



EPISODE 8

GUEST: DR. JENAE NELSON



“To Be a Greater Follower of Righteousness”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

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

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

Podcast Episode Descriptions

Part 1:

What if becoming who God is calling you to be requires leaving the survival version of yourself, not just a physical location? Dr. Jenae Nelson explores Abraham’s journey as a path toward covenant identity, healing from trauma, and claiming priesthood power, weaving scripture with her own story of loss, faith, and courageous belonging.

Part 2:

Dr. Jenae Nelson weaves Genesis 12-17 with Abraham 1-2 with her own “out of order” life story to show how covenants, divine timing, and wilderness seasons reveal that the ultimate reward of faith is a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Timecodes:

Part 1 -

- 00:00 Part 1 - Dr. Jenae Nelson
- 01:56 Episode Teaser
- 02:36 Bio
- 04:30 *Come, Follow Me Manual*
- 05:30 Abandoned children and tokens
- 07:56 Father of three religions
- 11:17 Restoring to the Abrahamic Covenant
- 16:14 Understanding the Gathering
- 19:15 President Oaks and Priesthood Authority
- 22:20 Blessings of our fathers (and mothers)
- 25:48 Becoming a change maker
- 29:53 Eternal identity
- 34:40 The Comeback Podcast
- 37:30 The capacity for righteous living
- 40:01 Survival skills and leaving behind old tools
- 43:23 What is a boundary?
- 46:28 Why Abraham? And unanswered prayers
- 51:43 Mistaken identity
- 56:58 A new convert
- 1:02:32 The Book of Mormon speaks to Israel
- 1:06:09 Faith requires uncertainty
- 1:10:03 The Abrahamic Covenant and becoming a finisher
- 1:14: 58 End of Part 1 - Dr. Jenae Nelson

Part 2 -

- 00:00 Part 2 - Dr. Jenae Nelson
- 03:16 Patience for promised blessings
- 04:10 Life experiences not in the order expected
- 09:22 Souls that were won
- 12:15 Why covenants?
- 15:29 Elder Renlund on power through covenants
- 18:48 Abraham and Lot divide the land
- 22:29 Cutting a covenant
- 26:36 The Sea of Galilee vs The Dead Sea
- 30:58 The paradox of giving
- 33:45 Purpose at the intersection of gifts and the world
- 35:15 Where does our tent face?
- 39:52 Tent stories
- 42:04 Faith not in outcomes

- 44:44 Why obedience?
- 47:01 God expands and multiplies via covenant
- 50:44 Hope is what you need in the darkest times
- 54:11 Encouragement for those in difficult times
- 59:02 Unprofitable servants and promises kept
- 1:04:24 End of Part 2 - Dr. Jenae Nelson

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Dr. Jenae Nelson earned her Bachelor's and Doctorate degrees in Developmental Psychology from Brigham Young University. She is currently an assistant professor in the Psychology Department at BYU Provo. Dr. Nelson completed her postdoctoral research at Baylor University, focusing on character development during adolescence and young adulthood, and at Harvard Medical School, where she studied

the neuroscience of spirituality. Her expertise lies in the cultivation of character traits such as gratitude and compassion, and the positive impacts of religion and spirituality on youth development. Her work has been featured in publications such as Church News, Music & the Spoken Word, Christianity Today, The Associated Press, Meridian Magazine, and BYU Magazine. Dr. Nelson and her husband have four children, aged 21, 19, 17, and 15.

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To Be a Greater Follower of Righteousness PART 1



GUEST: DR. JENAE NELSON

- Hank Smith: 00:00:00 Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:00:04 With finding out that I had a different dad, I ended up having to get a new birth certificate because that my birth certificate had the wrong dad on it. I got a new name. I changed my last name. I inherited the name Brunson. Also, I got new family. My dad had six children that I had never met that was now, I knew these were now my siblings and I inherited this new family.
- Hank Smith: 00:00:33 Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode to followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with John Bytheway, who is a great follower of righteousness. John, I was reading Abraham chapter one. Abraham says he was hoping to be a greater follower of righteousness, and I thought, that's John Bytheway. He's trying to be more like John Bytheway.
- John Bytheway: 00:00:55 I'm a couple of hundred miles behind. I'm not tailgating righteousness, but I'm trying to follow it. Yeah, thanks for that.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:01 It's up there quite a ways.
- John Bytheway: 00:01:02 It's way up there.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:04 John, we are blessed to have Dr. Jenae Nelson back with us. Jenae, welcome back to followHIM. It's been a couple of years.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:01:11 Yeah, I'm so excited to be back today.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:13 Yeah, we love having you. I've been looking forward to this. I've had you on the schedule for quite a while. John, we are in Genesis 12 through 17, Abraham one and two. Abraham is a much bigger deal than I thought. When I first started reading the Bible, especially the book of Genesis. I thought, oh, it's a story of Adam and Eve. It really isn't. This is the story of Abraham.

John Bytheway: 00:01:36 That's what I've been thinking, because I know you always ask me what are you looking forward to. In the past, what would you say decade? We've just been talking a lot more about covenants, about Abraham. Hank has a brilliant presentation about Abraham and who we are in the Abrahamic Covenant. Greater covenant consciousness, which I'm grateful for and excited to talk about it today.

Hank Smith: 00:01:56 Yeah, here's this name that comes up all the time throughout scripture, even in the temple. Jenae, what are we gonna do today? Are we gonna get to know Abraham?

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:02:05 Yes, we are. Because I'm a developmental psychologist, I'm really excited to look at his story as a process, to look at his story of development and learn how we can become better followers of Christ.

Hank Smith: 00:02:21 John, you were right when you said earlier that I love this story. I frequently tell young people, if you wanna know why you came to Earth, you better know the story of Abraham, right? If you wanna know why you're here, hopefully that's a big deal to someone out there. Why am I on Earth? Well, John, someone might not have been with us two years ago when we studied the book of Helaman with Jenae. What do we know about her? Introduce her to our followHIM audience.

John Bytheway: 00:02:51 Well, I'd love to. I was excited when she was coming back because I remember what a great time we had last time. Dr. Jenae Nelson is a developmental psychologist and assistant professor in the psychology department at BYU. She focuses on positive youth development, relational [virtues](#), such as compassion and indebtedness, faith and character education in [sports](#). I wanna talk to her about that and the role of spirituality in psychological well-being. Her PhD is from BYU. She is a post-doctoral research fellow at Baylor and a research affiliate at Harvard. We're just glad to have you back because I remember I read that impressive bio, but what it doesn't tell you, I mean, Jenae is so unique. She actually had a period of time in her life when she was homeless. I'm excited to hear more about that today, will we?

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:03:44 Yes, we will. And I did share a little bit last time, so I'll try not to repeat too much. I do think that some insights from my story about finding my father, being homeless, repeating a lot of the themes of Abraham will be applicable, and I hope it can speak to others who, um, have similar experiences, and maybe not the same, but maybe struggle with feeling of belonging or trying to understand how they fit in.

Hank Smith: 00:04:09 Yeah. I remember there were quite a few mothers that came up to me after we talked to Jenae last time, John, and said, I love that she talked about her teenage years. Now I feel more hope for my daughter because Jenae decided she was gonna be a bit of a rebel early on.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:04:28 It's true. It's true.

Hank Smith: 00:04:30 That blesses a lot of lives when we open up like that. Hey, let's get started. I'm gonna read from the [Come Follow Me](#) manual, and then Jenae, John and I are excited to learn from you again. The title of the lesson this week is To Be a Greater Follower of a Righteousness. Because of the covenant God made with him, Abraham has been called the father of the faithful and the friend of God. Millions today honor him as their direct ancestor, and others have been adopted into his family through conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ, yet Abraham himself came from a troubled family. His father, who had abandoned the true worship of God, tried to have Abraham sacrifice to false gods. In spite of this, Abraham's desire was to be a greater follower of righteousness, and the account of his life shows that God honored his desire. Abraham's life stands as a testimony that no matter what a person's family history has been, the future can be filled with hope. Beautiful. Jenae, where do we wanna start?

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:05:30 I wanna start with a bit of an analogy, a little historical story that I think can teach us a lot about covenant and what it means to be part of the House of Israel. I came across the story of the [Foundling Hospital](#). This hospital was a children's home in London, England founded in 1739. It was established to care for orphans and abandoned children. And children were seldom taken after they were 12 months old, so many of the orphans were infants. At first, no questions were asked about the child or parent, but a note was made of any particular writing or other distinguishing mark or token which might later be used to identify a child if reclaimed. These were often marked coins, trinkets, pieces of fabric or ribbon, as well as verses and notes written on scraps of paper. There's a museum that has one of these tokens, it's a silver heart.

00:06:24 On this heart, it reads the following: You have my heart though we must part. Born September 6th, 1759. And as the historians have noted, sadly, this token did not get associated with a child. The child that it belonged to remains unknown, so in the event that the mother came to reclaim her child, she would have not been able to do so. I wanna use this story, again, like I said, as an analogy, and like matter as children of the covenant, we

have eternal tokens or covenants that identify us and enable us to be reclaimed and return to our heavenly parents. And [President Nelson](#), of course, has emphasized the importance of remembering our true identity as a child of God and a child of the covenant. This image of these little tokens, I wish I could show you guys. This one in particular really struck me in terms of what tokens do I carry, what marks of discipleship do I have that I could be recognized as part of the House of Israel. I hope to talk about that today, and I think Abraham starts to tell us, through his life story, what it means to be a member of the House of Israel and how we can be recognized as such.

John Bytheway: 00:07:35 I remember that the Bible Dictionary with the definition of Israel says one who prevails with God or to let God prevail, and that's the one that [President Nelson](#) really talked about a lot. Willingness to let God prevail as a identifier of Israel, which is interesting.

Hank Smith: 00:07:56 Think how many religions look back to Abraham. Think of how many people look back to Abraham. Islam, Judaism, Christianity, that is a large portion of the world's population. Looking back to this one prophet and his wife, Sarah.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:08:16 With that, let's go ahead and go to Abraham chapter one, verse two, so we can get a sense of this developmental journey that I talked about and where we're going to go today. Abraham says, In finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the Fathers and the right where and two I should be ordained to administer the same. Having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge and to be a greater follower of righteousness and to possess greater knowledge and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a high priest holding the right belonging to the fathers. Over and over again, we see the word greater. We get the sense that he was a follower of righteousness and he did have great knowledge, but he wanted more.

00:09:10 That's important when we're thinking about what is the point of the covenant, what is the point of the restoration. So much of the restoration was giving more. The body of Christianity, broadly speaking, has Christ. They have an understanding of his life. For those who come into the church, they're often looking for something greater, for something more. This is what we see pattern in the life of Abraham. I also want to talk about why Abraham is so important as an exemplar and why he's somebody that we should try to look to as a pattern. Scholar [E.](#)

[Douglas Clark](#), there's a book that he's written, *The Blessings of Abraham Becoming a Zion People*. It's really good. He says that according to Jewish tradition, Abraham's entire life prefigure the future history of Israel. It's important for us to understand Abraham's life if we want to understand Israel. He also says he's a model for anyone and everyone aspiring to Zion.

00:10:11 According to [Brigham Young](#), when we conclude to make a Zion, we will make it, and this work commences in the heart of each person. Right away, we start talking about hearts again, which is interesting because we talked about that on the Helaman podcast, but Abraham himself begins by talking about how his fathers had turned their hearts from righteousness in Abraham 1:5. Then in six, he says that they were wholly turned to the God of Elkenah. And in seven, they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen. We have this turning, this heart turning, but they're turning in the wrong direction. We know that prophecy and the words spoken to Joseph Smith through Moroni, the words of Malachi, that we're supposed to be participating in the work of turning the hearts of the children to the fathers and the hearts of the fathers to their children. This is a different kind of turning, so it's a turning to children, a turning to fathers, instead of turning to these false gods that were common then, but are still a problem today.

Hank Smith: 00:11:17 Jenae, I don't think we could overemphasize what you talked about. With the gathering of Israel, it's not necessarily about restoring Christ's New Testament church, although it does that. This is more about Abraham. Restoring a people. John, isn't that Section 84? Right at the opening. This restoration is about restoring my people. Jenae, that's perfect, turning their hearts to God.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:11:45 Yeah. To understand a little bit more who the Fathers are, here's another one. This is Israel, the Lord's chosen people by [Dallas W. Lee](#). It's super thick. The pages are very thin but really, really good. So I'm gonna be referring to him as well. He says, The fathers, Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph is another topic intimately related to the subject of Israel. These are the fathers and the children of Israel are part of that heritage. In the last days, we know the Lord would send Elijah the prophet for the very purpose of turning the hearts of the children to these fathers. When we're talking about fathers, we're talking about hearts turning to covenants, hearts turning to these ordinances. And essentially, all of that pointing to Christ. That's what we mean when we say that. There's other interpretations as well. We oftentimes talk about fathers as in

our genealogy, our ancestry. It's really important that we don't lose this idea that the fathers are connected to covenant.

