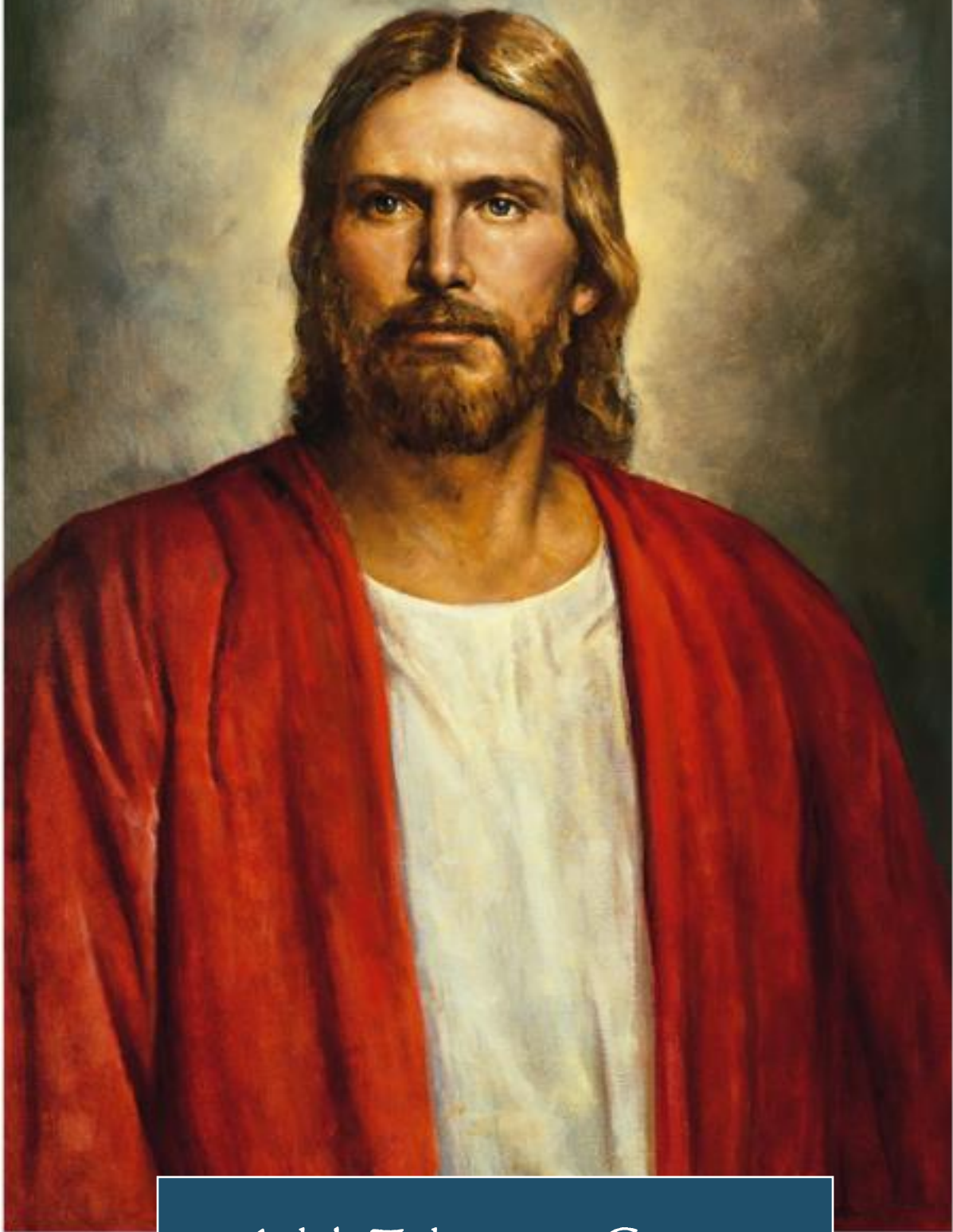


The Atonement of Jesus Christ



Adult Education Course

Accountability Sheet:

	Topic	Reading			Invitation
		# Days	Scriptures	Talks	
Week 1	The Meaning of Atonement, An Invitation				
Week 2	The Intimate Atonement				
Week 3	God's Plan from the Beginning				
Week 4	Overcoming the effects of the Fall				
Week 5	Jehovah's Birth into Mortality				
Week 6	The Upper Room and the Sacrament				
Week 7	Gethsemane				
Week 8	The Road to Golgotha				
Week 9	The Garden Tomb				
Week 10	Mercy – Satisfying the Demands of Justice				
Week 11	Reconciliation – Bringing a Change of Heart				
Week 12	Grace – Power to do Godly Works				
Week 13	At-one-ment				
Week 14	The Atonement and the Temple				
Week 15	Repentance – Accessing the Atonement				
Week 16	Forgiveness and Forgiving -- Accepting the INFINITE Atonement for All				
Week 17	Come unto Christ and Be Perfected in Him				

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Week 1 - The Meaning of Atonement, An Invitation

Scripture and Other Readings: "Atonement" in the Bible Dictionary and in "True to the Faith." Ezekiel 36:25-28; Moses 7:24-69.

Invitation Week 1:

Find at least one scripture that says, "Atonement" to you. Ponder what the atonement means to you and record your thoughts and feelings about the atonement by the scripture that you have chosen. Choose one of President Nelson's invitations and begin a daily study of the Savior and the Atonement.

Bruce R. McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *General Conference, April 1985*

1. I feel, and the Spirit seems to accord, that the most important doctrine I can declare, and the most powerful testimony I can bear, is of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. His atonement is the most transcendent event that ever has or ever will occur from Creation's dawn through all the ages of a never-ending eternity.
3. It is the supreme act of goodness and grace that only a god could perform. Through it, all of the terms and conditions of the Father's eternal plan of salvation became operative.
4. Through it are brought to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. Through it, all men are saved from death, hell, the devil, and endless torment.
5. And through it, all who believe and obey the glorious gospel of God, all who are true and faithful and overcome the world, all who suffer for Christ and his word, all who are chastened and scourged in the Cause of him whose we are—all shall become as their Maker and sit with him on his throne and reign with him forever in everlasting glory.
6. In speaking of these wondrous things I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other Apostles and prophets.
7. True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but they are now mine, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true, and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance. I have thereby heard his voice and know his word.
8. Two thousand years ago, outside Jerusalem's walls, there was a pleasant garden spot, Gethsemane by name, where Jesus and his intimate friends were wont to retire for pondering and prayer.
9. There Jesus taught his disciples the doctrines of the kingdom, and all of them communed with Him who is the Father of us all, in whose ministry they were engaged, and on whose errand they served.
10. This sacred spot, like Eden where Adam dwelt, like Sinai from whence Jehovah gave his laws, like Calvary where the Son of God gave his life a ransom for many, this holy ground is where the Sinless Son of the Everlasting Father took upon himself the sins of all men on condition of repentance.
11. We do not know, we cannot tell, no mortal mind can conceive the full import of what Christ did in Gethsemane.
12. We know he sweat great goutts of blood from every pore as he drained the dregs of that bitter cup his Father had given him.
13. We know he suffered, both body and spirit, more than it is possible for man to suffer, except it be unto death.
14. We know that in some way, incomprehensible to us, his suffering satisfied the demands of justice, ransomed penitent souls from the pains and penalties of sin, and made mercy available to those who believe in his holy name.
15. We know that he lay prostrate upon the ground as the pains and agonies of an infinite burden caused him to tremble and would that he might not drink the bitter cup.
16. We know that an angel came from the courts of glory to strengthen him in his ordeal, and we suppose it was mighty Michael, who foremost fell that mortal man might be.
17. As near as we can judge, these infinite agonies—this suffering beyond compare—continued for some three or four hours.
18. After this—his body then wrenched and drained of strength—he confronted Judas and the other incarnate devils, some from the very Sanhedrin itself; and he was led away with a rope around his neck, as a common criminal, to be judged by the arch-criminals who as Jews sat in Aaron's seat and who as Romans wielded Caesar's power.
19. They took him to Annas, to Caiaphas, to Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate. He was accused, cursed, and smitten. Their foul saliva ran down his face as vicious blows further weakened his pain-engulfed body.
20. With reeds of wrath they rained blows upon his back. Blood ran down his face as a crown of thorns pierced his trembling brow.
21. But above it all he was scourged, scourged with forty stripes save one, scourged with a multithonged whip into

whose leather strands sharp bones and cutting metals were woven.

22. Many died from scourging alone, but he rose from the sufferings of the scourge that he might die an ignominious death upon the cruel cross of Calvary.
23. Then he carried his own cross until he collapsed from the weight and pain and mounting agony of it all.
24. Finally, on a hill called Calvary—again, it was outside Jerusalem’s walls—while helpless disciples looked on and felt the agonies of near death in their own bodies, the Roman soldiers laid him upon the cross.
25. With great mallets they drove spikes of iron through his feet and hands and wrists. Truly he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.
26. Then the cross was raised that all might see and gape and curse and deride. This they did, with evil venom, for three hours from 9:00 A.M. to noon.
27. Then the heavens grew black. Darkness covered the land for the space of three hours, as it did among the Nephites. There was a mighty storm, as though the very God of Nature was in agony.
28. And truly he was, for while he was hanging on the cross for another three hours, from noon to 3:00 P.M., all the infinite agonies and merciless pains of Gethsemane recurred.
29. And, finally, when the atoning agonies had taken their toll—when the victory had been won, when the Son of God had fulfilled the will of his Father in all things—then he said, “It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)), and he voluntarily gave up the ghost.
30. As the peace and comfort of a merciful death freed him from the pains and sorrows of mortality, he entered the paradise of God.
31. When he had made his soul an offering for sin, he was prepared to see his seed, according to the messianic word.
32. These, consisting of all the holy prophets and faithful Saints from ages past; these, comprising all who had taken upon them his name, and who, being spiritually begotten by him, had become his sons and his daughters, even as it is with us; all these were assembled in the spirit world, there to see his face and hear his voice.
33. After some thirty-eight or forty hours—three days as the Jews measured time—our Blessed Lord came to the Arimathæan’s tomb, where his partially embalmed body had been placed by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa.
34. Then, in a way incomprehensible to us, he took up that body which had not yet seen corruption and arose in that glorious immortality which made him like his resurrected Father.
35. He then received all power in heaven and on earth, obtained eternal exaltation, appeared unto Mary Magdalene and many others, and ascended into heaven, there to sit down on the right hand of God the Father Almighty and to reign forever in eternal glory.
36. His rising from death on the third day crowned the Atonement. Again, in some way incomprehensible to us, the effects of his resurrection pass upon all men so that all shall rise from the grave.
37. As Adam brought death, so Christ brought life; as Adam is the father of mortality, so Christ is the father of immortality.
38. And without both, mortality and immortality, man cannot work out his salvation and ascend to those heights beyond the skies where gods and angels dwell forever in eternal glory.
39. Now, the atonement of Christ is the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and it is the least understood of all our revealed truths.
40. Many of us have a superficial knowledge and rely upon the Lord and his goodness to see us through the trials and perils of life.
41. But if we are to have faith like Enoch and Elijah we must believe what they believed, know what they knew, and live as they lived.
42. May I invite you to join with me in gaining a sound and sure knowledge of the Atonement.
43. We must cast aside the philosophies of men and the wisdom of the wise and hearken to that Spirit which is given to us to guide us into all truth.
44. We must search the scriptures, accepting them as the mind and will and voice of the Lord and the very power of God unto salvation.
45. As we read, ponder, and pray, there will come into our minds a view of the three gardens of God—the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Garden of the Empty Tomb where Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene.
46. In Eden we will see all things created in a paradisiacal state—without death, without procreation, without probationary experiences.
47. We will come to know that such a creation, now unknown to man, was the only way to provide for the Fall.
48. We will then see Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman, step down from their state of immortal and paradisiacal glory to become the first mortal flesh on earth.
49. Mortality, including as it does procreation and death, will enter the world. And because of transgression a probationary estate of trial and testing will begin.
50. Then in Gethsemane we will see the Son of God ransom man from the temporal and spiritual death that came to us because of the Fall.
51. And finally, before an empty tomb, we will come to know that Christ our Lord has burst the bands of death and stands forever triumphant over the grave.
52. Thus, Creation is father to the Fall; and by the Fall came mortality and death; and by Christ came immortality and eternal life.
53. If there had been no fall of Adam, by which cometh death, there could have been no atonement of Christ, by which cometh life.
54. And now, as pertaining to this perfect atonement, wrought by the shedding of the blood of God—I testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha, and as

pertaining to Jesus Christ, I testify that he is the Son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself independent of any other person.

55. I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears.
56. But I shall not know any better than I know now that he is God's Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and

Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way.

57. God grant that all of us may walk in the light as God our Father is in the light so that, according to the promises, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son will cleanse us from all sin.
58. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Russell M. Nelson "The Atonement," *General Conference, October 1996*

1. Humbly I join the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, who asked, "Why not speak of the atonement of Christ?"¹ This topic comprises our third article of faith: "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel." [A of F 1:3]
2. Before we can comprehend the Atonement of Christ, however, we must first understand the Fall of Adam. And before we can understand the Fall of Adam, we must first understand the Creation. These three crucial components of the plan of salvation relate to each other.²

The Creation

3. The Creation culminated with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were created in the image of God, with bodies of flesh and bone.³ Created in the image of God and not yet mortal, they could not grow old and die.⁴ "And they would have had no children"⁵ nor experienced the trials of life. (Please forgive me for mentioning children and the trials of life in the same breath.) The creation of Adam and Eve was a paradisiacal creation, one that required a significant change before they could fulfill the commandment to have children⁶ and thus provide earthly bodies for premortal spirit sons and daughters of God.

The Fall

4. That brings us to the Fall. Scripture teaches that "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."⁷ The Fall of Adam (and Eve) constituted the mortal creation and brought about the required changes in their bodies, including the circulation of blood and other modifications as well.⁸ They were now able to have children. They and their posterity also became subject to injury, disease, and death. And a loving Creator blessed them with healing power by which the life and function of precious physical bodies could be preserved. For example, bones, if broken, could become solid again. Lacerations of the flesh could heal themselves. And miraculously, leaks in the circulation could be sealed off by components activated from the very blood being lost.⁹
5. Think of the wonder of that power to heal! If you could create anything that could repair itself, you would have created life in perpetuity. For example, if you could create a chair that could fix its own broken leg, there would be no limit to the life of that chair. Many of you

walk on legs that were once broken and do so because of your remarkable gift of healing.

6. Even though our Creator endowed us with this incredible power, He consigned a counterbalancing gift to our bodies. It is the blessing of aging, with visible reminders that we are mortal beings destined one day to leave this "frail existence."¹⁰ Our bodies change every day. As we grow older, our broad chests and narrow waists have a tendency to trade places. We get wrinkles, lose color in our hair—even the hair itself—to remind us that we are mortal children of God, with a "manufacturer's guarantee" that we shall not be stranded upon the earth forever. Were it not for the Fall, our physicians, beauticians, and morticians would all be unemployed.
7. Adam and Eve, as mortal beings, were instructed to "worship the Lord their God, and ... offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord."¹¹ They were further instructed that "the life of the flesh is in the blood: ... for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."¹² Probation, procreation, and aging were all components of—and physical death was essential to—God's "great plan of happiness."¹³
8. But mortal life, glorious as it is, was never the ultimate objective of God's plan. Life and death here on planet Earth were merely means to an end—not the end for which we were sent.

The Atonement

9. That brings us to the Atonement. Paul said, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."¹⁴ The Atonement of Jesus Christ became the immortal creation. He volunteered to answer the ends of a law previously transgressed.¹⁵ And by the shedding of His blood, His¹⁶ and our physical bodies could become perfected. They could again function without blood, just as Adam's and Eve's did in their paradisiacal form. Paul taught that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; ... this mortal must put on immortality."¹⁷

Meaning of Atonement

10. With this background in mind, let us now ponder the deep meaning of the word atonement. In the English language, the components are at-one-ment, suggesting that a person is at one with another. Other languages¹⁸ employ words that connote either expiation or reconciliation. Expiation means "to atone for." Reconciliation comes from Latin roots *re*, meaning

“again”; con, meaning “with”; and sella, meaning “seat.” Reconciliation, therefore, literally means “to sit again with.”

11. Rich meaning is found in study of the word atonement in the Semitic languages of Old Testament times. In Hebrew, the basic word for atonement is kaphar, a verb that means “to cover” or “to forgive.”¹⁹ Closely related is the Aramaic and Arabic word kafat, meaning “a close embrace”—no doubt related to the Egyptian ritual embrace. References to that embrace are evident in the Book of Mormon. One states that “the Lord hath redeemed my soul . . . ; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.”²⁰ Another proffers the glorious hope of our being “clasped in the arms of Jesus.”²¹
12. I weep for joy when I contemplate the significance of it all. To be redeemed is to be atoned—received in the close embrace of God with an expression not only of His forgiveness, but of our oneness of heart and mind. What a privilege! And what a comfort to those of us with loved ones who have already passed from our family circle through the gateway we call death!
13. Scriptures teach us more about the word atonement. The Old Testament has many references to atonement, which called for animal sacrifice. Not any animal would do. Special considerations included:
 - the selection of a firstling of the flock, without blemish,²²
 - the sacrifice of the animal’s life by the shedding of its blood,²³
 - death of the animal without breaking a bone, and²⁴
 - one animal could be sacrificed as a vicarious act for another.²⁵
14. The Atonement of Christ fulfilled these prototypes of the Old Testament. He was the firstborn Lamb of God, without blemish. His sacrifice occurred by the shedding of blood. No bones of His body were broken—noteworthy in that both malefactors crucified with the Lord had their legs broken.²⁶ And His was a vicarious sacrifice for others.
15. While the words atone or atonement, in any of their forms, appear only once in the King James translation of the New Testament,²⁷ they appear 35 times in the Book of Mormon.²⁸ As another testament of Jesus Christ, it sheds precious light on His Atonement, as do the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Latter-day revelation has added much to our biblical base of understanding.

Infinite Atonement

16. In preparatory times of the Old Testament, the practice of atonement was finite—meaning it had an end. It was a symbolic forecast of the definitive Atonement of Jesus the Christ. His Atonement is infinite—without an end.²⁹ It was also infinite in that all humankind would be saved from never-ending death. It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope—it was to be done once for all.³⁰ And the mercy of the Atonement extends not only to an

infinite number of people, but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him.³¹ It was infinite beyond any human scale of measurement or mortal comprehension.

17. Jesus was the only one who could offer such an infinite atonement, since He was born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father. Because of that unique birthright, Jesus was an infinite Being.

The Ordeal of the Atonement

18. The ordeal of the Atonement centered about the city of Jerusalem. There the greatest single act of love of all recorded history took place.³² Leaving the upper room, Jesus and His friends crossed the deep ravine east of the city and came to a garden of olive trees on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. There in the garden bearing the Hebrew name of Gethsemane—meaning “oil-press”—olives had been beaten and pressed to provide oil and food. There at Gethsemane, the Lord “suffered the pain of all men, that all . . . might repent and come unto him.”³³ He took upon Himself the weight of the sins of all mankind, bearing its massive load that caused Him to bleed from every pore.³⁴
19. Later He was beaten and scourged. A crown of sharp thorns was thrust upon His head as an additional form of torture.³⁵ He was mocked and jeered. He suffered every indignity at the hands of His own people. “I came unto my own,” He said, “and my own received me not.”³⁶ Instead of their warm embrace, He received their cruel rejection. Then He was required to carry His own cross to the hill of Calvary, where He was nailed to that cross and made to suffer excruciating pain.
20. Later He said, “I thirst.”³⁷ To a Doctor of Medicine, this is a very meaningful expression. Doctors know that when a patient goes into shock because of blood loss, invariably that patient—if still conscious—with parched and shriveled lips cries for water.
21. Even though the Father and the Son knew well in advance what was to be experienced, the actuality of it brought indescribable agony. “And [Jesus] said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.”³⁸ Jesus then complied with the will of His Father.³⁹ Three days later, precisely as prophesied, He rose from the grave. He became the firstfruits of the Resurrection. He had accomplished the Atonement, which could give immortality and eternal life to all obedient human beings. All that the Fall allowed to go awry, the Atonement allowed to go aright.
22. The Savior’s gift of immortality comes to all who have ever lived. But His gift of eternal life requires repentance and obedience to specific ordinances and covenants. Essential ordinances of the gospel symbolize the Atonement. Baptism by immersion is symbolic of the death, burial, and Resurrection of the Redeemer. Partaking of the sacrament renews baptismal covenants and also renews our memory of the Savior’s broken flesh and of the blood He shed for us. Ordinances of the temple symbolize our reconciliation with the Lord and seal families together forever. Obedience to the sacred

covenants made in temples qualifies us for eternal life—the greatest gift of God to man⁴⁰—the “object and end of our existence.”⁴¹

The Atonement Enabled the Purpose of the Creation to Be Accomplished

23. The Creation required the Fall. The Fall required the Atonement. The Atonement enabled the purpose of the Creation to be accomplished. Eternal life, made possible by the Atonement, is the supreme purpose of the Creation. To phrase that statement in its negative form, if families were not sealed in holy temples, the whole earth would be utterly wasted.⁴²
24. The purposes of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement all converge on the sacred work done in temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The earth was created and the Church was restored to make possible the sealing of wife to husband, children to parents, families to progenitors, worlds without end.
25. This is the great latter-day work of which we are a part. That is why we have missionaries; that is why we have temples—to bring the fullest blessings of the Atonement to faithful children of God. That is why we respond to our own calls from the Lord. When we comprehend His voluntary Atonement, any sense of sacrifice on our part becomes completely overshadowed by a profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of serving Him.
26. As one of the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”⁴³ I testify that He is the Son of the living God. Jesus is the Christ—our atoning Savior and Redeemer. This is His Church, restored to bless God’s children and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Jacob 4:12.
2. The relationships of these components are found linked together in several scriptures, such as Alma 18:34–39; Morm. 9:12; D&C 20:17–24.
3. They were created as mortal beings—“without mortality”—not at that time subject to death.
4. See Alma 12:21–23.
5. 2 Ne. 2:23.
6. See Gen. 1:28; Moses 2:28.
7. 2 Ne. 2:25.
8. We should remember that God forgave Adam and Eve their transgression (see Moses 6:53).
9. Such as platelets and thrombin.

10. Eliza R. Snow, “O My Father,” Hymns, no. 292.
11. Moses 5:5.
12. Lev. 17:11.
13. Alma 42:8.
14. 1 Cor. 15:22; see also Mosiah 16:7–8.
15. See 2 Ne. 2:7; also “Behold the Great Redeemer Die,” Hymns, no. 191.
16. See Luke 13:32.
17. 1 Cor. 15:50–53.
18. Such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and German.
19. We might even surmise that if an individual qualifies for the blessings of the Atonement (through obedience to the principles and ordinances of the gospel), Jesus will “cover” our past transgressions from the Father.
20. 2 Ne. 1:15.
21. Morm. 5:11; additional examples are in Alma 5:33; Alma 34:16.
22. See Lev. 5:18; Lev. 27:26.
23. See Lev. 9:18.
24. See Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12.
25. See Lev. 16:10.
26. See John 19:31–33.
27. See Rom. 5:11.
28. Atonement=24; plus atone, atoning, or atoned=8; plus atoneth=3; total 35 times.
29. See 2 Ne. 9:7; 2 Ne. 25:16; Alma 34:10, 12, 14.
30. See Heb. 10:10.
31. See D&C 76:24; Moses 1:33.
32. See John 3:16.
33. D&C 18:11.
34. See Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18.
35. See Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5.
36. 3 Ne. 9:16; see also D&C 6:21; D&C 10:57; D&C 11:29; D&C 39:3; D&C 45:8; D&C 133:66.
37. John 19:28.
38. Mark 14:36. The word Abba is significant. Ab means “father”; Abba is an endearing and tender form of that term. The nearest English equivalent might be Daddy.
39. Centuries later, the Lord shared innermost recollections of this experience with the Prophet Joseph Smith, the record of which we read in Doctrine and Covenants 19.
40. See D&C 14:7.
41. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (1978), 568.
42. See D&C 2:3; D&C 138:48.
43. D&C 107:23

Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into our Lives,” *General Conference, April 2017, Excerpt only*

1. My dear brothers and sisters, we live in a most difficult dispensation. Challenges, controversies, and complexities swirl around us. These turbulent times were foreseen by the Savior. He warned us that in our day the adversary would stir up anger in the hearts of men and lead them astray. Yet our Heavenly Father never intended that we would deal with the maze of personal problems and social issues on our own.
2. God so loved the world that He sent His Only Begotten Son to help us. And His Son, Jesus Christ, gave His life for us. All so that we could have access to godly power—power sufficient to deal with the burdens, obstacles, and temptations of our day. Today I would like to speak

about how we can draw into our lives the power of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

3. We begin by learning about Him. “It is impossible for [us] to be saved in ignorance.” The more we know about the Savior’s ministry and mission—the more we understand His doctrine and what He did for us—the more we know that He can provide the power that we need for our lives.
4. Earlier this year, I asked the young adults of the Church to consecrate a portion of their time each week to study everything Jesus said and did as recorded in the standard works. I invited them to let the scriptural citations about Jesus Christ in the Topical Guide become their personal core curriculum.
5. I gave that challenge because I had already accepted it myself. I read and underlined every verse cited about Jesus Christ, as listed under the main heading and the 57 subtitles in the Topical Guide. When I finished that exciting exercise, my wife asked me what impact it had on me. I told her, “I am a different man!”
6. I felt a renewed devotion to Him as I read again in the Book of Mormon the Savior’s own statement about His mission in mortality. He declared:
7. “I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.
“And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross.”
8. As Latter-day Saints, we refer to His mission as the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which made resurrection a reality for all and made eternal life possible for those who repent of their sins and receive and keep essential ordinances and covenants.
9. It is doctrinally incomplete to speak of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice by shortcut phrases, such as “the Atonement” or “the enabling power of the Atonement” or “applying the Atonement” or “being strengthened by the Atonement.” These expressions present a real risk of misdirecting faith by treating the event as if it had living existence and capabilities independent of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.
10. Under the Father’s great eternal plan, it is the Savior who suffered. It is the Savior who broke the bands of death. It is the Savior who paid the price for our sins and transgressions and blots them out on condition of our repentance. It is the Savior who delivers us from physical and spiritual death.
11. There is no amorphous entity called “the Atonement” upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source. Sacred terms such as Atonement and Resurrection describe what the Savior did, according to the Father’s plan, so that we may live with hope in this life and gain eternal life in the world to come. The Savior’s atoning sacrifice—the central act of all human history—is best understood and appreciated when we expressly and clearly connect it to Him.
12. The importance of the Savior’s mission was emphasized by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who declared emphatically that “the fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”
13. It was this very statement of the Prophet that provided the incentive for 15 prophets, seers, and revelators to issue and sign their testimony to commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of the Lord’s birth. That historic testimony is titled “The Living Christ.” Many members have memorized its truths. Others barely know of its existence. As you seek to learn more about Jesus Christ, I urge you to study “The Living Christ.”
14. As we invest time in learning about the Savior and His atoning sacrifice, we are drawn to participate in another key element to accessing His power: we choose to have faith in Him and follow Him....
15. Faith in Jesus Christ propels us to do things we otherwise would not do. Faith that motivates us to action gives us more access to His power.
16. We also increase the Savior’s power in our lives when we make sacred covenants and keep those covenants with precision. Our covenants bind us to Him and give us godly power. As faithful disciples, we repent and follow Him into the waters of baptism. We walk along the covenant path to receive other essential ordinances. And gratefully, God’s plan provides for those blessings to be extended to ancestors who died without an opportunity to obtain them during their mortal lives....
17. Another element in drawing the Savior’s power into our lives is to reach up to Him in faith. Such reaching requires diligent, focused effort.
18. Do you remember the biblical story of the woman who suffered for 12 years with a debilitating problem? She exercised great faith in the Savior, exclaiming, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.”
19. This faithful, focused woman needed to stretch as far as she could to access His power. Her physical stretching was symbolic of her spiritual stretching.
20. Many of us have cried out from the depths of our hearts a variation of this woman’s words: “If I could spiritually stretch enough to draw the Savior’s power into my life, I would know how to handle my heart-wrenching situation. I would know what to do. And I would have the power to do it.”
21. When you reach up for the Lord’s power in your life with the same intensity that a drowning person has when grasping and gasping for air, power from Jesus Christ will be yours. When the Savior knows you truly want to reach up to Him—when He can feel that the greatest desire of your heart is to draw His power into your life—you will be led by the Holy Ghost to know exactly what you should do....
22. The gospel of Jesus Christ is filled with His power, which is available to every earnestly seeking daughter or son of God. It is my testimony that when we draw His power into our lives, both He and we will rejoice....

Week 2 - The INTIMATE Atonement

Scripture and Other Readings: 3 Nephi 11:11-17; 17; 19:15-35; Mosiah 28:1-5; Moses 6:31-34; 7:27-69

Invitation Week 2:

Find one person that you have not yet met and get to know them. Find out what the Lord loves about them and how the atonement has become an intimate experience for them. Spend time sharing your testimony one-on-one with someone this week.

M. Russell Ballard, "The Atonement and the Value of One Soul," *General Conference, April 2004*

1. This past January our family suffered the tragic loss of our grandson Nathan in an airplane crash. Nathan had served in the Russian-speaking Baltic Mission. He loved the people and knew it was a privilege to serve the Lord. Three months after I officiated at his eternal marriage to his sweetheart, Jennifer, this accident took his life. Nathan's being taken so suddenly from our mortal presence has turned each of our hearts and minds to the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. While it is impossible for me to put into words the full meaning of the Atonement of Christ, I pray that I can explain what His Atonement means to me and our family and what it might also mean to you and yours.
2. The Savior's precious birth, life, Atonement in the Garden of Gethsemane, suffering on the cross, burial in Joseph's tomb, and glorious Resurrection all became a renewed reality for us. The Savior's Resurrection assures all of us that someday we, too, will follow Him and experience our own resurrection. What peace, what comfort this great gift is which comes through the loving grace of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. Because of Him we know we can be with Nathan again.
3. There is no greater expression of love than the heroic Atonement performed by the Son of God. Were it not for the plan of our Heavenly Father, established before the world began, in a very real sense, all mankind—past, present, and future—would have been left without the hope of eternal progression. As a result of Adam's transgression, mortals were separated from God (see [Rom. 6:23](#)) and would be forever unless a way was found to break the bands of death. This would not be easy, for it required the vicarious sacrifice of one who was sinless and who could therefore take upon Himself the sins of all mankind.
4. Thankfully, Jesus Christ courageously fulfilled this sacrifice in ancient Jerusalem. There in the quiet isolation of the Garden of Gethsemane, He knelt among the gnarled olive trees, and in some incredible way that none of us can fully comprehend, the Savior took upon Himself the sins of the world. Even though His life was pure and free of sin, He paid the ultimate penalty for sin—yours, mine, and everyone who has ever lived. His mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish were so great they caused Him to bleed from every pore (see [Luke 22:44](#); [D&C 19:18](#)). And yet Jesus suffered willingly so that we might all have the opportunity to be washed clean—through having faith in Him, repenting of our sins, being baptized by proper priesthood authority, receiving the purifying gift of the Holy Ghost by confirmation, and accepting all other essential ordinances. Without the Atonement of the Lord, none of these blessings would be available to us, and we could not become worthy and prepared to return to dwell in the presence of God.
5. The Savior later endured the agony of inquisition, cruel beatings, and death by crucifixion on the cross at Calvary. Recently, there has been a great deal of commentary about this, none of which has made clear the singular point that no one had the power to take the Savior's life from Him. He gave it as a ransom for us all. As the Son of God, He had the power to alter the situation. Yet the scriptures clearly state that He yielded Himself to scourging, humiliation, suffering, and finally crucifixion because of His great love towards the children of men (see [1 Ne. 19:9–10](#)).
6. The Atonement of Jesus Christ was an indispensable part of our Heavenly Father's plan for His Son's earthly mission and for our salvation. How grateful we should be that our Heavenly Father did not intercede but rather withheld His fatherly instinct to rescue His Beloved Son. Because of His eternal love for you and for me, He allowed Jesus to complete His foreordained mission to become our Redeemer. The gift of resurrection and immortality is given freely through the loving grace of Jesus Christ to all people of all ages, regardless of their good or evil acts. And to those who choose to love the Lord and who show their love and faith in Him by keeping His commandments and qualifying for the full blessings of the Atonement, He offers the additional promise of exaltation and eternal life, which is the

blessing of living in the presence of God and His Beloved Son forever.

7. We often sing a hymn that expresses what I feel when I consider the Savior's benevolent, atoning sacrifice:
8. I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me, Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me. I tremble to know that for me he was crucified, That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.
9. Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind, is not dead. He lives—the resurrected Son of God lives—that is my testimony, and He guides the affairs of His Church today.
10. In the spring of 1820, a pillar of light illuminated a grove of trees in upstate New York. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This experience began the restoration of powerful doctrinal truths that had been lost for centuries. Among those truths that had been dimmed by the darkness of apostasy was the stirring reality that we are all the spirit sons and daughters of a loving God who is our Father. We are part of His family. He is not a father in some allegorical or poetic sense. He is literally the Father of our spirits. He cares for each one of us. Though this world has a way of diminishing and demeaning men and women, the reality is we are all of royal, divine lineage. In that unprecedented appearance of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove, the very first word spoken by the Father of us all was the personal name of Joseph. Such is our Father's personal relationship with each of us. He knows our names and yearns for us to become worthy to return to live with Him.
11. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith came the Restoration of the gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ has once again revealed, through His chosen prophet, the ordinances and the priesthood authority to administer them for the salvation of all who will believe.
12. Another prophet in another time was shown "the nations of the earth" (Moses 7:23). "And the Lord showed Enoch all things, even unto the end of the world" (Moses 7:67). Enoch saw also that Satan "had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he [Satan] looked up and laughed" (Moses 7:26).
13. With all that Enoch beheld, there was one thing that seemed to capture his attention above everything else. Enoch saw God look "upon the residue of the people, and He wept" (Moses 7:28). The sacred record then has Enoch asking God over and over: "How is it that thou canst weep? ... How is it thou canst weep?" (Moses 7:29–31).
14. The Lord answered Enoch: "Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands ... ; unto thy brethren have I ... also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Moses 7:32–33).
15. Enoch saw the conditions of these latter days. He and other early prophets knew that only as we accept the Atonement in our lives and strive to live the gospel can we meet the challenges of life and find peace, joy, and happiness. Coming to understand this great gift is an individual pursuit for each child of God.
16. Brothers and sisters, I believe that if we could truly understand the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would realize how precious is one son or daughter of God. I believe our Heavenly Father's everlasting purpose for His children is generally achieved by the small and simple things we do for one another. At the heart of the English word atonement is the word one. If all mankind understood this, there would never be anyone with whom we would not be concerned, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, or social or economic standing. We would strive to emulate the Savior and would never be unkind, indifferent, disrespectful, or insensitive to others.
17. If we truly understood the Atonement and the eternal value of each soul, we would seek out the wayward boy and girl and every other wayward child of God. We would help them to know of the love Christ has for them. We would do all that we can to help prepare them to receive the saving ordinances of the gospel.
18. Surely, if the Atonement of Christ was foremost in the minds of ward and branch leaders, no new or reactivated member would ever be neglected. Because every soul is so precious, leaders will counsel together to see that each one is taught the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
19. When I think of Nathan and how precious he is to us, I can see and feel more clearly how our Heavenly Father must feel about all of His children. We do not want God to weep because we did not do all we could to share with His children the revealed truths of the gospel. I pray that every one of our youth will seek to know the blessings of the Atonement and that they will strive to be worthy to serve the Lord in the mission field. Surely many more senior couples and others whose health will permit would eagerly desire to serve the Lord as missionaries if they would ponder over the meaning of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who said, "If ... you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:15; emphasis added). Not only that, but great shall be the Lord's joy in the soul that repenteth! For precious unto Him is the one.
20. Brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father has reached out to us through the Atonement of our Savior. He invites all to "come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption" (Omni 1:26). He has taught us that it is through our faithful adherence to gospel principles, through receiving the saving ordinances that have been restored, through continual service, and by enduring to the end that we can return to His sacred presence. What possible thing in the whole world is remotely as important as to know this?
21. Sadly, in today's world, a person's importance is often judged by the size of the audience before which he or she

performs. That is how media and sports programs are rated, how corporate prominence is sometimes determined, and often how governmental rank is obtained. That may be why roles such as father, mother, and missionary seldom receive standing ovations. Fathers, mothers, and missionaries “play” before very small audiences. Yet, in the eyes of the Lord, there may be only one size of audience that is of lasting importance—and that is just one, each one, you and me, and each one of the children of God. The irony of the Atonement is that it is infinite and eternal, yet it is applied individually, one person at a time.

22. There is a level at which the child’s hymn “I Am a Child of God” (Hymns, no. 301) harmonizes with the music of eternity. We are children of God. Each one of us is precious to the point of bringing the Lord God Almighty to a fulness of joy if we are faithful, or to tears if we are not.
23. As the resurrected Savior said to the Nephites, so He might say to us today:
24. “Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

25. “And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” (3 Ne. 17:20–21; emphasis added).
26. Brothers and sisters, never, never underestimate how precious is the one. Remember always the simple admonition of the Lord: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Always strive to live worthy of the sacred full blessings of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. In our sorrow over the separation from our dear Nathan has come the peace that only the Savior and Redeemer can give. Our family has turned to Him, one by one; and we now sing with greater appreciation and understanding:
27. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me
Enough to die for me!
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!
28. My dear brothers and sisters, may you give to others and receive for yourselves every blessing the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ offers, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Behold The Man,” *General Conference, April, 2018*

1. Today is a sacred day. It is Easter Sunday, when we commemorate that glorious morning when our Savior broke the bands of death¹ and emerged triumphant from the tomb.

The Greatest Day in History

2. Recently I asked the internet, “What day most changed the course of history?”
3. The responses ranged from surprising and strange to insightful and thought-provoking. Among them, the day when a prehistoric asteroid struck the Yucatán Peninsula; or when in 1440, Johannes Gutenberg finished his printing press; and, of course, the day in 1903 when the Wright brothers showed the world that man really can fly.
4. If the same question were asked of you, what would you say?
5. In my mind the answer is clear. To find the most important day in history, we must go back to that evening almost 2,000 years ago in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus Christ knelt in intense prayer and offered Himself as a ransom for our sins. It was during this great and infinite sacrifice of unparalleled suffering in both body and spirit that Jesus Christ, even God, bled at every pore. Out of perfect love, He gave all that we might receive all. His supernal sacrifice, difficult to comprehend, to be felt only with all our heart and mind, reminds us of the universal debt of gratitude we owe Christ for His divine gift.
6. Later that night, Jesus was brought before religious and political authorities who mocked Him, beat Him, and sentenced Him to a shameful death. He

hung in agony upon the cross until, finally, “it [was] finished.”² His lifeless body was laid in a borrowed tomb. And then, on the morning of the third day, Jesus Christ, the Son of Almighty God, emerged from the tomb as a glorious, resurrected being of splendor, light, and majesty.

7. Yes, there are many events throughout history that have profoundly affected the destiny of nations and peoples. But combine them all, and they cannot begin to compare to the importance of what happened on that first Easter morning.
8. What is it that makes the infinite sacrifice and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ the most important event in history—more influential than world wars, cataclysmic disasters, and life-changing scientific discoveries?

Because of Jesus Christ, We Can Live Again

9. The answer lies in two great, insurmountable challenges that every one of us faces.
10. First, we all die. No matter how young, beautiful, healthy, or cautious you are, someday your body will become lifeless. Friends and family will mourn you. But they cannot bring you back.
11. Nevertheless, because of Jesus Christ, your death will be temporary. Your spirit one day will reunite with your body. This resurrected body will not be subject to death,³ and you will live in the eternities, free from pain and physical suffering.⁴
12. This will happen because of Jesus the Christ, who laid down His life and took it up again. He did this for all who believe in Him. He did this for all who do not believe in Him.

He did this even for those who mock, revile, and curse His name.⁵

Because of Jesus Christ, We Can Live with God

13. Second, we have all sinned. Our sins would forever keep us from living with God, because “no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom.”⁶
14. As a result, every man, woman, and child was shut out of His presence—that is, until Jesus Christ, the Lamb without spot, offered His life as a ransom for our sins. Because Jesus owed no debt to justice, He could pay our debt and meet the demands of justice for every soul. And that includes you and me.
15. Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins. All of them.
16. On that most important day in history, Jesus the Christ opened the gates of death and cast aside the barriers that prevented us from passing into the holy and hallowed halls of everlasting life. Because of our Lord and Savior, you and I are granted a most precious and priceless gift—regardless of our past, we can repent and follow the path that leads to celestial light and glory, surrounded by the faithful children of Heavenly Father.

Why We Rejoice

17. This is what we celebrate on Easter Sunday—we celebrate life!
18. Because of Jesus Christ, we will rise from the despair of death and embrace those we love, shedding tears of overwhelming joy and overflowing gratitude. Because of Jesus Christ, we will exist as eternal beings, worlds without end.
19. Because of Jesus the Christ, our sins can not only be erased; they can be forgotten. We can become purified and exalted. Holy.
20. Because of our beloved Savior, we can forever drink from the fountain of water that springs up into eternal life.⁷ We can dwell forever in the mansions of our eternal King, in unimaginable glory and perfect happiness.

Do We “Behold the Man”?

21. In spite of all this, there are many in the world today who are either not aware of or do not believe in the precious gift Jesus Christ has given us. They may have heard of Jesus Christ and know of Him as a historical figure, but they do not see Him for who He truly is.
22. When I think of this, I am reminded of the Savior standing before the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate, just a few hours before the Savior’s death.
23. Pilate viewed Jesus from a strictly worldly perspective. Pilate had a job to do, and it involved two major tasks: collecting taxes for Rome and keeping the peace. Now the Jewish Sanhedrin had brought before him a man who they claimed was an obstacle to both.⁸
24. After interrogating his prisoner, Pilate announced, “I find in him no fault at all.”⁹ But he felt he had to

appease Jesus’s accusers, so Pilate called upon a local custom that allowed one prisoner to be released during Passover season. Would they not have him release Jesus instead of the notorious robber and murderer Barabbas?¹⁰

25. But the tumultuous mob demanded that Pilate release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.
26. “Why?” Pilate asked. “What evil [has] he done?”
27. But they only shouted the louder. “Crucify him!”¹¹
28. In one final effort to satisfy the mob, Pilate ordered his men to scourge Jesus.¹² This they did, leaving Him bloodied and bruised. They mocked Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, and clothed Him in a purple robe.¹³
29. Perhaps Pilate thought this would satisfy the mob’s lust for blood. Perhaps they would take pity on the man. “Behold, I bring him forth to you,” Pilate said, “that ye may know that I find no fault in him. . . . Behold the man!”¹⁴
30. The Son of God stood in the flesh before the people of Jerusalem. They could see Jesus, but they did not truly behold Him. They did not have eyes to see.¹⁵
31. In a figurative sense, we too are invited to “behold the man.” Opinions about Him vary in the world. Ancient and modern prophets testify that He is the Son of God. I do this too. It is significant and important that we each come to know for ourselves. So, when you ponder the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, what do you see?
32. Those who find a way to truly behold the Man find the doorway to life’s greatest joys and the balm to life’s most demanding despairs.
33. So, when you are encompassed by sorrows and grief, behold the Man. When you feel lost or forgotten, behold the Man. When you are despairing, deserted, doubting, damaged, or defeated, behold the Man. He will comfort you. He will heal you and give meaning to your journey. He will pour out His Spirit and fill your heart with exceeding joy.¹⁶ He gives “power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”
34. When we truly behold the Man, we learn of Him and seek to align our lives with Him. We repent and strive to refine our natures and daily grow a little closer to Him. We trust Him. We show our love for Him by keeping His commandments and by living up to our sacred covenants. In other words, we become His disciples.
35. His refining light saturates our souls. His grace uplifts us. Our burdens are lightened, our peace deepened. When we truly behold the Man, we have the promise of a blessed future that inspires and upholds us through the bends and bumps in life’s journey. Looking back, we will recognize that there is a divine pattern, that the dots really connect.¹⁸

36. As you accept His sacrifice, become His disciple, and finally reach the end of your earthly journey, what will become of the sorrows you have endured in this life?

They will be gone.

The disappointments, betrayals, persecutions you have faced?

Gone.

The suffering, heartache, guilt, shame, and anguish you have passed through?

Gone.

Forgotten.

37. Is it any wonder that “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ ... that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins”?¹⁹ Is it any wonder that we strive with all our hearts to truly behold the Man?

38. My beloved brothers and sisters, I testify that the most important day in the history of mankind was the day when Jesus Christ, the living Son of God, won the victory over death and sin for all of God’s children. And the most important day in your life and mine is the day when we learn to “behold the man”; when we see Him for who He truly is; when we partake with all our heart and mind of His atoning power; when with renewed enthusiasm and strength, we commit to follow Him. May that be a day that recurs over and over again throughout our lives.

39. I leave you my testimony and blessing that as we “behold the man,” we will find meaning, joy, and peace in this earthly life and eternal life in the world to come. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Tad R. Callister, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” General Conference, April 2019

1. At this season of the year we particularly rejoice and reflect upon the Savior’s Atonement. It is indeed the most supernal, mind-expanding, passionate doctrine this world or universe has ever known. It is what gives hope and purpose to our lives.
2. What then is the Atonement of Jesus Christ? In one sense, it is a series of divine events that commenced in the Garden of Gethsemane, continued on the cross, and culminated with the Savior’s Resurrection from the tomb. It was motivated by an incomprehensible love for each of us. It required a being who was sinless; who had infinite power over the elements—even death; who possessed a boundless capacity to suffer the consequences of all our sins and ailments; and who, in fact, descended beneath it all. This was the mission of Jesus Christ—this was His Atonement.
3. What then was its purpose? It was to make it possible for us to return to God’s presence, become more like Him, and have a fulness of joy. This was done by overcoming four obstacles:
4. Physical death
Spiritual death caused by Adam and by our sins
Our afflictions and infirmities
Our weaknesses and imperfections
5. But how can the Savior accomplish this without violating the laws of justice?
6. Suppose for a moment a man contemplating an exhilarating free fall makes a rash decision and spontaneously jumps from a small plane. After doing so, he quickly realizes the foolishness of his actions. He wants to land safely, but there is an obstacle—the law of gravity. He moves his arms with astounding speed, hoping to fly, but to no avail. He positions his body to float or glide to slow the descent, but the law of gravity is

unrelenting and unmerciful. He tries to reason with this basic law of nature: “It was a mistake. I will never do it again.” But his pleas fall on deaf ears. The law of gravity knows no compassion; it makes no exceptions. Fortuitously, though, the man suddenly feels something on his back. His friend in the plane, sensing the moment of foolishness, had placed a parachute there just before the jump. He finds the rip cord and pulls it. Relieved, he floats safely to the ground. We might ask, “Was the law of gravity violated, or did that parachute work within that law to provide a safe landing?”

7. When we sin, we are like the foolish man who jumped from the plane. No matter what we do on our own, only a crash-landing awaits us. We are subject to the law of justice, which, like the law of gravity, is exacting and unforgiving. We can be saved only because the Savior, through His Atonement, mercifully provides us with a spiritual parachute of sorts. If we have faith in Jesus Christ and repent (meaning we do our part and pull the rip cord), then the protective powers of the Savior are unleashed on our behalf and we can land spiritually unharmed.
8. This is possible, however, only because the Savior overcame the four obstacles that can prevent our spiritual progress.

