:11*** *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

I really do believe the book of Revelation is the backdrop to so many symbols in the temple.

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It's really important to see that these figures are temple related as we read about new names, and stones, and dressing in white, John wants us thinking about the temple, and certainly the Father does today as He's revealed how we should be reading these passages.

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God is restoring His people.

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When the millennium comes, this is something *God is going to do for all of the Saints*: wiping the tears from their eyes, removing suffering.

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Our role is to share the gospel. Our role is to never delight in the destruction of our fellow beings. *We're hoping that people repent. We're hoping that people change.* The book of Revelation is the story of a world that's fallen and *how it's going to be redeemed.*

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What is the mission of the Restoration on earth? It's to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth, to recognize that yeah, there's going to be persecution. *God's got a plan, He's in control of this the whole way, and our job is to keep the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

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This is a message of great hope and great peace. *We're part of this story.*

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I hope people walk away with the sense that the book of Revelation, it has some scenes, they're a little dark, *but this isn't a hopeless book. This isn't a scary book. This is a book about how Heavenly Father is in control.* And really, when we recognize how the Prophet Joseph used it, this is a message of the Restoration. This is about the temple. *This is about how you and I can participate in the kingdom of God even before it's about to unroll.* It hasn't come yet, but we're already blessed to be able to participate in it right now.

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# Christmas

Joy D. Jones

***Luke 2:11*** *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour; which is Christ the Lord.*

I love everything about Christmas that relates to the Savior, everything that leads us to Him. And that's why Christmas is so spectacular, because *it is all about Him.*

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Focus on Him. There are so many distractions at this time of the year that would come in the way of that, and I just feel like at this time of the year, the world is just *a little bit softer and a little more forgiving, a little bit happier, a little bit. There is more hope.*

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Jesus is the gift that *never* stops giving.

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His life has an infinite effect on all of us. It never stops.

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Perhaps we could see Mary as a type for all of us. She was overshadowed by the Holy Ghost, and a birth occurred. How does this relate to us? *It would seem that we need to be overshadowed, so to speak, by the Holy Ghost and be born again — born of God, becoming new creatures in Christ.*

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*Everything* connects us to Him somehow.

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Isn't it beautiful, how He honors our agency?

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We're talking about a God who left His throne and came to earth to a manger. That true condescension, a human baby, enters the world totally helpless, completely dependent upon His parents for every physical need. And *that's what Jesus did.*

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As we receive Him, it's got to be conscious. *We've got to think about it. He blesses and empowers us. How we receive Him matters.* And I believe we can receive His love, and we can pass it on. And isn't that what we're talking about today? Isn't that what Christmas is all about? It's His love.

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One more thing about the wise men I would share is that they brought gifts to little Jesus. *They didn't just come to receive, they came to give as well.* And I think that's significant. We are also asked to bring something to our Savior, but what do you give to a God who has everything? The Savior tells us clearly, in scripture and in the temple, that *the gift He asks of us is that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.*

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They were diligently seeking Him. And you always hear that quote today: "Wise men still seek Him." Are we wise men? The wise men traveled a great distance. It took at least a couple of years. We know Jesus was not an infant when they greeted him. *Our pathway to receive Jesus is often a long journey as well. It takes time. We know they fell down and worshiped the Christ child when they finally found him. How do we worship Him?* When we thank Heavenly Father for the gift of His Son, we are worshiping Him. When we bear our testimonies. We're worshiping Him. When we reverently partake of the sacrament, when we ponder the words of the scriptures, the words of modern-day prophets, or, most importantly, *as we seek to be more like Him, we are worshiping Him.* There are so many ways that we worship Him, that we receive Him, as the wise men did.

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I think all He wants for Christmas is our hearts.

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When we are promised blessings that don't come fast enough, we can remember Simeon and Anna who *waited on the Lord faithfully, patiently, and without complaint.*

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Are we limiting blessings, promised blessings, because we fear? Because we're not exerting faith and trust in the Lord? Could fear present or, excuse me, prevent us from receiving blessings? Could the application for us be *don't live in fear, rather live in faith?*

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I get so excited about the gathering of Israel on both sides of the veil, because we really are working with our loved ones. *They're helping us* when we're doing our family history, our temple work. I just feel the influence and the urgency to continue to move forward and not be distracted, to stay focused on what really matters.