- Hank Smith: 00:12:50 It's almost as if Abraham is reaching a couple millennia into the future saying, remember who you are. Remember our family.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:12:58 Yeah, that's right. Abraham says that he sought for the blessings of the fathers and the right whereunto he could be ordained to administer the same. He's very clearly tying the fathers to the priesthood here, and he became a rightful heir. Hank, I've heard you explain this before. Can you describe what the Abrahamic covenant entails?
- Hank Smith: 00:13:21 I try to make it as simple as possible for my students so they can remember it, wrap their minds around it at first, and then, you know, get to know the details later. But it seems that Jehovah says to Abraham, we are going to use your family, Abraham, to bless all the families of the earth. You're the chosen family, not necessarily because you're better, but you are chosen to do the work. I love all the families of the earth, so I'm gonna have a chosen family to bless everyone. I am going to give you and your family some very unique commandments. If you keep those commandments, you will have incredible blessings, which you can do the P alliteration, right? Priesthood, property or promised lands and posterity, including Christ himself will be part of this family. With those blessings, you are to bless every other family on the earth. I give you unique commandments, you keep those commandments, you get blessings, with those blessings, you bless the whole earth and invite them in to be part of this same family. Pretty soon, if we do it right, everybody is now in Abraham's family. How did I do?
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:14:35 That's really great. The Abrahamic Covenant also gives us a process of how to return into the presence of God. I would add those two, and we'll talk about that in more detail. The other thing that I wanna do is talk about how oftentimes when we start talking about the priesthood and the blessings of the priesthood, we forget how this relates to women and how women can also access that. First, I want to talk about the distinction between authority and power, because I think this is really important. There's a great quote from [Boyd K. Packer](#), your authority comes through your ordination. Your power comes through obedience and worthiness. I love that thought. And then [Spencer W. Kimball](#) says, There's no limit to the power of the priesthood which you hold. The limit comes in you if you do not live in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord. Likewise, there's a connection for women in their righteousness and their access to priesthood power.

00:15:32 [Russell M. Nelson](#), president and prophet, talked so much about this and talks so much to women. He said, Every woman and every man who makes covenants with God and keeps those covenants and who participates worthily in priesthood ordinances has direct access to the power of God. Then he says, Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God's priesthood power by virtue of their covenant, along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power. As we talk about the priesthood, I want us to think about the power and the blessings that can come. And those blessings that you talked about, Hank, are not just for the men, they're also for the women, and they lay out that process that we're to follow to come into the presence of the Lord.

Hank Smith: 00:16:14 Don't you think, Jenae and John, as a church, we are a true and living church, and learning things grow and understand things better. Do you think this is something maybe in the last 15 years, something that we're understanding more clearly than ever before?

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:16:34 Absolutely. I mean, having grown up without the gospel really actively in my home and not having a father in the home, I often reflected on that and thought to myself that there was no father in the home, there was no priesthood. And we used to talk like that, that if there's no dad in the home, there's no priesthood. Really, the lack that I had in my home was a connection to covenants and was a connection to the church by being actively involved in covenant keeping because I hadn't taken some of those covenants upon me, although I had been baptized and I did have the gift of the Holy Ghost. I wasn't really living worthy of those blessings in my life. It's no longer accurate to say that single women can't have the priesthood in their home that they can't have the priesthood blessings in their home.

Hank Smith: 00:17:22 This is from [Sister Aburto](#), who we've had on our show before. She said priesthood authority is the permission or license to perform specific priesthood duties and comes from ordination to priesthood office and from being set apart for callings in the church. Priesthood authority is conferred by the laying on of hands under the direction of those who have priesthood keys. Women receive this authority in the form of a calling. [President Dallin H. Oaks](#) made that clear when he said, Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties. Both of my sisters are single mothers. Someone would say, oh, you don't have the priesthood in your home.

That was wrong to say. It was an incorrect thing to say. My sister is endowed in the temple. She has priesthood authority.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:18:21 Yeah, I love that. And I think it's important for us to understand that those differences that you pointed out between what it means to be set apart, ordained, versus having that power in your life. Interestingly, Abraham early is faced with this problem where we see this imitated order of the priesthood with Pharaoh. Pharaoh has priests and they're doing what they would think of as ordinances and rituals, but they were imitated order. There was no priesthood associated with them. We contrast Pharaoh with Melchizedek, Melchizedek having that authorization, having the priesthood. Whereas Pharaoh was taking life, you have Melchizedek giving wine and bread and offering and blessing, just a different way of relating. And Abraham has these two contrasted orders.

John Bytheway: 00:19:15 When [President Oaks](#) gave that talk and he talked about a sister, I think he used the example of a sister missionary being set apart. He said she's given priesthood authority and then he said, What other authority would it be? And I thought, Well, yeah, you're doing the work of God. What else could it possibly be? I think of the phrase in, is it section 121? Well, that it may be conferred upon us, it is true, but when we undertake to gratify our pride, cover our sins, well, you may have been ordained, but it doesn't mean you have priesthood power.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:19:49 This reminds me of something that happened to me recently at BYU. I was on my way home. I came to my car. I realized the battery to my key wasn't working. And I was like, oh man, this is, this is like a really big problem because it's one of those new cars that there's no, like, key to get in. It's just a battery. I'm like, what am I gonna do? I'd have to walk to the store to get the battery to be able to make this work. Well, I looked online and found that there's actually like a hidden key inside the door handle. I, maybe I shouldn't be telling people this, but I won't tell you what make my car is. Anyways, so I had to take apart the handle, find this key, I get the key to open this thing in my other key, to force open this. Then this person comes out and says to me, that's my car. What are you doing?

00:20:33 And I realized this actually wasn't even my car. So I had removed this handle. I had gone through all this and it wasn't even my car. And so that's why my key wasn't working. But then I just, I was so embarrassed because it was so, it was so dumb. I put her handle back together and then I just left, found my car, and then all of a sudden my battery's working and I can open my car and I can get in. It turns out if you have the right car and

the right key, you're going to be okay. I think this is an important lesson for when we think about authorization and priesthood and imitation versus the actual authority. We need to have the right key so we know that we're getting into the right car. We want to be in the car that is the car associated with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We want to be part of the covenant. We don't want to be in just any old car.

- Hank Smith: 00:21:27 BYU professor tries to steal car.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:21:31 I know. I know. She was so confused and not very nice either. I can't blame her though. I would be, I would be, like, frustrated too seeing my car being taken apart.
- John Bytheway: 00:21:42 It really helped me the day that I realized that Abraham wanted the blessings of the fathers. And I'm like, wait a minute. Abraham is one of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But then when you realize God had made the same covenants with Adam and Seth and Enoch, you go, oh, okay, those fathers. But then maybe Abraham lived the covenant, modeled it so well, we started calling it the Abrahamic Covenant, kind of like we refer to the Melchizedek priesthood because he was such a great High Priest, although the real name is the Holy Priesthood after the order of the Son of God.
- Hank Smith: 00:22:22 Also, I would say, John, that we focus so much on Abraham because the scriptures themselves, the book of Genesis really says, let's talk about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their family. I assume it's there before, but it's really outlined in the life of Abraham. He does indicate that he knows this was happening before. I was looking for the blessings of the fathers.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:22:46 That's right. And he's not talking about his biological father in this case, and he talks about how his fathers had turned from these promises and that they had turned to these other gods. [Martin Luther](#) said, Anything on which your heart lies and depends, I say, that is really your God. [Calvin](#) said, The heart is a perpetual idol factory. We're constantly creating idols. This is where Abraham found himself. He found himself with traditions of his fathers that were not righteous, they were imitations, they didn't have the keys, and he couldn't become a greater follower of righteousness. The other thing that I wanna focus on is that who we listen to becomes our God. It's not just what our hearts are set on, but who we follow, who we listen to. [President Russell M. Nelson](#) taught, If any label replaces your most important identifiers, the results can be spiritually suffocating. [Elder Patrick Kearon](#) builds on this, and this was really enlightening to me.

00:23:49 He said, Little by little, the more we invite his goodness into our hearts and cast out the self-defeating voices in our heads, we become his people because we truly make him our God. Here, he's posing these self-defeating voices as false gods, which I think that's really interesting. How many of us have these types of false gods, these self-defeating voices? I think a lot of us struggle with that, and I know I do. A big part of those self-defeating voices is that sometimes they seem like they're our own. So we listen to them, but we don't have to listen to them. Patrick Kearon is saying, Elder Kearon is saying that we need to be listening to God. We need to be listening to what he has to say about us. But sometimes in order to do that, in order to hear him clearly, we have to do what Abraham did.

00:24:42 He left his home country. That was something that required separation. It required a great sacrifice. It wasn't just a physical move, but a radical severance from his past security relying entirely on God. The command and his journey began with the specific directive from Jehovah, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and unto a land I will shew thee. The severity of this request needs to be understood. This was massive for an ancient person because there was loss of identity and safety. In Abraham's era, a person's identity, their livelihood, and legal protection was rooted in the house of their father. To leave his father's house was to leave himself at the mercy of strangers without protection. He was asked to sever the most intimate bonds imaginable and to leave those safety nets. Sometimes our survival and safety and security involves leaving behind what was once safe and what was once secure.

00:25:48 I want to talk about a little bit, if you guys don't mind, Hank, you can decide how much you want to share here, but I want to talk a little bit about people who become change makers like you. I talked about in your Come Back podcast, Hank, when you make the decision to break off these traditions that aren't helpful, it's important to think about our past, especially for those who have survived trauma, abuse, that were malformed in any way. You create what psychologists called a survival style. Hank, I think you called it you got some toxic skills. What that means is that you learn how to survive within that environment that you grew up in, and it served you well. Those survival skills that you acquired were actually malforming because there were certain needs of yours that were not met. This happens to anybody who is coming from a home like this, but the main human needs that every child should have are connection, attunement, being able to meet your own needs and have your needs met. Trust, autonomy, love, and sexuality.

00:26:56 There's specific things that happen when those needs are not met. There's survival adaptations that happen. For example, when you don't have the connection that you need, the adaptation is foreclosing connection, disconnecting from your body and social engagement. And what happens is children give up their very sense of existence, disconnect, and attempt to become invisible. That's how they survive in that particular environment, but then once they become adults, that no longer serves them. There's other examples. So attunement, the survival adaptation is foreclosing awareness and expression of your own personal needs. What that looks like is children give up on their needs in order to focus on the needs of others, particularly the needs of their parents. The final one, there's five here, but the final one I'm gonna focus on is when you don't get your needs of love met. You foreclose on love and heart connection.

00:27:54 And what happens is children try to avoid rejection by perfecting themselves, hoping that they can win love through looks or performance. These are ways in which we, survivors of these types of environments have acquired in order to survive. As psychologists, we know that those adaptive survival styles, they don't work once you get into a normal home environment. So if you carry those on into your marriages and try to have a healthy relationship, try to be a good parent, and you're using those survival skills that they will no longer serve you. You need to make the decision, like Abraham, to leave your home country, to leave the false traditions, and you need to change your style. It's important for us to understand that human beings are adaptive, we're resilient, we're flexible, but that means sometimes we have adapted to the neglect or the abuse that we've experienced.

00:28:55 We need to then change. For those who have suffered from trauma or abuse or just, you know, malformation, it's a good idea to do this type of work with a therapist. It's not always needed, but I will say that one thing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers is a way to heal some of those malformations. Particularly the covenants. So I'm gonna talk about how the covenant structure can offer a healing to some of those malformations that we have. And one of the first things you do when you're on the healing journey from this developmental trauma that you may have endured is you learn about yourself, you learn about who you really are because you have maybe become somebody that isn't you. You try to become the perfect child or whatever, you rebel. Those, either side of those, whether you're people pleasing to the extreme or rebelling to

the extreme, neither one of those might be actually authentic to who you are.

00:29:53 He knows you might just be running from the past and how important it is for us to get it right when we talk about our identity and the covenant, particularly the Abrahamic Covenants, helps us get this identity right. John, you talked earlier about wanting to know a little bit about like faith in sports that I study. I'll just briefly say that actually we talk about this with athletes, but this applies to everybody, people who don't have their identity right for whatever reason. But athletes are really prone to this because so much of athletics has to do with winning, with performance. It's kind of built into the logic of the sport that you get rewarded for winning, right? But people outside of sport are also doing these things. So what we try to teach them is that there's a false identity, which is merit-based, and then there's a true identity, which is love-based.

00:30:47 If you don't mind, I'll quickly walk through what that looks like. And then I'd love to hear your guys' feedback on this. The first thing is you need to understand why you're loved. With a false identity, you think that you're loved because you're good or better than others. With a true identity, you understand that God loves me no earning needed. It's just a given. Now, with a false identity, your starting point is that your worth depends on effort or your choices, but with a love-based true identity, you understand that your worth starts and ends with God's love and his grace and mercy. It's not going to be dependent on your choices or on your performance. The other thing that we find is within a false identity is that people gain worth from different things. The false identity, you gain it from popularity, prestige, or possessions.