Death

9. He overcame death through His glorious Resurrection. The Apostle Paul taught, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Sin

10. The Savior overcame sin and guilt for all those who repent. So deep and expansive is His cleansing power that Isaiah promised, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

11. On occasion, I have met with good Saints who have had trouble forgiving themselves, who have innocently but incorrectly placed limits on the Savior's redemptive powers. Unwittingly, they have converted an infinite Atonement to a finite one that somehow falls short of their particular sin or weakness. But it is an infinite Atonement because it encompasses and circumscribes every sin and weakness, as well as every abuse or pain caused by others.
12. Truman G. Madsen made this comforting observation:
13. "If there are some of you who have been tricked into the conviction that you have gone too far, ... that you have had the poison of sin which makes it impossible ever again to be what you could have been—then hear me.
14. "I bear testimony that you cannot sink farther than the light and sweeping intelligence of Jesus Christ can reach. I bear testimony that as long as there is one spark of the will to repent and to reach, he is there. He did not just descend to your condition; he descended below it, 'that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.' [Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.]"
15. One reason it is so essential to understand the Savior's Atonement and its infinite implications is that with increased understanding comes an increased desire to forgive ourselves and others.
16. Even though we may believe in Christ's cleansing powers, the question often arises: "How do I know if I have been forgiven of my sins?" If we feel the Spirit, then that is our witness that we have been forgiven, or that the cleansing process is taking place. President Henry B. Eyring taught, "If you have felt the influence of the Holy Ghost ... , you may take it as evidence that the Atonement is working in your life."
17. Some have asked, "But if I am forgiven, why do I still feel guilt?" Perhaps in God's mercy the memory of that guilt is a warning, a spiritual "stop sign" of sorts that, at least for a time, cries out when additional temptations confront us: "Don't go down that road. You know the pain it can bring." In this sense, it serves as a protection, not a punishment.
18. Is it possible, then, to remember our sins and still be free of guilt?
19. Alma remembered his sins, even years after he repented. But when he cried unto Jesus for mercy, he said, "I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more."
20. How could he remember his sins but have no pain or guilt? Because when we repent, we are "born of God." We become, as the scriptures say, "new creatures" in Christ. With perfect honesty we can now say, "I am not the man or woman who

committed those past sins. I am a new and transformed being."

Afflictions and Infirmities

21. Alma prophesied that Christ "shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind." Why? "That his bowels may be filled with mercy, ... that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities."
22. How does He accomplish this? Sometimes He removes the affliction, sometimes He strengthens us to endure, and sometimes He gives us an eternal perspective to better understand their temporary nature. After Joseph Smith had languished in Liberty Jail for about two months, he finally cried out, "O God, where art thou?" Instead of providing instant relief, God responded, "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high."
23. Joseph now understood that this bitter experience was but a dot on the eternal spectrum. With this enhanced vision, he wrote the Saints from that same prison cell, "Dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God." Because of the Savior's Atonement, we can have an eternal perspective that gives meaning to our trials and hope for our relief.

Weaknesses and Imperfections

24. Because of His Atonement, the Savior has enabling powers, sometimes referred to as grace, that can help us overcome our weaknesses and imperfections and thus assist us in our pursuit to become more like Him
25. Moroni so taught: "Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ." There seem at least two channels or means of availing ourselves of those enabling powers that can refine—even perfect—us.
26. First, the saving ordinances. The scriptures tell us, "In the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest." Sometimes we may think of ordinances as a checklist—necessary for exaltation; but in truth each unleashes a godly power that helps us become more like Christ. For example:
27. When we are baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are made clean—thus becoming more holy like God.
28. In addition, through the Holy Ghost, our minds may be enlightened and our hearts softened so we can think and feel more like Him.
29. And when we are sealed as spouses, we inherit the right to "thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers" as gifts from God.

Week 3 - God's Plan from the Beginning

Scripture and Other Readings: Alma 13; 22; JST John 1; Abr. 3; Moses 4; D&C 93:6-39

Invitation Week 3:

Ponder scriptures about the pre-mortal life and try to imagine what life was like there. Read and study your patriarchal blessing and look for qualities that you possess to understand why Heavenly Father had faith in you to send you to earth in the latter days.

Dallin H. Oaks, “The Godhead and the Plan of Salvation,” General Conference, April 2017

1. Our first article of faith declares, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” We join other Christians in this belief in a Father and a Son and a Holy Ghost, but what we believe about Them is different from the beliefs of others. We do not believe in what the Christian world calls the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In his First Vision, Joseph Smith saw two distinct personages, two beings, thus clarifying that the then-prevailing beliefs concerning God and the Godhead were not true.
 2. In contrast to the belief that God is an incomprehensible and unknowable mystery is the truth that the nature of God and our relationship to Him is knowable and is the key to everything else in our doctrine. The Bible records Jesus’s great Intercessory Prayer, where He declared that “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).
- Holy Bible**
3. The effort to know God and His work began before mortality and will not be concluded here. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “It will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned ... all the principles of exaltation.”¹ We build on the knowledge we acquired in the premortal spirit world. Thus, in trying to teach Israelites the nature of God and His relationship to His children, the prophet Isaiah declared, as recorded in the Bible:
 4. “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? ... “Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?” (Isaiah 40:18, 21).
 5. We know that the three members of the Godhead are separate and distinct beings. We know this from instruction given by the Prophet Joseph Smith: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22).
 6. As to the supreme position of God the Father within the Godhead, as well as the respective roles each personage performs, the Prophet Joseph explained:
- The Prophet Joseph Smith**
7. “Any person that had seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and one presides over all. ...
 8. “... These personages ... are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator.
 9. “[It is] the province of the Father to preside as the Chief or President, Jesus as the Mediator, and the Holy Ghost as the Testator or Witness.”²
- The Plan**
10. We understand our relationship to the members of the Godhead from what is revealed about the plan of salvation.
 11. Questions like “Where did we come from?” “Why are we here?” and “Where are we going?” are answered in what the scriptures call the “plan of salvation,” the “great plan of happiness,” or the “plan of redemption” (Alma 42:5, 8, 11). The gospel of Jesus Christ is central to this plan.
 12. As spirit children of God, in an existence prior to mortality, we desired a destiny of eternal life but had progressed as far as we could without a mortal experience in a physical body. To provide that opportunity, our Heavenly Father presided over the Creation of this world, where, deprived of our memory of what preceded our mortal birth, we could prove our willingness to keep His commandments and experience and grow through the other challenges of mortal life. But in the course of that mortal experience, and as a result of the Fall of our first parents, we would suffer spiritual death by being cut off from the presence of God, be soiled by sin, and become subject to physical

death. The Father's plan anticipated and provided ways to overcome all of those barriers.

The Godhead

13. Knowing the purpose of God's great plan, we now consider the respective roles of the three members of the Godhead in that plan.
14. We begin with a teaching from the Bible. In concluding his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul makes this almost offhand reference to the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion [or fellowship³] of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).
15. This biblical scripture represents the Godhead and references the all-defining and motivating love of God the Father, the merciful and saving mission of Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

God the Father

16. It all begins with God the Father. While we know comparatively little about Him, what we know is decisive in understanding His supreme position, our relationship to Him, and His superintending role in the plan of salvation, the Creation, and all else that followed.
17. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote just before his death: "In the ultimate and final sense of the word, there is only one true and living God. He is the Father, the Almighty Elohim, the Supreme Being, the Creator and Ruler of the universe."⁴ He is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, as well as of all of us. President David O. McKay taught that "the first fundamental truth advocated by Jesus Christ was this, that behind, above and over all there is God the Father, Lord of heaven and earth."⁵
18. What we know of the nature of God the Father is mostly what we can learn from the ministry and teachings of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught, one of the paramount purposes of Jesus's ministry was to reveal to mortals "what God our Eternal Father is like, ... to reveal and make personal to us the true nature of His Father, our Father in Heaven."⁶ The Bible contains an apostolic witness that Jesus was "the express image" of His Father's person (Hebrews 1:3), which merely elaborates Jesus's own teaching that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).
19. God the Father is the Father of our spirits. We are His children. He loves us, and all that He does is for our eternal benefit. He is the author of the plan of salvation, and it is by His power that His plan achieves its purposes for the ultimate glory of His children.

The Son

20. To mortals, the most visible member of the Godhead is Jesus Christ. A great doctrinal statement by the First Presidency in 1909 declares Him to be "the firstborn among all the sons of God—the first begotten in the spirit, and the only begotten in the flesh."⁷ The Son, the greatest of all, was chosen by the Father to carry out the

Father's plan—to exercise the Father's power to create worlds without number (see Moses 1:33) and to save the children of God from death by His Resurrection and from sin by His Atonement. This supernal sacrifice is truly called "the central act of all human history."⁸

The Lord Jesus Christ

21. On those unique and sacred occasions when God the Father personally introduced the Son, He has said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; see also 3 Nephi 11:7; Joseph Smith—History 1:17). Thus, it is Jesus Christ, Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel, who speaks to and through the prophets.⁹ So it is that when Jesus appeared to the Nephites after His Resurrection, He introduced Himself as "the God of the whole earth" (3 Nephi 11:14). So it is that Jesus often speaks to the prophets of the Book of Mormon and to the Latter-day Saints as "the Father and the Son," a title explained in the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve's inspired doctrinal exposition just 100 years ago.¹⁰

The Holy Ghost

22. The third member of the Godhead is the Holy Ghost, also referred to as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Comforter. He is the member of the Godhead who is the agent of personal revelation. As a personage of spirit (see D&C 130:22), He can dwell in us and perform the essential role of communicator between the Father and the Son and the children of God on earth. Many scriptures teach that His mission is to testify of the Father and the Son (see John 15:26; 3 Nephi 28:11; D&C 42:17). The Savior promised that the Comforter will teach us all things, bring all things to our remembrance, and guide us into all truth (see John 14:26; 16:13). Thus, the Holy Ghost helps us discern between truth and falsehood, guides us in our major decisions, and helps us through the challenges of mortality.¹¹ He is also the means by which we are sanctified, that is, cleansed and purified from sin (see 2 Nephi 31:17; 3 Nephi 27:20; Moroni 6:4).
23. So, how does understanding this heavenly revealed doctrine about the Godhead and the plan of salvation help us with our challenges today?
24. Because we have the truth about the Godhead and our relationship to Them, the purpose of life, and the nature of our eternal destiny, we have the ultimate road map and assurance for our journey through mortality. We know whom we worship and why we worship. We know who we are and what we can become (see D&C 93:19). We know who makes it all possible, and we know what we must do to enjoy the ultimate blessings that come through God's plan of salvation. How do we know all of this? We know by the revelations of God to His prophets and to each of us individually.
25. Attaining what the Apostle Paul described as "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) requires far more than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough for us to be convinced of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are

converted by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ challenge us to become something.

26. As President Thomas S. Monson taught us in our last general conference:
“Essential to the plan [of salvation] is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Without His atoning sacrifice, all would be lost. It is not enough, however, merely to believe in Him and His mission. We need to work and learn, search and pray, repent and improve. We need to know God’s laws and live them.

Supplemental Readings:

New Testament Institute Student Manual pp 335-337

1. You belong to the family of Israel. By inheritance or adoption you may lay claim to every blessing reserved for Israel. Not all the reasons for your blessings are because of your conduct in this world; some go back into the beginning with God. Review the following scriptures and carefully study the dialogue between David and John.

Romans 9:11, 12

2. Did God bestow the same favors on Jacob and Esau? Was mortal performance the basis for God’s favoring Jacob over Esau—had there been opportunity for either child to do either good or evil at the time of the indication of favor?

Romans 9:14

3. Does the fact that God favored Jacob over Esau even at the time of birth mean that God arbitrarily selects those upon whom his favors will be bestowed without reference to their worthiness or obedience?

Romans 9:18–20

4. When we look at God’s dealings with men from a purely mortal perspective, it is difficult to see why he gives to one blessings that he may withhold from another. The questions in verse 19 are the questions asked by those who have no understanding of a premortal life. Is it appropriate to challenge God, or to suggest that he is not fair in placing us in the stations we occupy in this world? If two souls are born into this world in seemingly unequal circumstances, and God is just, what had to occur to justify God’s placing them in unequal circumstances?

David

5. If some of the circumstances in which I find myself are based upon my conduct before, where did I begin? When did I start?

John

6. Well, first of all, there is an eternity of spirit matter. “Our spirit matter was eternal and co-existent with God, but it was organized into spirit bodies by our Heavenly Father.” (Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 5.) “All men were first born in pre-existence as the literal spirit offspring of God our Heavenly Father. This birth constituted the beginning of the human ego as a

We need to receive His saving ordinances. Only by so doing will we obtain true, eternal happiness.

27. “From the depths of my soul and in all humility,” President Monson declared, “I testify of the great gift which is our Father’s plan for us. It is the one perfect path to peace and happiness both here and in the world to come.”
28. I add my testimony to that of our beloved prophet-president. I testify that we have a Heavenly Father, who loves us. I testify that we have a Holy Ghost, who guides us. And I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who makes it all possible, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

conscious identity. By the ordained procreative process our exalted and immortal Father begat his spirit progeny in pre-existence.” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 84.) “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.” (The First Presidency [Joseph Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund], “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, p. 78.)

David

7. If I was born in the premortal world, what experiences did I go through there that provided God with a basis to favor or restrict me in this world?

John

8. We lived there in the home of our Father in heaven.
9. “He is a resurrected and holy and perfected man, and we are his offspring. We are his spirit children. He lives in the family unit. We are members of his family. We lived in this premortal life with him for an infinite period of time. We were on probation; we were being schooled and tested and examined; we were given the laws and the circumstances so that we could progress and advance. . . .
10. “This system was given to us, and for an infinite period of time, we advanced and progressed and did things that enabled us to go along the course leading to exaltation and dominion and godhood. . . .
11. “In this prior life, this premortal existence, this pre-existence, we developed various capacities and talents. Some developed them in one field and some in another. The most important of all fields was the field of spirituality, the ability, the talent, the capacity to recognize truth.” (Bruce R. McConkie, as cited in *When Thou Art Converted, Strengthen Thy Brethren, A Study Guide for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of the Church, 1974–75*, pp. 8–9.)
12. “Our spirit bodies went through a long period of growth and development and training and, having passed the test successfully, were finally admitted to this earth and to mortality.” (Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 5.)
13. “Preexistence is not some remote and mysterious place. All of us are but a few years removed from the Eternal Presence, from him whose children we are and in whose house we dwell. . . .

14. “. . . We know we had friends and associates there. We know we were schooled and trained and taught in the most perfect educational system ever devised, and that by obedience to his eternal laws we developed infinite varieties and degrees of talents. . . .
15. “. . . When we come into mortality, we bring the talents, capacities, and abilities acquired by obedience to law in our prior existence.” (Bruce R. McConkie in CR, Apr. 1974, pp. 101–3.)

David

16. I am to understand, then, that I was born as the spirit son of God in heaven, that I lived there with my Father and mother in heaven and with my spirit brothers and sisters, and that I had opportunities to learn, to be tested, and to develop talents and abilities?

John

17. That is right. Some accounts that we have of the premortal life teach that we “were on the same standing” (Alma 13:5), and that we were “innocent” in the beginning (D&C 93:38). We were given laws and agency, and commandments to have faith and repent from the wrongs that we could do there. “. . . Man could and did in many instances, sin before he was born. . . .” (Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, p. 44.)
18. “God gave his children their agency even in the spirit world, by which the individual spirits had the privilege, just as men have here, of choosing the good and rejecting the evil, or partaking of the evil to suffer the consequences of their sins. . . . some even there were more faithful than others in keeping the commandments of the Lord. . . .
19. “The spirits of men . . . had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it.” (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:58–59.)
20. Many responded to the spirit of God there. They were favored and foreordained to receive privileges.
21. “. . . And it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish; therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.” (Alma 13:10, 11 ; compare McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 477.)
22. “Now this is the doctrine of foreordination; this is the doctrine of election. This is the reason why the Lord has a chosen and favored and peculiar people on earth; and this is why he said: ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.’” (Bruce R. McConkie in CR, Apr. 1974, p. 103.)

David

23. But what of those in pre-mortality who rejected the Spirit of God and did not exercise exceeding great faith and

repentance and righteousness before God? (See Alma 13:4, 10 .)

John

24. They were not able to enjoy the great privileges that others were foreordained to receive. (See Alma 13:4 .) They “did not show the loyalty to their Redeemer that they should.” (Smith, *Way to Perfection*, p. 43.)

David

25. But weren’t they allowed to come into the world innocent, too?

John

26. Yes. They were innocent at the time of their mortal birth. (See D&C 93:38) Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said this:
27. “Their sin was not one that merited the extreme punishment which was inflicted on the devil and his angels. They were not denied the privilege of receiving the second estate, but were permitted to come to the earth-life with some restrictions placed upon them. . . . Yet, like all other spirits who come into this world, they come innocent before God so far as mortal existence is concerned, and here, under certain restrictions, they may work out their second estate.” (*Way to Perfection*, pp. 43, 44. Emphasis added.)
28. Hence, some in this world receive great privileges and opportunities to receive the gospel because they chose to do good in preexistence. Others are limited here because they were not as “noble and great” there. (See Abraham 3:22)

David

29. And how does the concept of Israel enter into this?

John

30. The family of Jacob is somehow involved in preexistence.
31. “Israel is an eternal people. Members of that chosen race first gained their inheritance with the faithful in the premortal life. Israel was a distinct people in pre-existence. Many of the valiant and noble spirits in that first estate were chosen, elected, and foreordained to be born into the family of Jacob, so as to be natural heirs of all of the blessings of the gospel. It was to their pre-existent status that Moses alluded when, in speaking to mortal Israel, he said: ‘Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.’ (Deut. 32:7–9) Those of mortal Israel who walk uprightly in this second estate shall have eternal inheritance with Israel in the world to come.” (McConkie, *DNTC*, 2:284.)

David

32. So the fact that I am here now and receiving the blessings and opportunities that I now receive means that I have already passed the test, under different circumstances and conditions?

John

33. Yes. And if you succeed here in this second estate, you shall not only be entitled to advantages in the world to come (D&C 130:19), but you “shall have glory added upon [your head] for ever and ever.” (Abraham 3:26.)

YOU MUST BE FAITHFUL HERE TO RETAIN YOUR BIRTHRIGHT AND MERIT THE BLESSINGS YOU WERE ELECTED TO RECEIVE

34. Does birthright by itself secure your eternal destiny? Will Israel be saved just because they are of Israel? Read Romans 10:11–13.
35. Of course, the gentiles in Paul’s day had not had the same opportunities to receive the gospel as had members of the house of Israel. But did members of the house of Israel receive the rewards of the gospel just because they had the advantage of hearing about the gospel before the gentiles?
36. “The house of Israel was a distinct people in pre-existence; that is, by obedience and devotion, certain of the spirit children of the Father earned the right to be born in the lineage of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of being natural heirs to the blessings of the gospel. But some of them, after such a favored birth, after being numbered with the chosen seed, turn from the course of righteousness and become children of the flesh; that is,

they walk after the manner of the world, rejecting the spiritual blessings held in store for Israel. They are disinherited; they shall not continue as children in the family of the prophets when the chosen race continues as a distinct people in the eternal worlds. Thus they are descendants of the prophets in this life but shall not inherit with the sons of God in the life to come.” (McConkie, DNTC, 2:276–77.)

37. “. . . there are many among us who because of their faithfulness in the spirit world were ‘called’ to do a great work here, but like reckless spendthrifts they are exercising their free agency in riotous living and are losing their birthright and the blessings that were theirs had they proved faithful to their calling.” (Lee, Youth and the Church, p. 172.)
38. Now what of you? For all that has been said of Israel applies to you. You were vitally interested and personally involved there.
39. What shall you do, and what shall you be, here? You came from God, and you have been given great privileges and blessings here because of your faithfulness. But you will go back one day, and you will answer for all these blessings, for as Paul wrote, “Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12.)

“The Atonement of Jesus Christ: Glad Tidings of Great Joy,” 2007 Sperry Symposium, 239-241

1. From our first beginnings, it was knowledge of Christ’s atonement that gave us hope that we could come to earth and overcome the challenges of this mortal existence and obtain a fullness of joy (Alma 13:1-12). Living in the presence of God, we learned that without a physical body we could not receive a fullness of joy (D&C 93:29-35). In order to obtain a body, we would need to come to earth and experience mortality. As the plan unfolded regarding the separation that would take place because of sin and the need for a Savior, we became fully aware of the unlimited capacity that would be required by he who would fulfill the role of redeemer. When Christ stood to accept the role as Savior, it was not simply the offering of a kind, wishful brother. Through the eons and eternities, he alone had lived fully every word that our Father in Heaven had instructed and had attained a fullness of light. Not only was he willing to perform the role of redeemer, he also possessed the ability to fulfill such an infinite task. He was in very deed the Word of God.
2. Some of us showed exceeding great faith in the Word and the redemption that would come through Christ’s atonement. As spirit children of God, we were witnesses of his infinite goodness. We felt his great love for us. With this evidence as the foundation of our faith, we chose to follow him. We exercised faith in his ability to fulfill God’s plan and were thus allowed to come to earth. We knew that he was the only one with the infinite capacity and love to do as he promised. From the foundation of the world, Christ was prepared to redeem

all those who would believe on his name that we might receive joy (Alma 22:13-15). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains,

3. He who was beloved and chosen from the beginning then became the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; he was then chosen and foreordained to be the One who would work out the infinite and eternal atonement. “Behold I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people,” he said to the brother of Jared. “Behold, I am Jesus Christ.” (Ether 3:14.) And so before mortal men were, before Adam fell that men might be, before there was mortality and procreation and death—before all this, provision was made for the redemption. (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [SLC: Deseret Book Co., 1985], 110.)

4. The knowledge of Christ’s atoning power taught to us in our pre-mortal existence penetrated deep into the fibers of our spirits and became engraved in the spiritual countenances (Alma 5:14) of those who believed in Christ. This knowledge provided a light for all of us who chose to follow our Father’s plan and enabled us to discern good from evil in order to see our way through our mortal existence. With this light, we took courage and were confident that we could make the journey to earth and return home to our Father. The light of Christ was given to every one of us that we might be persuaded to “lay hold on every good thing” so that we could become as our Father in Heaven (Moroni 7:15-25).

Week 4 - Overcoming the effects of the Fall

Scripture and Other Readings: 2 Nephi 2; Moses 3-5; D&C 29:34-47; Alma 42

Invitation Week 4:

Memorize Moses 5:11. Reflect upon times in your life when you have experienced a personal fall. Write down how the atonement has overcome the negative effects of your fall so that you can comprehend the joy of your redemption. Record the positive effects that have come from your fall because you have applied the atoning blood of Christ to cover your fall.

Harold B. Lee, "The Fall of Man," CES Summer School Lecture given June 23, 1954, 62-77

1. Shortly before his death, the late Elder Matthew Cowley of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was invited to the temple to perform a marriage ceremony, and in a few remarks just before he performed the ceremony, he said something like this to the young couple:
2. "This is a great experience in your life—one of the greatest experiences; in fact, there is only one experience that you will ever have that is greater than this one, and that is the experience you will have when you die."
3. That was to the young couple a rather startling expression and yet one which carried with it a great understanding and at the same time a great conviction as to the purpose of death as the climax of mortal life.
4. As I have followed along the thinking of Brother Cowley, I have remembered a part of the revelation given in the book of Job, where a question was asked:
5. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. . . .
6. "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).
7. What was the thing that caused that great shout? Imagine how many there were in that great concourse who must have heard some thrilling news, had received some great vision, had been given some great understanding that caused the stars of morning to sing and all the sons of God to shout for joy. There is no doubt but that it had reference to the same thing to which Abraham made reference when he saw the organized intelligences gathered together before the world was organized, and among these were many of the great and noble ones (see Abraham 3:22).
8. To these the plan was revealed that would permit each to come here to the earth to be added upon, a body added to each spirit to take upon himself the experience of mortality and then to gain the right through a successful sojourn in mortality to return back into the presence of God. That prospect, undoubtedly, was accompanied by the vision of what this earth was to be like, the place where he was to come for this experience. He didn't see it as a molten mass, inert, not able to sustain life, but he must have been given a glimpse of the beautiful earth that we so cherish, that when our life's span has run we might go back to "that God who gave [us] life" (Alma 40:11).
9. We so love life and love our associates and love all the things that life brings here on this beautiful earth, with all its trials and vicissitudes, that we are loath to leave here to go elsewhere, because there has been taken from us the memory of our preexistence. As I have thought of that, I have wondered about the leaving of each one of the spirits, each in its time, having accepted now the call which had come to enter mortal life. The full purpose of the plan had been outlined to the spirit children as each came to his leave-taking.
10. Believing, as I do, that all things earthly are but typical of things heavenly or vice versa, I can imagine that as each one left and suffered a separation from former acquaintances, there was a sadness of heart—perhaps they held a funeral service, comparable to what we hold; maybe someone stood in the pulpit and re-preached the instructions of the Father and comforted those who were a bit lonely at the passing of a loved one.
11. "Now, haven't you faith in what the Father has said?" the preacher may have said. "Satan is there with a third of the hosts trying to destroy, but there will be a plan provided by which all of you can return back eventually. And after having the experience, you will have the opportunity then to gain a body which shall live forever and shall not be subject to death thereafter."
12. And so they may have been comforted. But just as that farewell comfort was given over there, there was rejoicing over the arrival of that spirit child here in this mortality—into the home of some couple. The friends, the neighbors gathered around and looked at the little infant child and said, "He looks like his father."
13. "She looks like her mother." Usually the father's folks say it looks like the mother, and the mother's folks say it looks like the father. In fact, it didn't look like anything but itself, and here it was, bringing a bit of joy and rejoicing into some home.
14. Now it's span of mortal life takes place—three score and ten, more or less— and the tables are reversed. That spirit

that came into a baby body now has a body which has grown to the full stature of its spirit, if it has grown to manhood, and goes back to that God which gave it life. And we hold another funeral service here. We try to comfort the folks who are mourning its passing. Another chapter of life has been completed, but this passing is an even greater passing than the coming here from the spirit world, because now it has gained something that it did not have before—a great opportunity to live in the presence of the Lord if the person has been successful in earth life.

15. As I have contemplated that thinking about life and death, I have thought that all of that prospect brought great joy to the great concourse of spirits, so much so that they sang for joy, and all of the sons of God shouted at the opportunity and the prospect.
16. To me, the subject of this discussion is the crowning act of the entire Creation, the act by which all creation which had been made according to plan was to become mortal and therefore subject to death in order that all might live again. Why did the sons of God shout for joy? The plan was carefully laid. The 4th and 5th chapters of the book of Abraham lay the foundation for what we may refer to as the “blueprint” of the Lord’s Creation: how the Gods counseled together and the head God, with the other Gods, planned each step carefully. Then we find the revelation given to John saying, “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).
17. So not only was there a plan of the organization of the earth, with each step defined, but also the Gods understood the plan for the coming of man upon the earth, the Lamb to be slain from the foundation of the world—suggesting that in the plan was the need for a Savior and a Redeemer. A Savior from what? A Redeemer from what? If there be a Redeemer, there must be a cause that made a Redeemer necessary. It is about that cause that we now concern ourselves.
18. We find the Master speaking of this same thing when He said:
19. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).
20. Consider that dramatic experience when Lazarus had sickened and was nigh unto death, and Martha and Mary sent for Jesus, who was nearby with His disciples.
21. But He delayed His coming for several days, and then He said He was going to Lazarus, who was sleeping, and He was going now to wake him. Some of them, not understanding, said, “If he sleep, he shall do well.” The Master said, putting it more plainly, “Lazarus is dead.”
22. Now, you remember as He approached, Martha rushed out to meet Him. Mary, overcome by grief, remained in her home, comforted by friends. Martha, through her tears, said:
23. “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. “But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.”
24. With compassion, the Master looked upon her and said, “Thy brother shall rise again.”
25. Martha said to him, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection.”
26. And then came that great declaration of the mission and the purpose of the life of the Master:
27. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
28. “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”
29. And then from the depths of this humble woman, who had on another occasion complained because Mary spent so much time listening to the words of the Master that she was neglecting the housework (see Luke 10:38–42)—it was she who then said, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (See John 11:1–27.)
30. If the Master had replied to her as He did to Peter, when Peter declared a similar testimony (see Matthew 16:15–17), He would probably have said something like this: “Blessed art thou, Martha, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” She was given a glimpse, in other words, of the mission of the Son of God as the Savior of the world. The Master declared that He was the resurrection and the life and that whosoever believed in Him should never die. Now, what did that mean? It didn’t mean what some of the world has considered it to mean, but it meant something that had to do with what we are going to discuss today and which we refer to as the Fall.
31. To accept the reality of the Fall and the Atonement is to immediately defeat the teachings of the theories of the so-called scientific men. President Joseph Fielding Smith sets that distinction up sharply in this quotation from Robert Blatchford’s book *God and My Neighbor*, in which Blatchford says this: “But no Adam, no Fall; no Fall no Atonement; no Atonement no Savior. Accepting evolution, how can we believe in a Fall? When did man fall; was it before he ceased to be a monkey, or after? Was it when he was a tree man, or later? Was it in the Stone Age, or the Bronze Age, or in the Age of Iron? . . . And if there never was a Fall, why should there be any Atonement?”¹
32. And when you begin to see that, you see how vital to all we are teaching is an understanding of the Fall, making necessary the Atonement—hence the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Recently President J. Reuben Clark and I were talking about some of these things—about some who perhaps claim membership in the Church but who deny the Fall and therefore deny the need for the Atonement and even the Atonement itself.
33. President Clark said, “If they really only knew it, they are not Christians, because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world.”

34. Then Brother Smith makes this sharp statement (just before quoting from Robert Blatchford's book): "Of course, a man who believes that man has descended from lower forms of life, and by gradual development after an enormous length of time evolved from fish to reptile and then to ape, can never understand the fall of man and the atonement. These truths are mysteries to him and only contempt and abuse do they receive from him."²
35. Now, let us go back again and review some of the things as they pertain to the story of the Fall. I am not relating anything new; every student of the scriptures and certainly those who are teaching in our seminaries should all have learned well the story, which is simply related in the scriptures. That plan laid in heaven, spoken of but briefly in the book of Abraham, was simply this—the Lord said:
36. "We will go down . . . , and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [spirits] may dwell;
37. "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;
38. "And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever" (Abraham 3:24–26).
39. Now, the plan and the purpose were, then, to give to preexistent spirits the opportunity of gaining what? Glory and honor forever and ever. The author of the book of John—after speaking of Jesus as the word of God's power who came into the world, by whom all things were created and without whom was not anything made that was made (see John 1:1–3, 10)—writes:
40. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:11–12).
41. As discussed in an earlier lecture, the Son gained the title of Father because those that accept Him are adopted into the Church of the Firstborn, and thus by adoption He becomes the spiritual Father of those who accept Him. Now, that plan by which these should come was spoken of by the Lord to Moses in this significant statement that we repeat time and time again: "This is my work and my glory— to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). It was that purpose which the Lord had in mind with Adam and Eve, just as He had it in mind with all of Adam and Eve's posterity and ourselves—that everyone should have the opportunity of gaining those two things.
42. In the discussion of this plan in the heavens, you recall the contest between the two great opposing forces. You will find that the Lord had revealed to Moses:
43. "That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—
44. Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1).
45. That was set forth in another scripture in which Isaiah explains that same desire of Satan for the power which was to be given only to the Father:
46. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!
47. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:
48. "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.
49. "Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isaiah 14:12–15).
50. The Lord continues His inspired explanation to Moses:
51. "But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.
52. "Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;
53. "And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.
54. "And now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which I, the Lord God, had made.
55. "And Satan put it into the heart of the serpent, (for he had drawn away many after him,) and he sought also to beguile Eve, for he knew not the mind of God, wherefore he sought to destroy the world" (Moses 4:2–6).
56. How the Fall took place and the purposes of the Fall are explained in a revelation which the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Doctrine and Covenants.
57. The Lord says this: "Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created" (D&C 29:34). Every command He gave to Adam was for a spiritual purpose.
58. He gave him two commands—one was that he should multiply and replenish the earth, and the other was that he should not partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But "behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.
59. "And it came to pass that Adam, being tempted of the devil—for, behold, the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which

- is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency;
60. “And they were thrust down, and thus came the devil and his angels;
 61. “And, behold, there is a place prepared for them from the beginning, which place is hell.
 62. “And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—
 63. “Wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment, wherein he became subject to the will of the devil, because he yielded unto temptation” (D&C 29:35–40).
 64. Now, that same truth was taught by Father Lehi, who said to his son, speaking of these same matters:
 65. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.
 66. “Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God.
 67. “And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness.
 68. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.
 69. “And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:11–14).
 70. And then follows this great teaching that we have heard quoted many times in connection with this subject:
 71. “And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter” (2 Nephi 2:15).
 72. The forbidden fruit was sweet, but the tree of life was bitter, and how like life that is. Sometimes the things that are best for us and the things that bring eternal rewards seem at the moment to be the most bitter, and the things forbidden are oftentimes the things which seem to be the more desirable. And then Lehi said this:
 73. “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself.
 74. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).
 75. Now, here we have two great principles involved. The plan our Father had was to bring to pass immortality and eternal life in our first parents. The next principle that must be observed is that they had to do it by the exercise of their own agency. In the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, that same principle is set forth in what the Lord says:
 76. “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence” (D&C 93:30).
 77. Now, here was our Father in Heaven, bound by that eternal law, according to the plan which had been made to bring about mortality. But it had to be done by the act of will, or agency, by Adam and Eve themselves.
 78. And so what happened? Satan—with all his cunning and, as the Lord said to Moses, not knowing the mind of God (see Moses 4:6)—was permitted to enter into the body of a serpent and speak through that serpent to Adam and Eve.
 79. Adam and Eve had had taken from them the memory of their preexistence in order that they might walk by faith. They were in this garden which was very desirable and beautiful, and they had not been told that they should not partake of any other of the fruits of the garden except the forbidden fruit. They had even partaken of the fruit of the tree of life, I assume, prior to the forbidding that came thereafter.
 80. This fruit must have been of a celestial nature. By eating it they could have lived forever, as they were told later. They may have even been partaking of this fruit all along before this time. And Satan, in his cunning, not knowing the mind of God, sought to destroy the plan, or “destroy the world” (Moses 4:6).
 81. Now, he came first to Eve and tempted her to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He tempted her through the same means by which he has tempted womankind from that time to this. He appealed to her vanity, to the appetites which are of the flesh and for the pleasure of man.
 82. That is a pretty strong temptation. And so Eve partook because she was deceived by Satan, the scriptures tell us. She was deceived.
 83. It wasn’t because she understood that the great purpose of God would be realized if she did partake. She didn’t understand that. She was deceived by Satan, and so she was in transgression of that law.
 84. Then again to bring about the fall of Adam, Satan put it into her mind to give the forbidden fruit to her husband. And so Adam partook.

85. Now, the Lord had constructed that fruit in such a way as to make the partaking of it sow into the bloodstream the seeds of death. I give the thinking of Brother James E. Talmage, who writes in two great books which will be preserved, I guess, as long as we shall live as a church, which will be forever. From his book *Jesus the Christ*, I quote this: “The man and the woman had now become mortal; through indulgence in food unsuited to their nature and condition and against which they had been specifically warned, and as the inevitable result of their disobeying the divine law and commandment, they became liable to the physical ailments and bodily frailties to which mankind has since been the natural heir. Those bodies, which before the fall had been perfect in form and function, were now subjects for eventual dissolution or death.”³
86. And again this regarding the nature of the Fall:
87. “The crowning scene of the great drama of creation was the forming of man in the image of his spiritual Father, God. For the reception of the first man the Creator had especially prepared a choice region of earth, and had embellished it with natural beauties to gladden the heart of its possessor. .
88. “The temptation to disobey [the] injunction [not to partake of the forbidden fruit] soon came. Satan presented himself before Eve in the garden, and, speaking by the mouth of the serpent, questioned her about the commandments that God had given respecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eve answered that they were forbidden even to touch the fruit of that tree, under penalty of death. Satan then sought to beguile the woman, contradicting the Lord’s statement and declaring that death would not follow a violation of the divine injunction; but that, on the other hand, by doing that which the Lord had forbidden she and her husband would become like unto the gods, knowing good and evil for themselves. The woman was captivated by these representations; and, being eager to possess the advantages pictured by Satan, she disobeyed the command of the Lord, and partook of the fruit forbidden.
89. She feared no evil, for she knew it not. Then, telling Adam what she had done, she urged him to eat of the fruit also.
90. “Adam found himself in a position that made it impossible for him to obey both of the specific commandments given by the Lord. He and his wife had been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth. Adam had not yet fallen to the state of mortality, but Eve already had; and in such dissimilar conditions the two could not remain together, and therefore could not fulfil the divine requirement as to procreation. On the other hand, Adam would be disobeying another commandment by yielding to Eve’s request.
91. He deliberately and wisely decided to stand by the first and greater commandment; and, therefore, with understanding of the nature of his act, he also partook of the fruit that grew on the tree of knowledge.”⁴
92. May I quote something else related to what some of the enemies of truth have taught in an effort to contradict this story. Brother Talmage wrote again about the Fall:
93. “Here let me say that therein consisted the fall—the eating of things unfit, the taking into the body of the things that made of that body a thing of earth: and I take this occasion to raise my voice against the false interpretation of scripture, which has been adopted by certain people, and is current in their minds, and is referred to in a hushed and half-secret way, that the fall of man consisted in some offense against the laws of chastity and of virtue. Such a doctrine is an abomination. What right have we to turn the scriptures from their proper sense and meaning? What right have we to declare that God meant not what He said?
94. The fall was a natural process, resulting through the incorporation into the bodies of our first parents of the things that came from food unfit, through the violation of the command of God regarding what they should eat. Don’t go around whispering that the fall consisted in the mother of the race losing her chastity and her virtue. It is not true; the human race is not born of fornication. These bodies that are given unto us are given in the way that God has provided. Let it not be said that the patriarch of the race, who stood with the gods before he came here upon the earth, and his equally royal consort, were guilty of any such foul offense.
95. The adoption of that belief has led many to excuse departures from the path of chastity and the path of virtue, by saying that it is the sin of the race, that it is as old as Adam. It was not introduced by Adam. It was not committed by Eve. It was the introduction of the devil and came in order that he might sow the seeds of early death in the bodies of men and women, that the race should degenerate as it has degenerated whenever the laws of virtue and of chastity have been transgressed.
96. “Our first parents were pure and noble, and when we pass behind the veil we shall perhaps learn something of their high estate, more than we know now. But be it known that they were pure; they were noble. It is true that they disobeyed the law of God, in eating things they were told not to eat; but who amongst you can rise up and condemn?”⁵
97. Satan had performed his function; he had been permitted to become the tempter by God. Adam and Eve had now exercised their agency and of their own volition had partaken of the fruit of which they were commanded not to eat, and thus they had become subject to the law of Satan. In that disobedience God was now free to visit upon them a judgment.
98. They were to learn that besides God being a merciful Father, He is also a just Father, and when they broke the law, they were subject to the receiving of a penalty. So they were cast out of that beautiful garden. They were visited upon by all the vicissitudes to which mortals from that time since have been heir. They were to learn that by their disobedience, they received the penalty of a just judgment.

99. They were forced to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and so they had become mortals. Instead of spirit fluid, which had made them not subject to death, there had now come another element. The life of the body is the blood, and in the bloodstream there were to be found the seeds that were to bring about their mortal death. Pain, misery, and death all now came in the wake of the Fall, but with that pain, quite like our experience from that time to this, there came knowledge and understanding that could never have been gained except in this way. I think that the Apostle Paul may have had something like this in mind when he said:
100. “Though he were a Son [meaning the Son of God], yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;
101. “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8–9).
102. Thus the plan of salvation came. This is beautifully set forth in the book of Moses.
103. There is explained the way by which all of us can obtain joy. (See Moses 5:4–11; 6:51–68.)
104. The plan of salvation was the way by which they could climb back, as mortals, to gain this prized estate called eternal life. The plan of salvation was nothing more or less than a series of commandments.
105. We call them principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is called the new and everlasting covenant or the everlasting covenant—“new” because it applies to us and is new in this dispensation. The plan of salvation taught men how to worship the Lord.
106. They were told to offer sacrifices. They were given the opportunity to be baptized by water, that they might receive the benefits of the Atonement, even as the Apostle Paul taught to the Galatians:
107. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus . . . and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28–29).
108. It was also the Apostle Paul who said to the Corinthians, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). He was a learned man; he had studied under some of the greatest teachers of law of his day. (I suppose we would call him a lawyer today.) But when he came among the people of Corinth, he said, “I am determined that I teach nothing, that I know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”
109. If teachers would understand their callings, they would say that same thing, time and time again. “My mission and purpose is to teach ‘nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified’—the meaning of the Atonement and the plan of salvation.”
110. After Adam and Eve and their posterity had been baptized that they might be made partakers thereby of the benefits of the Atonement, they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Adam also held the holy priesthood (see Moses 6:67; D&C 107:40–41). And thus, by baptism, being justified by the Holy Ghost, and having the priesthood, Adam was blessed to become, as stated in the closing words of Moses 6, “a son of God” (v. 68), or a member of the Church of the Firstborn. Now, besides the Fall having had to do with Adam and Eve, a change coming over them, that change also affected all human nature, all of the natural creation of animals and plants. All kinds of life were affected by the Fall. The earth itself became subject to death. One time it must also be cleansed. How the change took place no one can explain, and anyone who would attempt to make an explanation would be going far beyond anything the Lord has told us. But a change was wrought over the whole face of His creation, which up to that time had not been subject to death, and from that time henceforth it was in a state of gradual dissolution until mortal death was to come, requiring a resurrection there from.
111. But now there came that thrilling announcement, which was given voice again by the Apostle Paul in his great teachings on the Resurrection: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).
112. The saint and the sinner, the rich, the poor, the good, the bad—everybody—all who have lived upon the earth shall be entitled to resurrection and to come forth in the Day of Judgment.
113. Now, about the change that resulted from the Fall, some of our Presidents have spoken rather plainly, and I quote to you one or two paragraphs first from President Brigham Young: “How did Adam and Eve sin? Did they come out in direct opposition to God and to his government?”
114. No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord, and through that transgression sin came into the world. . . .
115. Then came the curse upon the fruit, upon the vegetables, and upon our mother earth; and it came upon the creeping things, upon the grain in the field, the fish in the sea, and upon all things pertaining to this earth, through man’s transgression.”⁶
116. Parley P. Pratt speaks upon that change. He describes it thus: “We can never understand precisely what is meant by restoration, unless we understand what is lost or taken away.” And then he describes how the earth was pronounced very good. “From this we learn that there were neither deserts, barren places, stagnant swamps, rough, broken, rugged hills; nor vast mountains, covered with eternal snow; and no part of it was located in the frigid zone, so as to render its climate dreary and unproductive, subject to eternal frost, or everlasting chains of ice . . . but the whole earth was probably one vast plain, or interspersed with gently rising hills, and sloping vales, well calculated for cultivation.”⁷ He is describing what he surmises may have been the glory of the Creation.
117. Now, finally, may we read again the Lord’s great pronouncement, the revelation that came by the power of the Holy Ghost to Eve—one of the greatest sermons. (I suppose the shortest sermon ever preached by a person was preached by Mother Eve.) With this I close, in

addition to quoting the echoing statement from Adam himself. Mother Eve declared that the power of the Holy Ghost opened her eyes and gave her understanding. She said, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11).

118. I would ask all of you to memorize this scripture, so that all can have it clearly in mind. So should we, with Eve, rejoice in the Fall, which permitted the coming of the knowledge of good and evil, which permitted the coming of children into mortality, which permitted the receiving of joy of redemption and the eternal life which God gives to all.
119. And so Adam likewise, blessed with the gift of the Holy Ghost, “blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying:

Supplemental Readings:

Jeffrey R. Holland, “Where Justice, Love, and Mercy Meet,” *General Conference, April 2015*

1. Without safety ropes, harnesses, or climbing gear of any kind, two brothers—Jimmy, age 14, and John, age 19 (though those aren’t their real names)—attempted to scale a sheer canyon wall in Snow Canyon State Park in my native southern Utah. Near the top of their laborious climb, they discovered that a protruding ledge denied them their final few feet of ascent. They could not get over it, but neither could they now retreat from it. They were stranded. After careful maneuvering, John found enough footing to boost his younger brother to safety on top of the ledge. But there was no way to lift himself. The more he strained to find finger or foot leverage, the more his muscles began to cramp. Panic started to sweep over him, and he began to fear for his life.
2. Unable to hold on much longer, John decided his only option was to try to jump vertically in an effort to grab the top of the overhanging ledge. If successful, he might, by his considerable arm strength, pull himself to safety.
3. In his own words, he said: “Prior to my jump I told Jimmy to go search for a tree branch strong enough to extend down to me, although I knew there was nothing of the kind on this rocky summit. It was only a desperate ruse. If my jump failed, the least I could do was make certain my little brother did not see me falling to my death.
4. “Giving him enough time to be out of sight, I said my last prayer—that I wanted my family to know I loved them and that Jimmy could make it home safely on his own—then I leapt. There was enough adrenaline in my spring that the jump extended my arms above the ledge almost to my elbows. But as I slapped my hands down on the surface, I felt nothing but loose sand on flat stone. I can still remember the gritty sensation of hanging there with nothing to hold on to—no lip, no ridge, nothing to grab or grasp. I felt my fingers begin

120. Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10).
121. May the Lord give us His understanding of the great boon that has thus come to us. And let us honor in our minds and in our teachings the great legacy which Adam and Eve gave to us when, through their experience, by the exercise of their own agency, they partook of fruit which gave them the seeds of mortal life and gave to us, their descendants down through the generations of time, that great boon by which we could receive the joy of our redemption, and in our flesh see God, and have eternal life.

to recede slowly over the sandy surface. I knew my life was over.

5. “But then suddenly, like a lightning strike in a summer storm, two hands shot out from somewhere above the edge of the cliff, grabbing my wrists with a strength and determination that belied their size. My faithful little brother had not gone looking for any fictitious tree branch. Guessing exactly what I was planning to do, he had never moved an inch. He had simply waited—silently, almost breathlessly—knowing full well I would be foolish enough to try to make that jump. When I did, he grabbed me, held me, and refused to let me fall. Those strong brotherly arms saved my life that day as I dangled helplessly above what would surely have been certain death.”¹
6. My beloved brothers and sisters, today is Easter Sunday. Although we should *always* remember (we promise in our weekly sacramental prayers that we will), nevertheless this is the most sacred day of the year for special remembrance of brotherly hands and determined arms that reached into the abyss of death to save us from our fallings and our failings, from our sorrows and our sins. Against the background of this story reported by John and Jimmy’s family, I express my gratitude for the Atonement and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge events in the divine plan of God that led up to and give meaning to “the love Jesus offers [us].”²
7. In our increasingly secular society, it is as uncommon as it is unfashionable to speak of Adam and Eve or the Garden of Eden or of a “fortunate fall” into mortality. Nevertheless, the simple truth is that we *cannot* fully comprehend the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ and we *will not* adequately appreciate the unique purpose of His birth or His death—in other words, there is no way to truly celebrate Christmas *or* Easter—without understanding that there was an actual Adam

and Eve who fell from an actual Eden, with all the consequences that fall carried with it.