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And I think, again, we go to our knees in prayer and we involve our Heavenly Father. That's always the answer: *seeking His help and His guidance, and feeling His love. Because when I feel His love, I feel peaceful. I feel like everything's going to be okay.*

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What do I really need? *I need my testimony of Jesus Christ.* I need His love and light in my life.

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Our Savior brings a perfect brightness of hope and the promise of eternal life.

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I feel like the Savior's purpose in being lifted up upon the cross is to draw all men unto Him. And considering Christmas, of course, the shepherds were drawn, the wise men were drawn, children were drawn. So our question that we can ask ourselves is, *are we drawn to Him?*

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Let's put Jesus Christ first.

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Ministering is the true spirit of Christmas. I believe we can practice the spirit of Christmas in our missionary service, our temple and family history service. We can give that gift to someone else here or across the veil. And what a gift we give as we share friendship, as we share our testimony, as we share our love and our time. *Time is often the greatest gift of all, isn't it?*

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Here we are preparing for the Savior's coming. What a glorious time it is to be on the earth. And what a glorious opportunity it is for us to celebrate Christmas as the Savior's life, as His mission, as all of the incredible blessings that come to us because of Him through His atoning sacrifice and His Resurrection.

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I love that you can look and see Christmas lights everywhere. But *the lights of the temple are on all year long* I love it. *I love that you can always pick out the temples because those lights are shining brightly all year long to remind us of Him.*

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I've had people say to me, "How did you speak in general conference the day after your son's funeral?" and *all the glory goes to the Father*. I just use that as an opportunity to tell them I am so grateful to Him. *It was Him*. It was nothing that I did. I take no credit whatsoever. I was held up by angels and given that privilege. It was a privilege and it was a blessing, and it just fortified me to be able to stand before the Saints and to be able to declare my love and my testimony. And so, you know what I mean? I just want to make sure that the glory goes to Him and to our Savior. Because their power, *we cannot comprehend it. It's just too glorious.*

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# Revelation 15–22

Richard Draper

***Revelation 22:20*** *He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

When Jesus is upset, how does He handle it? Isn't there a lesson there for us? Yeah. He is always in control. I mean, just stop and think for a minute. *He cleanses the temple*, right?

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We have to go to chapter 15 and understand that the message of chapter 15 is *everything's under God's control. It's okay. He's got His grip. Nothing's gonna get out of hand.*

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The Saints, if they're prepared for Christ, will know, and therefore can be ready for when it comes. I don't know that we'll know the literal day or the hour, but the figurative day and hour yes. If we keep our eye on the Prophet, on the Twelve Apostles, the Lord's not going to abandon us.

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God said, "Only people are to be loved. Everything else is to be used. I've given you all of this, and I want you to enjoy it. *But I do not want you to love it. Only people are to be loved.*" But Babylon turns all that upside down, and therefore it causes people to love things instead of people, and worse, *to use people in order to get things.*

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Heaven so transcends anything. We mortals can imagine that the only way to *get us even close* to that reality is through very powerful symbols.

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As hard as it may seem right now, *God will show that it's worth it.*

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The source of power, the source of life, *is God*. But that through which that life flows *is Jesus Christ*. And therefore, it shows the equality of the teamwork of the Father and the Son, as both then sit on the throne and rule and reign in heaven.

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The very soul of love is care and concern for others. And *that is what God is all about*. “This is my work and my glory,” right? “To bring to past the immortality and eternal life of man.”

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We need to reach out to others to put away our shyness — to put away our concerns, our self consciousness, and so on — and be able to reach out to others and bring them into the fold of Zion so that they, with us, *can be assured that they can have peace and rest during troubled times*.

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These are brutal chapters, but what we see in them is the power of God moving. And that power is upon His Saints. And if we will just do as He wants us to do, the future promises to be unlike anything we’ve seen before as God moves onto the stage of history, as He dwells with His people, and as we prepare for the great millennial reign. And so, it is my prayer and my hope that we will reach out beyond ourselves and say to others, “Come, *come be with us*. I do not partake to the plagues of Babylon.” And I say that in Jesus’s name. Amen.

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