00:31:41 I am what people think of me. I'm only worthy if others think I'm good, attractive, smart, athletic, et cetera. Prestige, I'm better than others because what I do or achieve. I derive my worth from my status. And then possessions, I am what I own. What I have shows my value. That's a merit-based, but we want a love-based identity. We want your primary identity to be your priority, which President Nelson taught us, and that we have infinite worth. And what God thinks about us is what matters most. We also know that power is important. We receive power from Jesus Christ's Atonement and keeping our covenants. And then provision, I belong to God. You can see how the covenant provides every single one of those. It helps you understand your identity. You can receive power in your life and provision, and that God will provide for you because you belong to him.

- 00:32:37 And there's more, but those are the only ones that I'll share with you here. But this is a whole chart that we give to our athletes so they can look at what merit-based identity versus a love-based identity looks like. I think every adult, child, teenager should think about how they view the love of God and how they derive their worth. Is it from these other gods, those self-depreciating voices from chasing perfection that likely came from having malformed ideas of who you are, or is it from God, from Christ, from your identity in the house of Israel? So I'd love to hear your guys' thoughts on that.
- John Bytheway: 00:33:14 I remember Hank when Adam Miller was here. He spent a significant portion of his episode on love is a law, not a reward. A lot of people were blessed by that idea. Like 30, 40 years ago when Hank was a toddler, I was at an education week. And I remember, I think it was [Dr. James MacArthur](#). He had the do box and the [be](#) box. And he said, sometimes people get a lot of praise in the do box based on what you did, performance. And then he said, but the be box is based on your value as a human being, just the fact that you be. And he said he presented this at the prison once. One of these prisoners said, do you mean to tell me that I have worth beyond what I've done? He was like, that is exactly what I'm telling you.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:34:07 That's perfect. Yeah. It's tricky for us because we're talking about a potential paradox here in that when we know who we are, we will act in a certain way. There's certainly going to be works that come out of this. We'll talk about the works of Abraham in a minute. We need to begin with this foundational truth that our worth doesn't depend on those things.
- Hank Smith: 00:34:30 Jenae, I appreciate you bringing up that episode I did with Ashly Stone there in the Come Back podcast. I didn't think much of it at the time. I wanted to help out Ashly. I think what she's doing is fantastic, but that episode has brought out emotions in people I did not anticipate. A few times this has happened, but one in particular, I had a very large Samoan man who came up to me and I thought, oh no, I'm in trouble here. And he started to weep and he said that episode saved my marriage. I was stuck and I'm here I am hugging this enormous football coach. I think what you're talking about, and what I tried to talk about, you said it much more eloquently, is you develop skills to survive. I developed the ability to talk my way out of things because I didn't want to get hurt.
- 00:35:26 I developed a sense of humor, kind of an extreme sense of humor to cool down situations and to make my siblings laugh. Some of these serve me well, some of these skills serve me well,

and then others can actually do harm in future relationship. What was happening to this man that I, that I talked to. And we can link the episode in the show notes, in his mind, he was thinking, I'm a bad person. I respond in these ways to my wife, or I respond in these ways to my children. Once he was able to see, no, this was a survival skill when you were younger, and now the Lord, like he is with, here with Abraham, is calling you away from that. My name is Jehovah. I have heard you and I come down to deliver you and take you away from thy father's house or take you away from maybe the trauma or the skills you developed from your childhood home.

00:36:22

And I wanna be careful here. I tried to make that clear on the show. My parents were making every effort to give me a better life than they had, and they did love me. And now our home did have a lot of toxic traits and abuse and problems, and two things can be true at the same time, that my parents did love me and were trying, and also that it was an abusive childhood. I adore them. I love them. I intend on honoring them by trying to live the commandments. They wanted me to love the Lord. I know they both did. They wanted me to love the Lord and to serve him. Abraham's, I think his situation is different in that his father's trying to kill him. He said, I saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence. I love what you're doing here with Abraham chapter one, Jenae, is you're taking it and making it very real in the lives of people who had difficult childhood homes and that they can, through the Lord, they can be healed and they can move on.

Dr. Jenae Nelson:

00:37:31

I wanna be careful here in that we don't entirely know what happened to Abraham growing up, so we don't have his whole story. And also, I want to make it really clear that as we continue to talk today about the covenants and how so much of that can be healing, also therapy can be really good as well. I was sitting with a student just this past week. She was telling me that she grew up in an abusive home and that it was really terrible. She was, became a convert to the church, so she resonated with my story. We were talking about this and she said, I went on a mission, but I struggled. I couldn't get along with anybody and I couldn't get along with my companions. I ruined all my friendships. I was just thinking about a friend the other day that I love so much. I lost her as a friend because I'm a horrible person. And she said, was saying to me, I repent every single day because I'm just not getting this right. I said, I want you to know that there's a difference between being righteous, righteous living and the capacity for righteous living. Let me explain that.

- 00:38:40 We know what we need to do, but sometimes we just can't do it, especially if we didn't learn certain skills. Quite honestly, that's one of the reasons why I went into psychology, because I wanted to understand how can I do these things? I knew I converted, I wanted to be like Christ, I wanted to be the best mom and wife. Then once I became a mom and I realized it was so hard, and I didn't really have the tools, I didn't know how to be a good mom, even though I knew what the gospel was telling me, people would say, you can get every single answer you need in the Book of Mormon and through the gospel. I found that that was true for the most part. It told me how to live and what I should be doing, but I couldn't get certain skills. My word of caution here is that some things are best learned from therapy, from intervention. That's one of the best things that you can do for yourself if you grew up in a situation like this.
- Hank Smith: 00:39:36 Just to be vulnerable, the therapy I've been through, it's been years of therapy, and it's been very, very good, very good. If you can find a therapist, in every industry, you'll find people who aren't helpful, but there are therapists out there who understand this, they do this on a daily basis, and I'm a product of good therapy. Been wonderful.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:40:01 Yeah, me too. I wanna segue back to your thought, because what you, when you were talking, Hank, I was thinking about a particular survival skill that I've acquired. I didn't even realize that I had acquired this, but I was talking to my therapist one day and saying, I have the hardest time making a dentist appointment. This is so silly, but I just can't get myself to do it. It's like, I'm going on two years now, my mom is a dental hygienist or was a dental hygienist, so I know how the virtue of going to the dentist on time, but I just, I literally can't do it. I don't know why. I just put it off. And, and then my therapist said, well, let's just unpack this a little bit. I'm like, there's nothing really to unpack. I don't know why. There's nothing deep here. As we started to talk about it, she asked me a really important question. She said, is it possible that you adapted so much to neglect that things that look like taking care of yourself, you put off because it's not familiar to you? And I just thought, that's a really weird question. But she said, the things that are familiar are the things that are easiest, even if they hurt us, we do them.
- John Bytheway: 00:41:19 Wow.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:41:20 Abraham leaving what was familiar for a new life and heading into the uncertainty, heading into the unknown, this is an important spiritual lesson for us to think about in our lives.

What is God calling us away from? Which home countries do we need to leave? What things are no longer serving us that we need to leave behind? We need to be comfortable with starting anew because the familiar is what we most frequently do because it's the easiest, even if it continues to cause harm.

- John Bytheway: 00:41:53 Jena, you talked about earlier that definition of what we rely upon, and I can't help but think the stories are not the same, but of Nephi having to leave in 2 Nephi 4, what that must have... I... Sorry, dad, I can't stay with Laman and Lemuel and their posterity. I've got ... I have to go. And then saying, oh, wretched man that I am. I, for one, would love to be as wretched as Nephi. And then to say, But I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support. He's relying on, I think it's such a perfect example of what do I rely on when I have to, when I have to leave that way? Having to leave must have been tough.
- Dr. Jena Nelson: 00:42:39 This is [Emily Belle Freeman](#) talking about walking in covenant relationship in her general conference talk. She says, his is a mission of condescension. Jesus Christ will meet us where we are. This is the why of the garden, the cross, and the tomb. Staying there won't bring the deliverance we seek. Just as he didn't leave Jacob there in the dirt, the Lord doesn't intend to leave any of us where we are. His is also a mission of ascension. He will work within us to lift us up to where he is and in the process, enable us to become as he is. Jesus Christ came to lift us. He wants to help us become. This is the why of the temple. It within the deliverance is not only him reaching down and saving us, but pulling us up.
- John Bytheway: 00:43:21 But lifting us up. I love that.
- Hank Smith: 00:43:24 Jena, I noticed that Abraham has to entirely leave his father. I don't think he's going to ever speak with him again or talk with him again. In my case, I didn't have to do that. I never felt that that was completely necessary. There were times to distance and take some time on my, by myself, but I wanted my children to know their grandparents. In your work, and I know this can be very sensitive, so we wanna be as careful as we can, but in your work, when have you seen there comes a time where you think, you know, I cannot be in this situation anymore, versus, maybe I'm, I wanna hurt the person who hurt me, so I'm gonna punish them by never seeing them. It's a very delicate subject, I realize that.
- Dr. Jena Nelson: 00:44:12 I'm not a clinical psychologist, which means I don't actually work with patients through these things, but I do the research that

helps the clinicians. As I understand it, one of the goals of therapy is to help clients to be able to be in these difficult situations. The eventual goal, you might set up a boundary for a while until you can learn how to self-regulate in that person's presence. So the boundary might serve as a safety or protection for a while until you can learn how to have those self-regulatory skills, but the goal is to eventually incorporate you back into those environments. Obviously, exceptions would be like in the case of ongoing abuse, and that can take many forms. I think it's really important to be making this decision with a trained therapist, to also be making this decision through prayer and with the Lord, because it's just not something that you can handle on your own.

00:45:05 Even Abraham, I mean, he didn't leave until the Lord told him to leave. That was when he was given permission. And not everyone does. You see Daniel, who's never called to leave, he stays with his people, and then he has dire consequences of that. Some people are called to stay, and some people are called to leave, and that's a decision that is best made in counsel with other people, including the Lord. But talking with bishops, therapists, those are good places to start.

Hank Smith: 00:45:32 Excellent. Sometimes we get into a false dichotomy that I can use my religion and my relationship with the Lord, or I can use a therapist. That's a false dichotomy. Those things can absolutely work together.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:45:47 And they often do. They work better together. We find that because in general, anytime you can get somebody to connect with something transcendent, you see this in AA, that it's really important to have a higher power, transcendent, precisely because we need to have a transcendent source of identity and purpose that will not change. And that's what Abraham gets through the covenant. He gets this idea of who he is and the work that he has to perform. Then he's able to build a life around those new identities and this new purpose. The real work of mortality is remembering who you are and coming to finish the work that God sent you to do.

Hank Smith: 00:46:29 Hmm. I wonder, both of you, if part of the reason Abraham gets chosen for this is because of the difficulties he's been through. In verse 16, Jehovah says, Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah. I have heard thee. Something was causing Abraham to look to God. So it's another one of those, John, it's 2 Nephi 2, right? I could turn your afflictions for thy gain. Is that right? Did I get that right?

John Bytheway: 00:47:00 Talking to Jacob.

Hank Smith: 00:47:02 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:47:03 Lehi talking to Jacob because he grew up totally different than Nephi did. He, Jacob had never seen Jerusalem. He saw a dysfunctional family in action every day. Let's kill dad. Let's kill Nephi. That's a good comparison.

Hank Smith: 00:47:19 He can consecrate, that's the word, consecrate thy afflictions.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:47:23 Yeah, I think that's a really good thought that will bless a lot of people, Hank, because growing up in the family or lack thereof that I grew up in, struggled with. I had a difficult time in the church trying to figure out where I fit in a family-centered church. Like, how can I make sense of my story? And people would tell me all the time, like, God can turn a bad thing into a good thing. Look at what God did. He just turned, you know, your parents one night stand how I came into the world and he turned it into a good thing, but then it always made my life feel like a plan B. Again, I can't remember if I shared this last time or not, but, we had a really wise stake president when my son's mission got changed from the proselyting mission to the service mission, it was devastating to him.

00:48:12 There were parts of his patriarchal blessing that he thought were not going to ever come to pass. As it reads, it really is hard to see how that's going to work out. We were sitting in the office with the stake president and he said, you need to know that with the Lord, there is no plan B. That actually really was ministering to me. I was just, I just started crying as he said that because it just, it felt really true. Like, so my life isn't a plan B. This life has been so hard. It's not a plan B. Like, this is what God wanted for me. Thank you for sharing that, that maybe it was Abraham's life that qualified him to be Abraham because sometimes when you have a hard childhood or you have hard things happen in your life, you feel like those things disqualify you, that they're the reason why you shouldn't be doing the things that you're doing or that you're not good enough and you carry those false gods of those, the self-deceptive voices in your brain.