8. I do not know the details of what happened on this planet before that, but I do know these two were created under the divine hand of God, that for a time they lived alone in a paradisiacal setting where there was neither human death nor future family, and that through a sequence of choices they transgressed a commandment of God which required that they leave their garden setting but which allowed them to have children before facing physical death.³ To add further sorrow and complexity to their circumstance, their transgression had spiritual consequences as well, cutting them off from the presence of God forever. Because we were then born into that fallen world and because we too would transgress the laws of God, we also were sentenced to the same penalties that Adam and Eve faced.
9. What a plight! The entire human race in free fall—every man, woman, and child in it physically tumbling toward permanent death, spiritually plunging toward eternal anguish. Is that what life was meant to be? Is this the grand finale of the human experience? Are we all just hanging in a cold canyon somewhere in an indifferent universe, each of us searching for a toehold, each of us seeking for something to grip—with nothing but the feeling of sand sliding under our fingers, nothing to save us, nothing to hold on to, much less anything to hold on to us? Is our only purpose in life an empty existential exercise—simply to leap as high as we can, hang on for our prescribed three score years and ten, then fail and fall, and keep falling forever?
10. The answer to those questions is an unequivocal and eternal no! With prophets ancient and modern, I testify that “all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.”⁴ Thus, from the moment those first parents stepped out of the Garden of Eden, the God and Father of us all, anticipating Adam and Eve’s decision, dispatched the very angels of heaven to declare to them—and down through time to us—that this entire sequence was designed for our eternal happiness. It was part of His divine plan, which provided for a Savior, the very Son of God Himself—another “Adam,” the Apostle Paul would call Him⁵—who would come in the meridian of time to atone for the first Adam’s transgression. That Atonement would achieve complete victory over physical death, unconditionally granting resurrection to every person who has been born or ever will be born into this world. Mercifully it would also provide forgiveness for the personal sins of all, from Adam to the end of the world, conditioned upon repentance and obedience to divine commandments.
11. As one of His ordained witnesses, I declare this Easter morning that Jesus of Nazareth was and is that Savior of the world, the “last Adam,”⁶ the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Alpha and Omega of eternal life. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,”⁷ Paul declared. And from the prophet-patriarch Lehi: “Adam fell that men might be. . . . And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.”⁸ Most thoroughly of all, the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob taught as part of a two-day sermon on the Atonement of Jesus Christ that “the resurrection must . . . come . . . by reason of the fall.”⁹
12. So today we celebrate the gift of victory over every fall we have ever experienced, every sorrow we have ever known, every discouragement we have ever had, every fear we have ever faced—to say nothing of our resurrection from death and forgiveness for our sins. That victory is available to us because of events that transpired on a weekend precisely like this nearly two millennia ago in Jerusalem.
13. Beginning in the spiritual anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane, moving to the Crucifixion on a cross at Calvary, and concluding on a beautiful Sunday morning inside a donated tomb, a sinless, pure, and holy man, the very Son of God Himself, did what no other deceased person had ever done nor ever could do. Under His own power, He rose from death, never to have His body separated from His spirit again. Of His own volition, He shed the burial linen with which He had been bound, carefully putting the burial napkin that had been placed over His face “in a place by itself,”¹⁰ the scripture says.
14. That first Easter sequence of Atonement and Resurrection constitutes the most consequential moment, the most generous gift, the most excruciating pain, and the most majestic manifestation of pure love ever to be demonstrated in the history of this world. Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, suffered, died, and rose from death in order that He could, like lightning in a summer storm, grasp us as we fall, hold us with His might, and through our obedience to His commandments, lift us to eternal life.
15. This Easter I thank Him and the Father, who gave Him to us, that Jesus still stands triumphant over death, although He stands on wounded feet. This Easter I thank Him and the Father, who gave Him to us, that He still extends unending grace, although He extends it with pierced palms and scarred wrists. This Easter I thank Him and the Father, who gave Him to us, that we can sing before a sweat-stained garden, a nail-driven cross, and a gloriously empty tomb:
16. How great, how glorious, how complete
Redemption’s grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!
17. In the sacred name of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ,
amen

Richard G. Scott, "The Atonement Can Secure Your Peace and Happiness," October 2006

1. Our Father in Heaven wants each of us to enjoy peace and happiness in mortal life. Our Master, Jesus Christ, and His prophets have taught how to have that peace and happiness, even in a world that is ever more challenging, with increasing conflict and an intense concentration of alluring temptations.
2. I will illustrate the wrong way to find peace and happiness, and then the proper way, by using an analogy to rock climbing. There are those who attempt to scale a difficult rock cliff by a method called "soloing." They ascend alone, without equipment, companions, or any secure protection. They depend on their own skill and capacity. They do it for the thrill of living on the edge with high risk. It is done despite the probability that in time they will fall and be seriously injured or lose their life. They are like many who face the challenges and temptations of life without the security of following the commandments of God, guided by the Holy Spirit. In today's difficult world they will almost surely violate critical laws, with painful, destructive consequences. Do not "solo" in life. You will almost certainly fall into transgression.
3. There is a safer way to rock climb. When a pair of climbers tackle a difficult ascent, the leader scales a wall, placing anchors a few feet apart. His or her rope is linked to the anchor by a carabiner. Safety is assured by a companion, called the second, stationed in a very solid position. The lead is protected as the second belays, that is, carefully controls how the rope is payed out. In this way the lead is assured protection while ascending. Should there be an inadvertent misstep, the anchor will safely limit the fall. The second not only secures the lead but gives encouragement with comments and signals as they communicate back and forth. Their goal is a safe, exhilarating experience by overcoming a significant challenge. They employ techniques and equipment that are tried and proven. The essential equipment includes a secure harness, a reliable rope, a variety of anchors to be fixed to the rock face, a chalk bag to improve grip, and proper boots or special shoes that a leader can use to grip the surface of the steep wall.
4. The companionship has studied the rules and techniques of rock climbing. They have received instruction from experienced climbers and have practiced to become comfortable with the proper moves and the use of equipment. They have planned a route and determined how they will work together. When the leader scales far enough and finds a convenient place that is very safe, he or she belays while taking up the rope as the second follows the "pitch" or length of rope that has been extended. When the leader is reached, the process is then repeated. One belays while the other climbs, inserting anchors every few feet as protection should there be an inadvertent fall. While technical rock climbing appears to be risky and dangerous, these precautions assure an exhilarating experience, safely accomplished by following correct principles.
5. In real life, the anchors are the laws of God that provide protection under all of the challenges that you will face. The rope and carabineers that secure the rope to the anchors represent obedience to those commandments. When you learn those commandments, continue to practice them, and have a plan to avoid danger, you will have a secure means of obtaining protection against Satan's temptations. You will develop strength of character that will fortify you against transgression. Should you make a wrong move, there need be no enduring problem because of the belaying or help that is available through your repentance.
6. Let the Savior be your "lead" in life. He has said, "I am ... the Rock of Heaven ... ; whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall."¹ The Redeemer will safely lead you over the most difficult obstacles of life. His laws are absolutely secure anchors of protection that dispel fear and assure success in an otherwise dangerous world. Such a life will certainly provide you peace and happiness.
7. True, enduring happiness, with the accompanying strength, courage, and capacity to overcome the greatest difficulties, will come as you center your life in Jesus Christ. Obedience to His teachings provides a secure ascent in the journey of life. That takes effort. While there is no guarantee of overnight results, there is the assurance that, in the Lord's time, solutions will come, peace will prevail, and happiness will be yours.
8. The challenges you face, the growth experiences you encounter, are intended to be temporary scenes played out on the stage of a life of continuing peace and happiness. Sadness, heartache, and disappointment are events in life. It is not intended that they be the substance of life. I do not minimize how hard some of these events can be. When the lesson you are to learn is very important, trials can extend over a long period of time, but they should not be allowed to become the confining focus of everything you do. Your life can and should be wondrously rewarding. It is your understanding and application of the laws of God that will give your life glorious purpose as you ascend and conquer the difficulties of life. That perspective keeps challenges confined to their proper place—stepping-stones to further growth and attainment.
9. The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. Your progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether you welcome the experience or not. Trust in the Lord. Ask to be led by the Spirit to know His will. Be willing to accept it. You will then qualify for the greatest happiness and the heights of attainment from this mortal experience.

Week 5 – Jehovah’s Birth into Mortality

Scripture and Other Readings: Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2; 1 Nephi 11:13-24; Mosiah 15:1-5

Invitation Week 5:

Read through the story of the Savior’s birth and answer the Twelve Questions of Christmas at the end of this lesson. Give a gift to someone this week that will help turn their heart to the Savior and help them see his birth as his condescending in order to become one with us.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson, *Christmas Devotional*, December 2014

1. It is a story that never grows old in the telling:
2. “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ...
3. “And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
4. “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)
5. “To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
6. “And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
7. “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”¹
8. We find it remarkable that the very Son of God, the great Jehovah of old, should be born into this mortal world in the humblest of circumstances. An inn would have been lowly enough, but it was not even an inn. Rather it was a stable, and the babe was laid on the hay of a manger where common animals fed. Even so, the greater condescension is that Jesus should have submitted to mortality at all, even if He were to be born in the best and most elegant of circumstances. With Paul, we marvel at “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh”²—that He should have become a baby; that He should have been a child and then a man, suffering “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue”³ and even death.
9. How is it that He who ruled on high in the heavens, the very Creator of the earth, should consent to be born “after the manner of the flesh”⁴ and walk upon His footstool⁵ in poverty, despised and abused and, in the end, be crucified? Why this near inconceivable degradation? Jesus explained: “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ... And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”⁶ Faithfully, Jesus endured all that was necessary in life and in death to atone, redeem, and establish a celestial pattern for the children of God—for us.
10. It was essential that the Son of God be born in the flesh and descend below all things⁷ that He might “redeem all things.”⁸ Paul spoke of it as Jesus having “descended first into the lower parts of the earth ... that he might [fulfill] all things.”⁹ Then, “when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive.”¹⁰ In latter-day revelation we read that “he that ascended up on high, [is] also he [that] descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ.”¹¹
11. Jesus was the Firstborn among spirits and the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh. Although we are not begotten of God in the flesh, we are, just as Jesus, the spirit offspring of God. Thus, our birth into mortality is also something of a condescension, and like Christ’s, it has a noble purpose. Just as Jesus, we came down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent us and to achieve, with the grace of Christ, immortality and eternal life.¹² Might it be important for us, as we seek to “ascend up on high,” also to descend below at least some things that we might comprehend more fully and become more Christlike? If Jesus needed certain experiences, might we also require some challenges and trials, “that [our] bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that [we] may know according to the flesh how to succor [one another] according to [our] infirmities”?¹³

12. The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith while he was a prisoner in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, some of what Joseph had yet to suffer, and then He said: “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”¹⁴
13. At this season, I recall the poignant experience of Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President of the Church, at an earlier time in his life, when he was a young father:
14. “He was working at the Church tithing office from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. each day, for which he received three dollars per day in tithing pay. [Tithing pay] meant that he could go to the tithing store and exchange his pay [voucher] for flour or meat or molasses. At least the family had food [although little or no money]. He described how he felt that holiday as he longed to provide his family with a wonderful Christmas:
15. “I left the old home with feelings I cannot describe. I wanted to do something for my [children]. I wanted something to please them, and to mark the Christmas day from all other days—but not a cent to do it with! I walked up and down Main Street looking into the shop windows—into ... every store—everywhere—and then slunk out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child, until my poured-out grief relieved my aching heart; and after a while returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with my children, grateful and happy only for them.”¹⁵
16. Joseph F. Smith grew up without his father, Hyrum Smith, and in his youth was sometimes rough and undisciplined. I cannot help but believe that this experience, along with others, helped transform him into the strong, tender, and spiritually sensitive man he became. Just as the Savior, “though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”¹⁶
17. If we consistently rely on “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah”¹⁷ and look to Him in every thought,¹⁸ whatever we suffer will also lead us to be better. But this is not all. Just as the Savior’s experiences in mortality had redeeming purpose, our experiences, especially the difficult ones, will prepare and enable us to lift and help redeem one another.
18. At Christmas when we ponder the birth of Jesus and His example of near-constant service, we are prone to draw from our own resources that which would bless and liberate others. The stories of people helping and blessing one another at Christmastime are legion. And that is certainly one of the main reasons we rejoice so much in this holiday.
19. One such story unfolded just a few weeks ago in West Jordan, Utah. Four-year-old Ethan Van Leuven had battled an acute form of leukemia since he was two. He had been treated with an experimental drug, full-body radiation, and a bone marrow transplant. Though the cancer was in remission for a time, by October of this year it was out of control and no longer treatable.
20. Ethan’s father, Merrill, and mother, Jen, realized that their little boy would soon be taken from them. “I ... want him to know how proud I am of him,” said Merrill, “for fighting through this, and in the midst of his challenge being such an example of faith and strength to me.”¹⁹
21. Halloween was coming at the end of October, Ethan’s birthday was in November, and his favorite holiday, Christmas, would come the following month. When it became apparent that Ethan would not live long enough to experience any of these one last time, the members of his ward and stake and other neighbors and friends banded together to hold all of these celebrations for Ethan in one week—Halloween was on Tuesday, a birthday celebration on Thursday, Christmas Eve on Friday, and Christmas Day on Saturday. Ethan’s parents, who had often helped others, now graciously accepted the help that so many wanted to give.
22. “Christmas Eve,” on October 24th, featured Santa Claus arriving at the Van Leuven home on a fire truck. Some sent or brought gifts to Ethan. A 13-year-old boy, a stranger to the family, donated his stuffed animal collection that had been years in the making. A local radio station played Christmas music for three hours in the evening for Ethan and his family. More than 150 people crowded into the Van Leuven’s front yard, singing Christmas carols, and members of the ward created a live Nativity on the lawn, complete with a small baby representing the Christ child. The family was taken on a hayride pulled by a tractor through the neighborhood, where neighbors had decorated their homes with Christmas lights.
23. Finally, Ethan and his family returned home for a private “Christmas Eve” celebration and their “Christmas Day” on Saturday, concluding their week of holidays. Ethan passed away three days later, leaving behind a family and a community enriched by his example and their own acts of love and service to make a suffering child’s last days happy ones.²⁰
24. And so at Christmas, the stories of sacrifice and ministering multiply across the world. Our gifts and service gladden hearts; the kindness of others pours healing balm into our own wounds. It is living the Savior’s way of life. And since, as He, we came down from heaven to do the will of the Father, it must not be only an annual event, but rather the pattern of our lives. In all that serves to deepen our empathy, broaden our understanding, and purify our souls, His declaration reassures us:

“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”²¹

25. I rejoice to bear testimony of the birth and life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and invoke

His blessings upon all this Christmas in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Elder Richard G. Scott, “Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer,” *General Conference, April 1997*

1. It is April 6th. Modern scripture records that Jesus Christ was born on this day. 1 Humbly I speak of this glorious being to whom each of us owes so very much. I know that what the scriptures teach of Him is true and will use some of them in expressing personal feelings.
2. Paul testified, “Being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”²
3. Eternal salvation—how precious! But you must obey Him to obtain it.
4. “Jesus said, ... I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
5. “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”³
6. “And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life.”⁴
7. Shall never die; shall have eternal life—you must be obedient and endure to the end.
8. I testify that the Lord came “into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice,” that He suffered “the pains of all men,” and that He was crucified “that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.” I witness that “he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in [Him], ... or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.”⁵ Repent, be baptized, and have perfect faith in Him. These are some of the essential requirements that must be met.
9. I know that “there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.”⁶ I witness that Jesus Christ atoned “for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.”⁷ I testify that except for the Atonement of the Holy Redeemer, the demands of justice would prevent every soul born on earth from returning to the presence of God, to partake of His glory and exaltation, ⁸ for all make mistakes for which we cannot personally appease justice. I witness that except for the “infinite atonement” of Christ, we could not return to God at death and, as Jacob solemnly warned, “our spirits [would] become subject to ... the devil, to rise no more. And our spirits [would] become like unto him, and we [would] become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, ... to remain with the father of lies, in misery.”⁹
10. I witness that “redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; ... unto all those who have *a broken heart and a contrite spirit*; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.”¹⁰ This absolute requisite of “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” prescribes the need to be submissive, compliant, humble (that is, teachable), and willingly obedient. Finally, I witness “how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the *merits, and mercy, and grace* of the Holy Messiah.”¹¹
11. Jesus Christ possessed *merits* that no other child of Heavenly Father could possibly have. He was a God, Jehovah, before His birth in Bethlehem. His Father not only gave Him His spirit body, but Jesus was His Only Begotten Son in the flesh. Our Master lived a perfect, sinless life and therefore was free from the demands of justice. He was and is perfect in every attribute, including love, compassion, patience, obedience, forgiveness, and humility. His *mercy* pays our debt to justice when we repent and obey Him. Even with our best efforts to obey His teachings we will still fall short, yet because of His *grace* we will be saved “after all we can do.”¹²
12. Although our memory of it is withheld, before we came to this earth we lived in the presence of God, our Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. We shouted for joy when given the privilege of coming to this earth to receive a body and to move forward in God’s plan for our happiness. We knew that we would be tested here. Our determination was to live obediently to be able to return to be with our Father forever. Part of that testing here is to have so many seemingly interesting things to do that we can forget the main purposes for being here. Satan works very hard so that the essential things won’t happen.
13. The plan is really very simple when considered in its essence. The Lord has told us that we are here to be tried—to be proven, to see whether we will be valiant and be obedient to His teachings. You among all of the people on earth have the best possibility of doing that because you have access to the fulness of the restored gospel and the teachings

of the Savior. In quiet moments when you think about it, you recognize what is critically important in life and what isn't. Be wise and don't let good things crowd out those that are essential.

14. What are the essential ones? They are related to doctrine. They are centered in ordinances and embrace critical covenants. Those ordinances are baptism and confirmation into His Church and kingdom on earth. For men they include worthy ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood and honoring and using it in service to others. For each adult man and woman, they entail all of the ordinances of the temple, including one's own personal endowment. They embody the sealing ordinance of the temple where a man and wife are bound so that through obedience they can live together for time and all eternity. When faithful, the children born to that union or later sealed to their parents are joined in love and rejoicing throughout all eternity. To receive all of the blessings of His atoning sacrifice, we are only asked to be obedient to His commandments and to receive *all* of these essential ordinances. The Atonement will not only help us overcome our transgressions and mistakes, but in His time, it will resolve all inequities of life—those things that are unfair which are the consequences of circumstance or others' acts and not our own decisions.
15. While some may not understand or agree, I testify that it is not sufficient to be baptized and then live an acceptable life, avoiding major transgressions. The Lord has decreed that the additional ordinances and covenants that I have mentioned must be received for exaltation and eternal life. Being worthy of temple ordinances means that you will choose to do what many in the world are not willing to do. You will keep the Sabbath day holy, exercise faith through the payment of tithing and fast offerings, consistently participate in Church worship, give service, and show love and appreciation for your family by helping each member of it. After you have received all of the temple ordinances, you will continue to grow by keeping the covenants made and faithfully "endur[ing] to the end." ¹³
16. Keeping the covenants is not hard when you do it willingly with a "broken heart and a contrite spirit." ¹⁴ When obeyed, those covenants bring happiness and joy. They give purpose to life. Difficulty comes when agency is used to make choices that are inconsistent with those covenants. Study the things you do in your discretionary time, that time you are free to control. Do you find that it is centered in those things that are of highest priority and of greatest importance? Or do you unconsciously, consistently fill it with trivia and activities that are not of enduring value nor help you accomplish the purpose for which you came to earth? Think of the long view of life, not just what's going to happen today or tomorrow. *Don't give up what you most want in life for something you think you want now.*
17. The essential things must be accomplished during your testing period on earth. They must have first priority. They must not be sacrificed for lesser things, even though they are good and worthwhile accomplishments. After this life, you will be restored to that which you have here allowed yourself to become. Oh, if I but had the capacity to communicate the peace and serenity that come from knowing that you and your family have worthily received all of the saving ordinances and the corresponding covenants are being righteously kept.
18. I encourage you with every capacity that I possess to receive *all* of the ordinances for salvation and do all you can to have the other members of your family receive those ordinances before departing this earth. You can progress much more rapidly here on earth with your mortal body in this environment of good and evil than you will as a spirit in the spirit world. ¹⁵ Compared to the length of a normal life, it doesn't take much time to receive all of the ordinances essential to exaltation. It does take diligence, understanding, and obedience. It does require you to do all within your capacity to qualify for those ordinances and to receive as many as you are able. Where, for reasons beyond your control, you are not able to receive them all, live worthily and do not disqualify yourself through neglect, indifference, or unworthiness. The Lord will make it possible for you to receive all of the blessings He has promised in His time and place.
19. Whether you intend to or not, when you live as though the Savior and His teachings are only one of many other important priorities in your life, you are clearly on the road to disappointment and likely on the path to tragedy. Is it really wise to forfeit eternal happiness by fulfilling only part of the requirements? I pray that you'll be moved to make needed changes now.
20. If you have strayed in transgression, please come back. If you have been enticed by the things of the world to forget the things of God, correct your priorities. If you haven't received all of the essential ordinances, decide now to do what is necessary to receive them.
21. Oh, how grateful we must be for the Atonement wrought by our Redeemer, Jesus Christ! It gives life richness and joy when we live the pattern described in this scripture:
22. "They did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the

The Twelve Questions of Christmas

1. Why in Bethlehem? **BD, John 6:25-58**
2. Is there room in my “inn” for the Savior? Am I a part of the “inn” crowd or part of the “stable” few? **Luke 2:7 (no room for them)**
3. Why would the “King of Kings” be born in a stable and laid in a manger? **John 21:15-17; D&C 122:7-8; Alma 7:11-12.**
4. Why was the first announcement made to shepherds “keeping watch over their flocks by night?” **John 10**
5. Why singing to announce the birth? **D& C 25:12**
6. What brings glory to God in the highest? **Matthew 5:16; Moses 1:39**
7. How was “Peace” now come to the earth? **Luke 2:14, John 14:27; Ephesians 2:13-19**
8. Did everyone see the star? If so, why didn’t they come? If not, why not?
9. How long did the Wiseman follow the star? How do wise men seek him still? Whose star do I follow?
10. Do I give gifts (heart-felt offerings that point to God) or presents? What gifts do I bring to acknowledge the Savior’s place in my life?
11. Why gold, frankincense, and Myrrh? (Think of the censor on the Table of Shewbread in the Tabernacle)
12. Do I incorporate the real meaning of Christmas into the way that I live my life? Do I see the gospel of Jesus Christ as “good tidings of great joy?” **Luke 2:10**

Week 6 -The Upper Room and the Sacrament

Scripture and Other Readings: Matthew 26:17-35; Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-38; John 13-17

Invitation Week 6:

Arrive ten minutes before church and contemplate the meaning of the sacrament. As you look at the sacrament table, remember that it represents the body of Christ. Imagine that you have come to a memorial service for the Savior. Sing the hymns from your heart as you unite with your brothers and sisters to honor Him. Worship, don't just attend the meeting. Reflect on how his atonement has affected you during the week. Keep your mind focused on the Savior and his atoning sacrifice as you partake of the bread and water and through the rest of the meeting.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “The Living Bread Which Came Down from Heaven,” October 2017

1. The day after Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 in Galilee with only “five barley loaves, and two small fishes,”¹ He spoke to the people again in Capernaum. The Savior perceived that many were not so much interested in His teachings as they were in being fed again.² Accordingly, He tried to convince them of the immensely greater value of “that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.”³ Jesus declared:
 2. “I am that bread of life.
 3. “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.
 4. “This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.
 5. “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”⁴
 6. The Savior’s intended meaning was totally lost on His hearers who understood His statement only literally. Recoiling at the thought, they wondered, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”⁵ Jesus pressed the point further:
 7. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.
 8. “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
 9. “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”⁶
 10. He then expressed the profound meaning of His metaphor:
 11. “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.
 12. “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.”⁷
 13. Still His hearers did not grasp what Jesus was saying, and “many ... , when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? ... [And] from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”⁸
 14. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is a striking way of expressing how completely we must bring the Savior into our life—into our very being—that we may be one. How does this happen?
 15. First, we understand that in sacrificing His flesh and blood, Jesus atoned for our sins and overcame death, both physical and spiritual.⁹ Clearly, then, we partake of His flesh and drink His blood when we receive from Him the power and blessings of His Atonement.
 16. The doctrine of Christ expresses what we must do to receive atoning grace. It is to believe and have faith in Christ, to repent and be baptized, and to receive the Holy Ghost, “and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰ This is the gate, our access to the Savior’s atoning grace and to the strait and narrow path leading to His kingdom.
 17. “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward [on that path], feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.
 18. “... Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.”¹¹
 19. The symbolism of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is beautiful to contemplate. The bread and water represent the flesh and blood of Him who is the Bread of Life and the Living Water,¹² poignantly reminding us of the price He paid to redeem us. As the bread is broken, we remember the Savior’s torn flesh. Elder Dallin H. Oaks once observed that “because it is broken and torn, each

- piece of bread is unique, just as the individuals who partake of it are unique. We all have different sins to repent of. We all have different needs to be strengthened through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we remember in this ordinance.”¹³ As we drink the water, we think of the blood He shed in Gethsemane and on the cross and its sanctifying power.¹⁴ Knowing that “no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom,” we resolve to be among “those who have washed their garments in [the Savior’s] blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.”¹⁵
20. I have spoken of receiving the Savior’s atoning grace to take away our sins and the stain of those sins in us. But figuratively eating His flesh and drinking His blood has a further meaning, and that is to internalize the qualities and character of Christ, putting off the natural man and becoming Saints “through the atonement of Christ the Lord.”¹⁶ As we partake of the sacramental bread and water each week, we would do well to consider how fully and completely we must incorporate His character and the pattern of His sinless life into our life and being. Jesus could not have atoned for the sins of others unless He Himself was sinless. Since justice had no claim on Him, He could offer Himself in our place to satisfy justice and then extend mercy. As we remember and honor His atoning sacrifice, we should also contemplate His sinless life.
 21. This suggests the need for a mighty striving on our part. We cannot be content to remain as we are but must be moving constantly toward “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”¹⁷ Like King Lamoni’s father in the Book of Mormon, we must be willing to give away all our sins¹⁸ and focus on what the Lord expects of us, individually and together.
 22. Not long ago, a friend recounted to me an experience he had while serving as a mission president. He had undergone a surgery that required several weeks of recuperation. During his recovery, he devoted time to searching the scriptures. One afternoon as he pondered the Savior’s words in the 27th chapter of 3 Nephi, he drifted off to sleep. He subsequently related:
 23. “I fell into a dream in which I was given a vivid, panoramic view of my life. I was shown my sins, poor choices, the times ... I had treated people with impatience, plus the omissions of good things I should have said or done. ... [A] comprehensive ... [review of] my life was shown to me in just a few minutes, but it seemed much longer. I awoke, startled, and ... instantly dropped to my knees beside the bed and began to pray, to plead for forgiveness, pouring out the feelings of my heart like I had never done previously.
 24. “Prior to the dream, I didn’t know that I [had] such great need to repent. My faults and weaknesses suddenly became so plainly clear to me that the gap between the person I was and the holiness and goodness of God seemed [like] millions of miles. In my prayer that late afternoon, I expressed my deepest gratitude to Heavenly Father and to the Savior with my whole heart for what They had done for me and for the relationships I treasured with my wife and children. While on my knees I also felt God’s love and mercy that was so palpable, despite my feeling so unworthy. ...
 25. “I can say I haven’t been the same since that day. ... My heart changed. ... What followed is that I developed more empathy toward others, with a greater capacity to love, coupled with a sense of urgency to preach the gospel. ... I could relate to the messages of faith, hope, and the gift of repentance found in the Book of Mormon [as] never before.”¹⁹
 26. It is important to recognize that this good man’s vivid revelation of his sins and shortcomings did not discourage him or lead him to despair. Yes, he felt shock and remorse. He felt keenly his need to repent. He had been humbled, yet he felt gratitude, peace, and hope—real hope—because of Jesus Christ, “the living bread which came down from heaven.”²⁰
 27. My friend spoke of the gap he perceived in his dream between his life and the holiness of God. Holiness is the right word. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ means to pursue holiness. God commands, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.”²¹
 28. Enoch counseled us, “Teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ.”²² As a boy, I wondered why in the New Testament Jesus is often referred to (and even refers to Himself) as the Son of Man when He is really the Son of God, but Enoch’s statement makes it clear that these references are actually a recognition of His divinity and holiness—He is the Son of Man of Holiness, God the Father.
 29. If we yearn to dwell in Christ and have Him dwell in us,²³ then holiness is what we seek, in both body and spirit.²⁴ We seek it in the temple, whereon is inscribed “Holiness to the Lord.” We seek it in our marriages, families, and homes. We seek it each week as we delight in the Lord’s holy day.²⁵ We seek it even in the details of daily living: our speech, our dress, our thoughts. As President Thomas S. Monson has stated, “We are the product of all we read, all we view, all we hear

and all we think.”²⁶ We seek holiness as we take up our cross daily.²⁷

30. Sister Carol F. McConkie has observed: “We recognize the multitude of tests, temptations, and tribulations that could pull us away from all that is virtuous and praiseworthy before God. But our mortal experiences offer us the opportunity to choose holiness. Most often it is the sacrifices we make to keep our covenants that sanctify us and make us holy.”²⁸ And to “the sacrifices we make” I would add the service we give.
31. We know that “when [we] are in the service of [our] fellow beings [we] are only in the service of [our] God.”²⁹ And the Lord reminds us that such service is central to His life and character: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”³⁰ President Marion G. Romney wisely explained: “Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.”³¹
32. Zechariah prophesied that in the day of the Lord’s millennial reign, even the bells of the horses would bear the inscription “Holiness unto the Lord.”³² In that spirit, the pioneer Saints in these valleys affixed that reminder, “Holiness to the Lord,” on seemingly common or mundane things as well as those more directly associated with religious practice. It was inscribed on sacrament cups and plates and printed on certificates of ordination of Seventies and on a Relief Society banner. “Holiness to the Lord” also appeared over the display windows of Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution, the ZCMI department store. It was found on the head of a hammer and on a drum.

“Holiness to the Lord” was cast on the metal doorknobs of President Brigham Young’s home. These references to holiness in seemingly unusual or unexpected places may seem incongruous, but they suggest just how pervasive and constant our focus on holiness needs to be.

33. Partaking of the Savior’s flesh and drinking His blood means to put out of our lives anything inconsistent with a Christlike character and to make His attributes our own. This is the larger meaning of repentance: not only a turning away from past sin but also “a turning of the heart and will to God”³³ going forward. As happened with my friend in his revelatory dream, God will show us our flaws and failings, but He will also help us turn weakness into strength.³⁴ If we sincerely ask, “What lack I yet?”³⁵ He will not leave us to guess, but in love He will answer for the sake of our happiness. And He will give us hope.
34. It is a consuming endeavor, and it would be terribly daunting if in our striving for holiness we were alone. The glorious truth is we are not alone. We have the love of God, the grace of Christ, the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship and encouragement of fellow Saints in the body of Christ. Let us not be content with where we are, but neither let us be discouraged. As a simple but thoughtful hymn urges us:
35. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.³⁶
36. I bear testimony of Jesus Christ, “the living bread which came down from heaven,”³⁷ and that “whoso eateth [His] flesh, and drinketh [His] blood, hath eternal life,”³⁸ in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Jeffrey R. Holland, ““This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *General Conference, October 1995*

1. The hours that lay immediately ahead would change the meaning of all human history. It would be the crowning moment of eternity, the most miraculous of all the miracles. It would be the supreme contribution to a plan designed from before the foundation of the world for the happiness of every man, woman, and child who would ever live in it. The hour of atoning sacrifice had come. God’s own Son, his Only Begotten Son in the flesh, was about to become the Savior of the world.
2. The setting was Jerusalem. The season was that of the Passover, a celebration rich in symbolism for what was about to come. Long ago the troubled and enslaved Israelites had been “passed over,” spared, finally made free by the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts of their Egyptian homes (see Ex. 12:21–24). That, in turn, had been only a symbolic reiteration of what Adam and all succeeding prophets were taught

from the beginning—that the pure and unblemished lambs offered from the firstlings of Israel’s flocks were a similitude, a token, a prefiguration of the great and last sacrifice of Christ which was to come (see Moses 5:5–8).

3. Now, after all those years and all those prophecies and all those symbolic offerings, the type and shadow was to become reality. On this night when Jesus’ mortal ministry was concluding, the declaration made by John the Baptist when that ministry had begun now meant more than ever—“Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29).
4. As a final and specially prepared Passover supper was ending, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles, saying, “Take, eat” (Matt. 26:26). “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). In a similar manner

he took the cup of wine, traditionally diluted with water, said a blessing of thanks for it, and passed it to those gathered about him, saying: "This cup is the new testament in my blood," "which is shed . . . for the remission of sins." "This do in remembrance of me." "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (Luke 22:20; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:26).

5. Since that upper room experience on the eve of Gethsemane and Golgotha, children of the promise have been under covenant to remember Christ's sacrifice in this newer, higher, more holy and personal way.
6. With a crust of bread, always broken, blessed, and offered first, we remember his bruised body and broken heart, his physical suffering on the cross where he cried, "I thirst," and finally, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (John 19:28; Matt. 27:46.)
7. The Savior's physical suffering guarantees that through his mercy and grace (see 2 Ne. 2:8) every member of the human family shall be freed from the bonds of death and be resurrected triumphantly from the grave. Of course the time of that resurrection and the degree of exaltation it leads to are based upon our faithfulness.
8. With a small cup of water we remember the shedding of Christ's blood and the depth of his spiritual suffering, anguish which began in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). He was in agony and "prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).
9. The Savior's spiritual suffering and the shedding of his innocent blood, so lovingly and freely given, paid the debt for what the scriptures call the "original guilt" of Adam's transgression (Moses 6:54). Furthermore, Christ suffered for the sins and sorrows and pains of all the rest of the human family, providing remission for all of our sins as well, upon conditions of obedience to the principles and ordinances of the gospel he taught (see 2 Ne. 9:21–23). As the Apostle Paul wrote, we were "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). What an expensive price and what a merciful purchase!
10. That is why every ordinance of the gospel focuses in one way or another on the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and surely that is why this particular ordinance with all its symbolism and imagery comes to us more readily and more repeatedly than any other in our life. It comes in what has been called "the most sacred, the most holy, of all the meetings of the Church" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 2:340).
11. Perhaps we do not always attach that kind of meaning to our weekly sacramental service. How "sacred" and how "holy" is it? Do we see it as our passover, remembrance of our safety and deliverance and redemption?
12. With so very much at stake, this ordinance commemorating our escape from the angel of darkness should be taken more seriously than it sometimes is. It should be a powerful, reverent, reflective moment. It should encourage spiritual feelings and impressions. As such it should not be rushed. It is not something to "get over" so that the real purpose of a sacrament meeting can be pursued. This is the real purpose of the meeting. And everything that is said or sung or prayed in those services should be consistent with the grandeur of this sacred ordinance.
13. The administration and passing of the sacrament is preceded by a hymn which all of us should sing. It doesn't matter what kind of musical voice we have. Sacramental hymns are more like prayers anyway—and everyone can give voice to a prayer!
14. We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.
15. It is an important element of our worship to unite in such lyrical and moving expressions of gratitude.
16. In that sacred setting we ask you young men of the Aaronic Priesthood to prepare and bless and pass these emblems of the Savior's sacrifice worthily and reverently. What a stunning privilege and sacred trust given at such a remarkably young age! I can think of no higher compliment heaven could pay you. We do love you. Live your best and look your best when you participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
17. May I suggest that wherever possible a white shirt be worn by the deacons, teachers, and priests who handle the sacrament. For sacred ordinances in the Church we often use ceremonial clothing, and a white shirt could be seen as a gentle reminder of the white clothing you wore in the baptismal font and an anticipation of the white shirt you will soon wear into the temple and onto your missions.
18. That simple suggestion is not intended to be pharisaic or formalistic. We do not want deacons or priests in uniforms or unduly concerned about anything but the purity of their lives. But how our young people dress can teach a holy principle to us all, and it certainly can convey sanctity. As President David O. McKay taught, a white shirt contributes to the sacredness of the holy sacrament (see Conference Report, Oct. 1956, p. 89).
19. In the simple and beautiful language of the sacramental prayers those young priests offer, the principal word we hear seems to be remember. In the first and slightly longer prayer offered over the bread, mention is made of a willingness to take upon us the name of the Son of God and to keep the commandments he has given us.
20. Neither of those phrases is repeated in the blessing on the water, though surely both are assumed and expected. What is stressed in both prayers is that all of this is done in remembrance of Christ. In so participating we witness that we will always remember

him, that we may always have his Spirit to be with us (see D&C 20:77, 79).

21. If remembering is the principal task before us, what might come to our memory when those plain and precious emblems are offered to us?
22. We could remember the Savior's premortal life and all that we know him to have done as the great Jehovah, creator of heaven and earth and all things that in them are. We could remember that even in the Grand Council of Heaven he loved us and was wonderfully strong, that we triumphed even there by the power of Christ and our faith in the blood of the Lamb (see Rev. 12:10–11).
23. We could remember the simple grandeur of his mortal birth to just a young woman, one probably in the age range of those in our Young Women organization, who spoke for every faithful woman in every dispensation of time when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).
24. We could remember his magnificent but virtually unknown foster father, a humble carpenter by trade who taught us, among other things, that quiet, plain, unpretentious people have moved this majestic work forward from the very beginning, and still do so today. If you are serving almost anonymously, please know that so, too, did one of the best men who has ever lived on this earth.
25. We could remember Christ's miracles and his teachings, his healings and his help. We could remember that he gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf and motion to the lame and the maimed and the withered. Then, on those days when we feel our progress has halted or our joys and views have grown dim, we can press forward steadfastly in Christ, with unshaken faith in him and a perfect brightness of hope (see 2 Ne. 31:19–20).
26. We could remember that even with such a solemn mission given to him, the Savior found delight in living; he enjoyed people and told his disciples to be of good cheer. He said we should be as thrilled with the gospel as one who had found a great treasure, a veritable pearl of great price, right on our own doorstep. We could remember that Jesus found special joy and happiness in children and said all of us should be more like them—guileless and pure, quick to laugh and to love and to forgive, slow to remember any offense.
27. We could remember that Christ called his disciples friends, and that friends are those who stand by us in times of loneliness or potential despair. We could remember a friend we need to contact or, better yet, a friend we need to make. In doing so we could remember that God often provides his blessings through the compassionate and timely response of another. For someone nearby we may be the means of heaven's answer to a very urgent prayer.
28. We could—and should—remember the wonderful things that have come to us in our lives and that "all things which are good cometh of Christ" (Moro. 7:24). Those of us who are so blessed could remember the courage of those around us who face more difficulty than we, but who remain cheerful, who do the best they can, and trust that the Bright and Morning Star will rise again for them—as surely he will do (see Rev. 22:16).
29. On some days we will have cause to remember the unkind treatment he received, the rejection he experienced, and the injustice—oh, the injustice—he endured. When we, too, then face some of that in life, we can remember that Christ was also troubled on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed (see 2 Cor. 4:8–9).
30. When those difficult times come to us, we can remember that Jesus had to descend below all things before he could ascend above them, and that he suffered pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind that he might be filled with mercy and know how to succor his people in their infirmities (see D&C 88:6; Alma 7:11–12).
31. To those who stagger or stumble, he is there to steady and strengthen us. In the end he is there to save us, and for all this he gave his life. However dim our days may seem they have been darker for the Savior of the world.
32. In fact, in a resurrected, otherwise perfected body, our Lord of this sacrament table has chosen to retain for the benefit of his disciples the wounds in his hands and his feet and his side—signs, if you will, that painful things happen even to the pure and perfect. Signs, if you will, that pain in this world is not evidence that God doesn't love you. It is the wounded Christ who is the captain of our soul—he who yet bears the scars of sacrifice, the lesions of love and humility and forgiveness.
33. Those wounds are what he invites young and old, then and now, to step forward and see and feel (see 3 Ne. 11:15; 3 Ne. 18:25). Then we remember with Isaiah that it was for each of us that our Master was "despised and rejected . . . ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). All this we could remember when we are invited by a kneeling young priest to remember Christ always.
34. We no longer include a supper with this ordinance, but it is a feast nevertheless. We can be fortified by it for whatever life requires of us, and in so doing we will be more compassionate to others along the way.
35. One request Christ made of his disciples on that night of deep anguish and grief was that they stand by him, stay with him in his hour of sorrow and pain. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" he asked longingly (Matt. 26:40). I think he asks that again of us, every Sabbath day when the emblems of his life are broken and blessed and passed.
36. How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high
And sent the Savior from above
To suffer, bleed, and die!
37. "Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!" (Hymns, 1985, no. 193). I bear witness of him who is the Wonder of it all . . . in his own name, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Week 7 – Gethsemane

Scripture and Other Readings: Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; Alma 7; Isaiah 53; Mosiah 15:3-12

Invitation Week 7:

Memorize “Gethsemane” by Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Contemplate the “purpose of Gethsemane” in your life. Write down something that you can do to better submit your will to Heavenly Father. Do “In the Garden” scripture chain.

Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, March 2008, 32-38

1. As a young missionary, Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931), who later served in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, had a dream so powerful that it changed his life forever. He later wrote:
2. “One night I dreamed ... that I was in the Garden of Gethsemane, a witness of the Savior’s agony. ... I stood behind a tree in the foreground. ... Jesus, with Peter, James, and John, came through a little wicket gate at my right. Leaving the three Apostles there, after telling them to kneel and pray, He passed over to the other side, where He also knelt and prayed ... : ‘Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt.’”
3. “As He prayed the tears streamed down His face, which was [turned] toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I wept also, out of pure sympathy with His great sorrow. My whole heart went out to Him. I loved Him with all my soul and longed to be with Him as I longed for nothing else.
4. “Presently He arose and walked to where those Apostles were kneeling—fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, untinged by the least show of anger or scolding, asked them if they could not watch with Him one hour. ...
5. “Returning to His place, He prayed again and then went back and found them again sleeping. Again He awoke them, admonished them, and returned and prayed as before. Three times this happened, until I was perfectly familiar with His appearance—face, form, and movements. He was of noble stature and of majestic mien ... the very God that He was and is, yet as meek and lowly as a little child.
6. “All at once the circumstance seemed to change. ... Instead of before, it was after the Crucifixion, and the Savior, with those three Apostles, now stood together in a group at my left. They were about to depart and ascend into heaven. I could endure it no longer. I ran from behind the tree, fell at His feet, clasped Him around the knees, and begged Him to take me with Him.
7. “I shall never forget the kind and gentle manner in which He stooped and raised me up and embraced me.

It was so vivid, so real that I felt the very warmth of His bosom against which I rested. Then He said: ‘No, my son; these have finished their work, and they may go with me; but you must stay and finish yours.’ Still I clung to Him. Gazing up into His face—for He was taller than I—I besought Him most earnestly: ‘Well, promise me that I will come to You at the last.’ He smiled sweetly and tenderly and replied: ‘That will depend entirely upon yourself.’ I awoke with a sob in my throat, and it was morning.”¹

Why an Atonement?

8. This tender, personal glimpse of the Savior’s loving sacrifice is a fitting introduction to the significance of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Indeed the Atonement of the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh is the crucial foundation upon which all Christian doctrine rests and the greatest expression of divine love this world has ever been given. Its importance in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot be overstated. Every other principle, commandment, and virtue of the restored gospel draws its significance from this pivotal event.²
9. The Atonement was the foreordained but voluntary act of the Only Begotten Son of God in which He offered His life and spiritual anguish as a redeeming ransom for the effect of the Fall of Adam upon all mankind and for the personal sins of all who repent.
10. The literal meaning of the English word Atonement is self-evident: at-one-ment, the bringing together of things that have been separated or estranged. The Atonement of Jesus Christ was indispensable because of the separating transgression, or Fall, of Adam, which brought two kinds of death into the world when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.³ Physical death brought the separation of the spirit from the body, and spiritual death brought the estrangement of both the spirit and the body from God. As a result of the Fall, all persons born into mortality would suffer these two kinds of death. But we must remember the Fall was an essential part of Heavenly Father’s divine plan. Without it no mortal children would have been born to Adam and Eve, and there would have been no human family to experience

opposition and growth, moral agency, and the joy of resurrection, redemption, and eternal life.⁴

11. The need for this Fall and for an atonement to compensate for it was explained in a premortal Council in Heaven at which the spirits of the entire human family attended and over which God the Father presided. It was in this premortal setting that Christ volunteered to honor the moral agency of all humankind even as He atoned for their sins. In the process, He would return to the Father all glory for such redemptive love.⁵
12. This infinite Atonement of Christ was possible because (1) He was the only sinless man ever to live on this earth and therefore was not subject to the spiritual death resulting from sin, (2) He was the Only Begotten of the Father and therefore possessed the attributes of godhood that gave Him power over physical death,⁶ and (3) He was apparently the only one sufficiently humble and willing in the premortal council to be foreordained to that service.⁷

The Gifts of Christ's Atonement

13. Some gifts coming from the Atonement are universal, infinite, and unconditional. These include His ransom for Adam's original transgression so that no member of the human family is held responsible for that sin.⁸ Another universal gift is the Resurrection from the dead of every man, woman, and child who lives, has ever lived, or ever will live on earth.
14. Other aspects of Christ's atoning gift are conditional. They depend on one's diligence in keeping God's commandments. For example, while all members of the human family are freely given a reprieve from Adam's sin through no effort of their own, they are not given a reprieve from their own sins unless they pledge faith in Christ, repent of those sins, are baptized in His name, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and confirmation into Christ's Church, and press forward in faithful endurance the remainder of life's journey. Of this personal challenge, Christ said,
15. "For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; "But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I."⁹
16. Furthermore, although the Resurrection of the body is a free and universal gift from Christ, a result of His victory over death, the nature of the resurrected body (or "degree of glory" given it), as well as the time of one's Resurrection, is affected directly by one's faithfulness in this life. The Apostle Paul made clear, for example, that those fully committed to Christ will "rise first"¹⁰ in the Resurrection. Modern revelation clarifies the different orders of resurrected bodies,¹¹ promising the highest degree of glory only to those who adhere to the principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹²
17. Of course neither the unconditional nor the conditional blessings of the Atonement are available except through the grace of Christ. Obviously the unconditional blessings of the Atonement are unearned, but the

conditional ones are not fully merited either. By living faithfully and keeping the commandments of God, one can receive additional privileges; but they are still given freely, not technically earned. The Book of Mormon declares emphatically that "there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah."¹³

18. By this same grace, God provides for the salvation of little children, the mentally impaired, those who lived without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so forth: these are redeemed by the universal power of the Atonement of Christ and will have the opportunity to receive the fulness of the gospel after death, in the spirit world, where spirits reside while awaiting the Resurrection.¹⁴

Suffering and Triumph

19. To begin to meet the demands of the Atonement, the sinless Christ went into the Garden of Gethsemane, as Elder Whitney saw in his dream, there to bear the agony of soul only He could bear. He "began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy," saying to Peter, James, and John, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, unto death."¹⁵ Why? Because He suffered "the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam."¹⁶ He experienced "temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great [was] his anguish."¹⁷
20. Through this suffering, Jesus redeemed the souls of all men, women, and children "that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities."¹⁸ In doing so, Christ "descended below all things"—including every kind of sickness, infirmity, and dark despair experienced by every mortal being—in order that He might "comprehend all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth."¹⁹
21. The utter loneliness and excruciating pain of the Atonement begun in Gethsemane reached its zenith when, after unspeakable abuse at the hands of Roman soldiers and others, Christ cried from the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"²⁰ In the depths of that anguish, even nature itself convulsed. "There was a darkness over all the earth. . . . And the sun was darkened."²¹ "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent,"²² causing many to exclaim, "The God of nature suffers."²³ Finally, even the seemingly unbearable had been borne, and Jesus said, "It is finished."²⁴ "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."²⁵ Someday, somewhere, every human tongue will be called upon to confess as did a Roman centurion who witnessed all of this, "Truly this was the Son of God."²⁶

22. To the thoughtful woman and man, it is “a matter of surpassing wonder”²⁷ that the voluntary and merciful sacrifice of a single being could satisfy the infinite and eternal demands of justice, atone for every human transgression and misdeed, and thereby sweep all humankind into the encompassing arms of His merciful embrace. But so it is.
23. To quote President John Taylor (1808–87): “In a manner to us incomprehensible and inexplicable, He bore the weight of the sins of the whole world; not only of Adam, but of his posterity; and in doing that, opened the kingdom of heaven, not only to all believers and all

who obeyed the law of God, but to more than one-half of the human family who die before they come to years of maturity, as well as to [those] who ... [die] without [the] law.”²⁸

24. As Elder Whitney felt regarding this majestic gift and the giver of it, may we so feel: “I was so moved at the [gift] that I wept ... out of pure sympathy. My whole heart went out to Him. I loved Him with all my soul and longed to be with Him as I longed for nothing else.” Having already offered the Atonement in our behalf, Christ has done His part to make that longing a reality. The rest will depend entirely upon ourselves.

Notes

1. “The Divinity of Jesus Christ,” *Improvement Era*, Jan. 1926, 224–25; see also *Liahona*, Dec. 2003, 16; *Ensign*, Dec. 2003, 10; punctuation, capitalization, and spelling standardized.
2. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49.
3. See Genesis 2:9; 3.
4. See 2 Nephi 2:22–27; Moses 5:11.
5. See Revelation 13:8; Moses 4:1–2; Abraham 3:22–27.
6. See John 5:26–29; 2 Nephi 9:5–12; Alma 34:9–14.
7. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 21–22.
8. See *Articles of Faith* 1:2.
9. D&C 19:16–17.
10. 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
11. See D&C 76:50–113; compare 1 Corinthians 15:40–42.
12. See D&C 76:50–70; 88:4, 27–29; 132:21–24.
13. 2 Nephi 2:8.
14. See Alma 40:11; D&C 138; compare Luke 23:43; John 5:25.
15. Mark 14:33–34.
16. 2 Nephi 9:21.
17. Mosiah 3:7.
18. Alma 7:12.
19. D&C 88:6.
20. Matthew 27:46.
21. Luke 23:44–45.
22. Matthew 27:51.
23. 1 Nephi 19:12.
24. John 19:30.
25. Luke 23:46.
26. Matthew 27:54.
27. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. (1924), 77.
28. *The Mediation and Atonement* (1882), 148–49; capitalization standardized

Supplemental Readings:

Boyd K. Packer, "Atonement, Agency, Accountability," *General Conference, April 1988*

1. The Lord had come from Gethsemane; before Him was His crucifixion. At the moment of betrayal, Peter drew his sword against Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus said:
2. “Put up again thy sword into his place. ... “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:52–53).
3. During all of the taunting, the abuse, the scourging, and the final torture of crucifixion, the Lord remained silent and submissive. Except, that is, for one moment of intense drama which reveals the very essence of Christian doctrine.
4. That moment came during the trial. Pilate, now afraid, said to Jesus: “Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10).
5. One can only imagine the quiet majesty when the Lord spoke. “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).
6. What happened thereafter did not come because Pilate had power to impose it, but because the Lord had the will to accept it.
7. “I lay down my life,” the Lord said, “that I might take it again.
8. “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17–18).
9. Before the Crucifixion and afterward, many men have willingly given their lives in selfless acts of heroism. But none faced what the Christ endured. Upon Him was the burden of all human transgression, all human guilt.
10. And hanging in the balance was the Atonement. Through His willing act, mercy and justice could be reconciled, eternal law sustained, and that mediation achieved without which mortal man could not be redeemed.
11. He, by choice, accepted the penalty for all mankind for the sum total of all wickedness and depravity; for brutality, immorality, perversion, and corruption; for addiction; for the killings and torture and terror—for all

- of it that ever had been or all that ever would be enacted upon this earth.
12. In choosing, He faced the awesome power of the evil one who was not confined to flesh nor subject to mortal pain. That was Gethsemane!
 13. How the Atonement was wrought, we do not know. No mortal watched as evil turned away and hid in shame before the light of that pure being.
 14. All wickedness could not quench that light. When what was done was done, the ransom had been paid. Both death and hell forsook their claim on all who would repent. Men at last were free. Then every soul who ever lived could choose to touch that light and be redeemed.
 15. By this infinite sacrifice, through this atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.
 16. Atonement is really three words: At-one-ment, meaning to set at one, one with God; to reconcile, to conciliate, to expiate.
 17. But did you know that the word atonement appears only once in the English New Testament? Only once! I quote from Paul's letter to the Romans:
 18. "Christ died for us. . . .
"We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:8, 10–11; italics added).
 19. Only that once does the word atonement appear in the English New Testament. Atonement, of all words! It was not an unknown word, for it had been used much in the Old Testament in connection with the law of Moses, once only in the New Testament. I find that to be remarkable.
 20. I know of only one explanation. For that we turn to the Book of Mormon.
 21. Nephi testified that the Bible once "contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record" (1 Ne. 13:24) and that "After [the words] go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away" (1 Ne. 13:26).
 22. Jacob defined the great and abominable church in these words:
 23. "Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God" (2 Ne. 10:16).
 24. Nephi said, "Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, . . . an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Ne. 13:29).
 25. He then prophesied that the precious things would be restored (see 1 Ne. 13:34–35).
 26. And they were restored. In the Book of Mormon the word atone in form and tense appears fifty-five times. I quote but one verse from Alma: "And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also" (Alma 42:15; italics added).
 27. Only once in the New Testament—fifty-five times in the Book of Mormon. What better witness that the Book of Mormon is indeed another testament of Jesus Christ?
 28. And that is not all. The words atone, atonement, atoneth, appear in the Doctrine and Covenants eleven times and in the Pearl of Great Price three. Sixty-nine references of transcendent importance. And that is not all! Hundreds of other verses help to explain it.
 29. The cost of the Atonement was borne by the Lord without compulsion, for agency is a sovereign principle. According to the plan, agency must be honored. It was so from the beginning, from Eden.
 30. "The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency" (Moses 7:32).
 31. Whatever else happened in Eden, in his supreme moment of testing, Adam made a choice.
 32. After the Lord commanded Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth and commanded them not to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He said: "Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Moses 3:17).
 33. There was too much at issue to introduce man into mortality by force. That would contravene the very law essential to the plan. The plan provided that each spirit child of God would receive a mortal body and each would be tested. Adam saw that it must be so and made his choice. "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25).
 34. Adam and Eve ventured forth to multiply and replenish the earth as they had been commanded to do. The creation of their bodies in the image of God, as a separate creation, was crucial to the plan. Their subsequent fall was essential if the condition of mortality was to exist and the plan proceed.
 35. Jacob described what would happen to our bodies and our spirits except an atonement, an infinite atonement, were made. We should, he said, have become "like unto [the devil]" (see 2 Ne. 9:7–9).

36. I seldom use the word absolute. It seldom fits. I use it now—twice. Because of the Fall, the Atonement was absolutely essential for resurrection to proceed and overcome mortal death.
37. The Atonement was absolutely essential for men to cleanse themselves from sin and overcome the second death, which is the spiritual death, which is separation from our Father in Heaven. For the scriptures tell us, seven times they tell us, that no unclean thing may enter the presence of God.
38. Those scriptural words, “Thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee” (Moses 3:17), introduced Adam and Eve and their posterity to all the risks of mortality. In mortality men are free to choose, and each choice begets a consequence. The choice Adam made energized the law of justice, which required that the penalty for disobedience would be death.
39. But those words spoken at the trial, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11), proved mercy was of equal rank. A redeemer was sent to pay the debt and set men free. That was the plan.
40. Alma’s son Corianton thought it unfair that penalties must follow sin, that there need be punishment. In a profound lesson Alma taught the plan of redemption to his son, and so to us.
41. Alma spoke of the Atonement and said, “Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” (Alma 42:16).
42. If punishment is the price repentance asks, it comes at bargain price. Consequences, even painful ones, protect us. So simple a thing as a child’s cry of pain when his finger touches fire can teach us that. Except for the pain, the child might be consumed.
43. I readily confess that I would find no peace, neither happiness nor safety, in a world without repentance. I do not know what I should do if there were no way for me to erase my mistakes. The agony would be more than I could bear. It may be otherwise with you, but not with me.
44. An atonement was made. Ever and always it offers amnesty from transgression and from death if we will but repent. Repentance is the escape clause in it all. Repentance is the key with which we can unlock the prison from inside. We hold that key within our hands, and agency is ours to use it.
45. How supernally precious freedom is; how consummately valuable is the agency of man.
46. Lucifer in clever ways manipulates our choices, deceiving us about sin and consequences. He, and his angels with him, tempt us to be unworthy, even wicked. But he cannot, in all eternity he cannot, with all his power he cannot completely destroy us; not without our own consent. Had agency come to man without the Atonement, it would have been a fatal gift.
47. We are taught in Genesis, in Moses, in Abraham, in the Book of Mormon, and in the endowment that man’s mortal body was made in the image of God in a separate creation. Had the Creation come in a different way, there could have been no Fall.
48. If men were merely animals, then logic favors freedom without accountability.
49. How well I know that among learned men are those who look down at animals and stones to find the origin of man. They do not look inside themselves to find the spirit there. They train themselves to measure things by time, by thousands and by millions, and say these animals called men all came by chance. And this they are free to do, for agency is theirs.
50. But agency is ours as well. We look up, and in the universe we see the handiwork of God and measure things by epochs, by eons, by dispensations, by eternities. The many things we do not know we take on faith.
51. But this we know! It was all planned before the world was. Events from the Creation to the final, winding-up scene are not based on chance; they are based on choice! It was planned that way.
52. This we know! This simple truth! Had there been no Creation, no Fall, there should have been no need for any Atonement, neither a Redeemer to mediate for us. Then Christ need not have been.
53. At Gethsemane and Golgotha the Savior’s blood was shed. Centuries earlier the Passover had been introduced as a symbol and a type of things to come. It was an ordinance to be kept forever (see Ex. 12).
54. When the plague of death was decreed upon Egypt, each Israelite family was commanded to take a lamb, firstborn, male, without blemish. This paschal lamb was slain without breaking any bones, its blood to mark the doorway of the home. The Lord promised that the angel of death would pass over the homes so marked and not slay those inside. They were saved by the blood of the lamb.
55. After the crucifixion of the Lord, the law of sacrifice required no more shedding of blood. For that was done, as Paul taught the Hebrews, “once for all, . . . one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Heb. 10:10, 12). The sacrifice thenceforth was to be a broken heart and a contrite spirit—repentance.
56. And the Passover would be commemorated forever as the sacrament, in which we renew our covenant of baptism and partake in remembrance of the body of the Lamb of God and of His blood, which was shed for us.
57. It is no small thing that this symbol reappears in the Word of Wisdom. Beyond the promise that Saints in this generation, who obey, will receive health and great treasures of knowledge is this: “I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them” (D&C 89:21).
58. I cannot with composure tell you how I feel about the Atonement. It touches the deepest emotion of gratitude and obligation. My soul reaches after Him who wrought it, this Christ, our Savior of whom I am a witness. I

Gethsemane

*In golden youth when seems the earth
A Summer-land of singing mirth,
When souls are glad and hearts are light,
And not a shadow lurks in sight,
We do not know it, but there lies
Somewhere veiled under evening skies
A garden which we all must see --
The garden of Gethsemane.*

*With joyous steps we go our ways,
Love lends a halo to our days;
Light sorrows sail like clouds afar,
We laugh and say how strong we are.
We hurry on; and hurrying, go
Close to the border-land of woe,
That waits for you, and waits for me --
Forever waits Gethsemane.*

*Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams,
Bridged over by our broken dreams;
Behind the misty caps of years,
Beyond the great salt fount of tears,
The garden lies. Strive as you may,
You cannot miss it in your way.
All paths that have been, or shall be,
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.
All those who journey, soon or late,
Must pass within the garden's gate;
Must kneel alone in darkness there,
And battle with some fierce despair.
God pity those who cannot say,
"Not mine but thine," who only pray,
"Let this cup pass," and cannot see
The purpose in Gethsemane.*

(Poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Copyright 1910, W.P. Nimmo, Hay, and Mitchell, Edinburgh)

Week 8 - The Road to Golgotha and the Cross

Scripture and Other Readings: Matthew 26:47-27:54; Mark 14:43-15:39; Luke 22:47-23:49; John 18-19:37

Invitation Week 8:

Complete the exercise “The Journey from Gethsemane’s Garden to the Garden Tomb.” Spend some time this week talking to someone who might need some help or support as they travel their own “via dolorosa.” Ponder some of the crosses that you have been asked to bear. After choosing just one of those crosses, seek and record revelation from the Lord of the vision to bear your cross in a godly way. Next, think about and record the positive things that can come from this cross. Ponder and write the trust that you feel from Heavenly Father in allowing you to bear this cross in order to become like Him. Finally, think of someone who has experienced a loss and seek to give them comfort.

Jeffrey R. Holland, “None Were With Him,” *General Conference, April 2009*

1. Thank you, Sister Thompson, and thanks to the remarkable women of this Church. Brothers and sisters, my Easter-season message today is intended for everyone, but it is directed in a special way to those who are alone or feel alone or, worse yet, feel abandoned. These might include those longing to be married, those who have lost a spouse, and those who have lost—or have never been blessed with—children. Our empathy embraces wives forsaken by their husbands, husbands whose wives have walked away, and children bereft of one or the other of their parents—or both. This group can find within its broad circumference a soldier far from home, a missionary in those first weeks of homesickness, or a father out of work, afraid the fear in his eyes will be visible to his family. In short it can include all of us at various times in our lives.
2. To all such, I speak of the loneliest journey ever made and the unending blessings it brought to all in the human family. I speak of the Savior’s solitary task of shouldering alone the burden of our salvation. Rightly He would say: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me. . . . I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold [me].”¹
3. As President Uchtdorf so beautifully noted earlier, we know from scripture that Jesus’s messianic arrival in Jerusalem on the Sunday preceding Passover, a day directly analogous to this very morning, was a great public moment. But eagerness to continue walking with Him would quickly begin to wane.
4. Soon enough He was arraigned before the Israelite leaders of the day—first Annas, the former high priest, then Caiaphas, the current high priest. In their rush to judgment these men and their councils declared their verdict quickly and angrily. “What further need have we of witnesses?” they cried. “He is [worthy] of death.”²
5. With that He was brought before the gentile rulers in the land. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, interrogated Him once, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea, did so twice, the second time declaring to the crowd, “I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man.”³ Then, in an act as unconscionable as it was illogical, Pilate “scourged Jesus, [and] delivered him to be crucified.”⁴ Pilate’s freshly washed hands could not have been more stained or more unclean.
6. Such ecclesiastical and political rejection became more personal when the citizenry in the street turned against Jesus as well. It is one of the ironies of history that sitting with Jesus in prison was a real blasphemer, a murderer and revolutionary known as Barabbas, a name or title in Aramaic meaning “son of the father.”⁵ Free to release one prisoner in the spirit of the Passover tradition, Pilate asked the people, “Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?” They said, “Barabbas.”⁶ So one godless “son of the father” was set free while a truly divine Son of His Heavenly Father moved on to crucifixion.
7. This was also a telling time among those who knew Jesus more personally. The most difficult to understand in this group is Judas Iscariot. We know the divine plan required Jesus to be crucified, but it is wrenching to think that one of His special witnesses who sat at His feet, heard Him pray, watched Him heal, and felt His touch could betray Him and all that He was for 30 pieces of silver. Never in the history of this world has so little money purchased so much infamy. We are not the ones to judge Judas’s fate, but Jesus said of His betrayer, “Good [were it] for that man if he had not been born.”⁷
8. Of course others among the believers had their difficult moments as well. Following the Last Supper, Jesus left Peter, James, and John to wait while He ventured into the Garden of Gethsemane alone. Falling on His face in

prayer, “sorrowful . . . unto death,”⁸ the record says, His sweat came as great drops of blood⁹ as He pled with the Father to let this crushing, brutal cup pass from Him. But, of course, it could not pass. Returning from such anguished prayer, He found His three chief disciples asleep, prompting Him to ask, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?”¹⁰ So it happens two more times until on His third return He says compassionately, “Sleep on now, and take your rest,”¹¹ though there would be no rest for Him.

9. Later, after Jesus’s arrest and appearance at trial, Peter, accused of knowing Jesus and being one of His confidants, denies that accusation not once but three times. We don’t know all that was going on here, nor do we know of protective counsel which the Savior may have given to His Apostles privately,¹² but we do know Jesus was aware that even these precious ones would not stand with Him in the end, and He had warned Peter accordingly.¹³ Then, with the crowing of the cock, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord. . . . And [he] went out, and wept bitterly.”¹⁴
10. Thus, of divine necessity, the supporting circle around Jesus gets smaller and smaller and smaller, giving significance to Matthew’s words: “All the disciples [left] him, and fled.”¹⁵ Peter stayed near enough to be recognized and confronted. John stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus’s mother. Especially and always the blessed women in the Savior’s life stayed as close to Him as they could. But essentially His lonely journey back to His Father continued without comfort or companionship.
11. Now I speak very carefully, even reverently, of what may have been the most difficult moment in all of this solitary journey to Atonement. I speak of those final moments for which Jesus must have been prepared intellectually and physically but which He may not have fully anticipated emotionally and spiritually—that concluding descent into the paralyzing despair of divine withdrawal when He cries in ultimate loneliness, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”¹⁶
12. The loss of mortal support He had anticipated, but apparently He had not comprehended this. Had He not said to His disciples, “Behold, the hour . . . is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” and “The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him”?¹⁷
13. With all the conviction of my soul I testify that He did please His Father perfectly and that a perfect Father did not forsake His Son in that hour. Indeed, it is my personal belief that in all of Christ’s mortal ministry the Father may never have been closer to His Son than in these agonizing final moments of suffering. Nevertheless, that the supreme sacrifice of His Son might be as complete as it was voluntary and solitary, the Father briefly withdrew from Jesus the comfort of His Spirit, the support of His personal presence. It was

required, indeed it was central to the significance of the Atonement, that this perfect Son who had never spoken ill nor done wrong nor touched an unclean thing had to know how the rest of humankind—us, all of us—would feel when we did commit such sins. For His Atonement to be infinite and eternal, He had to feel what it was like to die not only physically but spiritually, to sense what it was like to have the divine Spirit withdraw, leaving one feeling totally, abjectly, hopelessly alone.

14. But Jesus held on. He pressed on. The goodness in Him allowed faith to triumph even in a state of complete anguish. The trust He lived by told Him in spite of His feelings that divine compassion is never absent, that God is always faithful, that He never flees nor fails us. When the uttermost farthing had then been paid, when Christ’s determination to be faithful was as obvious as it was utterly invincible, finally and mercifully, it was “finished.”¹⁸ Against all odds and with none to help or uphold Him, Jesus of Nazareth, the living Son of the living God, restored physical life where death had held sway and brought joyful, spiritual redemption out of sin, hellish darkness, and despair. With faith in the God He knew was there, He could say in triumph, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”¹⁹
15. Brothers and sisters, one of the great consolations of this Easter season is that because Jesus walked such a long, lonely path utterly alone, we do not have to do so. His solitary journey brought great company for our little version of that path—the merciful care of our Father in Heaven, the unfailing companionship of this Beloved Son, the consummate gift of the Holy Ghost, angels in heaven, family members on both sides of the veil, prophets and apostles, teachers, leaders, friends. All of these and more have been given as companions for our mortal journey because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of His gospel. Trumpeted from the summit of Calvary is the truth that we will never be left alone nor unaided, even if sometimes we may feel that we are. Truly the Redeemer of us all said: “I will not leave you comfortless: [My Father and] I will come to you [and abide with you].”²⁰
16. My other plea at Easter time is that these scenes of Christ’s lonely sacrifice, laced with moments of denial and abandonment and, at least once, outright betrayal, must never be reenacted by us. He has walked alone once. Now, may I ask that never again will He have to confront sin without our aid and assistance, that never again will He find only unresponsive onlookers when He sees you and me along His Via Dolorosa in our present day. As we approach this holy week—Passover Thursday with its Paschal Lamb, atoning Friday with its cross, Resurrection Sunday with its empty tomb—may we declare ourselves to be more fully disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in word only and not only in the flush of comfortable times but in deed and in courage and in faith, including when the path is lonely and when our cross is difficult to bear. This Easter week and

Supplemental Readings:

James E. Faust, "A Crown of Thorns, a Crown of Glory," *General Conference, April 1991*

1. My beloved brothers and sisters and friends, today I wish to speak of thorns, briars, slivers, and a crown of thorns. I also wish to speak of the exquisite beauty and fragrance to be found in life, and of a crown of glory. I wish that I better understood all of the divine purposes in having to contend with so many painful irritants in this life. Lehi explained one reason: that we will appreciate and savor the goodness and loveliness of the world. (See 2 Ne. 2:10–13.) Adam was told that the ground is cursed with thorns and thistles for our sakes. (See Gen. 3:17–18.) Likewise, mortality is "cursed" with the thorns of worldly temptation and the slivers of sin so that we can be tested and prove ourselves. This is necessary for our eternal progression. The Apostle Paul explained, "Lest I should be exalted above measure . . . , there was given to me a thorn in the flesh." (2 Cor. 12:7.)
2. The denial of our own sins, of our own selfishness, of our own weakness is like a crown of thorns which keeps us from moving up one more step in personal growth. Perhaps worse than sin is the denial of sin. If we deny that we are sinners, how can we ever be forgiven? How can the atonement of Jesus work in our lives if there is no repentance? If we do not promptly remove the slivers of sin and the thorns of carnal temptation, how can the Lord ever heal our souls? The Savior said, "Repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you." (3 Ne. 9:13.) It is most difficult for us to pray for those who hate us, who spitefully use us, who persecute us. But by failing to take this vital extra step, however, we fail to remove some of the festering briars in our souls. Extending forgiveness, love, and understanding for perceived shortcomings and weaknesses in our wives, husbands, children, and associates makes it much easier to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13.)
3. It seems that no matter how carefully we walk through life's paths, we pick up some thorns, briars, and slivers. As a young boy, when school was out for the summer and we went to the farm, off came our shoes. The shoes stayed off all summer long except for special occasions. For the first week or two, when our feet were tender, the smoothest pebble or stick would be painful. But as the weeks came and went, the soles of our feet toughened so that they could withstand almost anything in the path except thistles, of which there seemed to be more than any other weed. And so it is with life; as we grow and mature and keep close to Him who was crowned with thorns, our souls seem to get stronger in withstanding the challenges, our resolve hardens, our wills become firmer, and our self-discipline increases to protect us from the evils of this world. These evils are so omnipresent, however, that we must always walk in the paths which are the most free of the thistles of earthly temptation.
4. As children, we used to delight in waving thistle-down stalks to watch the seeds float on the wind. Only later did we realize the effects that this had on our own and neighboring gardens. Many of us delight in flirting with temptation, only later to learn how we and others have sown the seeds of our own unhappiness and how we can also affect our neighbor's happiness.
5. There is a defense mechanism to discern between good and evil. It is called conscience. It is our spirit's natural response to the pain of sin, just like pain in our flesh is our body's natural response to a wound—even a small sliver. Conscience strengthens through use. Paul told the Hebrews, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:14.) Those who have not exercised their conscience have "their conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Tim. 4:2.) A sensitive conscience is a sign of a healthy spirit.
6. How are the thorns and slivers of life removed? The power to remove the thorns in our lives and in the lives of others begins with ourselves. Moroni writes that when we deny ourselves of ungodliness, then the grace of Christ is sufficient for us. (See Moro. 10:32.)
7. Too often we seek bandages to cover the guilt rather than removal of the thorn causing the pain. How much we resist the momentary pain of removing a sliver, even though it will relieve the longer-lasting pain of a festering sore. Everyone knows that if thorns and briars and slivers are not removed from the flesh, they will cause sores that fester and will not heal.
8. One of the members of our family has a remarkable dog named Ben. A few years ago, on a beautiful fall day, some of us were walking in the fields. Ben was going back and forth in front of us, sniffing the ground, tail wagging, and obviously enjoying himself. After a while we sat down on a ditch bank to rest and could feel the warmth of the autumn sun caressing us. Ben came limping up to his master and, with a pained look in his eye, held up his front paw. Ben's master gently took his paw into his hands and examined it carefully. Between two of his toes was a thorn. The thorn was carefully removed, and Ben stayed long enough to wag his tail a little more vigorously and receive a few pats on his head. He then ran off, no longer limping nor bothered by the pain. I was amazed that Ben instinctively seemed to know that the thorn needed to come out to relieve the pain and to know where to go to have it removed. Like Ben, we also seem to instinctively look for relief from the thorns of sin that inflict us. In contrast, however, we do not always seek our Master for relief; and many do not yet know who their Master is.
9. As a carpenter, Jesus would have been familiar with slivers and thorny woods. As a child, He would have learned that one rarely gets a sliver when working the

wood in the right direction. He would also have known more than any how slivers—small and painful—divert attention from important matters. The scourging of Jesus took place partly with thorns:

10. “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.
11. “And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.
12. “And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!
13. “And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.” (Matt. 27:27–30.)
14. Perhaps this cruel act was a perverse attempt to mimic the placing of an emperor’s laurel upon His head. Thus, there was pressed down upon Him a crown of thorns. He accepted the pain as part of the great gift He had promised to make. How poignant this was, considering that thorns signified God’s displeasure as He cursed the ground for Adam’s sake that henceforth it would bring forth thorns. But by wearing the crown, Jesus transformed thorns into a symbol of His glory. As Emily Dickinson so aptly described it:
15. One crown that no one seeks
And yet the highest head
Its isolation coveted
Its stigma deified.
16. Because He was focused on giving, neither the adulation nor the scorn of the world could deflect Him from His mission.
17. Our Savior knows “according to the flesh” every dimension of our suffering. There is no infirmity He is not familiar with. In His agony He became acquainted with all of the thorns, slivers, and thistles that might afflict us:
18. “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
19. “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” (Alma 7:11–12.)
20. All irritants of the flesh and the soul should be removed before they fester. However, though they ulcerate and though they torment, they can still be removed, and the healing process will take place. When the infection is healed, the soreness will leave. That process is known as repentance. Repentance and forgiveness are among the greatest fruits of the Atonement. It is not easy to remove the thorns of pride, the thistles of selfishness, the slivers of ego, and the briars of appetite.
21. In Roselandia, Brazil, outside the great city of São Paulo, there are many acres of beautiful roses. When one stands on a small hill above the rose fields, the

aroma is delightful and the beauty is exhilarating. The thorns on the bushes are there, but they in no way lessen the enjoyment of the sight and the smell. I would challenge all to put the thorns, slivers, and thistles we encounter in life in proper perspective. We should deal with them but then concentrate on the flowers of life, not on the thorns. We should savor the smell and beauty of the flower of the rose and the cactus. To savor the sweet aroma of the blossoms, we need to live righteous and disciplined lives in which the study of the scriptures, prayer, right priorities, and right attitudes are integrated into our lives. For members of this church, that focus sharpens inside of our temples. We will all surely encounter some of the thorns, but they are only incidental to the sweet fragrances and exquisite beauty of the blooms. Did not the Savior say, “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matt. 7:16.)

22. Thomas Carlyle, a British writer, stated, “Every noble crown is, and on Earth will forever be, a crown of thorns.” (Past and Present, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912, 3:173.) The ancient Latin phrase *sic transit gloria mundi* means “thus passes away the glory of this world.” Earthly rewards can be a sore temptation. In contrast, those who are faithful and are committed to service are promised that they will be “crowned with honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life.” (D&C 75:5.) Thus neither honors nor trials can defeat. Paul spoke of an incorruptible crown (see 1 Cor. 9:25), and James spoke of the faithful receiving a “crown of life” (James 1:12). John the Revelator counseled, “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” (Rev. 3:11.)
23. I believe that earthly crowns such as power, the love of money, the preoccupation with material things, the honors of men are a crown of thorns because they are based upon obtaining and receiving rather than giving. So selfishness can make what we think is a noble crown into a crown of thorns beyond our power to endure. When I first started my professional career, one of the senior members in our office asked another senior member for some help on a legal matter. The other man who was asked to help was gifted and able but also selfish. He replied, “What’s in it for me?” The “what’s in it for me?” philosophy is basically what’s wrong with the world. It is surely one of the sharpest points in a crown of thorns.
24. The call of Jesus Christ to each of us is, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24.) Is it not time that we begin denying ourselves, as the Savior counseled, and surrender and master ourselves rather than indulge ourselves in a “do my own thing” selfish little world? The question is not so much what we can do, but what God can do through us. Paul said, “If man therefore purge himself . . . , he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” (2 Tim. 2:21.)

25. Taking up one's cross and following the Savior is always a commitment to service. When going to school I was very poor. I worked long hours in a canning factory catching steaming-hot cans for twenty-five cents an hour. I learned that selfishness has more to do with how we feel about what we have than how much we have. A poor man can be selfish and a rich man generous, but a person obsessed only with getting will have a hard time to find God. I have come to know that with any privilege comes responsibility. Most privilege carries with it the responsibility to serve, to give, and to bless. God can take away any privilege if it is not used under His omnipotent will. Meeting that challenge to give, to serve, to bless in faithfulness and devotion is the only way to enjoy the crown of glory spoken of by the original Apostles. It is the only way true meaning comes to life. We will be able to receive honors or scorn with equal serenity.

26. I conclude with the words of Ezekiel, "And thou, son of man, . . . though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid." (Ezek. 2:6.) In our constantly changing world, may we continually cling to those things that do not change: to prayer, to faith, to saving covenants, to love of families, and to brotherhood. By removing the slivers of sin and the thorns of worldly temptation in our lives, and by denying ourselves and taking up our own cross and following the Savior, we can change a crown of thorns to a crown of glory. I testify, as one of his humble servants called to be His special witness, that He lives. I witness from the depths of my soul that we are engaged in His holy work, to which, if we are faithful, we can be crowned with honor, glory, and eternal life. (See D&C 75:5.) In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

David A. Bednar, "The Character of Christ," *BYU-Idaho Religion Symposium, January 25, 2003*

1. Good morning, brothers and sisters. I am delighted to be here with you. I pray for and invite the Holy Ghost to be with me and with you as together we discuss an important aspect of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Last September I participated in an area training meeting in Twin Falls, Idaho. Elder Neal A. Maxwell presided at the training session, and on a Friday night and a Saturday morning he, the Idaho Area Presidency, and other general church officers instructed a group of approximately one hundred stake presidents. It was a meaningful and memorable time of spiritual enrichment, learning, and edification.
3. During the course of his teaching and testifying, Elder Maxwell made a statement that impressed me deeply and has been the recent focus for much of my studying, reflecting, and pondering. He said, "There would have been no Atonement except for the character of Christ." Since hearing this straightforward and penetrating statement, I have tried to learn more about and better understand the word "character." I have also pondered the relationship between Christ's character and the Atonement--and the implications of that relationship for each of us as disciples. This morning I hope to share with you just a few of the learnings that have come to my mind and heart as I have attempted to more fully appreciate this teaching by Elder Maxwell.

What is Character?

4. After returning home from the area training meeting in Twin Falls, the first question I attempted to answer was "What is character?" The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that many of the uses of the word character relate to graphic symbols, printing, engraving, and writing. The

- usages I found most relevant, however, relate to ". . . the sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a race; mental or moral constitution; moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, University Press 2003, Second Edition, 1989). Interestingly, when we look up the word "character" in the topical guide of our scriptures, we discover that it is cross-referenced to the topics of honesty, honor, and integrity.
5. Brigham Young emphasized the significance of the Savior's character as he taught and testified about the truthfulness of the Holy Bible:
 6. . . . the Bible is true. It may not all have been translated aright, and many precious things may have been rejected in the compilation and translation of the Bible; but we understand, from the writings of one of the Apostles, that if all the sayings and doings of the Savior had been written, the world could not contain them. I will say that the world could not understand them. They do not understand what we have on record, **nor the character of the Savior**, as delineated in the Scriptures; and yet it is one of the simplest things in the world, and the Bible, when it is understood, is one of the simplest books in the world, for, as far as it is translated correctly, it is nothing but truth, and in truth there is no mystery save to the ignorant. The revelations of the Lord to his creatures are adapted to the lowest capacity, and they bring life and salvation to all who are willing to receive them. (Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 124, emphasis added)
 7. Brigham Young further taught that faith must be focused upon Jesus' character, in His Atonement, and in the Father's plan of salvation:

8. “. . . I will take the liberty of saying to every man and woman who wishes to obtain salvation through him (the Savior) that *looking* to him, only, is not enough: **they must have faith in his name, character and atonement**; and they must have faith in his father and in the plan of salvation devised and wrought out by the Father and the Son. What will this faith lead to? It will lead to obedience to the requirements of the Gospel; and the few words that I may deliver to my brethren and sisters and friends this afternoon will be with the direct view of leading them to God.” (Journal of Discourses, Vol.13, p. 56, Brigham Young, July 18, 1869, emphasis added)

The Character of the Lord Jesus Christ

9. In a message entitled "O How Great the Plan of Our God" delivered to CES religious educators in February of 1995 (p. 5), Elder Maxwell specifically linked Christ's character to the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice:
10. "Jesus' character necessarily underwrote His remarkable atonement. Without Jesus' sublime character there could have been no sublime atonement! His character is such that He "[suffered] temptations of every kind" (Alma 7:11), yet He gave temptations "no heed" (Doctrine and Covenants 20:22).
11. Someone has said only those who resist temptation really understand the power of temptation. Because Jesus resisted it perfectly, He understood temptation perfectly, hence He can help us. The fact that He was dismissive of temptation and gave it "no heed," reveals His marvelous character, which we are to emulate (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:22; 3 Nephi 12:48; 27:27).
12. Perhaps the greatest indicator of character is the capacity to recognize and appropriately respond to other people who are experiencing the very challenge or adversity that is most immediately and forcefully pressing upon us. Character is revealed, for example, in the power to discern the suffering of other people when we ourselves are suffering; in the ability to detect the hunger of others when we are hungry; and in the power to reach out and extend compassion for the spiritual agony of others when we are in the midst of our own spiritual distress. Thus, character is demonstrated by looking and reaching outward when the natural and instinctive response is to be self-absorbed and turn inward. If such a capacity is indeed the ultimate criterion of moral character, then the Savior of the world is the perfect example of such a consistent and charitable character."

Examples of Christ's Character in the New Testament

13. The New Testament is replete with "strikingly displayed" examples of the Savior's character. We are all well aware that following His baptism by John the Baptist and as a preparation for His public

ministry, the Savior fasted for forty days. He also was tempted by the adversary to inappropriately use His supernal power to satisfy physical desires by commanding that stones be made bread, to gain recognition by casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and to obtain wealth and power and prestige in exchange for falling down and worshiping the tempter (see Matthew 4:1-9). It is interesting to note that the overarching and fundamental challenge to the Savior in each of these three temptations is contained in the taunting statement, "*If thou be the Son of God.*" Satan's strategy, in essence, was to dare the Son of God to improperly demonstrate His God-given powers, to sacrifice meekness and modesty, and, thereby, betray who He was. Thus, Satan attempted repeatedly to attack Jesus' understanding of who He was and of His relationship with His Father. Jesus was victorious in meeting and overcoming the strategy of Satan.

14. I suspect the Savior may have been at least partially spent physically after forty days of fasting--and somewhat spiritually drained after His encounter with the adversary. With this background information in mind, please turn with me now to Matthew 4, and together we will read verse 11: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."
15. This verse in the King James version of the New Testament clearly indicates that angels came and ministered to the Savior after the devil had departed. And, undoubtedly, Jesus would have benefitted from and been blessed by such a heavenly ministration in a time of physical and spiritual need.
16. However, the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 4:11 provides a remarkable insight into the character of Christ. Please note the important differences in verse 11 between the King James version and the Joseph Smith Translation: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, now Jesus knew that John was cast into prison, and he sent angels, and, behold, they came and ministered unto him (John)."
17. Interestingly, the additions found in the JST completely change our understanding of this event. Angels did not come and minister to the Savior; rather, the Savior, in His own state of spiritual, mental, and physical distress, sent angels to minister to John. Brothers and sisters, it is important for us to recognize that Jesus in the midst of His own challenge recognized and appropriately responded to John--who was experiencing a similar but lesser challenge than that of the Savior's. Thus, the character of Christ is manifested as He reached outward and ministered to one who was suffering--even as He himself was experiencing anguish and torment.

18. In the upper room on the night of the last supper, the very night during which He would experience the greatest suffering that ever took place in all of the worlds created by Him, Christ spoke about the Comforter and peace:
19. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.
20. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.
21. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:25-27)
22. Once again the fundamental character of Christ is revealed magnificently in this tender incident. Recognizing that He himself was about to intensely and personally experience the absence of both comfort and peace, and in a moment when His heart was perhaps troubled and afraid, the Master reached outward and offered to others the very blessings that could and would have strengthened Him.
23. In the great intercessory prayer, offered immediately before Jesus went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron to the Garden of Gethsemane, the Master prayed for His disciples and for all:
24. . . . which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me . . . that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:20, 21, 23, 26)
25. I find myself repeatedly asking the following questions as I ponder this and other events that took place so close to the Savior's suffering in the garden and His betrayal: How could He pray for the well-being and unity of others immediately before His own anguish? What enabled Him to seek comfort and peace for those whose need was so much less than His? As the fallen nature of the world He created pressed in upon Him, how could He focus so totally and so exclusively upon the conditions and concerns of others? How was the Master able to reach outward when a lesser being would have turned inward? The statement I quoted earlier from Elder Maxwell provides the answer to each of these powerful questions:
26. "Jesus' character necessarily underwrote His remarkable atonement. Without Jesus' sublime character there could have been no sublime atonement! His character is such that He "[suffered] temptations of every kind" (Alma 7:11), yet He gave temptations "no heed" (Doctrine and Covenants 20:22). ("O How Great the Plan of Our God," message delivered to CES religious educators in February of 1995, p. 5)"
27. Jesus, who suffered the most, has the most compassion for all of us who suffer so much less. Indeed, the depth of suffering and compassion is intimately linked to the depth of love felt by the ministering one. Consider the scene as Jesus emerged from His awful suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. Having just sweat great drops of blood from every pore as part of the infinite and eternal Atonement, the Redeemer encountered a multitude:
28. And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew unto Jesus to kiss him.
29. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?
30. When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?
31. And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. (Luke 22:47-50)
32. Given the magnitude and intensity of Jesus' agony, it perhaps would have been understandable if He had not noticed and attended to the guard's severed ear. But the Savior's character activated a compassion that was perfect. Note His response to the guard as described in verse 51: "And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him (Luke 22:51).
33. As individually impressive as is each of the preceding events, I believe it is the consistency of the Lord's character across multiple episodes that is ultimately the most instructive and inspiring. In addition to the incidents we have thus far reviewed, recall how the Savior, while suffering such agony on the cross, instructed the Apostle John about caring for Jesus' mother, Mary (John 19:26-27). Consider how, as the Lord was taken to Calvary and the awful agony of the crucifixion was commenced, He pleaded with the Father in behalf of the soldiers to ". . . forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Remember also that in the midst of excruciating spiritual and physical pain, the Savior offered hope and reassurance to one of the thieves on the cross, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Throughout His mortal ministry, and especially during the events leading up to and including the atoning sacrifice, the Savior of the world turned outward--when the natural man or woman in any of us would have been self-centered and focused inward.

Developing a Christlike Character

34. We can in mortality seek to be blessed with and develop essential elements of a Christlike

character. Indeed, it is possible for us as mortals to strive in righteousness to receive the spiritual gifts associated with the capacity to reach outward and appropriately respond to other people who are experiencing the very challenge or adversity that is most immediately and forcefully pressing upon us. We cannot obtain such a capacity through sheer willpower or personal determination. Rather, we are dependent upon and in need of "the merits, mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8). But "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30) and "in [the] process of time" (Moses 7:21), we are enabled to reach outward when the natural tendency is for us to turn inward.

35. It is interesting to me that one of the central elements of the word *character* is created by the letters A, C, and T. As we already have seen in the examples of Christ's character from the New Testament, the nature and consistency of how one **acts** reveals in a powerful way his or her true **character**. In the case of Christ, he is described as one ". . . who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Let me now briefly share with you two memorable experiences from my service as a stake president that highlight the relationship between our **actions** and a Christlike **character**.
36. Early one summer morning I was showering. My wife called to me in the middle of my shower and indicated that I was needed immediately on the telephone. (This was before the day of cell and cordless phones). I quickly put on my robe and hurried to the phone. I next heard the voice of a dear sister and friend informing me of a tragic automobile accident that had just occurred in a remote area involving three teenage young women from our stake. Our friend indicated one of the young women had already been pronounced dead at the scene of the accident and that the two other young women were badly injured and presently were being transported to the regional medical center in Fayetteville. She further reported that the identity of the deceased young woman was not yet known. There was urgency in her voice, but there was no panic or excessive alarm. She then asked if I could go to the hospital, meet the ambulance when it arrived, and assist in identifying the young women. I answered that I would leave immediately.
37. During the course of our telephone conversation and as I listened to both the information being conveyed and the voice of our friend, I gradually became aware of two important things. First, this friend's daughter was one of the young women involved in the accident. Our friend lived approximately 35 miles from the hospital and therefore needed the assistance of someone who lived closer to the city. Second, I detected that the mother simultaneously was using two telephone handsets--with one in each hand pressed to each of her ears. I became aware that as she was talking with me, she was also talking with a nurse at a small rural hospital who had initially attended to the three accident victims. Our friend was receiving updated information about the condition of the young women in the very moment she was informing me about the accident and requesting my help. I then heard one of the most remarkable things I have ever heard in my life.
38. I faintly heard the nurse telling this faithful mother and friend that the young woman pronounced dead at the scene of the accident had been positively identified as her daughter. I could not believe what I was hearing. I was listening to this good woman in the very moment that she learned of the death of her precious daughter. Without hesitation, and with a calm and most deliberate voice, our friend next said, "President Bednar, we must get in contact with the two other mothers. We must let them know as much as we can about the condition of their daughters and that they will soon be in the hospital in Fayetteville." There was no self-pity; there was no self-absorption; there was no turning inward. The Christlike character of this devoted woman was manifested in her immediate and almost instinctive turning outward to attend to the needs of other suffering mothers. It was a moment and a lesson that I have never forgotten. In a moment of ultimate grief, this dear friend reached outward when I likely would have turned inward.
39. I then drove to the hospital with a concern in my heart for the well-being of the two other beautiful young women who had been involved in the accident. Little did I realize that the lessons I would learn about Christlike character--lessons taught by seemingly ordinary disciples--were just beginning.
40. I arrived at the hospital and proceeded to the emergency room. After properly establishing who I was and my relationship to the victims, I was invited into two different treatment areas to identify the injured young women. It was obvious that their respective wounds were serious and life threatening. And the lovely countenances and physical features of these young women had been badly marred. Within a relatively short period of time, the two remaining young women died. All three of these virtuous, lovely, and engaging young women--who seemed to have so much of life in front of them--suddenly had gone home to their Eternal Father. My attention and the attention of the respective families now shifted to funeral arrangements and logistics.
41. A day or so later, in the midst of program planning and detail arranging for the three funerals, I received a phone call from the Relief Society president of my home ward. Her daughter had been

one of the victims in the accident, and she and I had talked several times about her desires for the funeral program. This faithful woman was a single mother rearing her only child--her teenage daughter. I was especially close to this woman and her daughter having served as both their bishop and stake president. After reviewing and finalizing several details for the funeral of her daughter, this good sister said to me, "President, I am sure it was difficult for you to see my daughter in the emergency room the other day. She was severely injured and disfigured. As you know, we will have a closed casket at the funeral. I have just returned from the funeral home, and they have helped my daughter to look so lovely again. I was just wondering . . . why don't we arrange a time when we can meet at the mortuary and you can have one last look at her before she is buried. Then your final memories of my daughter will not be the images you saw in the emergency room the other day." I listened and marveled at the compassion and thoughtfulness this sister had for me. Her only daughter had just been tragically killed, but she was concerned about the potentially troublesome memories I might have given my experience in the emergency room. In this good woman I detected no self-pity and no turning inward. Sorrow, certainly. Sadness, absolutely. Nevertheless, she reached outward when many or perhaps most of us would have turned inward with sorrow and grief.

42. Let me describe one final episode related to these three tragic deaths. On the day of her daughter's funeral, this Relief Society president from my home ward received a phone call from an irritated sister in our ward. The complaining sister had a cold and did not feel well, and she basically chewed out the Relief Society president for not being thoughtful or compassionate enough to arrange for meals to be delivered to her home. Just hours before the funeral of her only child, this remarkable Relief Society president prepared and delivered a meal to the murmuring sister.
43. We appropriately and rightly speak with reverence and awe of young men who sacrificed their lives to rescue stranded handcart pioneers and of other mighty men and women who repeatedly gave their all to establish the Church in the early days of the Restoration. I speak with equal reverence and awe of these two women--women of faith and character and conversion--who taught me so much and instinctively reached outward when most of us would have turned inward. Oh how I appreciate their quiet and powerful examples.

44. I noted earlier in my remarks that the letters A, C, and T form a central component in the word **character**. Also noteworthy is the similarity between the words **character** and **charity**--as both words contain the letters C, H, A, and R. Etymologically there is no relationship between these two words. Nevertheless, I believe there are several conceptual connections that are important for us to consider and ponder.
45. Let me suggest that you and I must be praying and yearning and striving and working to cultivate a Christlike **character** if we hope to receive the spiritual gift of **charity**--the pure love of Christ. Charity is not a trait or characteristic we acquire exclusively through our own purposive persistence and determination. Indeed we must honor our covenants and live worthily and do all that we can do to qualify for the gift; but ultimately the gift of charity possesses us--we do not possess it (see Moroni 7:47). The Lord determines if and when we receive all spiritual gifts, but we must do all in our power to desire and yearn and invite and qualify for such gifts. As we increasingly **act** in a manner congruent with the **character** of Christ, then perhaps we are indicating to heaven in a most powerful manner our desire for the supernal spiritual gift of **charity**. And clearly we are being blessed with this marvelous gift as we increasingly reach outward when the natural man or woman in us would typically turn inward.
46. I conclude now by returning to where I began--the statement by Elder Maxwell in that special training session last September: "There would have been no Atonement except for the character of Christ." It was the Prophet Joseph Smith who stated that "it is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345). The New Testament is a rich resource for learning about and increasing our appreciation for the character and life and example of the Savior. My prayer for each of us is that through our study of this sacred volume of scripture we will more fully come unto Him; more completely become like Him; and more fervently worship, reverence, and adore Him.
47. As a witness, I declare my witness. I know and testify and witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father. I know that He lives. And I testify that His character made possible for us the opportunities for both immortality and eternal life. May we reach outward when the natural tendency for us is to turn inward, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Journey from Gethsemane's Garden to the Garden Tomb

The stages below depict the various stages in the Savior's journey from his suffering in the garden of Gethsemane to his victory over death at the Garden Tomb. It was a lonely journey that only he could accomplish. As you read the following scriptures, imagine that you have been asked to go with him. Write the thoughts and feelings that you think the Savior was going through or express what you might say to him at each stage of this incredible journey.