00:49:21 Remember when, I believe it was [Elder Cook](#) said that more than half of the church is single? That really shocked me. And so we need to be thinking about non-traditional families. We need to be thinking about single parents. We need to think about fatherless children. We need to think about people who don't have that ideal family. What does the gospel look like for them

when they may never be sealed to their parents? I'm not sealed to my mom. I don't know if I'll ever get that privilege until the next life, and I think God will work that all out. But for right now, there are a lot of people who might feel like they don't have a home in the church because their family life doesn't fit that happy family.

- Hank Smith: 00:50:05 Yeah. Jena, thank you for that. And we're grateful for your vulnerability because we know that we have listeners who are in very difficult, dark situations, and to have someone like you testify that the Lord can give beauty for ashes, and it was his plan all along.
- Dr. Jena Nelson: 00:50:28 Yeah. It didn't surprise him. Somehow in the grand scheme of things, it didn't surprise him that my parents made the mistake that they made. I don't get how that works. Like Nephi said, I don't know the meaning of all things, but I know that God loves his children, and I'm learning to believe that he loves, He loves me. I know he does, but it's a, it's a continual process to really believe that.
- John Bytheway: 00:50:52 Going back to 2 Nephi 2 again, it's one of my fallback verses, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knowest all things. And there's a exhale that comes with that. Whether or not it's clear to you, John, things are unfolding as they should, and that helps me.
- Hank Smith: 00:51:11 Yeah. In the temple, the phrase overcome the blood and sins of this generation caught my attention once. I thought, blood and sins, it's probably my DNA that's in my blood and the sins of the parenting. Everybody harms their children as parents in one way or another, right? Some more than others. But I think the Lord says, you can overcome. You can overcome your DNA and you can overcome the way you were parented, and I'm gonna help you get there.
- Dr. Jena Nelson: 00:51:43 That is such a perfect segue, actually, to what I wanted to talk about next, kind of building on that idea that covenants give us identity. It can, even like you're saying, overcome our DNA, our biology, our inherited characteristics and traits. I talked last time about finding my dad for the first time, but one of the interesting things about that experience is that I actually had a case of mistaken identity and that I grew up thinking that this other guy was my dad the whole time I was a child. I didn't actually grow up with him. I actually only had a picture of this man who I thought was my dad. The interesting thing about that is I would have to ask my mom, what was he like? Tell me about him. And she would give me facts about who he was. She

said that he was really attractive and that he was athletic and super smart.

00:52:34 He was a mechanical engineer and he lived in Hawaii. And again, I didn't know him at all and he didn't wanna have anything to do with me, but I had this idea of who he was and that idea of who my dad was gave me an idea of who I was. When I would be chosen last for whatever sports team, because I'm super clumsy, I would think to myself, well, my dad is really athletic. I can probably learn how to do this. Or when I really struggled in school a lot, I would think, well, my dad is really smart. Maybe I can be smart too. I built a whole identity around who I thought my dad was. But then when I was 16, through a DNA test, as I mentioned last time, I found out I had a different dad. And the interesting thing happened from that with finding out that I had a different dad, I ended up having to get a new birth certificate because my birth certificate had the wrong dad on it.

00:53:36 I got a new name. I changed my last name. I inherited the name Brunson. Also, I got new family. My dad had six children that I had never met that was now, I knew these were now my siblings, and I inherited this new family, a stepmom. My dad had a home. Another part of becoming his daughter was knowing that I could go to his home because all of these things happen in conjunction with learning who my dad was. Now, think about the analogy we can draw from that with the covenant. When you now identify with Christ as being a child of Christ, there is a new identity. You take on a new name. You have a new home, a new family, new responsibilities. There are new family rules that I had to learn. When I went through that, I also had a major identity crisis.

00:54:38 Who am I? Who actually am I now? Because I had built this whole identity around this other idea of who my dad was. I literally, because I, now I had a new dad, I didn't know who I was. So one of the first things that my dad did for me, once we found out he was my dad, is he sent me a manila envelope filled with family history stories and pictures of my new family and instantly connected me with the stories of our past. And I learned that I had pioneer heritage. I learned about some incredible people, Seymour Brunson, who's in the Doctrine and Covenants, who I was related to. I reconstructed my identity around this new idea of who my dad was. We are called to do the same thing. And so I want us to just pause for a moment and think about when people come to the church, when we are bringing people, when we're participating in the gathering of

Israel, when we are proselyting, are we thinking about missionary work at this depth?

00:55:49 Are we thinking about people gaining a new home, a new name, a new identity? Are we thinking about all of the things that they're going to have to leave behind? You're gonna have a new home, God, from, you're gonna have a new dad. You're gonna have someone that will care for you. You're gonna have a congregation of people, a new family that's gonna bring you in. What if when we're doing the gathering, we're actually bringing home a brother or sister? How different would it be when we think about the gathering if we thought about that process?

Hank Smith: 00:56:23 Hmm. It's beautiful. Isaiah frequently gives the image of missionaries or really anyone picking up the daughters and sons of the house of Israel and carrying them home upon their shoulders and upon their backs. It's a beautiful image. I'm here to take you home.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:56:48 Yes, I love that. I think that a lot of times when we're trying to share the gospel with people, we're trying to, like, prove to them why we're right, or we're trying to show them all the things they're missing out on. Let me explain why you're getting this wrong. Like Abraham, there's a lot of really great people. There's a lot of good people out there, but they just need more. Abraham recognized he needed more. I had to get really clear about what it was that our church offered that was greater, that was more when I started sharing the gospel with my friends and colleagues, particularly at Baylor. I can't wait to share this story with you guys because I've been waiting to tell you. Last time I was on the podcast, I told you I had a friend and scholar that was helping me prepare. He was not of our faith. He's, he was Episcopalian, a theologian working at Baylor. I got him reading the Book of Mormon because of this podcast. He started reading the Book of Mormon, and it wasn't long before he gained a testimony that it was the word of God.

00:57:54 He just knew it was different. He told me there's something different about this book. This is not written by Joseph Smith. He recognized the voice of God. He recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Book of Mormon. It wasn't until he came to BYU. We collaborate together. He came to BYU. He met several BYU professors. He just happened to land among some of the most incredible people. They started fellowshiping him. He said to me one day while he was out here on a work trip, he said, I just feel different here. I just feel something different. It feels like home. That is when things started to change for him when it went from, he did get a testimony of the Book of

Mormon. That part was delicious to him, but then it was the nurturing that came from other people, the nurturing of the seed that came from other people, where he recognized that this was something that he was missing in his life, that he needed more.

00:58:56 He needed greater righteousness, greater knowledge, greater peace, greater truth. It was because of that familial connection, I believe, that he was able to feel that. The best part is that he ended up getting baptized in October. That was a real treat. Just as a little bit of a backstory, you cannot be a Latter-Day Saint and work at Baylor, anywhere at Baylor. It's just their policy. But especially in the seminary where he worked, because he's a theologian. It's really difficult to get a job anywhere at all if you're LDS as a theologian, because their seminaries just won't accept you. My friend got baptized with this knowledge, knowing that he was going to lose his job. He was a tenured professor. It caused family disturbances. He lost friends. He did all of this not knowing what was ahead, going into that uncertainty like Abraham, not having the way mapped out, but having the promises of the Lord that eternity as his covering in the wilderness, so to speak. That is what gave him hope and peace and then it wasn't until after he was baptized that he ended up getting a job offer at BYU, which is incredible and remarkable. I really believe that he needed to demonstrate that faith in order for that blessing to come. It was an incredibly remarkable experience to be a part of.

Hank Smith: 01:00:18 That is unbelievable.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:00:20 Yeah, it really is. Another good friend of ours at Baylor, he said that he similarly noticed something different about me. He started investigating the church and then he sent me a text one day and he said, oh, I just wanted to let you know that I'm taking the discussions from the missionaries and I'm getting baptized. I'm like, what? Just what? It just totally surprised me. And I had this image come in my mind of being in the vineyard. People who have had fruit trees are familiar with this. Sometimes the fruit is so ripe, you just have to brush past the branch and the fruit just falls off. I feel like that's the way it was with my friend. He was just so ready. My other friend who had to lose his job, he was a little bit more work. That's the thing you just don't know. But when you're sharing the gospel, when you are sharing how it has given you a home, how it's given you a name, an identity, purpose, that's the stuff that brings people to the truth. The doctrine matters. The doctrine serves the function of bringing us to Christ to know who our Savior is and to know who it is we're coming home to.

Hank Smith: 01:01:36 And I'm sure he's listening right now, Jenae, so we just want to tell him. Wow. Yeah. The admiration we have for someone. I'm a tenured professor. So put that on the altar and say, I'll give that up. All that time, all that effort. That is very similar to what we're seeing here in Abraham one and two. Abraham, it's time to leave. Get thee out of thy country, from thy kindred, from thy father's house, to a land I will show thee. A land called BYU.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:02:14 It feels like the promised land for him. He's so grateful. He felt called here and not everyone can work at BYU, but there is something wonderful about being with the saints. There's something wonderful about being gathered home and know that you'll be around people who wanna join in the work of building Zion.

Hank Smith: 01:02:32 Isn't that interesting too, that it started with the Book of Mormon? It speaks to modern Israel.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:02:38 It does. [Elder Gerrit W. Gong](#) said, The Book of Mormon is evidence we can hold in our hand of covenant belonging. The Book of Mormon is the promised instrument for the gathering of God's children prophesied as a new covenant. The Book of Mormon speaks by ancient and modern covenant to you who are the children of Lehi, the children of the prophets. Your forefathers received a covenant promise that you, their descendants would recognize a voice as if from the dust in the Book of Mormon. The voice you feel as you read testifies you are children of the covenant and Jesus is your Good Shepherd.

Hank Smith: 01:03:16 Wow. The book speaks out of the dust.

John Bytheway: 01:03:19 Yeah. I love the phrase that you started with, with talking about, I've heard this so many times, I bet you both have, that I felt like I was home. It felt like home. Abraham's gonna bless all the families of the earth, and Moses sees all the children of men. Why not? We're a family. It's not, oh, I feel doctrinal clarity. Nope. It's, I feel home. And the doctrinal clarity is there too, but I feel like I'm home with brothers and sisters and covenant belonging. What a great phrase.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:03:53 Yeah. It is funny because when my friend bore his testimony, even though he's a theologian and things had to make sense to him, I mean, we talked for two years. I was literally giving him discussions for two years until he met, finally met with the missionaries, but by then he was ready. He was the fruit that just needed to be bumped and he fell off the tree by then. Things had to make sense to him. So it's not that God asked us to leave our brains at the door when we walk into a church. It's

the congruence between the heart and the mind that matters. And if you don't have the heart being in congruence with the mind and you don't feel that belonging, then it's going to be very difficult for you to want to stay and for that to feel like a home.

- John Bytheway: 01:04:37 We have a former mission president in our ward and I remember hearing him say once that people in London where he served didn't join the church because they were dazzled by the brilliance of the missionaries. They felt what you're talking about. Here's a theologian meeting with these missionaries, but I'm sure he felt something.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:05:01 Yeah, it was really interesting. I was able to observe one of them. He was still in Waco, so I was over Zoom. And the missionaries were talking to him, giving one of their discussions, and the whole time I'm like, they have no idea who they're talking to.
- Hank Smith: 01:05:13 Yeah, who they're talking to.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:05:17 Then afterwards, I talked to him and he was like, that was great. And he was like, I just felt the Spirit. They're so humble. They did have some fumbles in terms of, like, they just didn't understand his education and his background, but that's not the point. The point is that they brought the Spirit and that Spirit is what created the belonging, what helped him to recognize the covenant and that they were true messengers. It was really a humbling experience for me too. There's a reason why we have these set apart missionaries. There's also a reason why they need member missionaries because we prepare them and he required a lot of preparing before those missionaries could come in and before he would be ready for those next steps. And that's an important thing to keep in mind. Missionaries are supposed to come at the end.
- 01:06:09 They kind of wrap that up and they can't spend years working with people. We need to be the ones that are reaching out and talking and fellowshiping and doing that work so that when they're ready, the missionaries can come in, they can do their job, and that's what they're set apart to do. Faith requires a certain amount of uncertainty. Alma talks about this when he's talking about the seed, that once you know something, it's no longer faith, it's knowledge. And I think what he means by knowledge is it's really, it's certainty. It turns out our brains don't like uncertainty because one of the things that our brain loves doing is predicting things, and so much of what we do is trying to predict what's coming next. When we don't know for

sure, when we don't have that certainty, that's when it requires faith. The greater the uncertainty, the greater the faith.

01:07:03 This is exactly what Abraham is called to do. He's called to go out into the unknown, into the uncertain, the unfamiliar like we've been talking about, but one of the ways that we can handle some of the anxiety that comes from uncertainty is by placing our thoughts on the broader context, by thinking about God and having eternity as our covering. I found this interesting [story](#). It's in that book the Blessings of Abraham that I mentioned earlier. There's some Jewish rabbis that tell this story, and who knows if it's true or not, because we don't have this in the Bible, but they tell the story that [Abraham](#) invented this tool to help people to plant their seeds in a way that the seeds would be covered. The reason why he invented this tool was because birds kept coming and eating the seeds. Apparently, according to this tradition, this made Abraham quite famous.