Stage 1 (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:35-41; Luke 22:42-44)

Stage 2 (Matthew 26:46-56; Mark 14:43-46; Luke 22:45-53; John 18:4-8)

Stage 3 (Matthew 26:59-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54; John 18:19-24)

Stage 4 (Matthew 27:11-25; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28-38)

Stage 5 (Matthew 27:26-31; Mark 15:6-20; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-40; 19:1-12)

Stage 6 (Matthew 27:34-51; Mark 15:22-38; Luke 23:26-45; John 19:13-27)

Stage 7 (Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-57; John 19:28-42)

Week 9 - The Garden Tomb

Scripture and Other Readings: Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20; D&C 138

Invitation Week 9:

Participate in temple work for the dead this week in any way that you can. Read the testimony of the Apostles and prophets recorded in "The Living Christ." Read or sing to yourself Hymn #136 and ponder its meaning. Write your own personal testimony of the resurrection and how you have come to know that He lives

James E. Faust, "The Supernal Gift of the Atonement," *General Conference, October 1988*

1. My dear brothers, sisters and friends, sixteen years ago I was called to be a General Authority of this Church, and ten years ago this conference I was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These years have been challenging and, in many ways, difficult, but they have also been fulfilling. My wife and I have been trying humbly to serve the Lord as best we know how. We have traveled over much of the earth in my ministry. This has afforded us opportunity to bear witness of the Savior in many countries.
2. During those years, having worn as a spiritual cloak the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, I feel led today to give my personal witness concerning Jesus of Nazareth and his mission. I wish to testify of the mediation, the atonement, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I speak of these transcendent events in light of my spiritual knowledge that Jesus is the Redeemer and the Son of God. I also testify of His divinity and of those events in the office, the priesthood, the calling, and the authority of the holy Apostleship with which I and my Brethren are charged.
3. Through the Atonement and those singular events surrounding it, all of the terrible individual and collective sins of all mankind were taken upon the Lord's shoulders. The marvelous result of this great suffering was that He was able to redeem from physical death the believers and the obedient as well as the unbelieving and disobedient. (See D&C 46:13–14; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:22.) Every person ever born or yet to be born is the beneficiary of both the mediation and the atonement of the Savior. (See Alma 11:42.)
4. The act of the Atonement is, in its simplest terms, a reconciliation of man with his God. The word atonement means to be at one. "It is literally at-one-ment." (James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 47th ed., Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924, p. 75.) Because of their transgression, Adam and Eve, having chosen to leave their state of innocence (see 2 Ne. 2:23–25), were banished from the presence of God. This is referred to in Christendom as the Fall, or Adam's transgression. It is a spiritual death because Adam and Eve were separated from the presence of God and given agency "to act for themselves and not to be acted upon." (2 Ne. 2:26.) They were also given the great power of procreation, so that they could keep the commandment to "multiply, and replenish the earth" and have joy in their posterity. (Gen. 1:28.)
5. All of their posterity were likewise banished from the presence of God. (See 2 Ne. 2:22–26.) However, the posterity of Adam and Eve were innocent of the original sin because they had no part in it. It was therefore unfair for all of humanity to suffer eternally for the transgressions of our first parents, Adam and Eve. It became necessary to settle this injustice; hence the need for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus in his role as the Savior and Redeemer. Because of the transcendent act of the Atonement, it is possible for every soul to obtain forgiveness of sins, to have them washed away and be forgotten. (See 2 Ne. 9:6–9; Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, p. 89.) This forgiveness comes about, however, on condition of repentance and personal righteousness.
6. There is a distinction between immortality, or eternal existence, and eternal life, which is to have a place in the presence of God. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, immortality comes to all men, just or unjust, righteous or wicked. However, eternal life is "the greatest of all the gifts of God." (D&C 14:7.) We obtain this great gift, according to the Lord, "if you keep my commandments and endure to the end." If we so endure, the promise is, "you shall have eternal life." (D&C 14:7.)
7. President Joseph Fielding Smith explains, "This distinction between eternal life, as received by the faithful, and immortality, obtained by both the faithful and unfaithful, is shown in the words of the Lord to Moses: 'For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.' The conjunction clearly separates the two thoughts. It

- explains that the Lord is giving to the vast majority of men, those who will not be obedient, the blessing of immortality; and to those who will serve him, the blessing of eternal life.” (The Way to Perfection, Salt Lake City: The Genealogical Society of Utah, 1946, p. 329.)
8. It has been almost two thousand years since the wondrous occasion when death was conquered. We still do not know how the Savior was able to take upon Himself and bear our transgressions, our foolishness, our grief, our sorrows, and our burdens. It was indefinable and unfathomable. It was almost unbearable. The indescribable agony was so great in Gethsemane that “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44.) The haunting cry on the cross, in a loud voice in His native Aramaic, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) gives but a mere glimpse of His suffering and humiliation. One cannot help wondering how many of those drops of precious blood each of us may be responsible for.
 9. Even though, as a man or a woman, we are born, live a brief moment, and then die, through the atonement of Jesus Christ we will all live after death. Through the divinity which is within us as a gift of the great Creator, we can come to complete fruition as heirs of God with eternal powers, dominions, and progression without end. Paul said this gift is a free gift. (See Rom. 5:15.) Through the Mediation and Atonement we will be resurrected ourselves without going through any part of the atoning agony that the Son of God went through.
 10. Jacob’s teachings in the Book of Mormon further explain, “if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.” (2 Ne. 9:8.)
 11. The testimonies of those faithful followers who saw, heard, and touched the resurrected Lord stand uncontroverted to this day. After the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had bought sweet spices to anoint his body. (See Mark 16:1.)
 12. But the devoted women were concerned as to who would roll away the great stone in front of the sepulchre. When they arrived, they found that the stone had been rolled away. (See Mark 16:3–4.) A great earthquake had intervened, and an angel had rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it, causing the keepers to shake with fear and become as dead men. (See Matt. 28:2–4.) The angel instructed the women to tell the disciples quickly of the Lord’s resurrection, assuring them that “he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him.” (Matt. 28:7.) As they went to tell the disciples, “Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.” (Matt. 28:9.)
 13. During the forty days that the Savior spent with the Apostles and others, they heard and saw many unspeakable things. This special ministry changed the Apostles from an uncertain, confused, divided, and weak group into powerful witnesses of the Lord. Mark records that the Savior upbraided the eleven “because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.” (Mark 16:14.)
 14. Perhaps the Apostles should not be unduly criticized for not believing that Jesus, having been crucified and buried in a tomb, had come back to earth as a glorified being. In all human experience, this had never happened before. It was completely unprecedented. This was a different experience than the raising of Jairus’ daughter (see Mark 5:22, 24, 35–43), the young man of Nain (see Luke 7:11–15), or Lazarus (see John 11:1–44). They all died again. Jesus, however, became a resurrected being. He would never die again. So it was that to the Apostles the story of Mary Magdalene and the other women who witnessed the Resurrection “seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” (Luke 24:11.)
 15. Said President David O. McKay of this experience: “The world would never have been stirred by men with such wavering, doubting, despairing minds as the apostles possessed on the day of the crucifixion.
 16. “What was it that suddenly changed these disciples to confident, fearless, heroic preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ? It was the revelation that Christ had risen from the grave. His promises had been kept, his Messianic mission fulfilled. In the words of an eminent writer, ‘The final and absolute seal of genuineness has been put on all his claims and the indelible stamp of divine authority upon all his teachings. The gloom of death had been banished by the glorious light of the presence of their Risen, Glorified Lord and Savior.’
 17. “On the evidence of these unprejudiced, unexpectant, incredulous witnesses, faith in the resurrection has its impregnable foundation.” (Treasures of Life, comp. Clare Middlemiss, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1962, pp. 15–16.)
 18. Like the Apostles of old, this knowledge and belief should transform all of us to be confident, settled, unafraid, and at peace in our lives as followers of the divine Christ. It should help us carry all burdens, bear any sorrows, and also fully savor all joys and happiness that can be found in this life. The disciples who walked with the Savior on the road to Emmaus said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32.) No wonder they entreated him, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening,” and he “sat at meat with them.” (Luke 24:29–30.) They sought to savor those precious moments and feelings.
 19. The vacating of the tomb transcended all other events in the history of the world, for it attested that Jesus had not died, but that death itself had been overcome.

20. As I have traveled over much of the earth, I have been saddened over and over again by the legions of crippled, maimed, deformed, suffering, and diminished people almost everywhere. What parent of a special child has not agonized over the future and well-being of that child? Through the individual resurrection of each of us, there is great hope for all.
21. Amulek, in the Book of Mormon, promises that following the temporal death, “the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, ... and we shall be brought to stand before God, ... and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.” (Alma 11:43.)
22. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. ... I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life ... , you taste them, and I know that you believe them.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, p. 355.) So it is that the humblest and newest believer, the child, youth, or adult can come to have a personal conviction of the truth of eternal life.
23. John the Revelator “saw a new heaven and a new earth” and “heard a great voice out of heaven.” (Rev. 21:1, 3.) “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” (Rev. 21:7.) “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:4.)
24. It is not necessary for anyone to depend continually upon the testimony of another regarding the mediation, atonement, and resurrection of Christ as our Redeemer and Savior. Each can savor the sweetness of the truths of the gospel by obedience to the principles, ordinances, and covenants.
25. One can still go to the Garden of Gethsemane, but the Lord Jesus cannot be found there, nor is He in the Garden Tomb. He is not on the road to Emmaus, nor in Galilee, nor at Nazareth or Bethlehem. He must be found in one’s heart. But He left us the great Comforter forever (see John 14:16) and the everlasting power of the priesthood. Of this power, Jacob, the son of Lehi, testified, “We truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.” (Jacob 4:6.)
26. I testify that, through righteousness, this priesthood power and these supernal gifts of the Atonement and the Mediation can operate in our lives. Ultimately each of us must come to know these great spiritual truths by following the counsel of Jesus, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17.)
27. In conclusion, I wish to make a humble declaration and affirmation that Jesus is the Christ, our Redeemer, and the Savior of the world. I do this with all the solemnity of my soul. This testimony has come to me, not alone from a lifetime of study or from reason or logic, but more by personal revelation under the spirit of prophecy.
28. I pray that our Savior will heal our souls, dry our tears, and create in each of us a pure heart. I also pray that we may find shelter in the shadows of His outstretched arms and that He will be merciful and forgiving concerning our weaknesses. That He will be a father to the fatherless, and deliver to the needy according to their needs, and incline His ear to our cries, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Sunday Will Come," *General Conference, October 2006*

1. I am grateful to be with you today and to draw strength from your testimonies. More than words can express, I am grateful for your kind words of support, your expressions of love, and your prayers.
2. Today I would like to indulge in a few personal memories.
3. I was born of goodly parents. From my father, Joseph L. Wirthlin, I learned the values of hard work and compassion. He was bishop of our ward during the Great Depression. He possessed a genuine concern for those in distress. He reached out to those in need not because it was his duty but because it was his sincere desire.
4. He tirelessly cared for and blessed the lives of many who suffered. In my mind, he was an ideal bishop.
5. Those who knew my father knew how active he was. Someone once told me that he could do the work of three men. He rarely slowed down. In 1938 he was operating a successful business when he received a call from the President of the Church, Heber J. Grant.
6. President Grant told him they were reorganizing the Presiding Bishopric that day and wanted my father to serve as counselor to LeGrand Richards. This caught my father by surprise, and he asked if he could pray about it first.
7. President Grant said, “Brother Wirthlin, there are only 30 minutes before the next session of conference, and I want to have some rest. What do you say?”
8. Of course, my father said yes. He served 23 years, 9 of them as Presiding Bishop of the Church.
9. My father was 69 years old when he passed away. I happened to be with him when he suddenly collapsed. Soon after, he was gone.
10. I often think about my father. I miss him.
11. My mother, Madeline Bitner, was another great influence in my life. In her youth she was a fine athlete and a champion sprinter. She was always kind and loving, but her pace was exhausting. Often she would say, “Hurry up.” And when she did, we picked up the

pace. Perhaps that was one of the reasons I had quick acceleration when I played football.

12. My mother had great expectations for her children and expected the best from them. I can still remember her saying, “Don’t be a scrub. You must do better.” Scrub was her word for someone who was lazy and not living up to his potential.
13. My mother passed away when she was 87 years old, and I think about her often and miss her more than I can say.
14. My younger sister Judith was an author, composer, and educator. She loved many things, including the gospel, music, and archaeology. Judith’s birthday was a few days before mine. Every year I would give her a crisp one-dollar bill as my birthday present to her. Three days later she would give me 50 cents as her birthday present to me.
15. Judith passed away a few years ago. I miss her and think of her often.
16. And that brings me to my wife, Elisa. I remember the first time I met her. As a favor to a friend, I had gone to her home to pick up her sister, Frances. Elisa opened the door, and at least for me, it was love at first sight.
17. I think she must have felt something too, for the first words I ever remember her saying were, “I knew who you was.”
18. Elisa was an English major.
19. To this day I still cherish those five words as some of the most beautiful in human language.
20. She loved to play tennis and had a lightning serve. I tried to play tennis with her, but I finally quit after coming to the realization that I couldn’t hit what I couldn’t see.
21. She was my strength and my joy. Because of her, I am a better man, husband, and father. We married, had eight children, and walked together through 65 years of life.
22. I owe more to my wife than I can possibly express. I don’t know if there ever was a perfect marriage, but, from my perspective, I think ours was.
23. When President Hinckley spoke at Sister Wirthlin’s funeral, he said that it is a devastating, consuming thing to lose someone you love. It gnaws at your soul.
24. He was right. As Elisa was my greatest joy, now her passing is my greatest sorrow.
25. In the lonely hours I have spent a great deal of time thinking about eternal things. I have contemplated the comforting doctrines of eternal life.
26. During my life I have heard many sermons on the Resurrection. Like you, I can recite the events of that first Easter Sunday. I have marked in my scriptures passages regarding the Resurrection and have close at hand many of the key statements uttered by latter-day prophets on this subject.
27. We know what the Resurrection is—the reuniting of the spirit and body in its perfect form.¹
28. President Joseph F. Smith said “that those from whom we have to part here, we will meet again and see as they are. We will meet the same identical being that we associated with here in the flesh.”²
29. President Spencer W. Kimball amplified this when he said, “I am sure that if we can imagine ourselves at our very best, physically, mentally, spiritually, that is the way we will come back.”³
30. When we are resurrected, “this mortal body is raised to an immortal body. . . . [We] can die no more.”⁴
31. Can you imagine that? Life at our prime? Never sick, never in pain, never burdened by the ills that so often beset us in mortality?
32. The Resurrection is at the core of our beliefs as Christians. Without it, our faith is meaningless. The Apostle Paul said, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and [our] faith is also vain.”⁵
33. In all the history of the world there have been many great and wise souls, many of whom claimed special knowledge of God. But when the Savior rose from the tomb, He did something no one had ever done. He did something no one else could do. He broke the bonds of death, not only for Himself but for all who have ever lived—the just and the unjust.⁶
34. When Christ rose from the grave, becoming the firstfruits of the Resurrection, He made that gift available to all. And with that sublime act, He softened the devastating, consuming sorrow that gnaws at the souls of those who have lost precious loved ones.
35. I think of how dark that Friday was when Christ was lifted up on the cross.
36. On that terrible Friday the earth shook and grew dark. Frightful storms lashed at the earth.
37. Those evil men who sought His life rejoiced. Now that Jesus was no more, surely those who followed Him would disperse. On that day they stood triumphant.
38. On that day the veil of the temple was rent in twain.
39. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were both overcome with grief and despair. The superb man they had loved and honored hung lifeless upon the cross.
40. On that Friday the Apostles were devastated. Jesus, their Savior—the man who had walked on water and raised the dead—was Himself at the mercy of wicked men. They watched helplessly as He was overcome by His enemies.
41. On that Friday the Savior of mankind was humiliated and bruised, abused and reviled.
42. It was a Friday filled with devastating, consuming sorrow that gnawed at the souls of those who loved and honored the Son of God.
43. I think that of all the days since the beginning of this world’s history, that Friday was the darkest.
44. But the doom of that day did not endure.
45. The despair did not linger because on Sunday, the resurrected Lord burst the bonds of death. He ascended from the grave and appeared gloriously triumphant as the Savior of all mankind.
46. And in an instant the eyes that had been filled with ever-flowing tears dried. The lips that had whispered

prayers of distress and grief now filled the air with wondrous praise, for Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, stood before them as the firstfruits of the Resurrection, the proof that death is merely the beginning of a new and wondrous existence.

47. Each of us will have our own Fridays—those days when the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces. We all will experience those broken times when it seems we can never be put together again. We will all have our Fridays.
48. But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death—Sunday will come. In the darkness of our sorrow, Sunday will come.
49. No matter our desperation, no matter our grief, Sunday will come. In this life or the next, Sunday will come.
50. I testify to you that the Resurrection is not a fable. We have the personal testimonies of those who saw Him. Thousands in the Old and New Worlds witnessed the risen Savior. They felt the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. They shed tears of unrestrained joy as they embraced Him.
51. After the Resurrection, the disciples became renewed. They traveled throughout the world proclaiming the glorious news of the gospel.
52. Had they chosen, they could have disappeared and returned to their former lives and occupations. In time, their association with Him would have been forgotten.
53. They could have denied the divinity of Christ. Yet they did not. In the face of danger, ridicule, and threat of death, they entered palaces, temples, and synagogues boldly proclaiming Jesus the Christ, the resurrected Son of the living God.
54. Many of them offered as a final testimony their own precious lives. They died as martyrs, the testimony of the risen Christ on their lips as they perished.
55. The Resurrection transformed the lives of those who witnessed it. Should it not transform ours?
56. We will all rise from the grave. And on that day my father will embrace my mother. On that day I will once again hold in my arms my beloved Elisa.
57. Because of the life and eternal sacrifice of the Savior of the world, we will be reunited with those we have cherished.
58. On that day we will know the love of our Heavenly Father. On that day we will rejoice that the Messiah overcame all that we could live forever.
59. Because of the sacred ordinances we receive in holy temples, our departure from this brief mortality cannot long separate relationships that have been fastened together with cords made of eternal ties.
60. It is my solemn testimony that death is not the end of existence. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”⁷ Because of the risen Christ, “death is swallowed up in victory.”⁸
61. Because of our beloved Redeemer, we can lift up our voices, even in the midst of our darkest Fridays, and proclaim, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”⁹
62. When President Hinckley spoke of the terrible loneliness that comes to those who lose the ones they love, he also promised that in the quiet of the night a still, unheard voice whispers peace to our soul: “All is well.”
63. I am grateful beyond measure for the sublime true doctrines of the gospel and for the gift of the Holy Ghost, which has whispered to my soul the comforting and peaceful words promised by our beloved prophet.
64. From the depths of my sorrow, I have rejoiced in the glory of the gospel. I rejoice that the Prophet Joseph Smith was chosen to restore the gospel to the earth in this last dispensation. I rejoice that we have a prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who directs the Lord’s Church in our day.
65. May we understand and live in thanksgiving for the priceless gifts that come to us as sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father and for the promise of that bright day when we shall all rise triumphant from the grave.
66. That we may always know that no matter how dark our Friday, Sunday will come is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Week 10 - Mercy - Satisfying the Demands of Justice

Scripture and Other Readings: Leviticus 3-5; D&C 88:21-39; Alma 42; Helaman 5:9-11; Alma 34:14-17

Invitation Week 10:

Each day this week, record the tender mercies of the Lord that occur during your day. Write down how that mercy has allowed you to feel more at one with the Savior and those with whom you have contact. How is Christ justified in showing you these tender mercies?

Dallin H. Oaks, "Love and Law," *General Conference, October 2009*

1. I have been impressed to speak about God’s love and God’s commandments. My message is that God’s universal and perfect love is shown in all the blessings of His gospel plan, including the fact that His choicest blessings are reserved for those who obey His laws.¹ These are eternal principles that should guide parents in their love and teaching of their children.
 - I.
 2. I begin with four examples which illustrate some mortal confusion between love and law.
 - A young adult in a cohabitation relationship tells grieving parents, “If you really loved me, you would accept me and my partner just like you accept your married children.”
 - A youth reacts to parental commands or pressure by declaring, “If you really loved me, you wouldn’t force me.”
 3. In these examples a person violating commandments asserts that parental love should override the commandments of divine law and the teachings of parents.
 4. The next two examples show mortal confusion about the effect of God’s love.
 - A person rejects the doctrine that a couple must be married for eternity to enjoy family relationships in the next life, declaring, “If God really loved us, I can’t believe He would separate husbands and wives in this way.”
 - Another person says his faith has been destroyed by the suffering God allows to be inflicted on a person or a race, concluding, “If there was a God who loved us, He wouldn’t let this happen.”
 5. These persons disbelieve eternal laws which they consider contrary to their concept of the effect of God’s love. Persons who take this position do not understand the nature of God’s love or the purpose of His laws and commandments. The love of God does not supersede His laws and His commandments, and the effect of God’s laws and commandments does not diminish the purpose and effect of His love. The same should be true of parental love and rules.
 - II.
 6. First, consider the love of God, described so meaningfully this morning by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” the Apostle Paul asked. Not tribulation, not persecution, not peril or the sword (see Romans 8:35). “For I am persuaded,” he concluded, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, . . . nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (verses 38–39).
 7. There is no greater evidence of the infinite power and perfection of God’s love than is declared by the Apostle John: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Another Apostle wrote that God “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). Think how it must have grieved our Heavenly Father to send His Son to endure incomprehensible suffering for our sins. That is the greatest evidence of His love for each of us!
 8. God’s love for His children is an eternal reality, but why does He love us so much, and why do we desire that love? The answer is found in the relationship between God’s love and His laws.
 9. Some seem to value God’s love because of their hope that His love is so great and so unconditional that it will mercifully excuse them from obeying His laws. In contrast, those who understand God’s plan for His children know that God’s laws are invariable, which is another great evidence of His love for His children. Mercy cannot rob justice,² and those who obtain mercy are “they who have kept the covenant and observed the commandment” (D&C 54:6).
 10. We read again and again in the Bible and in modern scriptures of God’s anger with the wicked³ and of His acting in His wrath⁴ against those who violate His laws. How are anger and wrath evidence of His love? Joseph Smith taught that God “institute[d] laws whereby [the spirits that He would send into the world]

could have a privilege to advance like himself.”⁵ God’s love is so perfect that He lovingly requires us to obey His commandments because He knows that only through obedience to His laws can we become perfect, as He is. For this reason, God’s anger and His wrath are not a contradiction of His love but an evidence of His love. Every parent knows that you can love a child totally and completely while still being creatively angry and disappointed at that child’s self-defeating behavior.

11. The love of God is so universal that His perfect plan bestows many gifts on all of His children, even those who disobey His laws. Mortality is one such gift, bestowed on all who qualified in the War in Heaven.⁶ Another unconditional gift is the universal resurrection: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Many other mortal gifts are not tied to our personal obedience to law. As Jesus taught, our Heavenly Father “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45).
12. If only we will listen, we can know of God’s love and feel it, even when we are disobedient. A woman recently returned to Church activity gave this description in a sacrament meeting talk: “He has always been there for me, even when I rejected Him. He has always guided me and comforted me with His tender mercies all around me, but I [was] too angry to see and accept incidents and feelings as such.”⁷

III.

13. God’s choicest blessings are clearly contingent upon obedience to God’s laws and commandments. The key teaching is from modern revelation:
14. “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—
15. “And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21).
16. This great principle helps us understand the why of many things, like justice and mercy balanced by the Atonement. It also explains why God will not forestall the exercise of agency by His children. Agency—our power to choose—is fundamental to the gospel plan that brings us to earth. God does not intervene to forestall the consequences of some persons’ choices in order to protect the well-being of other persons—even when they kill, injure, or oppress one another—for this would destroy His plan for our eternal progress.⁸ He will bless us to endure the consequences of others’ choices, but He will not prevent those choices.⁹
17. If a person understands the teachings of Jesus, he or she cannot reasonably conclude that our loving Heavenly Father or His divine Son believes that Their love supersedes Their commandments. Consider these examples.
18. When Jesus began His ministry, His first message was repentance.¹⁰

19. When He exercised loving mercy by not condemning the woman taken in adultery, He nevertheless told her, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).
20. Jesus taught, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).
21. The effect of God’s commandments and laws is not changed to accommodate popular behavior or desires. If anyone thinks that godly or parental love for an individual grants the loved one license to disobey the law, he or she does not understand either love or law. The Lord declared:
22. “That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willet to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still” (D&C 88:35).
23. We read in modern revelation, “All kingdoms have a law given” (D&C 88:36). For example:
24. “He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.
“And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory.
“And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory” (D&C 88:22–24).
25. In other words, the kingdom of glory to which the Final Judgment assigns us is not determined by love but by the law that God has invoked in His plan to qualify us for eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

IV.

26. In teaching and reacting to their children, parents have many opportunities to apply these principles. One such opportunity has to do with the gifts parents bestow on their children. Just as God has bestowed some gifts on all of His mortal children without requiring their personal obedience to His laws, parents provide many benefits like housing and food even if their children are not in total harmony with all parental requirements. But, following the example of an all-wise and loving Heavenly Father who has given laws and commandments for the benefit of His children, wise parents condition some parental gifts on obedience.
27. If parents have a wayward child—such as a teenager indulging in alcohol or drugs—they face a serious question. Does parental love require that these substances or their consumption be allowed in the home, or do the requirements of civil law or the seriousness of the conduct or the interests of other children in the home require that this be forbidden?
28. To pose an even more serious question, if an adult child is living in cohabitation, does the seriousness of sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage require that this child feel the full weight of family disapproval by being excluded from any family contacts, or does parental

love require that the fact of cohabitation be ignored? I have seen both of these extremes, and I believe that both are inappropriate.

29. Where do parents draw the line? That is a matter for parental wisdom, guided by the inspiration of the Lord. There is no area of parental action that is more needful of heavenly guidance or more likely to receive it than the decisions of parents in raising their children and governing their families. This is the work of eternity.
30. As parents grapple with these problems, they should remember the Lord's teaching that we leave the ninety and nine and go out into the wilderness to rescue the lost sheep.¹¹ President Thomas S. Monson has called for a loving crusade to rescue our brothers and sisters who are wandering in the wilderness of apathy or ignorance.¹² These teachings require continued loving concern, which surely requires continued loving associations.
31. Parents should also remember the Lord's frequent teaching that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6).¹³ In his conference talk on tolerance and love, Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that "real love for the sinner may compel courageous confrontation—not acquiescence! Real love does not support self-destructing behavior."¹⁴
32. Wherever the line is drawn between the power of love and the force of law, the breaking of commandments is certain to impact loving family relationships. Jesus taught:
33. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:
"For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.
"The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother" (Luke 12:51–53).
34. This sobering teaching reminds us that when family members are not united in striving to keep the commandments of God, there will be divisions. We do all that we can to avoid impairing loving relationships, but sometimes it happens after all we can do.
35. In the midst of such stress, we must endure the reality that the straying of our loved ones will detract from our happiness, but it should not detract from our love for one another or our patient efforts to be united in understanding God's love and God's laws.
36. I testify of the truth of these things, which are part of the plan of salvation and the doctrine of Christ, of whom I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

D. Todd Christofferson, "Free Forever, to Act for Themselves" *General Conference, October 2014*

1. It is God's will that we be free men and women enabled to rise to our full potential both temporally and spiritually.
2. William Shakespeare's play *The Life of King Henry V* includes a nighttime scene in the camp of English soldiers at Agincourt just before their battle with the French army. In the dim light and partially disguised, King Henry wanders unrecognized among his soldiers. He talks with them, trying to gauge the morale of his badly outnumbered troops, and because they do not realize who he is, they are candid in their comments. In one exchange they philosophize about who bears responsibility for what happens to men in battle—the king or each individual soldier.
3. At one point King Henry declares, "Methinks I could not die any where so contented as in the king's company; his cause being just."
4. Michael Williams retorts, "That's more than we know."
5. His companion agrees, "Ay, or more than we should seek after; for we know enough, if we know we are the king's subjects: if his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us."
6. Williams adds, "If the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make."
7. Not surprisingly, King Henry disagrees. "Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own."
8. Shakespeare does not attempt to resolve this debate in the play, and in one form or another it is a debate that continues down to our own time—who bears responsibility for what happens in our lives?
9. When things turn bad, there is a tendency to blame others or even God. Sometimes a sense of entitlement arises, and individuals or groups try to shift responsibility for their welfare to other people or to governments. In spiritual matters some suppose that men and women need not strive for personal righteousness—because God loves and saves us "just as we are."
10. But God intends that His children should act according to the moral agency He has given them, "that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment." It is His plan and His will that we have the principal decision-making role in our own life's drama. God will not live our lives for us nor control us as if we were His puppets, as Lucifer once proposed to do. Nor will His prophets accept the role of "puppet master" in God's place. Brigham Young stated: "I do not wish any Latter Day Saint in this world, nor in heaven, to be satisfied with anything I do, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ,—the spirit of revelation, makes them satisfied. I wish them to know for themselves and understand for themselves."
11. So God does not save us "just as we are," first, because "just as we are" we are unclean, and "no unclean thing can dwell ... in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man [of Holiness]."

And second, God will not act to make us something we do not choose by our actions to become. Truly He loves us, and because He loves us, He neither compels nor abandons us. Rather He helps and guides us. Indeed, the real manifestation of God's love is His commandments.

12. We should (and we do) rejoice in the God-ordained plan that permits us to make choices to act for ourselves and experience the consequences, or as the scriptures express it, to "taste the bitter, that [we] may know to prize the good." We are forever grateful that the Savior's Atonement overcame original sin so that we can be born into this world yet not be punished for Adam's transgression. Having been thus redeemed from the Fall, we begin life innocent before God and "become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon." We can choose to become the kind of person that we will, and with God's help, that can be even as He is.
13. The gospel of Jesus Christ opens the path to what we may become. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and His grace, our failures to live the celestial law perfectly and consistently in mortality can be erased and we are enabled to develop a Christlike character. Justice demands, however, that none of this happen without our willing agreement and participation. It has ever been so. Our very presence on earth as physical beings is the consequence of a choice each of us made to participate in our Father's plan. Thus, salvation is certainly not the result of divine whim, but neither does it happen by divine will alone.
14. Justice is an essential attribute of God. We can have faith in God because He is perfectly trustworthy. The scriptures teach us that "God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round" and that "God is no respecter of persons." We rely on the divine quality of justice for faith, confidence, and hope.
15. But as a consequence of being perfectly just, there are some things God cannot do. He cannot be arbitrary in saving some and banishing others. He "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance." He cannot allow mercy to rob justice.
16. It is compelling evidence of His justice that God has forged the companion principle of mercy. It is because He is just that He devised the means for mercy to play its indispensable role in our eternal destiny. So now, "justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own."
17. We know that it is "the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom [the Father] wast well pleased; ... the blood of [His] Son which was shed" that satisfies the demands of justice, extends mercy, and redeems us. Even so, "according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance." It is the requirement of and the opportunity for repentance that permits mercy to perform its labor without trampling justice.
18. Christ died not to save indiscriminately but to offer repentance. We rely "wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save" in the process of repentance, but acting to repent is a self-willed change. So by making repentance a condition for receiving the gift of grace, God enables us to retain responsibility for ourselves. Repentance respects and sustains our moral agency: "And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption."
19. Misunderstanding God's justice and mercy is one thing; denying God's existence or supremacy is another, but either will result in our achieving less—sometimes far less—than our full, divine potential. A God who makes no demands is the functional equivalent of a God who does not exist. A world without God, the living God who establishes moral laws to govern and perfect His children, is also a world without ultimate truth or justice. It is a world where moral relativism reigns supreme.
20. Relativism means each person is his or her own highest authority. Of course, it is not just those who deny God that subscribe to this philosophy. Some who believe in God still believe that they themselves, individually, decide what is right and wrong. One young adult expressed it this way: "I don't think I could say that Hinduism is wrong or Catholicism is wrong or being Episcopalian is wrong—I think it just depends on what you believe. ... I don't think that there's a right and wrong." Another, asked about the basis for his religious beliefs, replied, "Myself—it really comes down to that. I mean, how could there be authority to what you believe?"
21. To those who believe anything or everything could be true, the declaration of objective, fixed, and universal truth feels like coercion—"I shouldn't be forced to believe something is true that I don't like." But that does not change reality. Resenting the law of gravity won't keep a person from falling if he steps off a cliff. The same is true for eternal law and justice. Freedom comes not from resisting it but from applying it. That is fundamental to God's own power. If it were not for the reality of fixed and immutable truths, the gift of agency would be meaningless since we would never be able to foresee and intend the consequences of our actions. As Lehi expressed it: "If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation

- of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.”
22. In matters both temporal and spiritual, the opportunity to assume personal responsibility is a God-given gift without which we cannot realize our full potential as daughters and sons of God. Personal accountability becomes both a right and a duty that we must constantly defend; it has been under assault since before the Creation. We must defend accountability against persons and programs that would (sometimes with the best of intentions) make us dependent. And we must defend it against our own inclinations to avoid the work that is required to cultivate talents, abilities, and Christlike character.
 23. The story is told of a man who simply would not work. He wanted to be taken care of in every need. To his way of thinking, the Church or the government, or both, owed him a living because he had paid his taxes and his tithing. He had nothing to eat but refused to work to care for himself. Out of desperation and disgust, those who had tried to help him decided that since he would not lift a finger to sustain himself, they might as well just take him to the cemetery and let him pass on. On the way to the cemetery, one man said, “We can’t do this. I have some corn I will give him.”
 24. So they explained this to the man, and he asked, “Have the husks been removed?”
 25. They responded, “No.”
 26. “Well, then,” he said, “drive on.”
 27. It is God’s will that we be free men and women enabled to rise to our full potential both temporally and spiritually, that we be free from the humiliating limitations of poverty and the bondage of sin, that we enjoy self-respect and independence, that we be prepared in all things to join Him in His celestial kingdom.
 28. I am under no illusion that this can be achieved by our own efforts alone without His very substantial and constant help. “We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” And we do not need to achieve some minimum level of capacity or goodness before God will help—divine aid can be ours every hour of every day, no matter where we are in the path of obedience. But I know that beyond desiring His help, we must exert ourselves, repent, and choose God for Him to be able to act in our lives consistent with justice and moral agency. My plea is simply to take responsibility and go to work so that there is something for God to help us with.
 29. I bear witness that God the Father lives, that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Redeemer, and that the Holy Spirit is present with us. Their desire to help us is undoubted, and Their capacity to do so is infinite. Let us “awake, and arise from the dust, . . . that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto [us] may be fulfilled.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Book of Mormon Video Presentation - The Mediator

A Portrayal of the analogy Elder Boyd K. Packer used in his April 1977 general conference address. A young man who fails to pay a debt is saved from the grasp of justice through the mediation of a friend. (10:44)
<http://www.lds.org/media-library/video/book-of-mormon-presentations?lang=eng#2007-01-0005-the-mediator>

Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *General Conference, April 1977*

1. What I shall say I could say much better if we were alone, just the two of us. It would be easier also if we had come to know one another, and had that kind of trust which makes it possible to talk of serious, even sacred things.
2. If we were that close, because of the nature of what I shall say, I would study you carefully as I spoke. If there should be the slightest disinterest or distraction, the subject would quickly be changed to more ordinary things.
3. I have not, to my knowledge, in my ministry said anything more important. I intend to talk about the Lord, Jesus Christ, about what He really did—and why it matters now.
4. One may ask, “Aside from the influence He has had on society, what effect can He have on me individually?”
5. To answer that question I ask, have you ever been hard-pressed financially? Have you ever been confronted with an unexpected expense, a mortgage coming due, with really no idea how to pay it?
6. Such an experience, however unpleasant, can be, in the eternal scheme of things, very, very useful. If you miss that lesson you may have to make it up before you are spiritually mature, like a course that was missed or a test that was failed.
7. That may be what the Lord had in mind when He said,
8. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:24.)
9. Those who have faced a foreclosure know that one looks helplessly around, hoping for someone, anyone, to come to the rescue.
10. This lesson is so valuable because there is a spiritual account, with a balance kept and a settlement due, that no one of us will escape.
11. To understand this spiritual debt we must speak of such intangibles as love, faith, mercy, justice.
12. Although these virtues are both silent and invisible, surely I do not need to persuade you that they are real.

We learn of them by processes that are often silent and invisible as well. .

13. We become so accustomed to learning through our physical senses—by sight and sound and smell, by taste and touch—that some of us seem to learn in no other way.
14. But there are spiritual things that are not registered that way at all. Some things we simply feel, not as we feel something we touch, but as we feel something we feel.
15. There are things, spiritual things, that are registered in our minds and recorded in our memories as pure knowledge. A knowledge of “things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass.” (D&C 88:79; see also D&C 93:24, and Jacob 4:13.)
16. As surely as we know about material things, we can come to know of spiritual things.
17. Each of us, without exception, one day will settle that spiritual account. We will, that day, face a judgment for our doings in mortal life and face a foreclosure of sorts.
18. One thing I know: we will be justly dealt with. Justice, the eternal law of justice, will be the measure against which we settle this account.
19. Justice is usually pictured holding a set of scales and blindfolded against the possibility that she may be partial or become sympathetic. There is no sympathy in justice alone—only justice! Our lives will be weighed on the scales of justice.
20. The Prophet Alma declared:
21. “Justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.” (Alma 42:22.)
22. I commend to you the reading of the 42nd chapter of Alma. It reveals the place of justice and should confirm that the poet spoke the truth when he said, “In the course of justice [only,] none of us should see salvation.” (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, IV. i. 199–200.)
23. Let me tell you a story—a parable.
24. There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.
25. He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.
26. So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn’t worry too much about it, for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important.
27. The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.
28. But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.
29. Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.
30. “I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,” he confessed.
31. “Then,” said the creditor, “we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.”
32. “Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?” the debtor begged. “Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?”
33. The creditor replied, “Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?”
34. “I believed in justice when I signed the contract,” the debtor said. “It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.”
35. “It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,” the creditor replied. “That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.”
36. There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.
37. “If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,” the debtor pleaded.
38. “If I do, there will be no justice,” was the reply.
39. Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?
40. There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended—but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.
41. The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.
42. “I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.”
43. As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, “You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.”
44. And so the creditor agreed.
45. The mediator turned then to the debtor. “If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?”

46. “Oh yes, yes,” cried the debtor. “You save me from prison and show mercy to me.”
47. “Then,” said the benefactor, “you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.”
48. And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken. The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied.
49. Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone, to help us.
50. And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption.
51. Unless there is a mediator, unless we have a friend, the full weight of justice untempered, unsympathetic, must, positively must fall on us. The full recompense for every transgression, however minor or however deep, will be exacted from us to the uttermost farthing.
52. But know this: Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is such a Mediator.
53. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5.)
54. Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice.
55. This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.
56. The extension of mercy will not be automatic. It will be through covenant with Him. It will be on His terms, His generous terms, which include, as an absolute essential, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.
57. All mankind can be protected by the law of justice, and at once each of us individually may be extended the redeeming and healing blessing of mercy.
58. A knowledge of what I am talking about is of a very practical value. It is very useful and very helpful personally; it opens the way for each of us to keep his spiritual accounts paid up.
59. You, perhaps, are among those troubled people. When you come face to face with yourself in those moments of quiet contemplation—that many of us try to avoid—are there some unsettled things that bother you?
60. Do you have something on your conscience? Are you still, to one degree or another, guilty of anything small or large?
61. We often try to solve guilt problems by telling one another that they don’t matter. But somehow, deep inside, we don’t believe one another. Nor do we believe ourselves if we say it. We know better. They do matter!
62. Our transgressions are all added to our account, and one day if it is not properly settled, each of us, like Belshazzar of Babylon, will be weighed in the balance and found wanting.
63. There is a Redeemer, a Mediator, who stands both willing and able to appease the demands of justice and extend mercy to those who are penitent, for “He offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.” (2 Ne. 2:7.)
64. Already He has accomplished the redemption of all mankind from mortal death; resurrection is extended to all without condition.
65. He also makes possible redemption from the second death, which is the spiritual death, which is separation from the presence of our Heavenly Father. This redemption can come only to those who are clean, for no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God.
66. If justice decrees that we are not eligible because of our transgression, mercy provides a probation, a penitence, a preparation to enter in.
67. I have carried with me a great desire to bear testimony of the Lord, Jesus Christ. I have yearned to tell you in as simple terms as I can, what He did, and who He is.
68. Although I know how poor mere words can be, I know also that such feelings are often carried by the spirit, even without words.
69. At times I struggle under the burden of imperfections. Nevertheless, because I know that He lives, there is a supreme recurring happiness and joy.
70. There is one place where I am particularly vulnerable—when I know that I have abused someone, or caused them hurt, or offended them. It is then I know what agony is.
71. How sweet it is, on those occasions, to be reassured that He lives, and to have my witness reaffirmed. I want, with fervent desire, to show you how our burdens of disappointment, sin, and guilt can be laid before Him, and on His generous terms have each item on the account marked, “Paid in Full.”
72. I claim with my brethren of the Twelve to be a special witness of Him. My witness, and theirs, is true. I love the Lord, and I love the Father who sent Him.
73. Eliza R. Snow, with deep spiritual inspiration, wrote these words, with which I close.
74. *How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high
And sent the Savior from above
To suffer, bleed, and die!
His precious blood He freely spilt;
His life He freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.*

*How great, how glorious, how complete,
Redemption's grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!*

75. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

David A. Bednar, "The Tender Mercies of the Lord," *General Conference, April 2005*

1. Six months ago, I stood at this pulpit for the first time as the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Both then and even more so now, I have felt and feel the weight of the call to serve and of the responsibility to teach with clarity and to testify with authority. I pray for and invite the assistance of the Holy Ghost as I now speak with you.
 2. This afternoon I want to describe and discuss a spiritual impression I received a few moments before I stepped to this pulpit during the Sunday morning session of general conference last October. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf had just finished speaking and had declared his powerful witness of the Savior. Then we all stood together to sing the intermediate hymn that previously had been announced by President Gordon B. Hinckley. The intermediate hymn that morning was "Redeemer of Israel" (Hymns, no. 6).
 3. Now, the music for the various conference sessions had been determined many weeks before—and obviously long before my new call to serve. If, however, I had been invited to suggest an intermediate hymn for that particular session of the conference—a hymn that would have been both edifying and spiritually soothing for me and for the congregation before my first address in this Conference Center—I would have selected my favorite hymn, "Redeemer of Israel." Tears filled my eyes as I stood with you to sing that stirring hymn of the Restoration.
 4. Near the conclusion of the singing, to my mind came this verse from the Book of Mormon: "But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Ne. 1:20).
 5. My mind was drawn immediately to Nephi's phrase "the tender mercies of the Lord," and I knew in that very moment I was experiencing just such a tender mercy. A loving Savior was sending me a most personal and timely message of comfort and reassurance through a hymn selected weeks previously. Some may count this experience as simply a nice coincidence, but I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often, the Lord's timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.
- What Are the Tender Mercies of the Lord?**
6. Since last October I have reflected repeatedly upon the phrase "the tender mercies of the Lord." Through personal study, observation, pondering, and prayer, I believe I have come to better understand that the Lord's tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, the Lord suits "his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men" (D&C 46:15).
 7. Recall how the Savior instructed His Apostles that He would not leave them comfortless. Not only would He send "another Comforter" (John 14:16), even the Holy Ghost, but the Savior said that He would come to them (see John 14:18). Let me suggest that one of the ways whereby the Savior comes to each of us is through His abundant and tender mercies. For instance, as you and I face challenges and tests in our lives, the gift of faith and an appropriate sense of personal confidence that reaches beyond our own capacity are two examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. And the persistence and the fortitude that enable us to press forward with cheerfulness through physical limitations and spiritual difficulties are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord.
 8. In a recent stake conference, the tender mercies of the Lord were evident in the touching testimony of a young wife and mother of four whose husband was slain in Iraq in December of 2003. This stalwart sister recounted how, after being notified of her husband's death, she received his Christmas card and message. In the midst of the abrupt reality of a dramatically altered life came to this good sister a timely and tender reminder that indeed families can be together forever. With permission I quote from that Christmas card:
 9. "To the best family in the world! Have a great time together and remember the true meaning of Christmas! The Lord has made it possible for us to be together forever. So even when we are apart, we will still be together as a family.
"God bless and keep y'all safe and grant this Christmas to be our gift of love from us to Him above!!!
"All my love, Daddy and your loving husband!"
 10. Clearly, the husband's reference to being apart in his Christmas greeting referred to the separation caused by his military assignment. But to this sister, as a voice from the dust from a departed eternal companion and father, came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. As I indicated earlier, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by

coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings.

11. Some time ago I spoke with a priesthood leader who was prompted to memorize the names of all of the youth ages 13 to 21 in his stake. Using snapshots of the young men and women, he created flash cards that he reviewed while traveling on business and at other times. This priesthood leader quickly learned all of the names of the youth.
12. One night the priesthood leader had a dream about one of the young men whom he knew only from a picture. In the dream he saw the young man dressed in a white shirt and wearing a missionary name tag. With a companion seated at his side, the young man was teaching a family. The young man held the Book of Mormon in his hand, and he looked as if he were testifying of the truthfulness of the book. The priesthood leader then awoke from his dream.
13. At an ensuing priesthood gathering, the leader approached the young man he had seen in his dream and asked to talk with him for a few minutes. After a brief introduction, the leader called the young man by name and said: "I am not a dreamer. I have never had a dream about a single member of this stake, except for you. I am going to tell you about my dream, and then I would like you to help me understand what it means."
14. The priesthood leader recounted the dream and asked the young man about its meaning. Choking with emotion, the young man simply replied, "It means God knows who I am." The remainder of the conversation between this young man and his priesthood leader was most meaningful, and they agreed to meet and counsel together from time to time during the following months.
15. That young man received the Lord's tender mercies through an inspired priesthood leader. I repeat again, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts and, frequently, the Lord's timing helps us to recognize them.
16. We should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord's tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Ne. 1:20).

Who Are They Whom the Lord Has Chosen to Receive His Tender Mercies?

17. The word chosen in 1 Nephi 1:20 is central to understanding the concept of the Lord's tender mercies. The dictionary indicates that chosen suggests one who is selected, taken by preference, or picked out. It also can be used to refer to the elect or chosen of God (Oxford English Dictionary Online, second ed. [1989], "Chosen").
18. Some individuals who hear or read this message erroneously may discount or dismiss in their personal lives the availability of the tender mercies of the Lord, believing that "I certainly am not one who has been or ever will be chosen." We may falsely think that such blessings and gifts are reserved for other people who appear to be more righteous or who serve in visible Church callings. I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are available to all of us and that the Redeemer of Israel is eager to bestow such gifts upon us.
19. To be or to become chosen is not an exclusive status conferred upon us. Rather, you and I ultimately determine if we are chosen. Please now note the use of the word chosen in the following verses from the Doctrine and Covenants:
20. "Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?"
21. "Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men" (D&C 121:34–35; emphasis added).
22. I believe the implication of these verses is quite straightforward. God does not have a list of favorites to which we must hope our names will someday be added. He does not limit "the chosen" to a restricted few. Rather, it is our hearts and our aspirations and our obedience which definitively determine whether we are counted as one of God's chosen.
23. Enoch was instructed by the Lord on this very point of doctrine. Please note the use of the word choose in these verses: "Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;
24. "And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father" (Moses 7:32–33; emphasis added).
25. As we learn in these scriptures, the fundamental purposes for the gift of agency were to love one another and to choose God. Thus we become God's chosen and invite His tender mercies as we use our agency to choose God.
26. One of the most well-known and frequently cited passages of scripture is found in Moses 1:39. This verse clearly and concisely describes the work of the Eternal Father: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (emphasis added).

Week 11 - Reconciliation - Bringing a Change of Heart

Scripture and Other Readings: Mosiah 3-5; Ephesians 2; Romans 7-8; Alma 5

Invitation Week 11:

Ponder the qualities and attributes of a saint. Write down some of the things that are preventing you from committing your entire heart to the Lord. Ponder and record how the atonement can bring you a change of heart to have no more disposition to do evil.

David A. Bednar, “Ye Must Be Born Again,” *General Conference, April 2007*

1. My boyhood home in California was located relatively close to large orchards of apricots, cherries, peaches, pears, and other delicious fruits. We also lived near fields of cucumbers, tomatoes, and a variety of vegetables.
2. As a boy I always looked forward to canning season. I did not like scrubbing the canning jars or working in our hot kitchen. But I did like working with my mom and dad. And I loved eating my work! I am sure I ate more fruit than ever made it into any of our canning jars.
3. My memories of time spent in the kitchen with Mom and Dad are stirred every time I see a bottle of home-canned cherries or peaches. The basic lessons I learned about temporal self-reliance and provident living while picking and canning produce have blessed me throughout my life. Interestingly, simple and ordinary experiences often provide the most important learning opportunities we ever have.
4. As an adult I have reflected upon the things I observed in our kitchen during canning season. This morning I want to discuss some of the spiritual lessons we can learn from the process by which a cucumber becomes a pickle. I invite the Holy Ghost to be with us as we consider the significance of those lessons for me and for you as we come unto Christ and are spiritually reborn.
6. The next steps in this process of change are immersing and saturating the cucumbers in salt brine for an extended period of time. To prepare the brine, my mom always used a recipe she learned from her mother—a recipe with special ingredients and precise procedures. Cucumbers can only become pickles if they are totally and completely immersed in the brine for the prescribed time period. The curing process gradually alters the composition of the cucumber and produces the transparent appearance and distinctive taste of a pickle. An occasional sprinkle of or dip in the brine cannot produce the necessary transformation. Rather, steady, sustained, and complete immersion is required for the desired change to occur.
7. The final step in the process requires the sealing of the cured pickles in jars that have been sterilized and purified. The pickles are packed in canning jars, covered with boiling hot brine, and processed in a boiling-water-bath canner. All impurities must be removed from both the pickles and the bottles so the finished product can be protected and preserved. As this procedure is properly followed, the pickles can be stored and enjoyed for a long period of time.
8. To summarize, a cucumber becomes a pickle as it is prepared and cleaned, immersed in and saturated with salt brine, and sealed in a sterilized container. This procedure requires time and cannot be hurried, and none of the essential steps can be ignored or avoided.

Cucumbers and Pickles

5. A pickle is a cucumber that has been transformed according to a specific recipe and series of steps. The first steps in the process of changing a cucumber into a pickle are preparing and cleaning. I remember many hours spent on the back porch of my home removing stems from and scrubbing dirt off of the cucumbers we had picked. My mom was very particular about the preparing and cleaning of the cucumbers. She had high standards of cleanliness and always inspected my work to make sure this important task was properly completed.

A Mighty Change

9. The Lord’s authorized servants repeatedly teach that one of the principal purposes of our mortal existence is to be spiritually changed and transformed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Alma declared:
10. “Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

11. “And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:25–26).
12. We are instructed to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32), to become “new creature[s]” in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), to put off “the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19), and to experience “a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Please note that the conversion described in these verses is mighty, not minor—a spiritual rebirth and fundamental change of what we feel and desire, what we think and do, and what we are. Indeed, the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ entails a fundamental and permanent change in our very nature made possible through our reliance upon “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). As we choose to follow the Master, we choose to be changed—to be spiritually reborn.

Preparing and Cleaning

13. Just as a cucumber must be prepared and cleaned before it can be changed into a pickle, so you and I can be prepared with “the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6) and initially cleansed through the ordinances and covenants administered by the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood.
14. “And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;
15. “Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins” (D&C 84:26–27).
16. And the Lord has established a high standard of cleanliness.
17. “Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57).
18. Proper preparing and cleaning are the first basic steps in the process of being born again.

Immersing and Saturating

19. Just as a cucumber is transformed into a pickle as it is immersed in and saturated with salt brine, so you and I are born again as we are absorbed by and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we honor and “observe the covenants” (D&C 42:13) into which we have entered, as we “feast upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3), as we “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart” (Moroni 7:48), and as we “serve [God] with all [of our] heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2), then:
 20. “Because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him

and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

21. The spiritual rebirth described in this verse typically does not occur quickly or all at once; it is an ongoing process—not a single event. Line upon line and precept upon precept, gradually and almost imperceptibly, our motives, our thoughts, our words, and our deeds become aligned with the will of God. This phase of the transformation process requires time, persistence, and patience.
22. A cucumber only becomes a pickle through steady, sustained, and complete immersion in salt brine. Significantly, salt is the key ingredient in the recipe. Salt frequently is used in the scriptures as a symbol both of a covenant and of a covenant people. And just as salt is essential in transforming a cucumber into a pickle, so covenants are central to our spiritual rebirth.
23. We begin the process of being born again through exercising faith in Christ, repenting of our sins, and being baptized by immersion for the remission of sins by one having priesthood authority.
24. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).
25. And after we come out of the waters of baptism, our souls need to be continuously immersed in and saturated with the truth and the light of the Savior’s gospel. Sporadic and shallow dipping in the doctrine of Christ and partial participation in His restored Church cannot produce the spiritual transformation that enables us to walk in a newness of life. Rather, fidelity to covenants, constancy of commitment, and offering our whole soul unto God are required if we are to receive the blessings of eternity.
26. “I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” (Omni 1:26).
27. Total immersion in and saturation with the Savior’s gospel are essential steps in the process of being born again.

Purifying and Sealing

28. Cured cucumbers are packed into sterilized jars and heat processed in order to remove impurities and to seal the containers from external contaminants. The boiling-water-bath procedure enables the pickles to be both protected and preserved over a long period of time. In a similar way, we progressively become purified and sanctified as you and I are washed in the blood of the Lamb, are born again, and receive the ordinances and honor the covenants that are administered by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood.
29. “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls

with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35).

30. The word sealing in my message today does not refer exclusively to the ordinance of eternal marriage performed in the house of the Lord. Rather, I am using this particular word as explained in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:
31. “This is the testimony of the gospel of Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just—
32. “They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—
33. “That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power;
34. “And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true” (vv. 50–53).
35. The Holy Spirit of Promise is the ratifying power of the Holy Ghost. When sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, an ordinance, vow, or covenant is binding on earth and in heaven. (See D&C 132:7.) Receiving this “stamp of approval” from the Holy Ghost is the result

of faithfulness, integrity, and steadfastness in honoring gospel covenants “in [the] process of time” (Moses 7:21). However, this sealing can be forfeited through unrighteousness and transgression.

36. Purifying and sealing by the Holy Spirit of Promise constitute the culminating steps in the process of being born again.
- “In the Energy of My Soul”**
37. My beloved brothers and sisters, I pray this parable of the pickle may help us to evaluate our lives and to better understand the eternal importance of spiritual rebirth. With Alma, “I speak in the energy of my soul” (Alma 5:43).
 38. “I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again” (Alma 5:49).
 39. I witness the reality and divinity of a living Savior who invites us to come unto Him and be transformed. I testify His Church and priesthood authority have been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Through faith in Christ, we can be spiritually prepared and cleansed from sin, immersed in and saturated with His gospel, and purified and sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

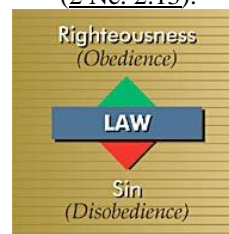
Supplemental Readings:

D. Todd Christofferson, “Justification and Sanctification,” *Ensign*, June 2001

1. Justification and sanctification are at the center of God’s gracious plan of salvation and are the essence of our witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. While justification and sanctification may be viewed as distinct topics, in reality I believe they are elements of a single divine process that qualifies us to live in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ.
2. I have organized my discussion of this doctrine into three sections based upon statements from “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.”
3. “As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice.”
4. “He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.”
5. “He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts” (*Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2–3; emphasis added).

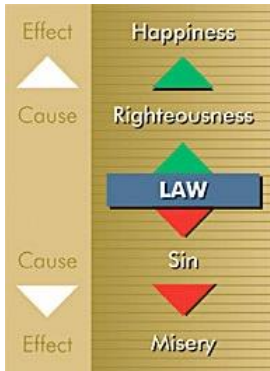
“The Infinite Virtue of His Great Atoning Sacrifice”

6. Justification and sanctification are the fruit of the Atonement’s “infinite virtue,” which virtue we also refer to as mercy or grace. A verse in the Book of Mormon lays a helpful foundation: “And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away” (2 Ne. 2:13).



7. Lehi taught: “If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness” (2 Ne. 2:13).

8. Lehi here remarks on the foundational nature of law, the divine law that governs in the universe. Elsewhere in the scriptures, as in Alma 42 for example, the word justice is used with similar meaning. So justice, or law, is something of a platform that sustains certain other fundamentals.
9. Lehi states that if there were no law, there would be no sin: “If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin.” Why cannot sin exist if law does not exist? What is sin? Quite simply it is disobedience to law. Obviously, where there is nothing to obey or disobey, there cannot be disobedience.
10. Lehi continues, “If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness.” Again the question, why? What is righteousness but obedience?
11. Just as law must exist for sin or disobedience to be possible, so law must exist to give rise to the possibility of obedience or righteousness.
12. Lehi next observes, “If there be no righteousness there be no happiness.” One may ask why. To me the answer is clear: happiness is the product of righteousness. It is a question of cause and effect. Happiness, the effect or result, can exist only when its necessary cause, righteousness, is first present.
13. Completing the symmetry, Lehi adds, “If there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery.” Why so? Again, it is a matter of cause and effect: misery is the consequence of sin, its natural result.



14. Righteousness leads to happiness, and sin leads to misery.
15. Without any of these things and the necessary predicate or foundation of law, Lehi concludes, there could be no God, no earth, no mankind, “for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon.” Without law, one could not predict or control outcomes of actions. Without awareness of cause and effect, there would really be no such thing as choice. Existence would simply be chaos, the action of random forces. God could not work His will, and if we existed at all, we would lack the means to be actors; we would only be “acted upon.”
16. Fortunately, reality is otherwise. Lehi affirms, “There is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:14).

17. Nevertheless, we still face a dilemma. Lehi states it earlier in this same chapter: “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Ne. 2:5).
18. With nothing more, by virtue of the Fall and our own disobedience, the law condemns us to temporal and spiritual death. Law, or justice, is not a pleasant concept when one is condemned by it and “miserable forever.” Worldly philosophies attempt to resolve this misery and guilt by endeavoring to erase divine law or define it out of existence. As we have already observed, if we could get rid of the law, there would be no such thing as sin and thus no misery. With Corianton, there are many today who “try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). This approach, however, if it could succeed, would also eliminate our potential for happiness. We need to preserve justice for our own sakes, for our own potential happiness.
19. There is a better way. That better way is not to deny the law, but to come out from under its condemnation. The righteous are supported by law, a pleasant position to be in. But to achieve that status, we need more than the law alone. We need a Savior. We need a Mediator.
20. Again, Lehi:
21. “Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.
22. “Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Ne. 2:6–7).
23. Because of “the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice,” Jesus Christ can satisfy or “answer the ends of the law” on our behalf. Pardon comes by the grace of Him who has satisfied the demands of justice by His own suffering, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). He removes our condemnation without removing the law. We are pardoned and placed in a condition of righteousness with Him. We become, like Him, without sin. We are sustained and protected by the law, by justice. We are, in a word, justified. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)
24. Thus, we may appropriately speak of one who is justified as pardoned, without sin, or guiltless. For example, “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Yet glorious as the remission of sins is, the Atonement accomplishes even more. That “more” is expressed by Moroni:
25. “And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the

blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:33; emphasis added).

26. To be sanctified through the blood of Christ is to become clean, pure, and holy. If justification removes the punishment for past sin, then sanctification removes the stain or effects of sin. The Prophet Joseph Smith testified:
27. “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—
28. “That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear [justify] the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness” (D&C 76:40–41).
29. Speaking of certain priesthood brethren in ancient times, Alma said:
30. “Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.
31. “Now, they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:11–12).
32. We may appropriately speak of sanctification as the baptism of the Spirit, or being “baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost” (Moses 6:66).
33. “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.
34. “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:19–20; emphasis added).
35. It will seem a natural thing for those who have been sanctified to enter into the rest or kingdom of God, for they will have become like Him (see 1 Jn. 3:2; Moro. 7:48). As the Lord said to Adam after he had been baptized by water and by the Spirit, “Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:68).

“His Was a Great Vicarious Gift”

36. This marvelous pardon that relieves us of the punishment that justice would otherwise exact for disobedience and the purifying sanctification that follows are best described as gifts, or the gift of grace. “His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth” (“The Living Christ,”²). Given the magnitude of the gift of grace, we would never suppose, even with all the good we could possibly do in this life, that we had earned it. It is just too great. “We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do,” says Nephi (2 Ne. 25:23). It

is, and will always be, in truth, the gift of God through His divine Son.

37. But, as Nephi implies, there is something we can do, something that all who are accountable must do. To have effect, the gift must be accepted: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).
38. Thus, it is not that we earn these gifts, but rather that we choose to seek and accept justification and sanctification. Since the Savior paid for our sins and satisfied justice for us, we become debtors to Him rather than to justice. We must therefore meet the stipulations He has established for forgiveness and cleansing. Otherwise, He withdraws His proffered mediation, and we are left to deal alone with the demands of justice, lacking the means to become pure. One must choose Christ to receive what Christ offers.
39. How does one choose Christ? We noted earlier Lehi’s declaration that it requires “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Ne. 2:7). Nephi elaborates: “Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17).
40. I repeat the Savior’s succinct declaration in 3 Nephi: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:20).
41. Referring to the diagram on page 24, we see that the gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost. This action of acceptance on our part opens the door for the process of justification (remission, or pardoning, of sins) and sanctification (cleansing from sin) to work in us—something we may refer to as being born again:
42. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
43. “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?
44. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3–5).
45. This rebirth was described more fully to Adam as recorded in the book of Moses. God taught Adam that it was necessary for men to repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. Adam, seeking deeper understanding, asked why (see Moses 6:50–53). God explained that man must be clean in order to dwell in

His presence and that this requires a cleansing birth into the kingdom of God:

46. “By reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;
47. “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:59–60).
48. We see here the elements that bring about our second birth or entry into the kingdom of God analogized to the elements that accompany our birth into mortality (water, blood, and spirit). This birth from mortal life into eternal life requires the interaction of (1) covenants (symbolized by water, the principal feature of our first covenant: baptism), (2) the grace of Christ (symbolized by His blood), and (3) the Holy Spirit, the medium through whom atoning grace is applied to remit sins and sanctify souls.
49. Justification and sanctification are accomplished by the grace of Christ, which grace is a gift to man based on faith. But our moral agency is also a necessary element in this divine process. We must will to repent and act to repent. We must elect to be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost, and we must elect to remain loyal to our covenants thereafter. To receive the gift we must act in the manner He has ordained.

“Each of Us Will Stand to Be Judged”

50. It is clear that our acceptance of the gift of grace is not a single act occurring at a single moment in time, but is instead an ongoing process and obligation. The words of the Savior in 3 Nephi that we have already referred to make this point:
51. “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled [with the Holy Ghost]; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.
52. “And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Ne. 27:16–17, 19; emphasis added).
53. We are warned: “There is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God;
54. “Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;
55. “Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:32–34).

56. In due course, Jesus Christ will judge the world, both those who have rejected His grace and those who have accepted His mercy:
57. “There is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.
58. “But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored to his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.
59. “For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:22–24).
60. To be classed among the truly penitent, random acts of obedience will not be adequate. We must properly enter into the covenants and persist in keeping them to the point that our expectation of salvation is affirmed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (see D&C 132:7, 19). It is not simply the promise of obedience in our contracts with Deity that brings grace, but the performance of our promises: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13).



61. The gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost.
62. None of us, of course, is perfectly obedient, and thus we rely on our baptismal covenant to bring a remission of sins after baptism just as it has done for our lives before baptism. We rely on repentance to reinvigorate that covenant, to bring the Holy Spirit and, with it, atoning grace. The process of cleansing and sanctifying through the baptisms of water and of the Holy Ghost can be continued weekly as we worthily partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The tokens of the Atonement, the bread and water, become symbolic

cleansing agents and the sign of our renewed covenant, similar to the symbolism of the water in which we were immersed at baptism. It is as if we were being baptized afresh and the door once again opened for the Holy Spirit to enter, “that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). Thus, we need not fear judgment. Having our sins remitted or pardoned and our garments spotless through the blood of Christ, we can imagine we hear the voice of the Lord in the Day of Judgment saying, “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

63. This personal persistence in the path of obedience is something different than achieving perfection in mortality. Perfection is not, as some suppose, a prerequisite for justification and sanctification. It is just the opposite: justification (being pardoned) and sanctification (being purified) are the prerequisites for perfection. We only become perfect “in Christ” (see Moro. 10:32), not independently of Him. Thus, what is required of us in order to obtain mercy in the day of judgment is simple diligence. As the Prophet Joseph Smith counseled from the dank prison of Liberty, Missouri: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17; see also Mosiah 4:27).
64. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once expressed our obligation this way:
65. “Everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he’s on the straight and narrow, he’s going to go on to eternal reward in his Father’s kingdom.
66. “We don’t need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. . . . The way it operates is this: you get on the path that’s named the ‘straight and narrow.’ You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The straight and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that’s called eternal life. . . . Now is the time and the day of your salvation, so if you’re working zealously in this life—though you haven’t fully overcome the world and you haven’t done

all you hoped you might do—you’re still going to be saved” (“The Probationary Test of Mortality,” Salt Lake Institute of Religion devotional, 10 Jan. 1982, 12).

67. When we stand before the Savior to be judged of Him, it will be “according to our works and the desires of our hearts” (“The Living Christ,” 3; see also D&C 137:9). Where we can act, where we have the capacity and the means, we must act if we are to retain a justified and sanctified status. But where we legitimately and truly cannot act, the Lord will accept the desire for the deed. An application of this principle can be found in King Benjamin’s statements about our obligations to the poor. To those with means and power to help, he counseled: “And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26).
68. To those who lack means to assist, he said: “And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.
69. “And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless” (Mosiah 4:24–25).
70. The Savior offers to all who will have faith and accept it, the gifts of being justified or pardoned before the law and also being sanctified—that is, being made spotless and holy. There is no other name, nor way, nor means whereby such redemption may occur (see Mosiah 3:17; Moses 6:52). And truly His grace is sufficient to achieve it (see Moro. 10:32). So my witness to each member of the Church, and our witness to the world, is as recorded in the scripture of this last and greatest dispensation:
71. “And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true;
72. “And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:30–31).

Neal A. Maxwell, “Testifying of the Great and Glorious Atonement,” *General Conference, October 2001*

1. The very brevity of the missionary discussions reminds us of what a harvest basket the Restoration really is. Jesus asks us, when we give, to give in “good measure,” using the metaphor of a harvest basket which is pressed down, shaken together, and running over (see [Luke 6:38](#)). And out of that marvelous harvest basket we are to teach but a few key truths and concepts.
2. This reality is a powerful reminder about the need for the Spirit to impel the message we give into the hearts

and minds of people—because the great things of eternity are being conveyed in some very brief teaching moments. Hence the need for the Spirit to accompany what we say.

3. When we share the gospel as members or full-time missionaries, our friends and investigators need to feel our convictions and testimonies about the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Yes, we are teaching a deep concept, but

we should also be sharing a deep conviction about that powerful doctrine.

4. The most important thing we can do in preparing individuals to receive the full blessings of the Atonement is to understand it and to believe in it ourselves. By understanding and believing in the Atonement personally, you and I can teach and testify of the Atonement with greater gratitude, greater love, and greater power.

Repentance Made Possible

5. Jesus' glorious Atonement is the central act in all of human history! It provides the universal Resurrection; it makes our personal repentance and forgiveness possible. Since all of us "have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), the need for repentance is universal. And mercifully, Christ's Atonement fits sins of all sizes—whether the smaller sins of omission or major transgressions. Hence, when we turn away from our sins, the required arc of that turning varies from person to person, but it is necessary for all.
6. The Greek word of which repentance is the English translation "denotes a change of mind, i.e., a fresh view about God, about oneself, and about the world" (Bible Dictionary, "Repentance," 760). This means we are to change our thoughts and then behavior until we are turned away from our sins and are aligned with God's commandments. This change of mind means that we are actually progressing toward what Paul called "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Repentance is thus a continuing process in which each of us needs to draw on the Atonement for real relief, real forgiveness, and real progress.
7. Christ gave us freely an enormous and unconditional gift: the universal Resurrection. However, Christ's proffer of the further gift of eternal life is conditional. As our Lawgiver, He sets the terms for receiving this great gift (see 3 Ne. 11:31–41; 3 Ne. 15:9–10; 3 Ne. 27:13–21). Therefore, our individual progress toward eternal life requires us to be willing to submit to Christ (see Mosiah 3:19). Then, if we are truly faithful and endure to the end, our wills can finally be swallowed up in the will of the Father (see Mosiah 15:7; 3 Ne. 11:11).
8. However, to begin such a significant transformation, we must first "give away all [our] sins" (Alma 22:18), and who else will take them anyway except Jesus? (see Alma 36:18–20).
9. No wonder there is such an urgency underlying our need to share the gospel! President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) declared:
10. "A great indicator of one's personal conversion is the desire to share the gospel with others. For this reason the Lord gave an obligation to every member of the Church to be a missionary.
11. "Those of us who have partaken of the Atonement are under obligation to bear faithful testimony of our Lord and Savior. For he has said, 'I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast

in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you'" (D&C 84:61) ("The Atonement and Missionary Work," seminar for new mission presidents, 21 June 1994, 2).

12. Thus, all of us are to "remain steadfast ... in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto [us]" (D&C 84:61). The forgiveness we need is correlated with our steadfastness in the work of the Lord.

Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost

13. Real repentance, therefore, requires the emancipating effects of baptism; it washes us clean. Think about it: how merciful when our yesterdays no longer hold our tomorrows hostage!
14. After the cleansing and emancipating effects of baptism, we experience further fortifying effects by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. We desperately need the Holy Ghost to help us choose the right. He will also help by preaching to us necessary sermonettes from the pulpit of memory. He will also testify to us of the truths of the gospel.
15. Given where we must go, we need the Holy Ghost as a constant companion, not just as an occasional influence.
16. We can also be further fortified after baptism by regularly partaking of the sacrament as we reflect on the Atonement and renew our covenants, including those made at the time of baptism. This process of emancipation and fortification is made possible by applying Jesus' Atonement to ourselves and to those we teach. We should regularly apply the Atonement for self-improvement, while enduring to the end. If we choose the course of steady improvement, which is clearly the course of discipleship, we will become more righteous and can move from what may be initially a mere acknowledgment of Jesus on to admiration of Jesus, then on to adoration of Jesus, and finally to emulation of Jesus. In that process of striving to become more like Him through steady improvement, we must be in the posture of repentance, even if no major transgression is involved.

Developing the Attributes of Christ

17. As we turn from transgression and strive to become more loving, more meek, more patient, and more submissive, the remaining sins, for most of us, are the less visible sins of omission. However, these must also be given away. Jesus has designated the attributes in that process for which we are to seek, such as faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, and patience. He further denotes the attributes of faith, hope, and charity, and having an eye single to the glory of God, and tells us that these qualify us for doing the Lord's work (see D&C 4:5–7; 2 Pet. 1:4–8). No wonder we are admonished to ask, seek, and knock in order to receive these gifts of the Spirit so that we can be much more effective in doing this grand work of the Lord. In this process of discipleship, we must never forget that the Atonement continues to be absolutely vital for all of us!

18. Jesus instructs us, for instance, that we are to come unto Him (see Alma 5:34; Matt. 11:28–30). However, as you have noticed, when we strive to come unto Him, we come to see how He will then make our weaknesses better known to us, sometimes painfully, in order to help us to progress. Christ even promises us that He will make some weaknesses into strengths (see Ether 12:27).
19. As to the location, nation, time, and circumstances in which our personal discipleship is placed, we should, as the scriptures say, be content with the things allotted to us (see Alma 29:3, 6). Yet there will be an accompanying divine discontent in order to spur us on as we strive to become more like Jesus.
20. Whether the needed attribute is good cheer, patience, submissiveness, meekness, or love, this process requires the steady help of the Holy Ghost. He will prompt us to repent further, such as when we are too proud, too impatient, or less loving than we should be, including in marriages, missionary companionships, and other relationships. However, since such progress is not cost-free, we also need the Holy Ghost to comfort us as we pay the price.
21. Yes, it is by means of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, mercifully, that we can be forgiven. But it is through the Holy Ghost that we can know that we have been forgiven—a tremendously important knowledge for us to achieve. So we need not despair nor live a life in which we “droop in sin” (2 Ne. 4:28). Indeed, we can “press forward with a ... brightness of hope” (2 Ne. 31:20).

Christ’s Second Coming and the Resurrection of Mankind

22. If we need any additional reminders as to the importance of our further developing the virtues of Christ, we should contemplate His glorious Second Coming. Then, among other things, the stars will fall dramatically from their places in heaven. Yet there will be no mortal comments about that, for the mortal explanations and exclamations will be about Jesus and will be words of praise for two of His many attributes: His goodness and His loving-kindness (see D&C 133:52). Remember, not only are we to have faith in Christ, but we are to strive to become more like Him in our goodness and loving-kindness (see 3 Ne. 27:27).
23. At that Second Coming, Jesus will not mention His having endured the crown of thorns, the awful scourging, the crucifixion, the vinegar and gall. He will, however, cite His awful aloneness: “And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, ... and none were with me” (D&C 133:50; see also Isa. 63:3).
24. No wonder the Atonement lies at the very heart of Christ’s gospel. In fact, the Restoration’s central messages are really about Jesus and the Resurrection, and they fulfill this prophecy given to Enoch anciently:
25. “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth.” Why? “To bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from

the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men” (Moses 7:62). Nothing is more central. Yes, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Jesus and His Atonement represent the most profound expression of Heavenly Father’s love for His children. How important the free gift of the Resurrection is for all mankind, and the proffer of the greatest gift which even God can give—eternal life for those willing to so live and to so qualify (see D&C 6:13; D&C 14:7).

Adversity

26. In this process of working out our salvation, adversity will provide part of the perspiration. Again and again for you and me, experience upon experience, we will have cause to ponder upon and rejoice in the great Atonement. For me, several scriptures have proved to be especially relevant and reassuring. When read aloud with and by some who suffer, these verses have been far better than anything I could say, especially to those valiant souls who have reached that point where they are sick of being sick.
27. First, consider what a perplexed but remarkable Nephi said: “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Ne. 11:17). We really do not need to know the meaning of all things if we know God loves us!
28. Likewise, our submissiveness to Him needs to grow, as in the words of King Benjamin, in order to become “a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and [become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).
29. King Benjamin’s use of the word inflict suggests to us customized challenges and tutoring which will require from us special submissiveness.
30. Similarly, our knowing of Jesus’ perfect empathy for us individually will help us greatly to endure our pains of various kinds. Christ “shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
31. “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).
32. Jesus fully understands! His empathy is perfect! He knows how to help us!

Blessings of the Atonement

33. In summation, the Atonement of Jesus Christ blesses us in so many ways. Through it and it alone, a remission of our sins, bringing the needed emancipation discussed earlier, can occur.
34. Likewise, the Atonement makes significant personal progress possible by what the Book of Mormon calls “faith unto repentance” in Jesus, in the Atonement, and

in the Father’s plan of salvation (see Alma 34:15–17). Otherwise, individuals who do not have faith unto repentance will wrongly reason, “Why bother to repent?” Little wonder the scriptures say that human “despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moro. 10:22). The Atonement, instead, can bring us a “brightness of hope” even amid our losses, crosses, sorrows, and disappointments (2 Ne. 31:20).

- 35. The spiritual submissiveness which is central to the blessings of the Atonement was well exemplified by Melissa Howes as she led her family in prayer a short while before her father died of cancer. Melissa was only 9 and her father 43. Consider unselfish Melissa Howes’s pleading, in her own words as reported to me by her mother: “Heavenly Father, bless my daddy, and if you need to take him and need him more than us, you can have him. We want him, but Thy will be done. And please help us not to be mad at you” (letter from Christie Howes, 25 Feb. 1998).
- 36. How many individuals, bereft of such an understanding of the plan of salvation, are angry with God instead of being grateful to Him and to Jesus for the glorious Atonement?
- 37. Not only is the Atonement the grand expression of Heavenly Father and Jesus’ love for us, but through it we can come to know of Their personal love for us.

The Influence of the Spirit of the Lord

- 38. We must never underestimate the power of the Spirit to stir people’s souls beyond any teaching capacity or skills we may have. As you know, such occurred with Alma when he was in his extremity. And what did he remember? He said he remembered the words of his father about the Atonement of Jesus and said, “My mind caught hold upon this thought” (see Alma 36:17–18).
- 39. The Spirit can help those to whom you testify to likewise catch hold of your words in a way that their minds and hearts will grasp them, especially when those words concern the deep doctrines of the kingdom, like the Atonement.
- 40. In another inspirational moment that reflects cumulative teaching, mothers of the Nephite stripling warriors were

aware that their sons had been given special promises before they went off to war. They were not as spiritually mature as their mothers, yet these dramatic promises were such that they were sustained by them. And we read that they did “not doubt [their] mothers knew it” (Alma 56:48).

- 41. Some of those whom you teach, under the direction of the Spirit and in like manner, will feel the power of your words about the Atonement and the restored gospel, and they will not doubt that you know it! These individuals are, to use Alma’s phrase, “in a preparation to hear the word” (Alma 32:6).

The Glorious Atonement

- 42. I give you my testimony of the glory and the reality of the great and glorious Atonement. I praise Jesus for enduring what He endured and for descending below all things in order to comprehend all things. I praise the Father for all that He experienced as He watched His Firstborn, His Beloved, and His Only Begotten, with whom He was well pleased, suffer all that Jesus suffered. I praise the Father for that divine empathy and whatever He endured and experienced in that moment.
- 43. I testify that Jesus’ grip on Himself in that atoning axis between Gethsemane and Calvary was really mankind’s grip on immortality. Jesus finished His preparations, as He said, unto the children of men (see D&C 19:19). Now it remains for us as mortals to claim the blessings of the great Atonement. Our gratitude for Christ and His Atonement will grow with the years and the decades. It will never cease growing. And the scriptures foretell that we will praise Him forever and ever (see D&C 133:52).
- 44. I so praise Him for the glorious and great Atonement and ask Him to bless all of us that we personally will claim, and in our ministries will help people claim, the blessings of that great Atonement, won at so great a cost. Indeed, “there was no other good enough to pay the price” (“There Is a Green Hill Far Away,” Hymns, no. 194).

Week 12 - Grace - Power to do Godly Works

Scripture and Other Readings: 2 Nephi 25:23-26; Hebrews 4; Ether 3, 12; Alma 26; BD – Grace

Invitation Week 12:

Write down some gifts and talents which you would like the Lord to touch in order to give them light. Record what you are going to do to bring them to the Lord in order for him to grace them with his power. As you feel his light, write down how this strengthens your faith and allows you to see his hand in your life.

David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord,” *BYU-Idaho Devotional*, January 8, 2002

1. Good afternoon, brothers and sisters, and welcome to a new semester at Brigham Young University-Idaho. It is for me a blessing and a remarkable responsibility to stand before you today.
 2. I have long been fascinated by the vast variety of analogies, imagery, and parables used by the Savior and by His apostles to teach the saving principles of the gospel. Frequently, common and ordinary experiences are used by these master teachers to help a learner relate to and better understand a vital principle or doctrine. Consider, for example, the use in the scriptures of the sense of taste. Please turn with me to Alma 32:28. Alma, while comparing the word of God to a seed, also employs the sense of taste to emphasize and enhance for his readers the significant spiritual consequences of exercising faith in Christ.
 3. Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves -- It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me (emphasis added).
 4. Please note how the good seed is described in this verse as enlarging, as enlightening, and as delicious.
 5. The Prophet Joseph Smith used the sense of taste in a similar way to summarize a key point in his King Follett Sermon, given in April of 1844.
 6. This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you . . . You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six, 1843-1844, p. 355, emphasis added).
 7. Hence, the Prophet Joseph relates our ability to taste to the importance of pondering upon and savoring the sweetness of the Savior's saving doctrines.
 8. My purpose this afternoon is to describe and discuss and testify of one of the most delicious doctrines of the restored gospel -- the doctrine of the redeeming and the enabling powers of the atonement of Jesus Christ. And I hope to place particular emphasis upon the enabling power of the atonement. I have been most prayerful and serious about preparing my presentation for today. I yearn and invite and pray for the companionship of the Holy Ghost to be with me and with you as we visit together for these few minutes about this sacred subject.
- THE JOURNEY OF LIFE**
9. The framework for my message today is a statement by President David O. McKay. He summarized the overarching purpose of the gospel of the Savior in these terms:
 10. . . . the purpose of the gospel is . . . to make bad men good and good men better, and to change human nature (from the film *Every Member a Missionary*, as acknowledged by Franklin D. Richards, CR, October 1965, pp. 136-137; see also Brigham Young, JD 8:130 [22 July 1860]).
 11. Thus, the journey of a lifetime is to progress from bad to good to better and to experience the mighty change of heart--and to have our fallen natures changed.
 12. May I suggest that the Book of Mormon is our handbook of instructions as we travel the pathway from bad to good to better and to have our hearts changed. Please turn with me to Mosiah 3:19. In this verse King Benjamin teaches about the journey of mortality and about the role of the atonement in successfully navigating that journey.
 13. For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord . . . (emphasis added).

14. Now I want to stop at this point and draw our attention to two specific phrases. First, consider "and putteth off the natural man." Let me suggest to you that President McKay was fundamentally talking about putting off the natural man when he said, "The purpose of the gospel is to make bad men good." Now I do not believe the word "bad" in this statement by President McKay connotes only wicked, awful, horrible, or inherently evil. Rather, I think he was suggesting that the journey from bad to good is the process of putting off the natural man or the natural woman in each of us. In mortality we all are tempted by the flesh. The very elements out of which our bodies were created are by nature fallen and ever subject to the pull of sin, corruption, and death. And we can increase our capacity to overcome the desires of the flesh and temptations, as described in this verse, "through the atonement of Christ." When we make mistakes, as we transgress and sin, we are able to overcome such weakness through the redeeming and cleansing power of the atonement of Jesus Christ. As we frequently sing in preparation to partake of the emblems of the sacrament:
15. His precious blood he freely spilt;
His life he freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.
"How Great the Wisdom and the Love," Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985, #195)
16. Now, please notice the next line in Mosiah 3:19: "and becometh a saint." May I suggest this phrase describes the continuation and second phase of life's journey as outlined by President McKay. "The purpose of the gospel is to make bad men good"--or, in other words, put off the natural man--"and good men better"--or, in other words, become more like a saint. Now, brothers and sisters, I believe this second part of the journey, this process of going from good to better, is a topic about which we do not study or teach frequently enough nor understand adequately.
17. If I were to emphasize one overarching point this afternoon, it would be this. I suspect that you and I are much more familiar with the nature of the redeeming power of the atonement than we are with the enabling power of the atonement. It is one thing to know that Jesus Christ came to earth to die for us. That is fundamental and foundational to the doctrine of Christ. But we also need to appreciate that the Lord desires, through His atonement and by the power of the Holy Ghost, to live in us--not only to direct us but also to empower us. I think most of us know that when we do things wrong, when we need help to overcome the effects of sin in our lives, the Savior has paid the price and made it possible for us to be made clean through His redeeming power. Most of us clearly understand that the atonement is for sinners. I am not so sure, however, that we know and understand that the atonement is also for saints--for good men and women

who are obedient and worthy and conscientious and who are striving to become better and serve more faithfully. I frankly do not think many of us "get it" concerning this enabling and strengthening aspect of the atonement, and I wonder if we mistakenly believe we must make the journey from good to better and become a saint all by ourselves, through sheer grit, willpower, and discipline, and with our obviously limited capacities.

18. Brothers and sisters, the gospel of the Savior is not simply about avoiding bad in our lives; it is also essentially about doing and becoming good. And the atonement provides help for us to overcome and avoid bad and to do and become good. There is help from the Savior for the entire journey of life--from bad to good to better and to change our very nature. Indeed, this doctrine tastes good.
19. I am not trying to suggest that the redeeming and enabling powers of the atonement are separate and discrete. Rather, these two dimensions of the atonement are connected and complementary; they both need to be operational during all phases of the journey of life. And it is eternally important for all of us to recognize that both of these essential elements of the journey of life--both putting off the natural man and becoming a saint, both overcoming bad and becoming good--are accomplished through the power of the atonement. Individual willpower, personal determination and motivation, and effective planning and goal setting are necessary but ultimately insufficient to triumphantly complete this mortal journey. Truly, we must come to rely upon "the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8).

GRACE AND THE ENABLING POWER OF THE ATONEMENT

20. I now want to describe in greater detail the enabling power of the atonement. Brothers and sisters, please notice the use of the word "grace" in the verse from 2 Nephi to which we just referred. In the Bible Dictionary in our scriptures, we learn that the word "grace" frequently is used in the scriptures to connote "enabling power." On page 697, under the word "grace," we read:
21. A word that occurs frequently in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.
22. It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, made possible by his atoning sacrifice, that mankind will be raised in immortality, every person receiving his body from the grave in a condition of everlasting life.
23. Now, please note these next sentences:
24. It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women

to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts (emphasis added).

25. That is, grace represents that divine assistance or heavenly help each of us will desperately need to qualify for the celestial kingdom. Thus, the enabling power of the atonement strengthens us to do and be good and serve beyond our own individual desire and natural capacity.
26. In my personal scripture study, I often insert the term "enabling power" whenever I encounter the word grace. Consider, for example, this verse with which we are all familiar in 2 Nephi, chapter 25, verse 23: ". . . for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."
27. Now let's review this verse one more time:
28. . . . for we know that it is by grace [the enabling and strengthening power of the atonement of Christ] that we are saved, after all we can do.
29. I believe we can learn much about this vital aspect of the atonement if we will insert "enabling and strengthening power" each time we find the word grace in the scriptures.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

30. The journey of a lifetime, as described by President McKay, is to go from bad to good to better and to have our very natures changed. And the Book of Mormon is replete with examples of disciples and prophets who knew and understood and were transformed by the enabling power of the atonement in making that journey. May I suggest, brothers and sisters, that as we come to better understand this sacred power, our gospel perspective will be greatly enlarged and enriched. Such a perspective will change us in remarkable ways.
31. Nephi is an example of one who knew and understood and relied upon the enabling power of the Savior. In 1 Nephi chapter 7 we recall that the sons of Lehi had returned to Jerusalem to enlist Ishmael and his household in their cause. Laman and others in the party traveling with Nephi from Jerusalem back to the wilderness rebelled, and Nephi exhorted his brethren to have faith in the Lord. It was at this point in their trip that Nephi's brothers bound him with cords and planned his destruction. Now please note Nephi's prayer in verse 17:
32. O Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound (emphasis added).
33. Now brothers and sisters, do you know what I likely would have prayed for if I had been tied up by my brothers? My prayer would have included a request for something bad to happen to my brothers and ended with the phrase "wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren" or, in other words, "Please get me out of this mess, NOW!" It is especially interesting to me that Nephi did not pray, as I probably would have prayed, to have his circumstances changed. Rather, he prayed for the strength to change his circumstances. And may I

suggest that he prayed in this manner precisely because he knew and understood and had experienced the enabling power of the atonement of the Savior.

34. I personally do not believe the bands with which Nephi was bound just magically fell from his hands and wrists. Rather, I suspect he was blessed with both persistence and personal strength beyond his natural capacity, that he then "in the strength of the Lord" (Mosiah 9:17) worked and twisted and tugged on the cords and ultimately and literally was enabled to break the bands.
35. Brothers and sisters, the implication of this episode for each of us is quite straightforward. As you and I come to understand and employ the enabling power of the atonement in our personal lives, we will pray and seek for strength to change our circumstances rather than praying for our circumstances to be changed. We will become agents who act rather than objects that are acted upon (2 Nephi 2:14).
36. Consider the example in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Mosiah as Alma and his people are being persecuted by Amulon. As recorded in verse 14, the voice of the Lord came to these good people in their afflictions and indicated:
37. And I will ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs.
38. Now if I had been one of Alma's people and received that particular assurance, my response likely would have been, "I thank thee, and please hurry!" But notice in verse 15 the process the Lord used to lighten the burden.
39. And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord (emphasis added).
40. Brothers and sisters, what was changed in this episode? It was not the burden that changed; the challenges and difficulties of persecution were not immediately removed from the people. But Alma and his followers were strengthened, and their increased capacity and strength made the burdens they bore lighter. These good people were empowered through the atonement to act as agents and impact their circumstances--and "in the strength of the Lord," Alma and his people were then directed to safety in the land of Zarahemla.
41. Now some of you may be legitimately wondering, "Brother Bednar, what makes you think the episode with Alma and his people is an example of the enabling power of the atonement?" I believe the answer to your question is found in a comparison of Mosiah 3:19 and Mosiah 24:15. Let's resume reading in Mosiah 3:19 where we previously had stopped:
42. . . . and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient,

- full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father (emphasis added).
43. As we progress in the journey of mortality from bad to good to better, as we put off the natural man or woman in each of us, and as we strive to become saints and have our very natures changed, then the attributes detailed in this verse increasingly should describe the type of person you and I are becoming. We will become more childlike, more submissive, more patient, and more willing to submit. Now compare these characteristics in Mosiah 3:19 with those used to describe Alma and his people in the latter part of verse 15 in Mosiah 24:
 44. . . . and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord (emphasis added).
 45. I find the parallels between the attributes described in these verses striking and an indication that Alma's good people were becoming a better people through the enabling power of the atonement of Christ the Lord.
 46. We are all familiar with the story of Alma and Amulek contained in Alma 14. In this episode many faithful saints had been put to death by fire, and these two servants of the Lord had been imprisoned and beaten. Please consider this petition contained in verse 26 offered by Alma as he prayed in prison:
 47. O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance (emphasis added).
 48. Here again we see reflected in his request Alma's understanding of and confidence in the enabling power of the atonement. Now note the result of this prayer, as described in the latter part of verse 26 and in verse 28:
 49. And they [Alma and Amulek] broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.
 50. And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ (emphasis added).
 51. Once again the enabling power is evident as good people struggle against evil and strive to become even better and serve more effectively "in the strength of the Lord" (Mosiah 9:17).
 52. Let me present one final example from the Book of Mormon. In Alma 31, Alma is directing a mission to reclaim the apostate Zoramites. You will recall that in this chapter we learn about the Rameumptom and the prescribed and prideful prayer offered by the Zoramites. Please notice the plea for strength in Alma's personal prayer, as described in verse 31:
 53. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people (emphasis added).
 54. In verse 33 Alma also prays that his missionary companions will receive a similar blessing:
 55. Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people (emphasis added).
 56. Again we observe that Alma did not pray to have his afflictions removed. He knew he was an agent of the Lord, and he prayed for the power to act and affect his situation.
 57. The key point of this example is contained in the final verse of Alma 31, verse 38:
 58. . . . yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith (emphasis added).
 59. No, the afflictions were not removed. But Alma and his companions were strengthened and blessed through the enabling power of the atonement to "suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ." What a marvelous blessing. And what a lesson each of us should learn.
 60. Examples of the enabling power are not found only in the scriptures. Daniel W. Jones was born in 1830 in Missouri, and he joined the Church in California in 1851. In 1856 he participated in the rescue of handcart companies that were stranded in Wyoming by severe storms. After the rescue party found the suffering saints, provided what immediate comfort they could, and made arrangements for the sick and the feeble to be transported to Salt Lake City, Daniel and several other young men volunteered to remain with and safeguard the company's possessions. The food and supplies left with Daniel and his colleagues were, to say the least, meager and were rapidly expended. I will now quote from Daniel Jones' personal journal and his description of the events that followed.
 61. Game soon became so scarce that we could kill nothing. We ate all the poor meat; one would get hungry eating it. Finally that was all gone, nothing now but hides were left. We made a trial of them. A lot was cooked and eaten without any seasoning and it made the whole company sick. Many were so turned against the stuff that it made them sick even to think of it.
 62. . . . Things looked dark, for nothing remained but the poor raw hides taken from starved cattle. We asked the Lord to direct us what to do. The brethren did not murmur, but felt to trust in God. We had cooked the hide, after soaking and scraping the hair off until it was soft and then ate it, glue and all. This made it rather inclined to stay with us longer than we desired. Finally I was impressed how to fix the stuff and gave the company advice, telling them how to cook it; for them to scorch and scrape the hair off; this had a tendency to kill and purify the bad taste that scalding gave it. After scraping, boil one hour in plenty of water, throwing the water away which had extracted all the glue, then wash and scrape the hide thoroughly, washing in cold water, then boil to a jelly and let it get cold, and then eat with

a little sugar sprinkled on it. This was considerable trouble, but we had little else to do and it was better than starving. (Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years Among the Indians*, pg. 81)

63. All that I have read thus far is a preparation for the next line from Daniel W. Jones' journal. It illustrates how those pioneer saints may have known something about the enabling power of the atonement that we, in our prosperity and ease, are not as quick to understand:
64. We asked the Lord to bless our stomachs and adapt them to this food (Ibid., emphasis added).
65. My dear brothers and sisters, I know what I would have prayed for in those circumstances. I would have prayed for something else to eat. "Heavenly Father, please send me a quail or a buffalo." It never would have occurred to me to pray that my stomach would be strengthened and adapted to what we already had. What did Daniel W. Jones know? He knew about the enabling power of the atonement of Jesus Christ. He did not pray that his circumstances would be changed. He prayed that he would be strengthened to deal with his circumstances. Just as Nephi, Amulek, and Alma and his people were strengthened, Daniel W. Jones had the spiritual insight to know what to ask for in that prayer.
66. We hadn't the faith to ask him to bless the raw-hide, for it was "hard stock." On eating now all seemed to relish the feast. We were three days without eating before this second attempt was made. We enjoyed this sumptuous fare for six weeks. (Ibid., pp. 81-82).
67. Thus, for Daniel and his associates, this delicious doctrine provided both physical and spiritual nourishment.
68. The enabling power of the atonement of Christ strengthens us to do things we could never do on our own. Sometimes I wonder if in our latter-day world of ease--in our world of microwave ovens and cell phones and air-conditioned cars and comfortable homes--I wonder if we ever learn to acknowledge our daily dependence upon the enabling power of the atonement. The greatest lessons I have learned about the enabling power have come from the quiet example of my wife in our own home. I watched her persevere through intense and continuous morning sickness and vomiting during each of her three pregnancies. She literally was sick all day every day for eight months with each pregnancy. That challenge was never removed from her. But together we prayed that she would be strengthened, and she indeed was blessed through the enabling power of the atonement to do physically what in her own power she could not do. Sister Bednar is a remarkably capable and competent woman, and over the years I have seen how she has been magnified to handle the mocking and scorn that come from a secular society when a Latter-day Saint woman heeds prophetic counsel and makes the family and home and the nurturing of children her highest priorities. In today's world, a righteous woman and mother in Zion will need both the enabling power of the atonement and priesthood support. I thank and pay tribute to Susan for helping me to learn such invaluable lessons.
69. In Alma chapter 7 we learn how and why the Savior is able to provide the enabling power, beginning with verse 11:
70. And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people (emphasis added).
71. Thus, the Savior has suffered not just for our iniquities but also for the inequality, the unfairness, the pain, the anguish, and the emotional distress that so frequently beset us. Additional detail is described in verse 12:
72. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities (emphasis added).
73. There is no physical pain, no anguish of soul, no suffering of spirit, no infirmity or weakness that you or I ever experience during our mortal journey that the Savior did not experience first. You and I in a moment of weakness may cry out, "No one understands. No one knows." No human being, perhaps, knows. But the Son of God perfectly knows and understands, for He felt and bore our burdens before we ever did. And because He paid the ultimate price and bore that burden, He has perfect empathy and can extend to us His arm of mercy in so many phases of our life. He can reach out, touch, and succor--literally run to us--and strengthen us to be more than we could ever be and help us to do that which we could never do through relying only upon our own power.
74. Perhaps now we can more fully understand and appreciate the lesson of Matthew 11:28-30:
75. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
76. I express my appreciation for the infinite and eternal sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The atonement is not only for people who have done bad things and are trying to be good. It is also for good people who are trying to become better and serve faithfully and who yearn for an ongoing and mighty change of heart. Indeed, "in the strength of the Lord" (Mosiah 9:17) we can do and overcome all things. Brothers and sisters, truly this is precious and delicious doctrine.
77. Later this year I will celebrate my fiftieth birthday. I can think of no person or knowledge or influence or event that has had a greater impact upon me during my half century of mortality than the doctrines I have attempted to discuss this afternoon. I pray that you will learn and understand and appreciate and apply this

essential doctrine early in your lives. I know the Savior lives. I have experienced both His redeeming and enabling power, and I witness that these powers are real and available to each of us. I know He directs the

affairs of this Church. I know apostles and prophets authoritatively act for and in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. These things I know to be true and so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Gift of Grace,” *General Conference, April 2015*

1. On Easter Sunday we celebrate the most long-awaited and glorious event in the history of the world.
2. It is the day that changed everything. On that day, my life changed. Your life changed. The destiny of all God’s children changed.
3. On that blessed day, the Savior of mankind, who had taken upon Himself the chains of sin and death that held us captive, burst those chains and set us free.
4. Because of the sacrifice of our beloved Redeemer, death has no sting, the grave has no victory,¹ Satan has no lasting power, and we are “begotten ... again unto a lively hope by the *resurrection of Jesus Christ.*”²
5. Truly, the Apostle Paul was correct when he said we can “comfort one another with these words.”

God’s Grace

6. We often speak of the Savior’s Atonement—and rightly so!
7. In Jacob’s words, “Why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him?”⁴ But as “we talk of Christ, ... rejoice in Christ, ... preach of Christ, [and] prophesy of Christ”⁵ at every opportunity, we must never lose our sense of awe and profound *gratitude* for the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God.
8. The Savior’s Atonement cannot become commonplace in our teaching, in our conversation, or in our hearts. It is sacred and holy, for it was through this “great and last sacrifice” that Jesus the Christ brought “salvation to all those who shall believe on his name.”⁶
9. I marvel to think that the Son of God would condescend to save us, as imperfect, impure, mistake-prone, and ungrateful as we often are. I have tried to understand the Savior’s Atonement with my finite mind, and the only explanation I can come up with is this: God loves us deeply, perfectly, and everlastingly. I cannot even begin to estimate “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ... [of] the love of Christ.”⁷
10. A powerful expression of that love is what the scriptures often call the *grace of God*—the divine assistance and endowment of strength by which we grow from the flawed and limited beings we are now into exalted beings of “truth and light, until [we are] glorified in truth and [know] all things.”⁸
11. It is a most wondrous thing, this grace of God. Yet it is often misunderstood.⁹ Even so, we should know about God’s grace if we intend to inherit what has been prepared for us in His eternal kingdom.
12. To that end I would like to speak of grace. In particular, first, how grace *unlocks the gates of heaven* and, second, how it *opens the windows of heaven*.