01:07:57 As a young lad, he became renowned for his tool. But I think this is really interesting as we think about some of the symbolisms in the story. You have this seed, which we know Abraham is associated and connected with posterity and seed, and this covering that he invented this tool that would be a covering from this, the seeds to prevent the birds from ravaging those seeds. Think about what we use to cover ourselves, and this was talked about in a previous podcast, but the word for atonement means one of the translations for it means to cover. Eternity as our covering, covenants as our covering, God's love as our covering, God's perspective as our covering, those are the things that can help us when times are uncertain. When we can't predict what's coming next, we can rely on our covenants and we can rely on our promises. Something interesting happens when there's a gap between our promises and our reality.

01:09:02 This is precisely what Abraham finds himself confronted with, this gap between what God has promised him. So he's promised land and he's experiencing famine and other things, and he's promised children. And of course, we know that there's a long period of time where he's not able to have children. There's a scholar that calls this particular conundrum a wilderness trial. It's when the promises of God don't match your current reality. I'm pretty sure that all of your listeners can think of a time where they had some kind of promise or expectation from the Lord that hasn't come to pass yet. This would be a wilderness trial. This is what Father Abraham and Sarah had to struggle with when they had fertility problems. I think that God actually

gives Abraham a way to deal with this. And so I wanna read from Genesis now, Genesis 17. This is often referred to as the context of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Lord's initiating a higher level of relationship with the 99-year-old patriarch by saying to him, I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect.

01:10:19 I know we've had a lot of people talk about perfection and how, as modern readers, we imply or impose on the text that perfect means flawlessness. I think we've had enough talks about this that we're trying to walk, we're trying to turn away from that interpretation, that it's not flawlessness, that it doesn't mean. When we have some kind of promise that is not being fulfilled or doesn't seem like it's fulfilled in our life, whether it's that patriarchal blessing, the perfect family, the husband that hasn't come yet, or the children, whatever it is, there's a line in many people's patriarchal blessing that says that these blessings are predicated upon our faithfulness. We also hear that in the temple. We are tempted to think that it's because we haven't been flawless, we haven't been perfect in the way that we think about it, but that we have disqualified ourselves for those blessings because we've made mistakes. There are people who do walk away from their covenants. There are people who do choose to not keep the commandments, but I think for most faithful Latter-Day Saints, even the type of Latter-Day Saint that finds themselves committing the same sin over and over again, that is not what the Lord is talking about.

01:11:33 I don't think that God ever wanted us to be flawless. My friend and scholar, the one that just got baptized, actually was telling me another way to understand the root for that word tamim. There's multiple ways of thinking about it. Of course, President Nelson taught us about it meaning complete or whole. The shared root is also used when Christ says it is finished, complete as in finished. Another interesting way, there's no, like, right, perfect way of understanding every word in the Bible, but maybe another interpretation that will help us understand this idea of becoming perfect, because God is commanding this, and he repeats that in the New Testament. What if we were to think about being perfect as finishing, as finishing the work you were sent here to do, as in don't give up. Don't stop.

01:12:33 Be determined, be loyal. That, to me, feels like something that I can do. Anthony Sweat says, I can't be flawless or perfect, but I can be loyal. Loyalty is also akin to this principle that you're unfailingly devoted. You just keep coming back. You keep standing up when you fall over and over and over again. That's the type of perfection that we're called to, that we are

continually working with Christ. I love this quote from President [Jeffrey R. Holland](#). He says, and this is from one of his most famous talks. He has so many. He says, Don't give up, boy. Don't you quit. You keep walking. You keep trying. There's help and happiness ahead. A lot of it. You keep your chin up. It will all be right in the end. Trust God and believe in good things to come. I testify that God lives that he is our eternal Father, that he loves each of us with the love divine. I testify that Jesus Christ is his Only Begotten Son in the flesh and having triumphed in this world is an heir of eternity, a joint heir with God, and now stands on the right hand of his Father. I testify that this is their true church and that they sustain us in our hour of need and always will, even if we cannot recognize that intervention. Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don't come until heaven. But for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, they come. Of that, I personally attest. I love that thought. If you're in a wilderness trial and you find yourself saying, God, you haven't done what you said you would do in my life. God tells Abraham to be perfect. I think in some ways he's telling him, Don't give up. Don't stop. Finish the work that you were sent here to do. We can be finishers.



To Be a Greater Follower of Righteousness PART 2



GUEST: DR. JENAE NELSON

- John Bytheway: 00:00:01 Welcome to part two with Dr. Jenae Nelson, Genesis 12-17, and Abraham 1-2.
- Hank Smith: 00:00:08 Jenae, this has been fantastic, and I know there are so many, including me. I've had times in my life where I thought, you promised. Is this ever gonna happen? I bet both of you remember this talk. Continue in Patience April of 2010. 16 years ago now, doesn't seem like it was that long ago. This is [Elder Uchtdorf](#). He says, I remember when I was preparing to be trained as a fighter pilot. We spent a great deal of our preliminary military training in physical exercise. I'm still not exactly sure why endless running was considered such an essential preparatory part of becoming a pilot. Nevertheless, we ran and we ran and we ran some more. As I was running, I began to notice something that frankly troubled me. Time and again, I was being passed by men who smoked, drank, and did all manner of things that were contrary to the gospel, and in particular, the word of wisdom.
- 00:01:07 I remember thinking, Wait a minute. Aren't I supposed to be able to run and not be weary? But I was weary. I was weary, and I was overtaken by people who were definitely not following the word of wisdom. I confess it troubled me at the time. I asked myself, was the promise true or was it not? Then this, Jenae, I think is what you're talking about. The answer didn't come immediately. But eventually, I learned that God's promises are not always filled as quickly as or in the way we might hope. They come according to his timing and in his ways. Years later, I could see clear evidence of the temporal blessings that come to those who obey the word of wisdom, in addition to the spiritual blessings that come immediately from obedience to any of God's laws. Looking back, I know for sure that the promises of the Lord, if perhaps not always swift, are always certain. Eventually, years later, I don't love that, but I know it's true.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:02:16 That's one of the interesting things about getting to this stage in life and seeing, you can see so many of these dramas unfold and how the timing was so perfect, even though at the time it was

that wilderness trial. God was in it the whole time, and that's the second thing that he says to Abraham, walk with me. So not only was it important for him to have an understanding that he needed to be perfect in terms of finish the work that he was called to do. Of Abraham, it says, Abraham was a prince in the heavens and by right came to the earth in this time to accomplish the things given him to do. Then Paul, of course, says, I have fought a good fight. I've finished my course. I have kept the faith. That's enduring to the end, that's being perfect, that's being a finisher. And ultimately, Christ is the finisher. He, which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. In other words, he'll perfect it, he'll finish it. Christ is finishing the work in our life.

Hank Smith: 00:03:16 I think of the fact that we know so much of what's going to happen to Abraham. The people in the scriptures, they don't know what's going to happen, but we have the benefit of just, oh, hold on, you know, next chapter, it's going to be great. But Abraham, he's going to have to wait a long time for the blessing of your posterity is going to bless the whole earth because Israel is going to be first sent to Egypt for hundreds of years and enslaved. Then when they return to the promised land, they're going to be scattered because they chose a king and how long are they scattered, John, before the gathering? I mean, a couple millennia. Even in the spirit world, Abraham and Sarah are probably thinking, wait, you promised. The Lord saying, yep, it's gonna be a while. Even if you have to wait a couple millennia, I will keep my promise. Yeah.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:04:10 One of my favorite things to tell my students is that when I was 35 years old, I didn't even have a bachelor's degree. That shocks them a little bit like, whoa, because I had to go back in my mid 30s to finish my bachelor's degree and then get my PhD. There is a line in my patriarchal blessing that talks about getting essentially a lot of education at a university. It's really clear that it's not like self-learning because there's lots of different ways to get an education. It doesn't have to be through a PhD, but it was very clear that I was going to have this experience in my life. I got married young and started having children right away, then health problems. My education was constantly put on hold. It just nagged me, that line in my patriarchal blessing nagged at me. Like, well, when is that going to happen?

00:05:03 Because I don't know how I'm going to be able to get all that education when I have kids, and then when they're young, and then my kids needed a lot of help. At every step, I saw myself getting further away from this possibility, this promise in my patriarchal blessing. My blessing also talks about how many

people will come into the church through me. The first person that I've ever seen baptize just happened in October. I'm 44 years old. I lived so much of my life with all these pieces of my patriarchal blessing that hadn't been fulfilled, yet God's timing was perfect. I ended up having fertility problems, and I had a hysterectomy at 29. Imagine if I had postponed having children, getting married. What if I did it in my order? What if I did it the way that I wanted it? You know, if I did the education first, there's a chance I wouldn't even have a family.

00:05:58 But at the time, I didn't see that. I didn't understand God's goodness. Now, when I get students in my office, I just tell them, trust God's timing for you. You will find that he is so good that even this thing that feels hard right now is blessing you, and you will find out why that is. And it will all make sense someday, but right now, while you're in the waiting, you just have to trust that God has a better plan than you have for yourself.

Hank Smith: 00:06:30 He does. He says in Abraham 2:8, My name is Jehovah. I know the end from the beginning. Therefore, my hand shall be over thee. He's saying, I know nothing has escaped from me. I know beginning to end, A to Z, you're gonna have to trust me.

John Bytheway: 00:06:48 That phrase that you used, Jenae, it wasn't happening according to my order. Reminded me of another one of my fallback verses. You know, Hank mentioned a couple of millennia, took me about that long to find someone who would marry me. Section 111 verse 11 says, Be as wise as serpents and yet without sin, but this is the part I love, and I will order all things for your good as fast as you are able to receive them. I've got the order down. I know when you're able to receive. That is so interesting. At 29, you had had your children and then you could do this education part, but it wasn't in your order. He ordered it for you.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:07:33 Yeah, and it worked out way better for so many reasons. I mean, going back to school at 35 was a huge blessing. I had a lot of life experience at that point. Being in a classroom with 20-year-olds was hard. At that time, I wasn't quite old enough to be their mom. I am now. It was challenging, feeling like I did my life out of order. But then when you realize, no, this was exactly the order that God had for me, and there's so many beautiful things that came out of my life because of it. I was raising teenagers while I was studying teenagers in grad school. I mean, how good is God? He was just like, let me give you a real education. You're gonna be learning about teenagers at the same time as you're raising them. I can't imagine a better time for me personally.

- 00:08:19 Other people have different timetables. I have really close colleagues that raised young children while they were in grad school. While they were preparing for their careers, that just wasn't what was gonna work for me. And God, in his infinite wisdom and love, understood that my path had to look differently. It had to be different from other people. That's precisely why these trials are so hard when there's a delay, when you're not fitting the stereotype, when you aren't participating in the rights of passage in the right order, those things actually cause a lot of psychological distress. That's when there's disorder in our life because we have these social and cultural differences in what's expected and what's happening in our life. We need to be gentle and careful with people who are breaking these molds and who aren't following this prescribed pathway or timeline that we often see in the church. And a lot of young people, a lot of their suffering really follows from not fitting this mold in one way or another.
- Hank Smith: 00:09:22 Don't you find it fascinating? In verse 15, he says, I took my family and the souls that we had won. I love that phrase. And we leave to go to the land of Canaan. Now, all three of us know how amazing Canaan is, but they don't know that. That phrase that comes up that you pointed out, Jenae, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation. You're going out there, you have no idea if this is going to work. It reminds me of the Saints going west from Nauvoo to Salt Lake. Eternity is our covering. What are you gonna do out there? How are you gonna get what you need? How do you know you're not all gonna go out there and die? Eternity is our covering. It's a beautiful phrase. God is my roof.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:10:11 He also says that he called on the Lord devoutly during that time. Consistently over and over, you see throughout his story, turning to the Lord. He doesn't stop. Oftentimes when we're in those wilderness type trials or when we're going through something treacherous in our life or uncertain, we can choose to call on the Lord. We can choose where we turn, back to that idea of turning, are we turning away from God or are we continuing to call on the Lord devoutly? God will answer our prayers, maybe not the way that we want. He will answer them in that he will be our presence. He will be our support.
- John Bytheway: 00:10:48 I love that quotation from [Elder Renlund](#). I had never equated an eternal perspective with eternity was our covering. That's really cool.
- Hank Smith: 00:10:57 I love having the perspective of the reader knowing the future. Right?

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:11:02 Yes. I know. We're like, it's gonna work out.