First: Grace Unlocks the Gates of Heaven

13. Because we have all “sinned, and come short of the glory of God”¹⁰ and because “there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God,”¹¹ every one of us is unworthy to return to God’s presence.
14. Even if we were to serve God with our whole souls, it is not enough, for we would still be “unprofitable servants.”¹² We cannot earn our way into heaven; the demands of justice stand as a barrier, which we are powerless to overcome on our own.
15. But all is not lost. The grace of God is our great and everlasting hope.
16. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the plan of mercy appeases the demands of justice¹³ “and [brings] about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.”¹⁴
17. Our sins, though they may be as scarlet, can become white as snow.¹⁵ Because our beloved Savior “gave himself a ransom for all,”¹⁶ an entrance into His everlasting kingdom is provided unto us.¹⁷ The gate is unlocked!
18. But the grace of God does not merely restore us to our previous innocent state. If salvation means only erasing our mistakes and sins, then salvation—as wonderful as it is—does not fulfill the Father’s aspirations for us. His aim is much higher: He wants His sons and daughters to become like Him.
19. With the gift of God’s grace, the path of discipleship does not lead backward; it leads upward.
20. It leads to heights we can scarcely comprehend! It leads to exaltation in the celestial kingdom of our Heavenly Father, where we, surrounded by our loved ones, receive “of his fulness, and of his glory.”¹⁸ All things are ours, and we are Christ’s.¹⁹ Indeed, all that the Father hath shall be given unto us.²⁰
21. To inherit this glory, we need more than an unlocked gate; we must enter through this gate with a heart’s desire to be changed—a change so dramatic that the scriptures describe it as being “born again; yea, born of God, changed from [our worldly] and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters.”²¹

Second: Grace Opens the Windows of Heaven

22. Another element of God’s grace is the opening of the windows of heaven, through which God pours out blessings of power and strength, enabling us to achieve things that otherwise would be far beyond our reach. It is by God’s amazing grace that His children can overcome the undercurrents and quicksands of the

deceiver, rise above sin, and “be perfect[ed] in Christ.”²²

23. Though we all have weaknesses, we can overcome them. Indeed it is by the grace of God that, if we humble ourselves and have faith, weak things can become strong.²³
 24. Throughout our lives, God’s grace bestows temporal blessings and spiritual gifts that magnify our abilities and enrich our lives. His grace refines us. His grace helps us become our best selves.
- Who Can Qualify?**
25. In the Bible we read of Christ’s visit to the home of Simon the Pharisee.
 26. Outwardly, Simon seemed to be a good and upright man. He regularly checked off his to-do list of religious obligations: he kept the law, paid his tithing, observed the Sabbath, prayed daily, and went to the synagogue.
 27. But while Jesus was with Simon, a woman approached, washed the Savior’s feet with her tears, and anointed His feet with fine oil.
 28. Simon was not pleased with this display of worship, for he knew that this woman was a sinner. Simon thought that if Jesus didn’t know this, He must not be a prophet or He would not have let the woman touch him.
 29. Perceiving his thoughts, Jesus turned to Simon and asked a question. “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: ... one owed five hundred pence, ... the other fifty.
 30. “And when they [both] had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”
 31. Simon answered that it was the one who was forgiven the most.
 32. Then Jesus taught a profound lesson: “Seest thou this woman? ... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; *for she loved much*: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”²⁴
 33. Which of these two people are we most like?
 34. Are we like Simon? Are we confident and comfortable in our good deeds, trusting in our own righteousness? Are we perhaps a little impatient with those who are not living up to our standards? Are we on autopilot, going through the motions, attending our meetings, yawning through Gospel Doctrine class, and perhaps checking our cell phones during sacrament service?
 35. Or are we like this woman, who thought she was completely and hopelessly lost because of sin? Do we *love much*?
 36. Do we understand our indebtedness to Heavenly Father and plead with all our souls for the grace of God?
 37. When we kneel to pray, is it to replay the greatest hits of our own righteousness, or is it to confess our faults, plead for God’s mercy, and shed tears of gratitude for the amazing plan of redemption?²⁵
 38. Salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience; it is purchased by the blood of the Son of God.²⁶ Thinking that we can trade our good works for salvation is like buying a plane ticket and then

supposing we own the airline. Or thinking that after paying rent for our home, we now hold title to the entire planet earth.

Why Then Obey?

39. If grace is a gift of God, why then is obedience to God’s commandments so important? Why bother with God’s commandments—or repentance, for that matter? Why not just admit we’re sinful and let God save us?
40. Or, to put the question in Paul’s words, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul’s answer is simple and clear: “God forbid.”²⁷
41. Brothers and sisters, we obey the commandments of God—out of love for Him!
42. Trying to understand God’s gift of grace with all our heart and mind gives us all the more reasons to love and obey our Heavenly Father with meekness and gratitude. As we walk the path of discipleship, it refines us, it improves us, it helps us to become more like Him, and it leads us back to His presence. “The Spirit of the Lord [our God]” brings about such “a mighty change in us, ... that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”²⁸
43. Therefore, our obedience to God’s commandments comes as a natural outgrowth of our endless love and gratitude for the goodness of God. This form of genuine love and gratitude will miraculously merge our works with God’s grace. Virtue will garnish our thoughts unceasingly, and our confidence will wax strong in the presence of God.²⁹
44. Dear brothers and sisters, living the gospel faithfully is not a burden. It is a joyful rehearsal—a preparation for inheriting the grand glory of the eternities. We seek to obey our Heavenly Father because our spirits will become more attuned to spiritual things. Vistas are opened that we never knew existed. Enlightenment and understanding come to us when we do the will of the Father.³⁰
45. Grace is a gift of God, and our desire to be obedient to each of God’s commandments is the reaching out of our mortal hand to receive this sacred gift from our Heavenly Father.

All We Can Do

46. The prophet Nephi made an important contribution to our understanding of God’s grace when he declared, “We labor diligently ... to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is *by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.*”³¹
47. However, I wonder if sometimes we misinterpret the phrase “after all we can do.” We must understand that “after” does not equal “because.”
48. We are not saved “because” of all that we can do. Have any of us done *all* that we can do? Does God wait until we’ve expended every effort before He will intervene in our lives with His saving grace?
49. Many people feel discouraged because they constantly fall short. They know firsthand that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³² They raise their

voices with Nephi in proclaiming, “My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.”³³

50. I am certain Nephi knew that the Savior’s grace *allows and enables* us to overcome sin.³⁴ This is why Nephi labored so diligently to persuade his children and brethren “to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God.”³⁵
51. After all, *that is* what we can do! And *that is* our task in mortality!

Grace Is Available to All

52. When I think of what the Savior did for us leading up to that first Easter Sunday, I want to lift up my voice and shout praises to the Most High God and His Son, Jesus Christ!

53. The gates of heaven are unlocked!
54. The windows of heaven are opened!
55. Today and forevermore God’s grace is available to all whose hearts are broken and whose spirits are contrite.³⁶ Jesus Christ has cleared the way for us to ascend to heights incomprehensible to mortal minds.³⁷
56. I pray that we will see with new eyes and a new heart the eternal significance of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. I pray that we will show our love for God and our gratitude for the gift of God’s infinite grace by keeping His commandments and joyfully “walk[ing] in [a] newness of life.”³⁸ In the sacred name of our Master and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen

Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *General Conference, October 2015.*

1. Because of His Atonement, the Savior has the power to succor—to help—every mortal pain and affliction.
2. In mortality we have the certainty of death and the burden of sin. The Atonement of Jesus Christ offsets these two certainties of mortal life. But apart from death and sin, we have many other challenges as we struggle through mortality.
3. Because of that same Atonement, our Savior can provide us the strength we need to overcome these mortal challenges. That is my subject today.
4. Most scriptural accounts of the Atonement concern the Savior’s breaking the bands of death and suffering for our sins. In his sermon recorded in the Book of Mormon, Alma taught these fundamentals. But he also provided our clearest scriptural assurances that the Savior also experienced the pains and sicknesses and infirmities of His people.
5. Alma described this part of the Savior’s Atonement: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11; also see 2 Nephi 9:21).
6. Think of it! In the Savior’s Atonement, He suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind.” As President Boyd K. Packer explained: “He had no debt to pay. He had committed no wrong. Nevertheless, an accumulation of all of the guilt, the grief and sorrow, the pain and humiliation, all of the mental, emotional, and physical torments known to man—He experienced them all.”¹
7. Why did He suffer these mortal challenges “of every kind”? Alma explained, “And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).
8. For example, the Apostle Paul declared that because the Savior “hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Similarly, President James E. Faust taught, “Since the Savior has suffered anything and everything that we could ever feel or experience, He can help the weak to become stronger.”²
9. Our Savior experienced and suffered the fulness of all mortal challenges “according to the flesh” so He could know “according to the flesh” how to “succor [which means to give relief or aid to] his people according to their infirmities.” He therefore knows our struggles, our heartaches, our temptations, and our suffering, for He willingly experienced them all as an essential part of His Atonement. And because of this, His Atonement empowers Him to succor us—to give us the strength to bear it all.
10. While Alma’s teaching in the seventh chapter is the single clearest of all the scriptures on this essential power of the Atonement, it is also taught throughout holy writ.
11. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus explained that He was sent “to heal the brokenhearted” (Luke 4:18). The Bible often tells us of His healing people “of their infirmities” (Luke 5:15; 7:21). The Book of Mormon records His healing those “that were afflicted in any manner” (3 Nephi 17:9). The Gospel of Matthew explains that Jesus healed the people “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17).
12. Isaiah taught that the Messiah would bear our “griefs” and our “sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). Isaiah also taught of His strengthening us: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee” (Isaiah 41:10). Thus we sing:
13. Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed, For I am thy God and will still give thee aid. I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, ... Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.³

14. Speaking of some of his own mortal challenges, the Apostle Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).
15. And so we see that because of His Atonement, the Savior has the power to succor—to help—every mortal pain and affliction. Sometimes His power heals an infirmity, but the scriptures and our experiences teach that sometimes He succors or helps by giving us the strength or patience to endure our infirmities.⁴
16. What are these mortal pains and afflictions and infirmities that our Savior experienced and suffered?
17. We all have pains and afflictions and infirmities at one time or another. Apart from what we experience because of our sins, mortality is filled with frequent struggles, heartaches, and suffering.
18. We and those we love suffer sickness. At some time each of us also experiences pain from traumatic injuries or from other physical or mental difficulties. All of us suffer and grieve in connection with the death of a loved one. We all experience failure in our personal responsibilities, our family relationships, or our occupations.
19. When a spouse or a child rejects what we know to be true and strays from the path of righteousness, we experience particularly stressful pain, just like the father of the prodigal son in Jesus’s memorable parable (see Luke 15:11–32).
20. As the Psalmist declared, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).
21. Thus, our hymns contain this true assurance: “Earth has no sorrow that heav’n cannot cure.”⁵ What cures us is our Savior and His Atonement.
22. Particularly poignant for teenagers is the feeling of rejection when peers seem to join in happy relationships and activities and deliberately leave them out. Racial and ethnic prejudices produce other painful rejections, for youth and adults. Life has many other challenges, such as unemployment or other reverses in our plans.
23. I am still speaking of mortal infirmities not caused by our sins. Some are born with physical or mental disabilities that cause personal suffering for them and struggles for those who love and care for them. For many, the infirmity of depression is painful or permanently disabling. Another painful affliction is the circumstance of singleness. Those who suffer this circumstance should remember that our Savior experienced this kind of pain also and that, through His Atonement, He offers the strength to bear it.
24. Few disabilities are more crippling to our temporal or spiritual lives than addictions. Some of these, like addictions to pornography or drugs, are likely to have been caused by sinful behavior. Even when that behavior has been repented of, the addiction may remain. That disabling grip can also be relieved by the decisive strength available from the Savior. So can the severe challenge experienced by those sent to prison for crimes. A recent letter testifies to the strength that can come even to one in that circumstance: “I know that our Savior is walking these halls, and I have often felt Christ’s love within these prison walls.”⁶
25. I love the testimony of our poetess and friend Emma Lou Thayne. In words we now sing as a hymn, she wrote:
26. Where can I turn for peace?
Where is my solace
When other sources cease to make me whole?
When with a wounded heart, anger, or malice,
I draw myself apart,
Searching my soul?
Where, when my aching grows,
Where, when I languish,
Where, in my need to know, where can I run?
Where is the quiet hand to calm my anguish?
Who, who can understand?
He, only One. ⁷
27. Who can be succored and strengthened through the Atonement of Jesus Christ? Alma taught that the Savior would “take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” and “succor his people” (Alma 7:11, 12; emphasis added). Who are “his people” in this promise? Is it all mortals—all who enjoy the reality of resurrection through the Atonement? Or is it only those select servants qualified through ordinances and covenants?
28. The word people has many meanings in the scriptures. The meaning most appropriate for the teaching that the Savior will succor “his people” is the meaning Ammon employed when he taught that “God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in” (Alma 26:37). That is also what the angels meant when they announced the birth of the Christ child: “Good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10).
29. Because of His atoning experience in mortality, our Savior is able to comfort, heal, and strengthen all men and women everywhere, but I believe He does so only for those who seek Him and ask for His help. The Apostle James taught, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). We qualify for that blessing when we believe in Him and pray for His help.
30. There are millions of God-fearing people who pray to God to be lifted out of their afflictions. Our Savior has revealed that He “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6). As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “Having ‘descended below all things,’ He comprehends, perfectly and personally, the full range of human suffering.”⁸
31. We might even say that having descended beneath it all, He is perfectly positioned to lift us and give

Week 13 - At - one – ment

Scripture and Other Readings: John 17; 3 Nephi 19; 4 Nephi 1:1-18; Moses 7:17-21

Invitation Week 13:

Do an act of love and service for someone this week. Record what you did and how it made you feel. Ponder and write what you are and what you hope to become in the process of doing as the Savior would do. Read Moses 7 and think about what it means to become a Zion people. Find someone this week with whom you can share what you have learned about the atonement from this class.

Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *General Conference, October 2000*

1. The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord’s teachings and teachers were given that we may all attain “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). This process requires far more than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough for us to be convinced of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are converted by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something.
2. Many Bible and modern scriptures speak of a final judgment at which all persons will be rewarded according to their deeds or works or the desires of their hearts. But other scriptures enlarge upon this by referring to our being judged by the condition we have achieved.
3. The prophet Nephi describes the Final Judgment in terms of what we have become: “And if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God” (1 Ne. 15:33; emphasis added). Moroni declares, “He that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still” (Morm. 9:14; emphasis added; see also Rev. 22:11–12; 2 Ne. 9:16; D&C 88:35). The same would be true of “selfish” or “disobedient” or any other personal attribute inconsistent with the requirements of God. Referring to the “state” of the wicked in the Final Judgment, Alma explains that if we are condemned by our words, our works, and our thoughts, “we shall not be found spotless; . . . and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God” (Alma 12:14).
4. From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.
5. A parable illustrates this understanding. A wealthy father knew that if he were to bestow his wealth upon a child who had not yet developed the needed wisdom and stature, the inheritance would probably be wasted. The father said to his child:
6. “All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I have I can easily give you, but that which I am you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours.”
7. This parable parallels the pattern of heaven. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises the incomparable inheritance of eternal life, the fulness of the Father, and reveals the laws and principles by which it can be obtained.
8. We qualify for eternal life through a process of conversion. As used here, this word of many meanings signifies not just a convincing but a profound change of nature. Jesus used this meaning when He taught His chief Apostle the difference between a testimony and a conversion. Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matt. 16:13). Next He asked, “But whom say ye that I am?”
9. “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:15–17).
10. Peter had a testimony. He knew that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, and he declared it. To testify is to know and to declare.

11. Later on, Jesus taught these same men about conversion, which is far more than testimony. When the disciples asked who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, “Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
12. “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2–4; emphasis added).
13. Later, the Savior confirmed the importance of being converted, even for those with a testimony of the truth. In the sublime instructions given at the Last Supper, He told Simon Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).
14. In order to strengthen his brethren—to nourish and lead the flock of God—this man who had followed Jesus for three years, who had been given the authority of the holy apostleship, who had been a valiant teacher and testifier of the Christian gospel, and whose testimony had caused the Master to declare him blessed still had to be “converted.”
15. Jesus’ challenge shows that the conversion He required for those who would enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 18:3) was far more than just being converted to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel. To testify is to know and to declare. The gospel challenges us to be “converted,” which requires us to do and to become. If any of us relies solely upon our knowledge and testimony of the gospel, we are in the same position as the blessed but still unfinished Apostles whom Jesus challenged to be “converted.” We all know someone who has a strong testimony but does not act upon it so as to be converted. For example, returned missionaries, are you still seeking to be converted, or are you caught up in the ways of the world?
16. The needed conversion by the gospel begins with the introductory experience the scriptures call being “born again” (e.g., Mosiah 27:25; Alma 5:49; John 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:23). In the waters of baptism and by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, we become the spiritual “sons and daughters” of Jesus Christ, “new creatures” who can “inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:25–26).
17. In teaching the Nephites, the Savior referred to what they must become. He challenged them to repent and be baptized and be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, “that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:20). He concluded: “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27).
18. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become. This spotless and perfected state will result from a steady succession of covenants, ordinances, and actions, an accumulation of right choices, and from continuing repentance. “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32).
19. Now is the time for each of us to work toward our personal conversion, toward becoming what our Heavenly Father desires us to become. As we do so, we should remember that our family relationships—even more than our Church callings—are the setting in which the most important part of that development can occur. The conversion we must achieve requires us to be a good husband and father or a good wife and mother. Being a successful Church leader is not enough. Exaltation is an eternal family experience, and it is our mortal family experiences that are best suited to prepare us for it.
20. The Apostle John spoke of what we are challenged to become when he said: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2; see also Moro. 7:48).
21. I hope the importance of conversion and becoming will cause our local leaders to reduce their concentration on statistical measures of actions and to focus more on what our brothers and sisters are and what they are striving to become.
22. Our needed conversions are often achieved more readily by suffering and adversity than by comfort and tranquillity, as Elder Hales taught us so beautifully this morning. Father Lehi promised his son Jacob that God would “consecrate [his] afflictions for [his] gain” (2 Ne. 2:2). The Prophet Joseph was promised that “thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high” (D&C 121:7–8).
23. Most of us experience some measure of what the scriptures call “the furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10; 1 Ne. 20:10). Some are submerged in service to a disadvantaged family member. Others suffer the death of a loved one or the loss or postponement of a righteous goal like marriage or childbearing. Still others struggle with personal impairments or with feelings of rejection, inadequacy, or depression. Through the justice and mercy of a loving Father in Heaven, the refinement and sanctification possible through such experiences can help us achieve what God desires us to become.
24. We are challenged to move through a process of conversion toward that status and condition called eternal life. This is achieved not just by doing what is right, but by doing it for the right reason—for the pure love of Christ. The Apostle Paul illustrated this in his famous teaching about the importance of charity (see 1 Cor. 13). The reason charity never fails and the reason charity is greater than even the most significant acts of goodness he cited is that charity, “the pure love of Christ” (Moro. 7:47), is not an act but a condition or state of being. Charity is attained through a succession of acts that result in a conversion. Charity is something

one becomes. Thus, as Moroni declared, “except men shall have charity they cannot inherit” the place prepared for them in the mansions of the Father (Ether 12:34; emphasis added).

25. All of this helps us understand an important meaning of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, which the Savior gave to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. As you remember, the owner of the vineyard hired laborers at different times of the day. Some he sent into the vineyard early in the morning, others about the third hour, and others in the sixth and ninth hours. Finally, in the eleventh hour he sent others into the vineyard, promising that he would also pay them “whatsoever is right” (Matt. 20:7).
26. At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard gave the same wage to every worker, even to those who had come in the eleventh hour. When those who had worked the entire day saw this, “they murmured against the goodman of the house” (Matt. 20:11). The owner did not yield but merely pointed out that he had done no one any wrong, since he had paid each man the agreed amount.
27. Like other parables, this one can teach several different and valuable principles. For present purposes its lesson is that the Master’s reward in the Final Judgment will not be based on how long we have labored in the vineyard. We do not obtain our heavenly reward by punching a time clock. What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to become something. For some of us, this requires a longer time than for others. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors. Many who come in the eleventh hour have been refined and prepared by the Lord in ways other than formal employment in the vineyard. These workers are like the prepared dry mix to which it is only necessary to “add water”—the perfecting ordinance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that addition—even in the eleventh hour—these workers are in the same state of

development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard.

28. This parable teaches us that we should never give up hope and loving associations with family members and friends whose fine qualities (see Moro. 7:5–14) evidence their progress toward what a loving Father would have them become. Similarly, the power of the Atonement and the principle of repentance show that we should never give up on loved ones who now seem to be making many wrong choices.
29. Instead of being judgmental about others, we should be concerned about ourselves. We must not give up hope. We must not stop striving. We are children of God, and it is possible for us to become what our Heavenly Father would have us become.
30. How can we measure our progress? The scriptures suggest various ways. I will mention only two.
31. After King Benjamin’s great sermon, many of his hearers cried out that the Spirit of the Lord “has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). If we are losing our desire to do evil, we are progressing toward our heavenly goal.
32. The Apostle Paul said that persons who have received the Spirit of God “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). I understand this to mean that persons who are proceeding toward the needed conversion are beginning to see things as our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, see them. They are hearing His voice instead of the voice of the world, and they are doing things in His way instead of by the ways of the world.
33. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer, whose Church this is. I testify with gratitude of the plan of the Father under which, through the Resurrection and Atonement of our Savior, we have the assurance of immortality and the opportunity to become what is necessary for eternal life. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen

Supplemental Readings:

D. Todd Christofferson, “That They May Be One in Us,” *General Conference, October 2002*

1. As His mortal ministry drew to a close, knowing “that his hour was come” (John 13:1), Jesus gathered His Apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem. Following their supper and after He had washed their feet and taught them, Jesus offered a sublime Intercessory Prayer on behalf of these Apostles and all who would believe in Him. He supplicated the Father in these words:
2. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;
“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.
“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:20–23).

3. How glorious it is to contemplate that we have been invited into that perfect unity that exists with the Father and the Son. How can this happen?
4. Pondering this question, it becomes clear that we must begin by becoming one within ourselves. We are dual beings of flesh and spirit, and we sometimes feel out of harmony or in conflict. Our spirit is enlightened by conscience, the light of Christ (see Moro. 7:16; D&C 93:2), and naturally responds to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit and desires to follow truth. But the appetites and temptations to which the flesh is subject can, if permitted, overwhelm and dominate the spirit. Paul said:

5. “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.
“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:
6. “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:21–23).
7. Nephi expressed similar feelings:
8. “Notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.
“I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Ne. 4:17–18).
9. But then, remembering the Savior, Nephi stated this hopeful conclusion: “Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted” (2 Ne. 4:19). What did he mean?
10. Jesus was also a being of flesh and spirit, but He yielded not to temptation (see Mosiah 15:5). We can turn to Him as we seek unity and peace within, because He understands. He understands the struggle, and He also understands how to win the struggle. As Paul said, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).
11. Most importantly, we may look to Jesus to help restore the inner unity of our soul when we have succumbed to sin and destroyed our peace. Soon after His intercessory plea that we might become “perfect in one,” Jesus suffered and gave His life to atone for sin. The power of His Atonement can erase the effects of sin in us. When we repent, His atoning grace justifies and cleanses us (see 3 Ne. 27:16–20). It is as if we had not succumbed, as if we had not yielded to temptation.
12. As we endeavor day by day and week by week to follow the path of Christ, our spirit asserts its preeminence, the battle within subsides, and temptations cease to trouble. There is greater and greater harmony between the spiritual and the physical until our physical bodies are transformed, in Paul’s words, from “instruments of unrighteousness unto sin” to “instruments of righteousness unto God” (see Rom. 6:13).
13. Becoming at one within ourselves prepares us for the greater blessing of becoming one with God and Christ.
14. Jesus achieved perfect unity with the Father by submitting Himself, both flesh and spirit, to the will of the Father. His ministry was always clearly focused because there was no debilitating or distracting double-mindedness in Him. Referring to His Father, Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29).
15. Because it was the Father’s will, Jesus submitted even to death, “the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7).
16. This was certainly no small thing. That suffering, He said, “caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—
17. “Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:18–19).
18. These statements reveal that the Savior’s overarching ambition is to glorify the Father. The Father is “in” the Son in the sense that the Father’s glory and the Father’s will are the all-consuming occupation of the Son.
19. During that Last Supper with His Apostles, the Savior said:
20. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.
21. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:1–2).
22. What form that purging may take, what sacrifices it may entail, we probably cannot know in advance. But if with the rich young ruler we were to ask, “What lack I yet?” (Matt. 19:20), the Savior’s answer would be the same: “Come and follow me” (Matt. 19:21); be my disciple as I am the disciple of the Father; become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [you], even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).
23. President Brigham Young spoke understandingly of our challenge when he said:
24. “After all that has been said and done, after he has led this people so long, do you not perceive that there is a lack of confidence in our God? Can you perceive it in yourselves? You may ask, ‘Brother Brigham, do you perceive it in yourself?’ I do, I can see that I yet lack confidence, to some extent, in him whom I trust.— Why? Because I have not the power, in consequence of that which the fall has brought upon me. ...
25. “... Something rises up within me, at times[,] that ... draws a dividing line between my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven; something that makes my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven not precisely one.
26. “... We should feel and understand, as far as possible, as far as fallen nature will let us, as far as we can get faith and knowledge to understand ourselves, that the interest of that God whom we serve is our interest, and that we have no other, neither in time nor in eternity” (Deseret News, 10 Sept. 1856, 212).
27. Surely we will not be one with God and Christ until we make Their will and interest our greatest desire. Such submissiveness is not reached in a day, but through the Holy Spirit, the Lord will tutor us if we are willing until, in process of time, it may accurately be said that He is in us as the Father is in Him. At times I tremble to consider what may be required, but I know that it is only in this perfect union that a fulness of joy can be found. I am grateful beyond expression that I am invited to be one with those holy beings I revere and worship as my Heavenly Father and Redeemer.

28. May God hear the Savior's prayer and lead us all to be one with Them is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

D. Todd Christofferson, "One in Christ," *General Conference, April 2023*

1. As President Dallin H. Oaks has noted, today is Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, marking the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His suffering in Gethsemane and death on the cross just days later, and His glorious Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Let us resolve never to forget what Christ endured to redeem us. And let us never lose the overwhelming joy we will feel once again on Easter as we contemplate His victory over the grave and the gift of universal resurrection.
2. The evening before the trials and crucifixion that awaited Him, Jesus joined in a Passover meal with His Apostles. At the end of this Last Supper, in a sacred Intercessory Prayer, Jesus petitioned His Father in these words: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name [mine Apostles] whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."
3. Then, tenderly, the Savior expanded His petition to include all believers:
4. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;
5. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."
6. Becoming one is a recurring theme in the gospel of Jesus Christ and in God's dealings with His children. With respect to the city of Zion in Enoch's day, it is said that "they were of one heart and one mind." Of the early Saints in the primitive Church of Jesus Christ, the New Testament records, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."
7. In our own dispensation, the Lord admonished, "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine." Among the reasons the Lord gave as to why the early Saints in Missouri had failed to establish a place of Zion was that they "are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom."
8. Where God prevails in all hearts and minds, the people are described as "in one, the children of Christ."
9. When the resurrected Savior appeared to the ancient Book of Mormon peoples, He noted with disapproval that in the past there had been disputations among the people about baptism and other matters. He commanded:
10. "There shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.
11. "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention."
12. In our extremely contentious world, how can unity be achieved, especially in the Church, where we are to have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"? Paul gives us the key:
13. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
14. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ."
15. We are too diverse and at times too discordant to be able to come together as one on any other basis or under any other name. Only in Jesus Christ can we truly become one.
16. Becoming one in Christ happens one by one—we each begin with ourselves. We are dual beings of flesh and spirit and are sometimes at war within ourselves. As Paul expressed:
17. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man;
18. "But I see another law in [the] members [of my body], warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."
19. Jesus was also a being of flesh and spirit. He was tested; He understands; He can help us achieve unity within. Therefore, drawing upon the light and the grace of Christ, we strive to give our spirit—and the Holy Spirit—dominance over the physical. And when we fall short, Christ, by His Atonement, has given us the gift of repentance and the opportunity to try again.
20. If individually we each "put on Christ," then together we can hope to become one, as Paul said, "the body of Christ." To "put on Christ" certainly includes making His "first and great commandment" our first and greatest commitment, and if we love God, we will keep His commandments.
21. Unity with our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ grows as we heed the second commandment—inextricably connected to the first—to love others as ourselves. And I suppose an even more perfect unity would obtain among us if we followed the Savior's higher and holier expression of this second commandment—to love one another not only as we love ourselves but as He loved us. In sum, it is "every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God."
22. President Marion G. Romney, a former counselor in the First Presidency, in explaining how enduring peace and unity are obtained, said:
23. "If a single person, yielding to Satan, is filled with the works of the flesh, he wars within himself. If two yield, they each war within themselves and fight with each other. If many people yield, a society [reaps] the harvest of great stress and contention. If the rulers of a country yield, there is world-wide contention."
24. President Romney continued: "As the works of the flesh have universal application, so likewise does the gospel of peace. If one man lives it, he has peace within himself. If two men live it, they each have peace within themselves and with each other. If the citizens live it, the nation has domestic peace. When there are enough nations enjoying the

fruit of the Spirit to control world affairs, then, and only then, will the war-drums throb no longer, and the battle flags be furl'd. ... (See Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall," *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson*, 1898, p. 93, lines 27–28.)"

25. When we "put on Christ," it becomes possible either to resolve or to lay aside differences, disagreements, and disputes. A rather dramatic example of overcoming division is found in our Church history. Elder Brigham Henry Roberts (commonly known as B. H. Roberts), born in England in 1857, served as a member of the First Council of the Seventy—what we refer to today as the Presidency of the Seventy. Elder Roberts was an able and tireless defender of the restored gospel and of the Church in some of its most difficult times.
26. In 1895, however, Elder Roberts's service in the Church was put in jeopardy by contention. B. H. had been appointed as a delegate to the convention that drafted a constitution for Utah when it became a state. Afterward, he decided to become a candidate for the United States Congress but did not notify or seek permission from the First Presidency. President Joseph F. Smith, a counselor in the First Presidency, censured B. H. for that failure in a general priesthood meeting. Elder Roberts lost the election and felt his defeat was due in large part to President Smith's statements. He was critical of Church leaders in some political speeches and interviews. He withdrew from active Church service. In a lengthy meeting in the Salt Lake Temple with members of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve, B. H. remained adamant in justifying himself. Later, "President [Wilford] Woodruff gave [Elder Roberts] three weeks to reconsider his position. If he remained unrepentant, they would release him from the Seventy."
27. In a subsequent private meeting with Apostles Heber J. Grant and Francis Lyman, B. H. was initially unyielding, but love and the Holy Spirit ultimately prevailed. Tears came to his eyes. The two Apostles were able to respond to certain perceived slights and offenses that troubled B. H., and they left with a heartfelt plea for reconciliation. The next morning, after lengthy prayer, Elder Roberts sent a note to Elders Grant and Lyman that he was prepared to reunite with his brethren.
28. When he later met with the First Presidency, Elder Roberts said, "I went to the Lord and received light and instruction through His Spirit to submit to the authority of God." Motivated by his love of God, B. H. Roberts remained a faithful and an able Church leader to the end of his life.
29. We can also see in this example that unity does not mean simply agreeing that everyone should do his or her own

thing or go his or her own way. We cannot be one unless we all bend our efforts to the common cause. It means, in B. H. Roberts's words, submitting to the authority of God. We are different members of the body of Christ, fulfilling different functions at different times—the ear, the eye, the head, the hand, the feet—yet all of one body. Therefore, our goal is "that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."

30. Unity does not require sameness, but it does require harmony. We can have our hearts knit together in love, be one in faith and doctrine, and still cheer for different teams, disagree on various political issues, debate about goals and the right way to achieve them, and many other such things. But we can never disagree or contend with anger or contempt for one another. Said the Savior:
31. "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.
32. "Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away."
33. A year ago, President Russell M. Nelson pled with us in these words: "None of us can control nations or the actions of others or even members of our own families. But we can control ourselves. My call today, dear brothers and sisters, is to end conflicts that are raging in your heart, your home, and your life. Bury any and all inclinations to hurt others—whether those inclinations be a temper, a sharp tongue, or a resentment for someone who has hurt you. The Savior commanded us to turn the other cheek [see 3 Nephi 12:39], to love our enemies, and to pray for those who despitely use us [see 3 Nephi 12:44]."
34. I say again that it is only in and through our individual loyalty to and love of Jesus Christ that we can hope to be one—one within, one at home, one in the Church, eventually one in Zion, and above all, one with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.
35. I return to the events of Holy Week and the ultimate triumph of our Redeemer. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ bears witness of His divinity and that He has overcome all things. His Resurrection bears witness that, bound to Him by covenant, we too may overcome all things and become one. His Resurrection bears witness that through Him, immortality and eternal life are realities.
36. This morning, I bear witness of His literal Resurrection and all that it implies, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Week 14 - The Atonement and the Temple

Scripture and Other Readings: Moses 4-5:15; Isaiah 22:20-25; 25:6-10; Ezekiel 47:1-9; D&C 128

Invitation Week 14:

Attend the temple this week and perform any of the ordinances for the dead that you are able to do. If possible, research a FAMILY name and do the work for one of your ancestors. Record in your journal your experience in doing the work for someone that they are unable to do for themselves.

D. Todd Christofferson, “The Redemption of the Dead and the Testimony of Jesus,” October 2000

1. Christian theologians have long wrestled with the question, What is the destiny of the countless billions who have lived and died with no knowledge of Jesus? ¹ With the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ has come the understanding of how the unbaptized dead are redeemed and how God can be “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.” ²
 2. While yet in life, Jesus prophesied that He would also preach to the dead. ³ Peter tells us this happened in the interval between the Savior’s Crucifixion and Resurrection. ⁴ President Joseph F. Smith witnessed in vision that the Savior visited the spirit world and “from among the righteous [spirits] ... organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness. ...
 3. “These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, [and] the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.” ⁵
 4. The doctrine that the living can provide baptism and other essential ordinances to the dead, vicariously, was revealed anew to the Prophet Joseph Smith. ⁶ He learned that the spirits awaiting resurrection are not only offered individual salvation but that they can be bound in heaven as husband and wife and be sealed to their fathers and mothers of all generations past and have sealed to them their children of all generations future. The Lord instructed the Prophet that these sacred rites are appropriately performed only in a house built to His name, a temple. ⁷
 5. The principle of vicarious service should not seem strange to any Christian. In the baptism of a living person, the officiator acts, by proxy, in place of the Savior. And is it not the central tenet of our faith that Christ’s sacrifice atones for our sins by vicariously satisfying the demands of justice for us? As President Gordon B. Hinckley has expressed: “I think that vicarious work for the dead more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Savior Himself than any other work of which I know. It is given with love, without hope of compensation, or repayment or anything of the kind. What a glorious principle.” ⁸
 6. Some have misunderstood and suppose that deceased souls “are being baptised into the Mormon faith without their knowledge” ⁹ or that “people who once belonged to other faiths can have the Mormon faith retroactively imposed on them.” ¹⁰ They assume that we somehow have power to force a soul in matters of faith. Of course, we do not. God gave man his agency from the beginning. ¹¹ “The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,” ¹² but only if they accept those ordinances. The Church does not list them on its rolls or count them in its membership.
 7. Our anxiety to redeem the dead, and the time and resources we put behind that commitment, are, above all, an expression of our witness concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we can make concerning His divine character and mission. It testifies, first, of Christ’s Resurrection; second, of the infinite reach of His Atonement; third, that He is the sole source of salvation; fourth, that He has established the conditions for salvation; and, fifth, that He will come again.
- The Power of Christ’s Resurrection**
8. As regards the Resurrection, Paul asked, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not ... ? why are they then baptized for the dead?” ¹³ We are baptized for the dead because we know that they will rise. “The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.” ¹⁴ “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” ¹⁵
 9. It matters tremendously what we do in relation to those who have gone before, because they live today as spirits and shall live again as immortal souls, and that because of Jesus Christ. We believe His words when He said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” ¹⁶ By the baptisms we perform in behalf of the dead, we testify

that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. . . .

10. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”¹⁷

The Infinite Reach of Christ’s Atonement

11. By identifying our ancestors and performing for them the saving ordinances they could not themselves perform, we are testifying of the infinite reach of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Christ “died for all.”¹⁸ “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”¹⁹
12. “God is no respecter of persons:
13. “But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”²⁰
14. “Doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.”²¹ Our Lord “inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.”²²
15. It is inconceivable that this invitation, universally extended in life, would be rescinded for those who had not heard it before they died. With Paul, we are persuaded that death poses no such obstacle: “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²³

Jesus Christ, the Sole Source of Salvation

16. Our anxiety to ensure that our kindred dead are offered baptism in Jesus’ name is testament to the fact that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” and that “no man cometh unto the Father, but by [Him].”²⁴ Peter proclaimed, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”²⁵
17. “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”²⁶
18. Some contemporary Christians, concerned for the billions who have died without a knowledge of Jesus Christ, have begun to wonder if there truly is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”²⁷ To believe that Jesus is the only savior, they say, is arrogant, narrow-minded, and intolerant. We say, however, that this is a false dilemma. There is no injustice in there being but One through whom salvation may come, when that One and His salvation are offered to every soul, without exception. We need not tamper with the doctrine or temper the good news of Christ.

Conditions of Salvation Set by Christ

19. Because we believe that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, we also accept His authority to establish the conditions by which we may receive His grace. Otherwise we

would not concern ourselves with being baptized for the dead.

20. Jesus confirmed that “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.”²⁸ Specifically, He said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”²⁹ This means we must “repent, and be baptized every one . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and . . . receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”³⁰
21. Notwithstanding He was sinless, Jesus Christ Himself was baptized and received the Holy Ghost to witness “unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments”³¹ and to show us “the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which [we] should enter, he having set the example before [us].” And He said, “He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do.”³²
22. There are no exceptions granted; none are needed. As many as will believe and be baptized—including by proxy—and endure in faith, shall be saved, “not only those who believed after [Christ] came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came.”³³ It is for this reason that the gospel is preached “also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”³⁴

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

23. Our work for the dead bears witness that Jesus Christ will come again to this earth. In the final verses of the Old Testament, Jehovah declared, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:
24. “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”³⁵
25. In an inspired commentary on this scripture, the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “The earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead.”³⁶
26. The vicarious ordinances we perform in temples, beginning with baptism, make possible an eternal welding link between generations that fulfills the purpose of the earth’s creation. Without this, “the whole earth would be utterly wasted at [Christ’s] coming.”³⁷ Elijah has, in fact, come as promised to confer the priesthood power that turns hearts and establishes the welding links between the fathers and the children so that once again what is bound on earth “shall be bound in heaven.”³⁸ When he came, Elijah declared, “The keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors.”³⁹
27. We are anxiously about the task of searching out our fathers and mothers of generations past and binding

them to us and us to them. Is not this the strongest possible evidence of our conviction that Jesus Christ will come again to reign upon the earth? We know He will, and we know what He expects we will have done in preparation for His return.

28. In the scriptures, the spirits of the dead are sometimes referred to as being in darkness or in prison.⁴⁰ Contemplating God's glorious plan for the redemption of these, His children, the Prophet Joseph Smith penned this psalm: "Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead

1. John Sanders, introduction to *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, by Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders (1995), 9. There are several theories concerning the "unevangelized" dead, ranging from an inexplicable denial of salvation, to dreams or other divine intervention at the moment of death, to salvation for all, even without faith in Christ. A few believe that souls hear of Jesus after death. None explain how to satisfy Jesus' requirement that a man must be born of water and spirit to enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:3–5). Lacking the knowledge once had in the early Church, these earnest seekers have been "forced to choose between a weak law that [allows] the unbaptized to enter heaven, and a cruel God who [damns] the innocent" (Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* [1987], 101).

2. Alma 42:15.
3. See John 5:25.
4. See 1 Pet. 3:18–19.
5. D&C 138:30, 33.
6. See D&C 124, 128, 132; *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (1984), 486; *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (1991), 49.
7. See D&C 124:29–36. Today's expansive construction of temples across the world has as one of its primary purposes to provide the place where ordinances essential to salvation may be performed for those who, in life, were not privileged to receive them.
8. "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign*, Jan. 1998, 73.
9. Ben Fenton, "Mormons Use Secret British War Files 'to Save Souls,'" *The Telegraph* (London), 15 Feb. 1999.
10. Greg Stott, "Ancestral Passion," *Equinox*, April/May 1998, 45.
11. See Moses 7:32; see also Alma 5:33–36; Alma 42:27.

Supplemental Readings:

Quentin L. Cook, "Roots and Branches," *General Conference, April 2014*

1. Just before his death from cancer in 1981, the controversial writer William Saroyan told the press, "Everybody has to die, but I always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?"¹
2. The "now what" in the face of death in this life and the "now what" in contemplation of life after death are at

the heart of the questions of the soul that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ answers so beautifully in the Father's plan of happiness.

29. Our charge extends as far and as deep as the love of God to encompass His children of every time and place. Our efforts on behalf of the dead bear eloquent witness that Jesus Christ is the divine Redeemer of all mankind. His grace and promises reach even those who in life do not find Him. Because of Him, the prisoners shall indeed go free. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
12. D&C 138:58.
13. 1 Cor. 15:29.
14. Alma 40:23.
15. Rom. 14:9.
16. John 11:25.
17. 1 Cor. 15:22, 25–26.
18. 2 Cor. 5:15.
19. 1 Jn. 2:2.
20. Acts 10:34–35.
21. 2 Ne. 26:25.
22. 2 Ne. 26:33.
23. Rom. 8:38–39.
24. John 14:6.
25. Acts 4:12; see also 2 Ne. 25:20; Mosiah 5:8.
26. 1 Tim. 2:5.
27. Eph. 4:5. See, for example, John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977).
28. Matt. 7:14.
29. John 3:5.
30. Acts 2:38.
31. 2 Ne. 31:7; see also Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:29–34.
32. 2 Ne. 31:9, 12.
33. D&C 20:26.
34. 1 Pet. 4:6.
35. Mal. 4:5–6; see also 3 Ne. 25:5–6; D&C 2:1–3.
36. D&C 128:18.
37. D&C 2:3; JS—H 1:39.
38. Matt. 16:19; see also Matt. 18:18; D&C 132:46.
39. D&C 110:16.
40. See Isa. 24:22; 1 Pet. 3:19; Alma 40:12–13; D&C 38:5; D&C 138:22, 30. Even the righteous spirits are spoken of as faithful "captives" awaiting deliverance from the bands of death (see D&C 138:18–19).
41. D&C 128:22.

3. In this life we laugh, we cry, we work, we play, we live, and then we die. Job asks the succinct question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"² The answer is a

resounding yes because of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior. Part of Job's diverse preamble to the question is interesting: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days. ... He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down. ...

There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease ... and bring forth boughs like a plant."³

4. Our Father's plan is about families. Several of our most poignant scriptures use the concept of the tree with its roots and branches as an analogy.
5. In the closing chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi, in describing the Second Coming of the Savior, vividly uses this analogy. Speaking of the proud and wicked, he notes that they shall be burned as stubble and "that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."⁴ Malachi closes this chapter with the Lord's reassuring promise:
6. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:
7. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."⁵
8. At the dawn of the Restoration, Moroni reemphasized this message in his initial instruction to young Joseph Smith in 1823.⁶
9. Christians and Jews the world over accept the Old Testament account of Elijah.⁷ He was the last prophet to hold the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood before the time of Jesus Christ.⁸

Elijah Restores Keys

10. Elijah's return occurred in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836. He declared he was fulfilling Malachi's promise. He committed the priesthood keys for sealing families in this dispensation.⁹ Elijah's mission is facilitated by what is sometimes called the spirit of Elijah, which, as Elder Russell M. Nelson has taught, is "a manifestation of the Holy Ghost bearing witness of the divine nature of the family."¹⁰
11. The Savior was emphatic about the necessity of baptism. He taught, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."¹¹ The Savior was personally baptized to set the example. What about the deceased who have not been baptized?

Doctrine of Temple and Family History Work

12. On October 11, 1840, in Nauvoo, Vilate Kimball wrote a letter to her husband, Elder Heber C. Kimball, who with other members of the Twelve was serving a mission in Great Britain. The October general conference had been held a few days before.
13. I quote from parts of Vilate's personal letter: "We had the largest and most interesting conference that ever has been since the Church was organized. ... President [Joseph] Smith has opened a new and glorious subject. ... That is, being baptized for the dead. Paul speaks of it, in First Corinthians 15th chapter 29th verse. Joseph has received a more full explanation of it by revelation. He says it is the privilege of [members of] this Church to be baptized for all their kinsfolk that have died before this gospel came forth. ... By so doing, we act as agents for

them, and give them the privilege of coming forth in the First Resurrection. He says they will have the gospel preached to them in prison."