Hank Smith: 00:11:05 Yeah, you're gonna be fine. What's the problem? And I wonder if the Lord looks at us the same way that we look at these scripture characters. He's going, oh, just wait a couple verses. Things get better. And we think, I don't have the book.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:11:20 Yeah. Just tell me how it's all gonna work out. Yeah. But that doesn't require faith. That's the point. If we knew what was going to happen, it wouldn't be that hard to trust. It wouldn't be that hard to have faith. That's why God knew that we needed a covenant because that's another thing that the covenant gives us is it helps us establish trust. I wanna share a passage from this book by [Jennifer Lane](#). This is what she says. As we get older, this simple concept of promises gets layered with our adult life experiences. We sign contracts for phones, apartments, cars, mortgages, and so on. We have obligations to make payments in exchange for goods and services. We do our part and we expect the other party to do their part. We make contracts, but we break contracts too. Others break contracts with us, too. We are penalized for breaking contracts, but that's a part of life.

00:12:15 This contractual model can and does easily color our sense of what covenant means, but in an ancient world, making a covenant wasn't a matter of commerce. In ancient Israel, the term for covenant was berit. The concept behind berit is a relationship understood as a family relationship. Making a covenant in scripture can be best understood as forming a new relationship. I love that. And she goes on to talk about, when we get married, we create a new relationship. When we have children, we become a mother and a father. We're creating new families, and she says that we don't need a contract for that. She says, you know, it's clear that we have new roles and new responsibilities, but she says that covenants in a like way create new family relationships. So if we think about our covenants as a family relationship, then she says that covenants can change who we are because they'll change our relationship with those around us and their relationship to us.

00:13:22 That's really profound. I asked a lot of my friends leading up to this, why do we need covenants? Can't God just bless us anyways? What is it about the covenant? It makes sense anciently because that's kind of how they lived, but in our day and age, we just aren't a people that can understand covenants the same way. It's just not part of our daily living. We have insane return policies. We don't keep anything. We're transactional beings and we don't understand what this type of

relationship means, but I had some people say God doesn't need covenants to bless us, that he causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. But what covenant does is what we just said. Covenant creates a new relationship. It's saying that I'm allowing Christ to claim me. I'm claiming him. I am accepting this new identity as being his.

00:14:19 I'm saying yes to this new identity. That's what covenant allows us to do. And then within that covenant, we can receive, because it's the authorized order, we can receive blessings, greater blessings, not that we didn't get blessings before, but we can now receive greater blessings. We can receive greater happiness, peace, et cetera.

John Bytheway: 00:14:42 I love that in the past dozen years, we've been speaking of covenants much more as a relationship. I think I'm hearing that. Do you guys think so? But this idea of a two-way agreement, eh, that's nice, but it can sound like a contract that I signed and put on the shelf. But thinking of a relationship and then loyalty and it's to Christ is so much better way to put it. And when somebody says, I just can't do this, you wanna say, yeah, you're right. You can't. But what if you're in covenant with Christ? He can do it. If you're bound to him with a covenant, it's amazing what you can do with being bound to Christ in a covenant, and then it makes more sense than a contract.

Dr. Jenaé Nelson: 00:15:28 Right.

Hank Smith: 00:15:29 I'm sure both of you remember this story, [Accessing God's Power Through Covenants](#), April of 2023. My grandparents, this is [Elder Renlund](#) speaking. I think it's Lena Sofia and Matts Leander Renlund received God's power through their baptismal covenant when they joined the church in 1912 in Finland. They were happy to be part of the first branch of the church in Finland. Leander died from tuberculosis five years later when Lena was pregnant with their 10th child. That child, my father, was born two months after Leander's death. Lena eventually buried not just her husband, but also seven of her 10 children. As an impoverished widow, she struggled. For 20 years, she did not get a good night's rest. During the day, she scrambled to provide food for her family. At night, she took care of dying family members. It's hard to imagine how she coped. Lena persevered because she knew that her deceased husband and children could be hers through the eternities.

00:16:34 The doctrine of temple blessings, including that of eternal families, brought her peace because she trusted in the sealing power. In 1938, Lena submitted records so that temple

ordinances could be performed for her deceased family members. Some of the earliest submitted from Finland. After she died, temple ordinances were performed by others for her, Leander and her deceased children. By proxy, she was endowed. Lena and Leander were sealed to each other and their deceased children and my father were sealed to them. Like others, Lena died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and was persuaded of them and embraced them. Lena lived as though she already made these covenants in her life. I mean, this is just the power of covenants. I like what you said there, Jenae. I don't know what's on the next page, but I know I've made covenants. God keeps his covenants.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:17:34

I love that. And there's not just belief in those covenants, but there's something indescribably real about those covenants. When I lost my grandma on my dad's side. So I've been sealed to my dad and my stepmom. I have that sealing to my grandma that passed away. I was very sad. It was difficult for me, but I had this peace that I couldn't describe. I could see her rejoicing in heaven. I could feel this very real bond to her that's really hard to describe. When my mom's mom died, my grandma Nina, this is the side of my family that I'm not sealed to. It was a different feeling. It felt unfinished. It felt like there was still work to do. I believe in a loving heavenly father that's not going to keep me away from my family. He's gonna provide those ordinances. It's messy for me right now, but God is going to work that out. I completely believe that. I still believe that God will make it work, but with that unfinished work, it created a different experience for me. Hank, I know that you love the story in Genesis 13. I would love to hear you tell us about it.

Hank Smith: 00:18:48

Yes, I love this story and I wish I could be more like Abraham here. I'm trying. They get to Canaan and he and his nephew, Lot are doing very well. They're doing so well that the land that they're in can't hold all their cattle. Their herdman, the herdman of Abraham's cattle and the herdman of Lot's cattle start to fight and get contentious. Abram says to Lot, I don't like this contention that's happening between our two, all of our employees, I would say. Why don't we do this. You choose a part of the land you want, and I'll just take whatever you don't want. Lot, of course, sees the better part, and he's like, I'll take the better part. And Abram says, Okay, I'll take the other half. Abraham to me here is an example of a peacemaker. He says, I have enough. I have sufficient for my needs. How can we make peace here between these two, between these two groups? Reminds me of [Edward Partridge](#), I have lost my affection for this world's goods.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:20:02 I love what [Douglas Clark](#) says about Abraham on this front. He says, this principle of righteous loving kindness or charity would become the governing principle of Abraham's life for which he is still remembered among his Jewish descendants as the embodiment of Hesed. For the decisive factor in Abraham's personality was the unceasing urge to help others. Going back to the very beginning, I shared the story of those tokens, the tokens that helped identify the children. This one is the most important characteristic of being part of Abraham's family, having this loving kindness, having this charity. And Christ himself said, By this shall men know you are my disciples if you have love one for another. It's our compassion. It's our desire to alleviate suffering that identifies us. It's a token of our membership in the House of Israel. If we want to be recognized as part of the covenant, we need to be living like Abraham in the sense that we embrace this loving kindness.

00:21:13 This story is a perfect example of how he did that. An interesting thing happens when money is involved in situations. As you know, money can bring out the worst in people. Money, property, land, business. They say don't go into business with your family. This can create major tensions and problems. It's precisely because we have put our trust or we created an idol out of these things and clearly Abraham is saying that he is done with idols and he is living that. He doesn't have an interest in accumulating those things that he knows are not eternal. He's in the business of collecting things of an eternal nature. He's in the business of worshiping the true God.

John Bytheway: 00:21:56 My father-in-law, Michael Loveridge is an estate planning attorney. He actually used to give talks at Education Week. His title of his talk was How to Avoid Death, Taxes, Probate, and Family Civil War. The stories he tells about, oh, it's awful what happens to some families when that time comes to divide up what their parents left behind. Some of those are heartbreaking to hear when they can't be like Abraham here.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:22:29 Yeah, he was putting the gods of this world behind him. That's interesting too, because as you guys know, the word for covenant means cutting, a covenant. We see the necessity of Abraham cutting ties from things of this world, cutting ties with the natural man, with these false idols. He cut those ties so that he could be opened up. We need to be cut open so that the word, the seed, the blessings can start to grow. They can flourish, but there's a cutting that's involved, which is sometimes painful. The beautiful thing is that God brings it all back together. We come to him with our broken hearts, with

ourselves split open, and that's the fertile grounds for which he can now do his work.

Hank Smith: 00:23:17 I'm very impressed by generosity. The older I get. We want to hold onto our goods. I earned that. I want that. And then I'll meet others who will say, oh, you know, it's just money or it's just stuff. It's not a big deal. I wanna give. I wanna share. To me, that's very impressive. Somehow overcoming selfishness. If I'm Abraham, I might say, okay, let's get somebody to come value the property so we can split it evenly. Instead, it's, I'll take whatever you don't want. Yeah, it's very impressive.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:23:57 It's interesting, Hank, because I was reflecting on how Abraham lived the laws of the endowment. It's really easy to see how he lived the law of obedience, the law of sacrifice. So we can see all of these laws in his life play out, but what you just described as the law of consecration. That's a crowning covenant precisely because what you're saying, it requires that you only have one God, that you're not relying on those other things for security, for safety. When you have that relationship with things where you're no longer requiring them for safety and security, it's easier to concentrate. But it also requires a loving kindness and a care for other people where you see it's not just about letting go of your attachment to other gods or making idols out of those, but it's also really knowing the identity of the other person that they are also a child of God and that they have needs and that you need to attend to them.

00:25:02 And if you truly understand their identity, then you will have that compassion and that desire. We think of generosity sometimes as something that we have to muster up. I actually researched this. We wonder, why aren't people more grateful? Why aren't they more generous? What's going on here? I think it's very similar to happiness, that once the right conditions are in place, generosity just results from it. Same with happiness. We lived after the manner of happiness. You do certain things and then it brings happiness. But if you are in the search for happiness, you're not going to find it that way. You're going to have to live after the manner of happiness. But similarly, with generosity, this is something that is cultivated by living a certain way. It's by not having those idols, not having those attachments to things, but it's also the way you see your fellow human beings that if you see them as you see yourself, then you would do anything to alleviate suffering of that person.

00:26:00 If you saw them the way that Heavenly Father saw them, or if you saw them as yourselves, it would just come naturally that you would want to help them. Our covenants help us do that.

Every single covenant that we make in the temple is relational. It is meant to help us relate better to each other. It's meant to help us get to that end that you're talking about, Hank, where that generosity comes naturally. It's not even a question of, am I going to give this or should I give them the better part? It just happens naturally because of the way that you view other people and the way you view yourself.

Hank Smith: 00:26:36 John, you've heard me make this [comparison](#) before about the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea over in the Holy Land. There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to take in its life giving waters. Along its shores, children play as the children played when our Lord was there. He loved it. He could look across its silver surface when he spoke his parables, and on a rolling plane not far away, he fed thousands of people. The River Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills so it laughs in the sunshine and people build their houses near it and birds their nests. And every kind of life is happier because it is there. The river Jordan flows on south into another sea.

00:27:24 Here, there's no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children's laughter. Travelers choose another route, unless on urgent business, the air hangs heavy above its water and neither man nor beast or fowl will drink. What makes this mighty difference in these neighboring seas? Not the river Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not the soil in which they lie and not the country about. This is the difference. The Sea of Galilee receives, but does not keep the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it, another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure. The other sea is selfish, hoarding its income jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps. The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. The other sea gives nothing. It is named the Dead Sea. If you've ever been there, it's one is gorgeous and beautiful, and the other is, I mean, you can float in it for a little while, which is kind of fun.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:28:34 I have compassion for people that are like the Dead Sea though too, Hank, because people that are like that, that are holding tightly onto their things oftentimes are doing that because they have this scarcity mindset that I'm not going to get more. This is all there is. They live in a world that isn't generous to them in their minds. Because the world isn't generous, because it's cruel, it takes from you, you can think of the world or God that way. People think of God that way too. You can imagine that Abraham and Sarah could have thought about God as a God

who takes. Similarly, every single person constructs a narrative about the world. They think that the world is either harsh and that everyone for their own or that the world is a loving, happy place. People are mostly good and that good things will come to you if you put it out there.

00:29:30 And it turns out that people that believe that have less depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems, and you can see why. The people that are holding on are usually doing that because they're afraid. They're afraid that they're not gonna get back. If we can use Abraham's story in our lives as evidence that God is generous, God does give, think how much Abraham was multiplied. Greater than the sands and the sea and the stars in the heaven. That's not just referring to his posterity, but the blessings. God is in the work of multiplying. And we live in a world that is harsh sometimes and that can feel like it takes from us and it can feel like if I give this, I'll never get anything back in return. But when you understand how God works, you realize that we don't have to be stuck in this transactional way of living the world. We can be in the business of transformation, in the business of giving, in the business of helping other people become their best selves and not just focus on what you get out of things. It requires us to make a shift in our mindset.

Hank Smith: 00:30:33 Yeah. John, think about the people on our team and our podcast. Are these not the most generous people that we get to work with? Not only our guests, people like Jenae who come and give of their time and expertise. Then we have Shannon, our producer, we have Lisa Spice, we have David Perry, we have Kyle Nelson. I don't want to go through the entire team here, but these are just people who give and give and give. And it's so fun to work with them.

John Bytheway: 00:30:58 Yeah. It is a paradox, isn't it? It's kind of like Malachi. If you bring the tithes, I'll open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing. It's paradoxical, but the more you give, the more you receive. If you lose yourself, you find yourself.

Hank Smith: 00:31:14 And I love what you said there, Jenae. It's not usually someone is, does not wanna be generous. There's a wound there. Something is happening. There's a need not being met. Something is happening inside of them. I think it was [President Kimball](#) who said the Savior was able to see sin as the result of an unmet need on the part of the sinner.

John Bytheway: 00:31:37 That story reminds me of a story told by [Elder Robert C. Gay](#). He said, sitting on the podium that day as I marched down the aisle

in my Harvard graduation robe was Mother Teresa. She rose and delivered one of the most memorable speeches ever given at Harvard, a profound call to service and repentance. She expressed the hope that we graduates in going into the world would go with Jesus, would work for Jesus, and would serve him in the distressing guise of the poor. She also shared the following story of a couple she had met just a few days before leaving Calcutta for Harvard. A young man and a young woman came to our house with a big amount of money. I asked them, where did you get this money? Because I knew that they gave their money to feed the poor. They gave me the most strange answer.

00:32:27 Before our wedding, we decided not to buy wedding clothes, not to have a wedding feast, but to give you the money to feed the poor. Then I asked them one more question. But why? Why did you do that? That is a scandal in India not to have a wedding feast and special clothes. And they gave me this most beautiful answer. Out of love for each other, we wanted to give each other something special, and that special something was that big sacrifice, the wonderful something. Here was one of the world's genuine saints reminding us graduates that everyone, not just some fortunate few in the audience that day, but even those in the poorest regions of the world with little to their names, have something to give. If nothing more than sacrifice and pure love for others, Mother Teresa taught us that sacrificing something as simple as new clothing or a meal or a cultural right of passage could change a life. I knew then, as I hope you know now, that everyone has something to give. God asks that we act courageously in giving of ourselves and sharing the gifts and blessings he has given us. Take the talents and skills you have developed and go out and be a positive force for and on behalf of our Savior.

Hank Smith: 00:33:45 And that is the law of consecration. It's part of the covenants Jenae's been talking about.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:33:51 Yeah. I love that. So we've talked a lot about identity and purpose as things that come out of the covenant. What you just touched on, John, with that story, is what we teach people about purpose. It's another thing that I research. And that is that oftentimes we find our purpose at the intersection of where our gifts and talents meet the needs of the world. Our job is to find out what is that work that we're called to do. Sometimes that requires some reflection and some identifying what those gifts and talents are that we have. Some people have really clear, easy to identify gifts and talents. If you're a musician, those types of things tend to be a little bit easier to

identify, but meekness, friendliness, those types of things, those characteristics and gifts, those can be used in small ways, but they can make a big difference.

- Hank Smith: 00:34:40 I don't know how many free, totally absolutely free firesides John Bytheway has given in this church. It's gotta be in the thousands.
- John Bytheway: 00:34:51 You get what you pay for.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:34:53 You're using your gifts, John.
- Hank Smith: 00:34:55 Yep. Using your gifts. And you've blessed the church. I wonder how many people out there listening have heard a John Bytheway talk.
- John Bytheway: 00:35:04 They had a good rest. They're in a comfortable pew.
- Hank Smith: 00:35:08 Yeah. Church sleep. Jenae, we're getting close to the end of our scripture block here. What's next?
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:35:15 Yeah, I think there's a section in Genesis 13 that we should talk about really quick. We talked about where we turn and how Abraham's fathers were turned towards these idols, these false gods, and that he was turning to the right God. And so we get this story in verse 12 about the direction the tent is faced. John, why don't you tell us a little bit more about this?
- John Bytheway: 00:35:46 I'm glad you asked. When King Benjamin is getting ready to give his address, it says in Mosiah 2:6, they pitch their tents roundabout the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, which is a nice little metaphor. And kind of I have in my margin, Genesis 13:12. It says, Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. And I remember [Elder Rasband](#) making a comment about the King Benjamin story and asking, where is our tent door pitched? Is it pitched toward the temples? Good question. My tent door, what's it facing? What's my life facing? What's my family trying to face and keep its eyes on?
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:36:43 Yeah, I like that because we've talked about how, what we rely on, who we listen to, and now where we're facing. These are all indicators of who we're serving. I like that a lot.

Hank Smith: 00:36:56 If you look in chapter 14, verse 12, wasn't long before Lot dwelt in Sodom. He ended up there. He faced there first and ended up there. That usually what happens, right? We face a certain direction and slowly over time, we end up there.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:37:13 You drift that way. When you change direction, even just a little bit, as [Uchtdorf](#) talks about, those little tiny degrees can actually get you way off the course in the long run. That story reminds me of, I think it was [Holland](#) that was talking about the jersey that you wear. My son ran for American Fork High School. Their cross country team is one of the best in the nation. They've got several national titles. Their coach would always say to them, wearing the jersey doesn't make you a national champion. You have to actually do the work. But there was something about putting on that jersey, knowing that you were now part of a team that was nationally recognized and that had this record. It made them think differently about themselves. They're like, I am a caveman. That's a big deal around here. If you're a runner, there is something about being on this team, this winning team that gave these young men and young women a different perspective.

00:38:17 And so I think about how when we are joining the Lord's team and when we are, when we're putting on our garments, when we're wearing the Lord's jersey, we're saying something about our identity. We're saying something about the team that we belong to. But not only is it important for us to put on that jersey or to make that commitment to be facing the right direction, but then it also requires that you are doing the work. Those runners are expected to run like national champions. They're expected to show up to practice and they work really hard. Their coach can turn just about anybody into a national champion runner because he's such a good coach, but this is the way that Christ is. He's such a good coach that he can bring us to that level. And there's nothing magical about the jersey, but it's that partnership with the coach.

00:39:08 It's the coaching that you get, the mentoring that you get. When you choose to be on God's team, when you join his family, you make those new covenant relationships. You are now saying, I'm taking Christ on as my coach and my partner, and I'm choosing to walk with him. That's the youth theme this year, which I think is really beautiful. You're choosing him as your coach. Who doesn't want a national championship as a coach?

Hank Smith: 00:39:34 Where does your tent face? A great devotional lesson for this week. For any seminary teacher, right, any mom or dad, go get a

tent, pitch it in the living room and talk about which way does our tent face?

- John Bytheway: 00:39:45 Could be a very intense discussion.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:39:52 Last time I was on here, I talked about a tent too. That's funny. That tent that blew over in the wind. Genesis 15, Abraham has an encounter with the Lord again. He's still Abram at this point. And this is, I think what the Lord says to him is really beautiful and instructive for us. He says, fear not, Abraham. I am thy shield. So again, eternity is his covering and thy exceeding great reward. Going back to this idea that there are certain promises that are associated with the Abrahamic covenant, there's outcomes, there's certain things that Abraham is expecting to see. And even Abraham says, what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless? He's bringing this up, you know, I don't have children. He's saying, I haven't got the outcome yet, the outcome that I want and the timing that I want. But right before that, I don't know if he was paying very good attention because the Lord said that he, as in the Lord, is his reward.
- 00:40:54 He says, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. In the gospel, when we think about obedience being tied with blessings, we often think about very specific blessings that we think we should be getting. And this is where we get into problems because we think, okay, if I'm not getting those blessings, then we're back to that cycle of perfectionism because maybe I'm not good enough or I'm not worthy enough for those blessings. Or then the opposite of that is that, or maybe God isn't good, maybe God doesn't love me. So we either blame ourselves or we blame God. Either way, the problem is that we're expecting the blessings of the covenant to be a certain thing or to come on a certain timetable. God is saying, I am your reward. Can you just see that, Abraham? I know that you want a child, you're going to get a child. I'm, you're going to get all the promises, but if you don't understand that I'm your shield, I'm your reward, I'm going to protect you, I am going to be your provision. The point of covenant is that we get Christ as our reward.
- Hank Smith: 00:42:03 My faith is not in outcomes. My faith is in Christ.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:42:08 That's hard though, Hank, because hope is tied to outcomes. There's a gap here in how people are supposed to actually practically apply this that don't have faith in outcomes, but also have faith in outcomes. That can be confusing for people. I hear this a lot from missionaries tell me, my mission president said that if we were exactly obedient, we would get blessings. There

were some missionaries that were breaking all the rules and they were baptizing 20 people a week and then I was keeping all the rules and I didn't have any baptisms and I just felt like I was the worst. How do you reconcile this? Not only do we have these wilderness trials where you're not seeing the blessings that God has promised you, but what about when you're obedient and we're told that if you're obedient, you'll get blessings, but it feels like you're not getting them.

00:43:03 Similar to that wilderness trial, but it can cause a lot of heartache for us. My son's patriarchal blessing says that you'll get certain blessings, and it repeatedly says, if you obey the principles of the gospel with exactness, we talked about how some of the blessings in his patriarchal blessing are not going to happen because of the way that his mission changed, which was out of his control. He's like, maybe it's because I didn't obey with exactness. And I said, okay, let's back this up a little bit. Similarly to like, let's unpack what perfect means and what God maybe meant by that. Obeying the principles of the gospel with exactness. So what are the principles of the gospel? Faith, repentance, baptism, receive the Holy Ghost endure to the end. I said, so to me, that sounds like repentance. You're gonna mess up, but you can choose to repent quickly. Like that's something that is in your power. You might have weaknesses or traditions of your fathers that keep you from being able to be exactly obedient. Nobody did it but Jesus. Jesus is the only one that had exact obedience, but we can keep repenting. And that's the same idea of don't give up, right? That we can continue going on because of repentance.

Hank Smith: 00:44:23 I really like that. And I think perhaps that's why the Lord made the first principle faith in him, because it sounds like if that's the first principle, we're gonna need it a lot. It's not gonna look like it's working out. You're gonna have faith in me. Chapter 15:6, and he believed.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:44:44 I love that. And it's not that we're saying that obedience doesn't matter. It's the first law of heaven. It's the first covenant we make in the temple. It's important to remember that obedience is necessary and Abraham quickly obeys when the Lord commands him to leave. He's consistently obeying and doing what the Lord asks him to do, and that obedience is an act of faith. Once we've demonstrated faith, then he can bless us, but it's not like we are earning those blessings through our obedience. It's just that we're demonstrating faith in him. We're demonstrating faith that he is the great reward. That requires listening to him and following him and choosing him as our God.

Hank Smith:	00:45:23	When I am obedient, I'm connected to him and therefore I have the reward.
Dr. Jenaë Nelson:	00:45:28	That's right. Still 15:6, and it came to pass that Abraham looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man. So he's seeing the life of Christ, and was glad and his soul found rest and he believed in the Lord and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness. There's this principle here that Abraham is looking to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ for rest, and he's receiving that rest. President Nelson talked to us about rest and how we can experience rest, because that's another plight that we have in this life, is, especially in the latter days, is just feeling busy, feeling like there's a lot to do, feeling overwhelmed, but if we can center our lives on Christ, if we can look to his life, we can find rest. Sometimes that means also paring down and that we're just focusing on the most important things, using Christ's life as an example as to what we should prioritize.
Hank Smith:	00:46:26	This story hits so close to home for many who can't have children, who want children, but are, for some reason or another, are unable to have children reading this where Abraham's kind of begging almost. You have given no seed, will you? The Lord tells him, take a look at the stars. Take a look at the stars. Try to number those stars. That's gonna be your posterity, and he believed. Still wondering how in the world it's gonna happen.
Dr. Jenaë Nelson:	00:47:01	I like that God is pointing Abraham to nature for a pattern of going back to that generosity, God's goodness. Look, my creations are vast. That can give you an understanding of what I want to do for you. If we think about God as being someone that's generous, he's a creator, he multiplies, versus, you know, a God who takes, a God who punishes a completely different paradigm. I'm glad that you brought up that, Hank, and I did wanna talk a little bit about Sarah and mothers in Israel, because we talk a lot about Abraham, but right by Abraham's side was Sarah. She also received a new name and she was also part of the covenant. We don't get Sarah's words. We don't get to get into her mind and what she's going through, but I think about how difficult it might have been for her, especially in giving Abraham Hagar and Hagar is the one who produces seed first and the emotion that she must have been going through, but yet we find that she's faithful.
	00:48:03	I love this quote from Jeffrey R. Holland , another good one from him. He said, This is speaking to women. Yours is the grand tradition of Eve, the mother of all human family, the one who understood that she and Adam had to fall in order that men and

women might be, and that there would be joy. Yours is the grand tradition of Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel, without whom there could not have been those magnificent patriarchal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which bless us all. Yours is the grand tradition of the mothers of the 2000 stripling warriors. Yours is the grand tradition of Mary, chosen and forordained from before this world was to conceive, carry, and bear the son of God himself. We thank all of you, including our own mothers, and tell you there is nothing more important in the world than participating so directly in the work and glory of God, in bringing to pass the immortality and earthly life of his daughters and sons so that immortality and eternal life can come to those celestial realms on high.

00:49:11 It's not just Abraham that got that promise, it was Sarah. God had a promise to keep, not just Abraham, but also to Sarah. It was so important that that promise be fulfilled through Isaac. We get kind of a glimpse of the way that the Lord must have felt about Sarah. He loved her. He wanted them to rely on him and to be able to trust him that that would happen, and that trust building required them to not have that promise for a while, which seems paradoxical or counterproductive, but that's exactly what increased their faith. So that when God finally comes to him in Genesis 17, when God finally comes to him and says, all right, now it's time. You're going to conceive. This is when he gets that promise. He's 99 years old.

Hank Smith: 00:50:16 The Lord seems to play out some of these people's lives like a really good movie, like the last possible moment where you think, It's all lost. There is no hope. It's all gone. Then he says, okay, it's almost like raising Lazarus from the dead. I'm gonna push this longer than anybody thinks possible. I'm gonna push your faith to the end and then a little bit more, which I don't love that idea.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:50:44 It was actually at the last followHIM gathering that, I believe it was Annabelle Sorensen. There was a video where she said that hope is something that you need when times are the darkest, when things are the most bleak. We often think about hope as being maybe toxic positivity or that people have hope when things are going well or when things are happy, but it's really difficult to have hope in those messy times. When things are not coming together when God's promises seem delayed, when things aren't making sense, that's actually when we need hope the most, but it's also when it can be the hardest. I think this is actually from [Uchtdorf](#). He says this. We learn to cultivate hope the same way we learn to walk one step at a time. As we study the scriptures, speak with our Heavenly Father daily and commit

to keep the commandments of God, like the word of wisdom, paying a tithing, we attain a hope.

00:51:47 We grow in our ability to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost as we more perfectly live the gospel. There may be times when we must make a courageous decision to hope when everything around us contradicts this hope. Like Father Abraham, we will against hope, believe in hope, or as one writer expressed, in the depth of winter, we find within us an invincible summer. That's from his talk on infinite hope. But I like that hope is something that he's saying, it's basically just putting one foot in front of the other. Some days hope just looks like I got out of bed. Some days it, that's as much as you can do. That was hope. Sometimes hope is saying, I'm not gonna listen to those self-sabotaging voices anymore. I'm going to believe that I'm loved. I'm gonna believe that I have value even if it doesn't feel that way right now. I'm just gonna take a step of faith and that faith can produce hope.

John Bytheway: 00:52:45 I just love that not only did God give Abram a new name, but how do you say it? Sarai, a new name. And it, to me, it speaks of the importance of marriage and family that this covenant is impossible without Abram, Abraham, and Sarah. I like that. And I wonder how many times God has done the same thing, but we don't know about it with others, but at least here we know about it with Abraham and Sarah, new names, new beginning, new start.

Hank Smith: 00:53:17 And what Jenae taught us about, perhaps that's why Isaac is going to be the covenant son over Ishmael is because of the Lord valuing Sarah in this instance. He does value Hagar. He's going to take care of her, but when it comes to Abraham, it's going to be Sarah. It's going to be the two of them together. Jenae, you've talked to us a lot about hope today and hope in difficult times when it does not seem that the promises we've been given are going to be fulfilled or can be fulfilled. Those wilderness trials. You have had many yourself. You've had dark times yourself. Sometimes I think people listening, John, assume that our guests when they come on the show aren't experiencing dark times, but many of them are. They, they come on the show in the middle of really hard things. They don't know how it's gonna work out.

00:54:11 They're still here with us teaching. Jenae, if you could maybe wrap us up here by speaking to those who are maybe in their car thinking it's ever gonna happen for me. Or maybe there's some in a dark room praying that the Lord will come through for them, and we've already seen. The Lord seems to push us way

past our comfort zones. What would you say to those listeners who are in moments where you also have been?

- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 00:54:43 Wow, that's a big question. Sometimes we think that the Lord's mercies are only for the righteous, for those who are doing their best, those who are maybe living the holiest, most righteous life. The darkest times in my life were when I was not living the gospel of Jesus Christ at all, when I didn't believe in God at all. And God rescued me from that. And it wasn't from anything that I did or deserved. He pulled me out of that. His mercy was there for me. His love was there for me. Now, as an older person, living with some of the consequences of my childhood, some of the imprints, some of those survival skills that we talked about that no longer serve me, I find myself in need, again, of rescuing, of being delivered. I think what we see in Abraham is a God who is responsive, a God that's proactive, a God that doesn't make the best out of bad situations, but that is actually using those trials to form his children.
- 00:56:03 And if we can see that his mercy is there, we are so afraid of making mistakes and we make them all the time, which is ironic, but we're so afraid that our sins will disqualify us or that we'll somehow miss the boat or that we'll have to be living out a plan B because we didn't marry the right person or do this at the right time or whatever it is. I just think we have to understand and keep in mind that God is bigger than all of these things. He sees the whole picture. When he tells Abraham to look at the stars in the sky, I don't think he's just doing math with Abraham. I think what he's trying to do and how Abraham is able to have this perspective is he's trying to get Abraham to look up. I think he's trying to get Abraham to think celestial.
- 00:56:55 The way that [President Nelson](#) taught us, he's trying to say, look, if I can put the stars in the sky, if I can number all of them, then I can take care of your life. I can handle this. I have a plan for you. Once you stop trusting in all these things, even the promises of God can become an idol for us if we are missing the point that God is the reward. God is the reward. Christ is the reason that we have covenants. We're not just following a bunch of rules so that we can earn a bunch of rewards. We are trying to live in a way that we can become like our Savior Jesus Christ, and he models that in the covenant. When times are really, really dark, God would say to us, and I think God does say to us out of these pages in the Bible to us, look up at the sky. When it's dark out, you can see the stars.
- 00:58:06 Sometimes when it's the darkest, that's when we can see the light from the stars the best. Understand that there's a pattern,

there's an order, and God is in charge of all of it. To people who feel like maybe their homes are falling apart, their relationships, who maybe struggle to understand their identity or their purpose, I would say to you that in Christ, you always have a home. In Christ, you always have belonging. In Christ, you always have a purpose. That's kind of what God is trying to tell us over and over and over again in the Old Testament through the covenant is, you know, we don't make very good covenant partners. [President Holland](#) said we're all he has to work with, but the fact that he's willing to enter into that relationship with us should tell us something about his love. We will always be indebted.

00:59:02 We will always be unprofitable servants. He still enters that relationship with us. Imagine starting a business with somebody and just knowing they're gonna be the worst business partner ever and still doing it and saying, it's gonna be fine and we're gonna make a profit because I'm just that good. I am going to cover you. I'm going to literally cover you. That's what the Atonement is for. You don't have to rely on your work alone. Our response to that type of love, to that hesed, to that covenant commitment that Christ is willing to enter that relationship with us should be a desire to obey. So we're, yes, we're not gonna be flawless in the terms of perfect, never making mistakes in that way, but we should want to obey. We should want to live like him. We should want to emulate him and follow him. That should be what spurs us on to keeping our covenants. Not just checking off these boxes so that I can receive these blessings, but that this will actually make me a better person. And in the process, I might help other people too.

Hank Smith: 01:00:10 Thank you, Jenae. I saw that connection chapter 15:5. You said, he told him to look up, look at the stars. And then you love that, you pointed out that phrase, Abraham too, eternity was our covering. It's almost like those two are linked. Those two moments. That he figured it out. The stars, eternity was my covering. And it will be for each of us as well.

Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:00:35 Yeah. We didn't talk about this, but when the Lord passes through those pieces on the altar, Abraham's altar and his sacrifice and he comes through those pieces, that would just be my final testimony that Christ comes in the pieces. The reason why we sometimes have to get broken up is so that he can enter in. We come with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. The Lord will pass through those broken pieces in our life and he will come. Abraham teaches us this process. We've learned today about all of the things that he went through and how he was

able to persevere because of his faith and his hope and his love. Ultimately, the point of all of it was for him to understand who God was and to be able to enjoy the presence of the Lord. And that's something that he wants. He wants us to be able to enjoy the blessings that he had, and one of them is the presence of the Lord. That's really powerful to me.

- Hank Smith: 01:01:34 And he believed. Man, I think that's a major takeaway for me today, right from Jenae. She believes.
- John Bytheway: 01:01:41 She believes. It's like, Abraham, do you still see those stars? Okay. Then the promise is still coming. Every night you see the stars? No. Those are the ones I told you about. The promises are still coming.
- Hank Smith: 01:01:54 They're still there. And Jenae, you're a testament to faith. You're a testament one, that you said the Lord came and grabbed you, right, and got you and said, you're coming with me. And then you've stuck with him ever since.
- Dr. Jenae Nelson: 01:02:07 Thank you. I feel when you know you've been rescued and when you know that there are people that are still in harm's way, you just wanna go and help as many people as you can. You want to introduce people to your rescuer. You want to introduce people to your deliverer and your savior because you know what it can do for you. You know that completely changes your life. When I say that this is the God I serve, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I'm saying, this is the type of God I serve, this type of God that rescues, that delivers. He invites me into his work and I want to bring other people back home.
- Hank Smith: 01:02:43 Jenae, what a testimony. We have been so blessed having you here, and I feel uplifted and edified, and I feel like I can continue to trust. I will keep trusting. And we hope and pray the Lord will continue to pour out blessings upon you and your family. With that, we want to thank Dr. Jenae Nelson for joining us again. We want to thank Shannon Sorensen, our executive producer, our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen, and every episode for the last five years, we've remembered our founder, Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We've got more to go through in the book of Genesis on followHIM.
- 01:03:23 Thank you for joining us on today's episode. Do you or someone you know speak Spanish, Portuguese, or French? You can now watch and listen to our podcast in those languages. Links are in the description below. Today's show notes and transcript are on our website, followhim.co. That's followhim.co. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew.

David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Sydney Smith, and Annabelle Sorensen.

followHIM Favorites



- Hank Smith: 00:03 Welcome to followHIM Favorites. This is where John and I share a single story to go with each week's lesson. John, we're in Genesis chapters 12 through 17 and a couple of chapters in Moses this week. And I have a story for you that fits this moment where Lot and Abram start to get into some strife, them and their households. There's a little bit of contention happening. And Abram turns to Lot and says, hey, let's work this out. I was in seminary a long time ago. I was a young seminary teacher. We were talking about siblings and relationships, how hard they are sometimes. This one student, she raised her hand and she said, "I get so frustrated. I get so mad because whenever it's my brother's turn to do the dishes, he goes to the bathroom and locks the door. I know that he's going in there because he doesn't wanna do the dishes and I try to stop him and he goes in and then he won't come out until they're, someone else does them." And she's like, "It just makes me so mad. I just get so angry."
- 01:04 You know, some of the other students were saying, "Yeah, I hate that." And they all, you know, I guess it happens frequently. Happens at our house. This young man raises his hand and I'll be honest, John, I couldn't say his full name. His name was, and I'm gonna just guess here. It was like Toafaufafa... It was this beautiful, long Polynesian name. But everyone just called him To because that was the first, that was the first sound of his name. Yeah. To. He was a big guy. He was a big To. To raises his hand and he says, "When my siblings don't do their chores, I just do them for them." And it was just silent in the room.
- John Bytheway: 01:52 What?
- Hank Smith: 01:53 I think they were expecting, when my siblings don't do their chores, right, I crack their skull. He just said, "I just usually just do them." And I remember the student who'd asked the question initially, she said, "You just do them." And he said, "Yeah, they're just dishes." And it was this moment of, "It's not worth fighting over."

John Bytheway: 02:13 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 02:15 "I'll just do it." Well, luckily his brother was in the class. Thumb, just kidding. His name was Ricky. I said, "Ricky, is that true? Does he just do the dishes?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "And so I give him candy." I looked at To and To said, "Yeah, I like candy." It was this moment of, "You know what? It's not worth fighting over. It's just dishes." What happens here, John, as you know, is that Abram says to Lot, hey, instead of fighting, why don't we just work this out? You do what you wanna do and I'll take what you don't want.

John Bytheway: 02:51 Right.

Hank Smith: 02:52 You take what you want and I'll just take the other side. You get that same feeling from Abram, don't you? Like-

John Bytheway: 02:58 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 02:59 It's not worth fighting over.

John Bytheway: 03:00 And that's when they separated.

Hank Smith: 03:02 Yeah. And Lot took the side he wanted, and Abram, Abram took the other. John, I think you're that way, too. You're just like, you know what? It's not worth fighting over. I'm gonna pick my battles.

John Bytheway: 03:13 I try to be. If you could just leave me To's number, I want him to come do the dishes.

Hank Smith: 03:19 Yeah. Hey, big To. I wonder what he's doing these days. I wonder if he's still doing dishes. Hey, we hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. We are with Dr. Jenae Nelson this week. She has been with us before in the Book of Mormon. She's back. You're gonna love what she does with this section and the light she sheds on it. Then come back here next week. We'll do another followHIM Favorites.