14. Vilate added: "I want to be baptized for my mother. ... Is not this a glorious doctrine?"¹²
 15. The essential doctrine of uniting families came forth line upon line and precept upon precept. Vicarious ordinances are at the heart of welding together eternal families, connecting roots to branches.
 16. The doctrine of the family in relation to family history and temple work is clear. The Lord in initial revelatory instructions referred to "baptism for *your* dead."¹³ Our doctrinal obligation is to our own ancestors. This is because the celestial organization of heaven is based on families.¹⁴ The First Presidency has encouraged members, especially youth and young single adults, to emphasize family history work and ordinances for their own family names or the names of ancestors of their ward and stake members.¹⁵ We need to be connected to both our roots and branches. The thought of being associated in the eternal realm is indeed glorious.
- #### **Temples**
17. Wilford Woodruff indicated that the Prophet Joseph Smith lived long enough to lay the foundation for temple work. By the last time he, Joseph Smith, ever met with the Quorum of the Twelve, he had given them their endowments.¹⁶
 18. After the Prophet's martyrdom, the Saints completed the Nauvoo Temple, and the sealing power was used to bless thousands of faithful members before the exodus to the Mountain West. Thirty years later, at the completion of the St. George Temple, President Brigham Young noted the eternal significance of saving ordinances finally being available for both the living and the dead.¹⁷
 19. This is simply stated by President Wilford Woodruff: "There is hardly any principle the Lord has revealed that I have rejoiced more in than in the redemption of our dead; that we will have our fathers, our mothers, our wives and our children with us in the family organization, in the morning of the first resurrection and in the Celestial Kingdom. These are grand principles. They are worth every sacrifice."¹⁸
 20. What a great time to be alive. This is the last dispensation, and we can feel the hastening of the work of salvation in every area where a saving ordinance is involved.¹⁹ We now have temples across much of the world to provide these saving ordinances. Attending the temple for spiritual renewal, peace, safety, and direction in our lives is also a great blessing.²⁰
 21. Less than a year after President Thomas S. Monson was called as an Apostle, he dedicated the Los Angeles Temple Genealogical Library. He spoke of deceased ancestors "waiting [for] the day when you and I will do the research which is necessary to clear the way, ... [and] likewise go into the house of God and perform that work ... that they ... cannot perform."²¹

22. When then-Elder Monson delivered those dedicatory remarks on June 20, 1964, there were only 12 operating temples. During the period President Monson has served in the senior councils of the Church, 130 of our 142 operating temples have had their initial dedication. It is nothing short of miraculous to see the hastening of the work of salvation in our day. Twenty-eight more temples have been announced and are in various stages of completion. Eighty-five percent of the Church members now live within 200 miles (320 km) of a temple.
- Family History Technology**
23. Family history technology has also advanced dramatically. President Howard W. Hunter declared in November 1994: “We have begun using information technology to hasten the sacred work of providing ordinances for the deceased. The role of technology ... has been accelerated by the Lord himself. ... However, we stand only on the threshold of what we can do with these tools.”²²
24. In the 19 years since this prophetic statement, the acceleration of technology is almost unbelievable. A 36-year-old mother of young children recently exclaimed to me, “Just think—we have gone from microfilm readers in dedicated family history centers to sitting at my kitchen table with my computer doing family history after my children are finally asleep.” Brothers and sisters, family history centers are now in our homes.
25. Temple and family history work is not just about us. Think of those on the other side of the veil waiting for the saving ordinances that would free them from the bondage of spirit prison. *Prison* is defined as “a state of confinement or captivity.”²³ Those in captivity might be asking William Saroyan’s question: “Now what?”
26. One faithful sister shared a special spiritual experience in the Salt Lake Temple. While in the confirmation room, after a vicarious confirmation ordinance was pronounced, she heard, “And the prisoner shall go free!” She felt a great sense of urgency for those who were waiting for their baptismal and confirmation work. Upon returning home, she searched the scriptures for the phrase she had heard. She found Joseph Smith’s declaration in section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free.”²⁴
27. The question is, what do we need to do? The Prophet Joseph’s counsel was to present in the temple “the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance.”²⁵
28. The leadership of the Church has issued a clarion call to the rising generation to lead the way in the use of technology to experience the spirit of Elijah, to search out their ancestors, and to perform temple ordinances for them.²⁶ Much of the heavy lifting in hastening the work of salvation for both the living and the dead will be done by you young people.²⁷
29. If the youth in each ward will not only go to the temple and do baptisms for their dead but also work with their families and other ward members to provide the family names for the ordinance work they perform, both they and the Church will be greatly blessed. Don’t underestimate the influence of the deceased in assisting your efforts and the joy of ultimately meeting those you serve. The eternally significant blessing of uniting our own families is almost beyond comprehension.²⁸
30. In the worldwide membership of the Church, fifty-one percent of adults currently do not have both parents in the Family Tree section of the Church’s FamilySearch Internet site. Sixty-five percent of adults do not have all four grandparents listed.²⁹ Remember, we without our roots and branches cannot be saved. Church members need to obtain and input this vital information.
31. We finally have the doctrine, the temples, and the technology for families to accomplish this glorious work of salvation. I suggest one way this might be done. Families could hold a “Family Tree Gathering.” This should be a recurring effort. Everyone would bring existing family histories, stories, and photos, including cherished possessions of grandparents and parents. Our young people are excited to learn about the lives of family members—where they came from and how they lived. Many have had their hearts turned to the fathers. They love the stories and photos, and they have the technological expertise to scan and upload these stories and photos to Family Tree and connect source documents with ancestors to preserve these for all time. Of course, the main objective is to determine what ordinances still need to be done and make assignments for the essential temple work. The *My Family* booklet can be utilized to help record family information, stories, and photos that can then be uploaded to Family Tree.
32. Family commitments and expectations should be at the top of our priorities to protect our divine destiny. For those who are looking for more fruitful use of the Sabbath day for the family as a whole, the hastening of this work is fertile ground. One mother glowingly tells how her 17-year-old son gets on the computer after church on Sunday to do family history work and her 10-year-old son loves to hear the stories and see pictures of his ancestors. This has blessed their entire family to experience the spirit of Elijah. Our precious roots and branches must be nourished.
33. Jesus Christ gave His life as a vicarious atonement. He resolved the ultimate question raised by Job. He overcame death for all mankind, which we could not do for ourselves. We can, however, perform vicarious ordinances and truly become saviors on Mount Zion³⁰ for our own families in order that we, with them, might be exalted as well as saved.
34. I bear witness of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice and the certainty of the Father’s plan for us and our families. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Temple Quotes: Various Prophets

Gordon B. Hinckley, Fireside in Birmingham, England, 29 Aug. 1995

I think that vicarious work for the dead more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Savior Himself than any other work of which I know. It is given with love, without hope of compensation, or repayment or anything of the kind. What a glorious principle. I repeat, we are never more like the Savior than when we minister to the deceased through vicarious service in the temple, doing for others that which they cannot do for themselves. This is the very essence of the Savior's life.

James E. Faust, Ensign, November 2000, 59

"All of these exquisite holy edifices are a testimony of our belief that the Savior broke the bonds of death and opened up the way for us to enter into covenants which will be binding in another world."

Heber C. Kimball, Journal of Discourses, 10:44

In the endowments, there is not a solitary thing but what is an imitation of the Son or the Father in some way or other.

David A. Bednar, "Let This House Be Built unto My Name," General Conference, April 2020

The most sacred covenants and priesthood ordinances are received only in a temple—the house of the Lord. Everything that is learned and all that is done in the temple emphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ and His role in Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness.

D. Todd Christofferson, Ensign, November 2000.

Our anxiety to redeem the dead, and the time and resources we put behind that commitment, are, above all, an expression of our witness concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we can make concerning His divine character and mission. It testifies, first, of Christ's Resurrection; second, of the infinite reach of His Atonement; third, that He is the sole source of salvation; fourth, that He has established the conditions for salvation; and, fifth, that He will come again.... By identifying our ancestors and performing for them the saving ordinances they could not themselves perform, we are testifying of the infinite reach of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Christ "died for all." He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Wilford Woodruff, Journal of Discourses, 19:228–29.

It is our duty to rise up and build these Temples. I look upon this portion of our ministry as a mission of as much importance as preaching to the living; the dead will hear the voice of the servants of God in the spirit-world, and they cannot come forth in the morning of the resurrection, unless certain ordinances are performed, for and in their behalf, in Temples built to the name of God. It takes just as much to save a dead man as a living man.

Joseph Smith, Jr., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 224.

We need the temple more than anything else" (H.C. 6:230).... The Church is not fully organized, in its proper order, and cannot be, until the temple is completed, where places will be provided for the administration of the ordinances of the priesthood.

Gordon B. Hinckley, 1996 Seminar for New Temple Presidents

Without temple and temple activity, we would only be half a church."

Robert D. Hales, BYU Devotional, November 15, 2005

The primary purpose of the temple is to provide the ordinances necessary for our exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Temple ordinances guide us to our Savior and give us the blessings that come to us through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The meaning of the word endowment is "gift." The ordinance consists of a series of instructions on how we should live and covenants we make to live righteously by following our Savior.

Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses 2:31

Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.

Gordon B. Hinckley, Regional Representatives Seminar, April 6, 1984.

I am satisfied that if our people would attend the temple more, there would be less of selfishness in their lives. There would be less of absence of love in their relationships. There would be more of fidelity on the part of husbands and wives. There would be more of love and peace and happiness in the homes of our people.

Bishop Glen L. Pace, Spiritual Plateaus, 68-69, 72

An infusion of the sanctifying Spirit comes to those who have gone to the temple that is not available to those who have only received the Gift of the Holy Ghost. After we have received the blessings of the temple the spirit begins to perfect us in ways not available to someone who has been baptized but not endowed. A new level of revelation becomes available to those who make - and keep - the covenants and who perform the ordinances of the temple. They begin to live by celestial laws and thereby receive celestial blessings.”

President James E. Faust “Standing in Holy Places,” Ensign, April 2005

“We unavoidably stand in so many unholy places and are subjected to so much that is vulgar, profane, and destructive of the Spirit of the Lord that I encourage our Saints all over the world, wherever possible, to strive to stand more often in holy places. Our most holy places are our sacred temples. Within them is a feeling of sacred comfort. We should seek to be worthy to take our families to the temple to be sealed together for eternity. We should also search for the records of our kindred dead so that they too can be sealed to us in one of the temples. We must strive for holiness by being ‘an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.’ In this way we can maintain and strengthen our own individual relationship with our God.”

Russell M. Nelson, Ensign, March 2002 - Two Concepts Worthy of Special Emphasis

1. There are two concepts we especially need to keep in mind as we prepare for the temple. The first is covenant. We need to remember that a covenant is a promise. A covenant made with God should be regarded not as restrictive but as protective. Covenants with Him protect us from danger.
2. This concept is not new. If our water supply is of questionable quality, for example, we filter the water. Similarly, divine covenants shield us from harm. When we choose to deny ourselves of all ungodliness, we lose nothing of value and gain glory known only to those who obtain eternal life. Keeping a temple covenant is not constraining but enabling. It elevates us beyond limits of our own perspective and power. It is like the difference between plodding through a muddy field and soaring through the skies in a supersonic jet. Keeping a covenant with God is both protective and enabling.
3. The second concept to stress in our mental preparation is Atonement. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the central act of all human history. It is the core of the plan of salvation. Without the infinite Atonement, all mankind would be irretrievably lost. Temple ordinances and covenants teach of the redeeming power of the Atonement.

Howard W. Hunter, “Follow the Son of God,” Ensign, Nov. 1994, 87

“And we again emphasize the personal blessings of temple worship and the sanctity and safety that are provided within those hallowed walls. It is the house of the Lord, a place of revelation and of peace. As we attend the temple, we learn more richly and deeply the purpose of life and the significance of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us make the temple, with temple worship and temple covenants and temple marriage, our ultimate earthly goal and the supreme mortal experience.”

Bruce R. McConkie, The Promised Messiah, 568.

“Perfect worship is emulation”

Russell M. Nelson, “Gratitude for the Mission and Ministry of Jesus Christ,” in BYU 1997-98 Speeches.

Surely the best evidence of our adoration of Jesus is our emulation of him”

President Ezra Taft Benson, The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, 252-254

We will not be able to dwell in the company of celestial beings unless we are pure and holy. The laws and ordinances which cause men and women to come out of the world and become sanctified are administered only in these holy places know as temples....You will be endowed with power from on high as the Lord has promised. You will receive the key of the knowledge of God (see D&C 84:19). You will learn how you can be like Him. Even the power of godliness will be manifest to you (see D&C 84:20).... Such are the blessings of the temple and the blessings of frequently attending the temple.

Gordon B. Hinckley, “Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 51

“Brigham Young once said that if young people really understood the blessings of temple marriage, they would walk all the way to England if that were necessary (see Journal of Discourses, 11:118). We hope they will not have to go anywhere near that far. These unique and wonderful buildings, and the ordinances administered therein, represent the ultimate in our worship. These ordinances become the most profound expressions of our theology. I urge our people everywhere, with all of the persuasiveness of which I am capable, to live worthy to hold a temple recommend, to secure one and regard it as a precious asset, and to make a greater effort to go to the house of the Lord and partake of the spirit and the blessings to be had therein. I am satisfied that every man or woman who goes to the temple in a spirit of sincerity and faith leaves the house of the Lord a better man or woman. There is need for constant improvement in all of our lives. There is need occasionally to leave the noise and the tumult of the world and step within the walls of a sacred house of God, there to feel His spirit in an environment of holiness and peace.”

Week 15 - Repentance - Accessing the Atonement

Scripture and Other Readings: 2 Nephi 2; Mosiah 27; Alma 24, 36 D&C 19; 2 Corinthians 7

Invitation Week 15:

Write down how repentance has been a blessing in your life and how it has brought you to be more at one with the Savior. Choose something that is keeping you from becoming more like him and seek to truly repent with godly sorrow and then bring forth the fruit meet for repentance. Seek guidance from the Lord and write down other things that He wants you to change in order to enjoy a greater measure of His Spirit in you and in your life.

D. Todd Christofferson, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *General Conference, October 2011*

1. The Book of Mormon contains the account of a man named Nehor. It is easy to understand why Mormon, in abridging a thousand years of Nephite records, thought it important to include something about this man and the enduring influence of his doctrine. Mormon was seeking to warn us, knowing that this philosophy would surface again in our day.
2. Nehor appeared on the scene about 90 years before the birth of Christ. He taught “that all mankind should be saved at the last day, ... for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).
3. About 15 years later, Korihor came among the Nephites preaching and amplifying the doctrine of Nehor. The Book of Mormon records that “he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies ... concerning the coming of Christ” (Alma 30:6). Korihor’s preaching was to the effect “that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime” (Alma 30:17). These false prophets and their followers “did not believe in the repentance of their sins” (Alma 15:15).
4. As in the days of Nehor and Korihor, we live in a time not long before the advent of Jesus Christ—in our case, the time of preparation for His Second Coming. And similarly, the message of repentance is often not welcomed. Some profess that if there is a God, He makes no real demands upon us (see Alma 18:5). Others maintain that a loving God forgives all sin based on simple confession, or if there actually is a punishment for sin, “God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 28:8). Others, with Korihor, deny the very existence of Christ and any such thing as sin. Their doctrine is that values, standards, and even truth are all relative. Thus, whatever one feels is right for him or her cannot be judged by others to be wrong or sinful.
5. On the surface such philosophies seem appealing because they give us license to indulge any appetite or desire without concern for consequences. By using the teachings of Nehor and Korihor, we can rationalize and justify anything. When prophets come crying repentance, it “throws cold water on the party.” But in reality the prophetic call should be received with joy. Without repentance, there is no real progress or improvement in life. Pretending there is no sin does not lessen its burden and pain. Suffering for sin does not by itself change anything for the better. Only repentance leads to the sunlit uplands of a better life. And, of course, only through repentance do we gain access to the atoning grace of Jesus Christ and salvation. Repentance is a divine gift, and there should be a smile on our faces when we speak of it. It points us to freedom, confidence, and peace. Rather than interrupting the celebration, the gift of repentance is the cause for true celebration.
6. Repentance exists as an option only because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is His infinite sacrifice that “bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15). Repentance is the necessary condition, and the grace of Christ is the power by which “mercy can satisfy the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Our witness is this:
7. “We know that justification [or forgiveness of sins] through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true;
8. “And we know also, that sanctification [or purification from the effects of sin] through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:30–31).
9. Repentance is an expansive subject, but today I would like to mention just five aspects of this fundamental gospel principle that I hope will be helpful.
10. **First**, the invitation to repent is an expression of love. When the Savior “began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17), it was a message of love, inviting all who would to

qualify to join Him “and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life [itself] in the world to come” (Moses 6:59). If we do not invite others to change or if we do not demand repentance of ourselves, we fail in a fundamental duty we owe to one another and to ourselves. A permissive parent, an indulgent friend, a fearful Church leader are in reality more concerned about themselves than the welfare and happiness of those they could help. Yes, the call to repentance is at times regarded as intolerant or offensive and may even be resented, but guided by the Spirit, it is in reality an act of genuine caring (see D&C 121:43–44).

11. **Second**, repentance means striving to change. It would mock the Savior’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross for us to expect that He should transform us into angelic beings with no real effort on our part. Rather, we seek His grace to complement and reward our most diligent efforts (see 2 Nephi 25:23). Perhaps as much as praying for mercy, we should pray for time and opportunity to work and strive and overcome. Surely the Lord smiles upon one who desires to come to judgment worthily, who resolutely labors day by day to replace weakness with strength. Real repentance, real change may require repeated attempts, but there is something refining and holy in such striving. Divine forgiveness and healing flow quite naturally to such a soul, for indeed “virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; [and] mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own” (D&C 88:40).
12. With repentance we can steadily improve in our capacity to live the celestial law, for we recognize that “he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory” (D&C 88:22).
13. **Third**, repentance means not only abandoning sin but also committing to obedience. The Bible Dictionary states, “Repentance comes to mean a turning of the heart and will to God, [as well as] a renunciation of sin to which we are naturally inclined.”¹ One of several examples of this teaching from the Book of Mormon is found in the words of Alma to one of his sons:
14. “Therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities;
15. “That ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength” (Alma 39:12–13; see also Mosiah 7:33; 3 Nephi 20:26; Mormon 9:6).
16. For our turning to the Lord to be complete, it must include nothing less than a covenant of obedience to Him. We often speak of this covenant as the baptismal covenant since it is witnessed by being baptized in water (see Mosiah 18:10). The Savior’s own baptism, providing the example, confirmed His covenant of obedience to the Father. “But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7). Without this covenant, repentance remains incomplete and the remission of sins unattained.² In the memorable expression of Professor Noel Reynolds, “The choice to repent is a choice to burn bridges in every direction [having determined] to follow forever only one way, the one path that leads to eternal life.”³
17. **Fourth**, repentance requires a seriousness of purpose and a willingness to persevere, even through pain. Attempts to create a list of specific steps of repentance may be helpful to some, but it may also lead to a mechanical, check-off-the-boxes approach with no real feeling or change. True repentance is not superficial. The Lord gives two overarching requirements: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).
18. Confessing and forsaking are powerful concepts. They are much more than a casual “I admit it; I’m sorry.” Confession is a deep, sometimes agonizing acknowledgment of error and offense to God and man. Sorrow and regret and bitter tears often accompany one’s confession, especially when his or her actions have been the cause of pain to someone or, worse, have led another into sin. It is this deep distress, this view of things as they really are, that leads one, as Alma, to cry out, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18).
19. With faith in the merciful Redeemer and His power, potential despair turns to hope. One’s very heart and desires change, and the once-appealing sin becomes increasingly abhorrent. A resolve to abandon and forsake the sin and to repair, as fully as one possibly can, the damage he or she has caused now forms in that new heart. This resolve soon matures into a covenant of obedience to God. With that covenant in place, the Holy Ghost, the messenger of divine grace, will bring relief and forgiveness. One is moved to declare again with Alma, “And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I [do] behold; yea, my soul [is] filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:20).
20. Any pain entailed in repentance will always be far less than the suffering required to satisfy justice for unresolved transgression. The Savior spoke little about what He endured to satisfy the demands of justice and atone for our sins, but He did make this revealing statement:
21. “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; “But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup” (D&C 19:16–18).
22. **Fifth**, whatever the cost of repentance, it is swallowed up in the joy of forgiveness. In a general conference address entitled “The Brilliant Morning of

Forgiveness,” President Boyd K. Packer provided this analogy:

23. “In April of 1847, Brigham Young led the first company of pioneers out of Winter Quarters. At that same time, 1,600 miles [2,575 km] to the west the pathetic survivors of the Donner Party straggled down the slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains into the Sacramento Valley.
24. “They had spent the ferocious winter trapped in the snowdrifts below the summit. That any survived the days and weeks and months of starvation and indescribable suffering is almost beyond belief.
25. “Among them was fifteen-year-old John Breen. On the night of April 24 he walked into Johnson’s Ranch. Years later John wrote:
26. ““It was long after dark when we got to Johnson’s Ranch, so the first time I saw it was early in the morning. The weather was fine, the ground was covered with green grass, the birds were singing from the tops of the trees, and the journey was over. I could scarcely believe that I was alive.
27. ““The scene that I saw that morning seems to be photographed on my mind. Most of the incidents are gone from memory, but I can always see the camp near Johnson’s Ranch.”
28. Said President Packer: “At first I was very puzzled by his statement that ‘most of the incidents are gone from

memory.’ How could long months of incredible suffering and sorrow ever be gone from his mind? How could that brutal dark winter be replaced with one brilliant morning?

29. “On further reflection I decided it was not puzzling at all. I have seen something similar happen to people I have known. I have seen some who have spent a long winter of guilt and spiritual starvation emerge into the morning of forgiveness. When morning came, they learned this:
30. ““Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more’ [D&C 58:42].”⁴
31. I gratefully acknowledge and testify that the incomprehensible suffering, death, and Resurrection of our Lord “bringeth to pass the condition of repentance” (Helaman 14:18). The divine gift of repentance is the key to happiness here and hereafter. In the Savior’s words and in deep humility and love, I invite all to “repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). I know that in accepting this invitation, you will find joy both now and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

1. Bible Dictionary, “Repentance.”
2. The Book of Mormon speaks repeatedly of being “baptized unto repentance” (see Mosiah 26:22; Alma 5:62; 6:2; 7:14; 8:10; 9:27; 48:19; 49:30; Helaman 3:24; 5:17, 19; 3 Nephi 1:23; 7:24–26; Moroni 8:11). John the Baptist used the same words (see Matthew 3:11), and Paul spoke of the “baptism of repentance” (Acts 19:4). The phrase appears in the Doctrine and Covenants as well (see Doctrine and Covenants 35:5; 107:20). “Baptism of or unto repentance” simply references the fact that baptism with its covenant of obedience is the capstone of repentance. With full repentance, including

baptism, one is qualified for the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and it is by the Holy Ghost that one receives the baptism of the Spirit (see John 3:5) and forgiveness of sins: “For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17).

3. Noel B. Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1996): 35; emphasis added.
4. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 21; see also “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 18.

Supplemental Material:

Elder Dale G. Renlund, “Repentance: A Joyful Choice,” *General Conference, October 2016*

1. My dear brothers and sisters, when I was 12 years old, my family lived in Göteborg, a coastal city in southern Sweden. By way of reference, it is the hometown of our dear associate Elder Per G. Malm,¹ who passed away this summer. We miss him. We’re grateful for his nobility and his noble service and for the example of his absolutely adorable family. And we certainly pray God’s richest blessings to be theirs.
2. Fifty years ago, we attended church in a large remodeled home. One Sunday, my friend Steffan,² the only other deacon in the branch, greeted me at church with some excitement. We went to the chapel’s adjacent overflow area, and he pulled from his pocket a

large firecracker and some matches. In an act of youthful bravado, I took the firecracker and lit the long gray fuse. I intended to snuff out the fuse before it blew up. But when I burned my fingers trying to do so, I dropped the firecracker. Steffan and I watched in horror as the fuse continued to burn.

3. The firecracker exploded, and sulfurous fumes filled the overflow area and the chapel. We hurriedly gathered up the scattered remnants of the firecracker and opened the windows to try to get the smell out, naively hoping that no one would notice. Fortunately, no one was hurt and no damage was done.

4. As members came to the meeting, they did notice the overpowering smell. It was hard to miss. The smell distracted from the sacred nature of the meeting. Because there were so few Aaronic Priesthood holders—and in what can only be described as dissociative thinking—I passed the sacrament, yet I did not feel worthy to partake of it. When the sacrament tray was offered to me, I took neither the bread nor the water. I felt horrible. I was embarrassed, and I knew that what I had done had displeased God.
5. After church, the branch president, Frank Lindberg, a distinguished older man with silver-gray hair, asked me to come to his office. After I sat down, he looked at me kindly and said he had noticed that I had not partaken of the sacrament. He asked why. I suspect he knew why. I was sure everyone knew what I had done. After I told him, he asked how I felt. Through tears, I haltingly told him I was sorry and that I knew I had let God down.
6. President Lindberg opened a well-worn copy of the Doctrine and Covenants and asked me to read some underlined verses. I read the following out loud:
7. “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.
8. “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.”³
9. I will never forget President Lindberg’s compassionate smile when I looked up after I had finished reading. With some emotion, he told me that he felt it would be fine for me to resume partaking of the sacrament. As I left his office, I felt indescribable joy.
10. Such joy is one of the inherent results of repentance. The word *repent* connotes “to perceive afterwards” and implies “change.”⁴ In Swedish, the word is *omvänd*, which simply means “to turn around.”⁵ The Christian writer C. S. Lewis wrote about the need and the method for change. He noted that repentance involves “being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can be put right,” he said, “but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply *going on*.”⁶ Changing our behavior and returning to the “right road” are part of repentance, but only part. Real repentance also includes a turning of our heart and will to God and a renunciation of sin.⁷ As explained in Ezekiel, to repent is to “turn from ... sin, ... do that which is lawful and right; ... restore the pledge, ... [and] walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity.”⁸
11. Yet even this is an incomplete description. It does not properly identify the power that makes repentance possible, the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. Real repentance must involve faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith that He can change us, faith that He can forgive us, and faith that He will help us avoid more mistakes. This kind of faith makes His Atonement effective in our lives. When we “perceive afterwards” and “turn around” with the Savior’s help, we can feel hope in His promises and the joy of forgiveness. Without the Redeemer, the inherent hope and joy evaporate, and repentance becomes simply miserable behavior modification. But by exercising faith in Him, we become converted to His ability and willingness to forgive sin.
12. President Boyd K. Packer affirmed the hopeful promises of repentance in April 2015 at his last general conference. He described the power of the Savior’s Atonement to heal in what I consider the distillation of the wisdom gained in half a century of apostolic service. President Packer said: “The Atonement leaves no tracks, no traces. What it fixes is fixed. ... It just heals, and what it heals stays healed.”⁹
13. He continued:
14. “The Atonement, which can reclaim each one of us, bears no scars. That means that no matter what we have done or where we have been or how something happened, if we truly repent, [the Savior] has promised that He would atone. And when He atoned, that settled that. ...
15. “... The Atonement ... can wash clean every stain no matter how difficult or how long or how many times repeated.”¹⁰
16. The reach of the Savior’s Atonement is infinite in breadth and depth, for you and for me. But it will never be imposed on us. As the prophet Lehi explained, after we “are instructed sufficiently” to “know good from evil,”¹¹ we “are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death.”¹² In other words, repentance is a choice.
17. We can—and sometimes do—make different choices. Such choices may not seem intrinsically wrong, but they prevent us from becoming truly penitent and thus preclude our pursuit of real repentance. For instance, we may choose to blame others. As a 12-year-old in Göteborg, I could have blamed Steffan. He was the one who brought the big firecracker and the matches to the church in the first place. But blaming others, even if justified, allows us to excuse our behavior. By so doing, we shift responsibility for our actions to others. When the responsibility is shifted, we diminish both the need and our ability to act. We turn ourselves into hapless victims rather than agents capable of independent action.¹³
18. Another choice that impedes repentance is minimizing our mistakes. In the Göteborg firecracker incident, no one was hurt, no permanent damage occurred, and the meeting was held anyway. It would have been easy to say that there was no reason to repent. But minimizing our mistakes, even if no immediate consequences are apparent, removes the motivation to change. This thinking prevents us from seeing that our mistakes and sins have eternal consequences.
19. Yet another way is to think that our sins do not matter because God loves us no matter what we do. It is tempting to believe what the deceitful Nehor taught the people of Zarahemla: “That all mankind should be

saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, ... and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.”¹⁴ But this seductive idea is false. God does love us. However, what we do matters to Him and to us. He has given clear directives about how we should behave. We call these commandments. His approbation and our eternal life depend on our behavior, including our willingness to humbly seek real repentance.¹⁵

20. Additionally, we forgo real repentance when we choose to separate God from His commandments. After all, if the sacrament were not sacred, it would not matter that the smell of the firecracker was disruptive to that Göteborg sacrament meeting. We should be wary of discounting sinful behavior by undermining or dismissing God’s authorship of His commandments. Real repentance requires recognizing the Savior’s divinity and the truthfulness of His latter-day work.
21. Instead of making excuses, let us choose repentance. Through repentance, we can come to ourselves, like the prodigal in the parable,¹⁶ and reflect on the eternal import of our actions. When we understand how our sins can affect our eternal happiness, we not only become truly penitent but we also strive to become better.
22. When faced with temptation, we are more likely to ask ourselves, in the words of William Shakespeare:
*What win I, if I gain the thing I seek?
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.
Who buys a minute’s mirth to wail a week,
Or sells eternity to get a toy?*¹⁷
23. If we have lost sight of eternity for the sake of a toy, we can choose to repent. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we have another chance. Metaphorically, we can exchange the toy we so ill-advisedly purchased in the first place and receive again the hope of eternity. As the Savior explained, “For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.”¹⁸
24. Jesus Christ can forgive because He paid the price for our sins.¹⁹

25. Our Redeemer chooses to forgive because of His incomparable compassion, mercy, and love. Our Savior wants to forgive because this is one of His divine attributes. And, like the Good Shepherd He is, He is joyful when we choose to repent.²⁰
26. Even as we feel godly sorrow for our actions,²¹ when we choose to repent, we immediately invite the Savior into our lives. As Amulek taught, “Come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately* shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.”²² We can feel godly sorrow for our actions and, at the same time, feel the joy of having the Savior’s help.
27. The fact that we can repent is the good news of the gospel!²³ Guilt can be “swept away.”²⁴ We can be filled with joy, receive a remission of our sins, and have “peace of conscience.”²⁵ We can be freed from feelings of despair and the bondage of sin. We can be filled with the marvelous light of God and be “pained no more.”²⁶ Repentance is not only possible but also joyful because of our Savior. I still remember the feelings that washed over me in the branch president’s office after the firecracker episode. I knew I had been forgiven. My feelings of guilt vanished, my gloomy mood lifted, and my heart felt light.
28. Brothers and sisters, as we conclude this conference, I invite you to feel more joy in your life: joy in the knowledge that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is real; joy in the Savior’s ability, willingness, and desire to forgive; and joy in choosing to repent. Let us follow the instruction to “with joy ... draw water out of the wells of salvation.”²⁷ May we choose to repent, forsake our sins, and turn our hearts and wills around to follow our Savior. I testify of His living reality. I am a witness and repeated recipient of His incomparable compassion, mercy, and love. I pray that the redeeming blessings of His Atonement may be yours now—and again and again and again throughout your lives,²⁸ as they have been in mine. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Neil L. Andersen, “Repent That I May Heal You,” *General Conference, October 2009*

1. My brothers and sisters, it has been six months since my call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. To now serve with men who have long been my examples and teachers remains a very humbling experience. I deeply appreciate your prayers and sustaining vote. For me, this has been a time of fervent prayer, of earnestly seeking the acceptance of the Lord. I have felt His love in sacred and unforgettable ways. I testify that He lives and that this is His holy work.
2. We love President Thomas S. Monson, the Lord’s prophet. I will forever remember his kindness as he extended my call last April. At the conclusion of our interview, he opened his arms to embrace me. President Monson is a tall man. As he wrapped his long arms

- around me and pulled me close, I felt like a little boy being held in the protective arms of a loving father.
3. In the months since that experience, I have thought of the Lord’s invitation to come unto Him and to spiritually be wrapped in His arms. He said, “Behold, [my arms] of mercy [are] extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.”¹
4. The scriptures speak of His arms being open,² extended,³ stretched out,⁴ and encircling.⁵ They are described as mighty⁶ and holy,⁷ arms of mercy,⁸ arms of safety,⁹ arms of love,¹⁰ “lengthened out all the day long.”¹¹

5. We have each felt to some extent these spiritual arms around us. We have felt His forgiveness, His love and comfort. The Lord has said, "I am he [who] comforteth you."¹²
6. The Lord's desire that we come unto Him and be wrapped in His arms is often an invitation to repent. "Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you."¹³
7. When we sin, we turn away from God. When we repent, we turn back toward God.
8. The invitation to repent is rarely a voice of chastisement but rather a loving appeal to turn around and to "re-turn" toward God.¹⁴ It is the beckoning of a loving Father and His Only Begotten Son to be more than we are, to reach up to a higher way of life, to change, and to feel the happiness of keeping the commandments. Being disciples of Christ, we rejoice in the blessing of repenting and the joy of being forgiven. They become part of us, shaping the way we think and feel.
9. Among the tens of thousands listening to this conference, there are many degrees of personal worthiness and righteousness. Yet repentance is a blessing to all of us. We each need to feel the Savior's arms of mercy through the forgiveness of our sins.
10. Years ago, I was asked to meet with a man who, long before our visit, had had a period of riotous living. As a result of his bad choices, he lost his membership in the Church. He had long since returned to the Church and was faithfully keeping the commandments, but his previous actions haunted him. Meeting with him, I felt his shame and his deep remorse at having set his covenants aside. Following our interview, I placed my hands upon his head to give him a priesthood blessing. Before speaking a word, I felt an overpowering sense of the Savior's love and forgiveness for him. Following the blessing, we embraced and the man wept openly.
11. I am amazed at the Savior's encircling arms of mercy and love for the repentant, no matter how selfish the forsaken sin. I testify that the Savior is able and eager to forgive our sins. Except for the sins of those few who choose perdition after having known a fulness, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven.¹⁵ What a marvelous privilege for each of us to turn away from our sins and to come unto Christ. Divine forgiveness is one of the sweetest fruits of the gospel, removing guilt and pain from our hearts and replacing them with joy and peace of conscience. Jesus declares, "Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?"¹⁶
12. Some listening today may need "a mighty change [of] heart"¹⁷ to confront serious sins. The help of a priesthood leader might be necessary. For most, repenting is quiet and quite private, daily seeking the Lord's help to make needed changes.
13. For most, repentance is more a journey than a one-time event. It is not easy. To change is difficult. It requires running into the wind, swimming upstream. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."¹⁸ Repentance is turning away from some things, such as dishonesty, pride, anger, and impure thoughts, and turning toward other things, such as kindness, unselfishness, patience, and spirituality. It is "re-turning" toward God.
14. How do we decide where our repentance should be focused? When a loved one or friend suggests things we need to change, the natural man in us sometimes pops up his head and responds, "Oh, you think I should change? Well, let me tell you about some of your problems." A better approach is to humbly petition the Lord: "Father, what wouldst Thou have me do?" The answers come. We feel the changes we need to make. The Lord tells us in our mind and in our heart.¹⁹
15. We then are allowed to choose: will we repent, or will we pull the shades down over our open window into heaven?
16. Alma warned, "Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point."²⁰ When we "pull the shades down," we stop believing that spiritual voice inviting us to change. We pray but we listen less. Our prayers lack that faith that leads to repentance.²¹
17. At this very moment, someone is saying, "Brother Andersen, you don't understand. You can't feel what I have felt. It is too difficult to change."
18. You are correct; I don't fully understand. But there is One who does. He knows. He has felt your pain. He has declared, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."²² The Savior is there, reaching out to each of us, bidding us: "Come unto me."²³ We can repent. We can!
19. Realizing where we need to change, we sorrow for the sadness we have caused. This leads to sincere and heartfelt confession to the Lord and, when needed, to others.²⁴ When possible, we restore what we have wrongly harmed or taken.
20. Repentance becomes part of our daily lives. Our weekly taking of the sacrament is so important—to come meekly, humbly before the Lord, acknowledging our dependence upon Him, asking Him to forgive and to renew us, and promising to always remember Him.
21. Sometimes in our repentance, in our daily efforts to become more Christlike, we find ourselves repeatedly struggling with the same difficulties. As if we were climbing a tree-covered mountain, at times we don't see our progress until we get closer to the top and look back from the high ridges. Don't be discouraged. If you are striving and working to repent, you are in the process of repenting.
22. As we improve, we see life more clearly and feel the Holy Ghost working more strongly within us.
23. Sometimes we wonder why we remember our sins long after we have forsaken them. Why does the sadness for our mistakes at times continue following our repentance?

24. You will remember a tender story told by President James E. Faust. “As a small boy on the farm ... , I remember my grandmother ... cooking our delicious meals on a hot woodstove. When the wood box next to the stove became empty, Grandmother would silently pick up the box, go out to refill it from the pile of cedar wood outside, and bring the heavily laden box back into the house.”
25. President Faust’s voice then filled with emotion as he continued: “I was so insensitive ... I sat there and let my beloved grandmother refill the kitchen wood box. I feel ashamed of myself and have regretted my [sin of] omission for all of my life. I hope someday to ask for her forgiveness.”²⁵
26. More than 65 years had passed. If President Faust still remembered and regretted not helping his grandmother after all those years, should we be surprised with some of the things we still remember and regret?
27. The scriptures do not say that we will forget our forsaken sins in mortality. Rather, they declare that the Lord will forget.²⁶
28. The forsaking of sins implies never returning. Forsaking requires time. To help us, the Lord at times allows the residue of our mistakes to rest in our memory.²⁷ It is a vital part of our mortal learning.
29. As we honestly confess our sins, restore what we can to the offended, and forsake our sins by keeping the commandments, we are in the process of receiving forgiveness. With time, we will feel the anguish of our sorrow subside, taking “away the guilt from our hearts”²⁸ and bringing “peace of conscience.”²⁹
30. For those who are truly repentant but seem unable to feel relief: continue keeping the commandments. I promise you, relief will come in the timetable of the Lord. Healing also requires time.
31. If you are concerned, counsel with your bishop. A bishop has the power of discernment.³⁰ He will help you.
32. The scriptures warn us, “Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance.”³¹ But, in this life, it is never too late to repent.
33. Once I was asked to meet an older couple returning to the Church. They had been taught the gospel by their parents. After their marriage, they left the Church. Now, 50 years later, they were returning. I remember the husband coming into the office pulling an oxygen tank. They expressed regret at not having remained faithful. I told them of our happiness because of their return, assuring them of the Lord’s welcoming arms to those who repent. The elderly man responded, “We know this, Brother Andersen. But our sadness is that our children and grandchildren do not have the blessings of the gospel. We are back, but we are back alone.”
34. They were not back alone. Repentance not only changes us, but it also blesses our families and those we love. With our righteous repentance, in the timetable of the Lord, the lengthened-out arms of the Savior will not only encircle us but will also extend into the lives of our children and posterity. Repentance always means that there is greater happiness ahead.
35. I bear witness that our Savior can deliver us from our sins. I have personally felt His redeeming power. I have unmistakably seen His healing hand upon thousands in nations throughout the world. I testify that His divine gift removes guilt from our heart and brings peace to our conscience.
36. He loves us. We are members of His Church. He invites each of us to repent, turn away from our sins, and come unto Him. I witness that He is there in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

1. 3 Nephi 9:14.
2. See Mormon 6:17.
3. See Alma 19:36.
4. See 2 Kings 17:36; Psalm 136:12.
5. See 2 Nephi 1:15.
6. See D&C 123:6.
7. See 3 Nephi 20:35.
8. See Alma 5:33.
9. See Alma 34:16.
10. See D&C 6:20.
11. 2 Nephi 28:32.
12. 2 Nephi 8:12.
13. Alma 5:33.
14. See Helaman 7:17.
15. See Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19.
16. 3 Nephi 9:13.
17. Alma 5:12.
18. Matthew 16:24.
19. See D&C 8:2.
20. Alma 42:30.
21. See Alma 34:17–18.
22. Isaiah 49:16.
23. 3 Nephi 9:14.
24. See D&C 58:43.
25. James E. Faust, “The Weightier Matters of the Law: Judgment, Mercy, and Faith,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 59.
26. See D&C 58:42–43; see also Alma 36:17–19.
27. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2007, 101.
28. Alma 24:10.
29. Mosiah 4:3. The scriptures link our happiness in this life and the next with peace of conscience. Note Alma’s teaching that the opposite of joy is remorse of conscience (see Alma 29:5). Other prophets tie the torment of the wicked following this life to the guilt they feel (see 2 Nephi 9:14, 46; Mosiah 2:38; 3:24–25; Mormon 9:5). Joseph Smith said: “A man is his own tormentor and his own

Week 16 - Forgiveness & Forgiving – Accepting the INFINITE Atonement

Scripture and Other Readings:

1 Samuel 25; Psalms 86; Romans 7-8; Mosiah 27; Alma 36; D&C 58:42-43; Matthew 6:14-15, 18:21-35; D&C 64:9-11

Invitation Week 16:

Record a time when you have felt the forgiveness of the Lord toward you and then describe how you felt after you knew that you had been forgiven. Explain how accepting the atonement in your behalf helped you to feel forgiven. Think of someone for whom you have held a grudge, hard feelings, or have refused to believe that the atonement covers their sin. Ponder the atonement and seek the Lord's help to overcome any of those feelings and forgive them. Contact them, face to face if possible and let them know that you truly forgive them and seek their forgiveness for the feelings that you have

James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *General Conference, October 2001*

1. My beloved brothers and sisters and friends, I come humbly to this pulpit this morning because I wish to speak about the greatest event in all history. That singular event was the incomparable Atonement of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. This was the most transcendent act that has ever taken place, yet it is the most difficult to understand. My reason for wanting to learn all I can about the Atonement is partly selfish: Our salvation depends on believing in and accepting the Atonement.¹ Such acceptance requires a continual effort to understand it more fully. The Atonement advances our mortal course of learning by making it possible for our natures to become perfect.² All of us have sinned and need to repent to fully pay our part of the debt. When we sincerely repent, the Savior's magnificent Atonement pays the rest of that debt.³
2. Paul gave a simple explanation for the need of the Atonement: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."⁴ Jesus Christ was appointed and foreordained to be our Redeemer before the world was formed. With His divine sonship, His sinless life, the shedding of His blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, His excruciating death on the cross and subsequent bodily Resurrection from the grave, He became the author of our salvation and made a perfect Atonement for all mankind.⁵
3. Understanding what we can of the Atonement and the Resurrection of Christ helps us to obtain a knowledge of Him and of His mission.⁶ Any increase in our understanding of His atoning sacrifice draws us closer to Him. Literally, the Atonement means to be "at one" with Him. The nature of the Atonement and its effects is so infinite, so unfathomable, and so profound that it lies beyond the knowledge and comprehension of mortal man. I am profoundly grateful for the principle of saving grace. Many people think they need only confess that Jesus is the Christ and then they are saved by grace alone. We cannot be saved by grace alone, "for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."⁷
4. Some years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley told "something of a parable" about "a one room school house in the mountains of Virginia where the boys were so rough no teacher had been able to handle them.
5. "Then one day an inexperienced young teacher applied. He was told that every teacher had received an awful beating, but the teacher accepted the risk. The first day of school the teacher asked the boys to establish their own rules and the penalty for breaking the rules. The class came up with 10 rules, which were written on the blackboard. Then the teacher asked, 'What shall we do with one who breaks the rules?'
6. "'Beat him across the back ten times without his coat on,' came the response.
7. "A day or so later, ... the lunch of a big student, named Tom, was stolen. 'The thief was located—a little hungry fellow, about ten years old.'
8. "As Little Jim came up to take his licking, he pleaded to keep his coat on. 'Take your coat off,' the teacher said. 'You helped make the rules!'
9. "The boy took off the coat. He had no shirt and revealed a bony little crippled body. As the teacher hesitated with the rod, Big Tom jumped to his feet and volunteered to take the boy's licking.
10. "'Very well, there is a certain law that one can become a substitute for another. Are you all agreed?' the teacher asked.
11. "After five strokes across Tom's back, the rod broke. The class was sobbing. 'Little Jim had reached up and caught Tom with both arms around his neck. "Tom, I'm sorry that I stole your lunch, but I was awful hungry.

Tom, I will love you till I die for taking my licking for me! Yes, I will love you forever!”⁸

12. President Hinckley then quoted Isaiah:
13. “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”⁹
14. No man knows the full weight of what our Savior bore, but by the power of the Holy Ghost we can know something of the supernal gift He gave us.¹⁰ In the words of our sacrament hymn:
*We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.*¹¹
15. He suffered so much pain, “indescribable anguish,” and “overpowering torture”¹² for our sake. His profound suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He took upon Himself all the sins of all other mortals, caused Him “to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit.”¹³ “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly,”¹⁴ saying, “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”¹⁵ He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and denied by Peter. He was mocked by the chief priests and officers; He was stripped, smitten, spat upon, and scourged in the judgment hall.¹⁶
16. He was led to Golgotha, where nails were driven into His hands and feet. He hung in agony for hours on a wooden cross bearing the title written by Pilate: “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.”¹⁷ Darkness came, and “about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”¹⁸
17. No one could help Him; He was treading the winepress alone.¹⁹ Then “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”²⁰ And “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.”²¹ “The earth did quake” and “when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”²²
18. In the words of the hymn, “Let me not forget, O Savior, / Thou didst bleed and die for me.”²³ I wonder how many drops were shed for me.
19. What He did could only be done by Deity. As the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh, Jesus inherited divine attributes. He was the only person ever born into mortality who could perform this most significant and supernal act. As the only sinless Man who ever lived on this earth, He was not subject to spiritual death. Because of His godhood, He also possessed power over physical death. Thus He did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He broke the cold grasp of death. He also

made it possible for us to have the supreme and serene comfort of the gift of the Holy Ghost.²⁴

20. The Atonement and the Resurrection accomplish many things. The Atonement cleanses us of sin on condition of our repentance. Repentance is the condition on which mercy is extended.²⁵ After all we can do to pay to the uttermost farthing and make right our wrongs, the Savior’s grace is activated in our lives through the Atonement, which purifies us and can perfect us.²⁶ Christ’s Resurrection overcame death and gave us the assurance of life after death. Said He: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”²⁷ The Resurrection is unconditional and applies to all who have ever lived and ever will live.²⁸ It is a free gift. President John Taylor described this well when he said: “The tombs will be opened and the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and they shall come forth, they who have done good to the resurrection of the just, and they who have done evil to the resurrection of the unjust.”²⁹
21. With reference to our mortal acts and the Atonement, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. contributed this valuable insight when he said:
22. “I feel that [the Savior] will give that punishment which is the very least that our transgression will justify. I believe that he will bring into his justice all of the infinite love and blessing and mercy and kindness and understanding which he has. . . .
23. “And on the other hand, I believe that when it comes to making the rewards for our good conduct, he will give us the maximum that it is possible to give, having in mind the offense which we have committed.”³⁰
24. As Isaiah wrote, if we will return unto the Lord, “he will abundantly pardon.”³¹
25. We are commanded to remember the singular events of the mediation, Crucifixion, and the Atonement by partaking of the sacrament weekly. In the spirit of the sacramental prayers, we partake of the bread and water in remembrance of the body and the blood sacrificed for us, and we are to remember Him and keep His commandments so that we may always have His Spirit to be with us.
26. Our Redeemer took upon Himself all the sins, pains, infirmities, and sicknesses of all who have ever lived and will ever live.³² No one has ever suffered in any degree what He did. He knows our mortal trials by firsthand experience. It is a bit like us trying to climb Mount Everest and only getting up the first few feet. But He has climbed all 29,000 feet to the top of the mountain. He suffered more than any other mortal could.
27. The Atonement not only benefits the sinner but also benefits those sinned against—that is, the victims. By forgiving “those who trespass against us” (JST, Matt. 6:13) the Atonement brings a measure of peace and comfort to those who have been innocently victimized by the sins of others. The basic source for the healing of

the soul is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This is true whether it be from the pain of a personal tragedy or a terrible national calamity such as we have recently experienced in New York and Washington, D.C., and near Pittsburgh.

28. A sister who had been through a painful divorce wrote of her experience in drawing from the Atonement. She said: "Our divorce . . . did not release me from the obligation to forgive. I truly wanted to do it, but it was as if I had been commanded to do something of which I was simply incapable." Her bishop gave her some sound advice: "Keep a place in your heart for forgiveness, and when it comes, welcome it in." Many months passed as this struggle to forgive continued. She recalled: "During those long, prayerful moments . . . I tapped into a life-giving source of comfort from my loving Heavenly Father. I sense that he was not standing by glaring at me for not having accomplished forgiveness yet; rather he was sorrowing with me as I wept. . . ."
29. "In the final analysis, what happened in my heart is for me an amazing and miraculous evidence of the Atonement of Christ. I had always viewed the Atonement as a means of making repentance work for the sinner. I had not realized that it also makes it possible for the one sinned against to receive into his or her heart the sweet peace of forgiving."³³
30. The injured should do what they can to work through their trials, and the Savior will "succor his people according to their infirmities."³⁴ He will help us carry

1. See Mosiah 4:6–7.
2. See Moro. 10:32.
3. See 2 Ne. 25:23.
4. 1 Cor. 15:22.
5. See Bible Dictionary, "Atonement," 617.
6. See Jacob 4:12.
7. 2 Ne. 25:23; emphasis added.
8. "Pres. Hinckley: Christmas a Result of Redeeming Christ," Church News, 10 Dec. 1994, 4.
9. Isa. 53:4–5.
10. See 1 Cor. 12:3.
11. "There Is a Green Hill Far Away," Hymns, no. 194.
12. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (1882), 150.
13. D&C 19:18.
14. Luke 22:44.
15. Matt. 26:42.
16. See Matt. 26:47–75; Matt. 27:28–31.
17. John 19:19.
18. Matt. 27:46.
19. See D&C 133:50.
20. Matt. 27:50.

our burdens. Some injuries are so hurtful and deep that they cannot be healed without help from a higher power and hope for perfect justice and restitution in the next life. Since the Savior has suffered anything and everything that we could ever feel or experience,³⁵ He can help the weak to become stronger. He has personally experienced all of it. He understands our pain and will walk with us even in our darkest hours.

31. We long for the ultimate blessing of the Atonement—to become one with Him, to be in His divine presence, to be called individually by name as He warmly welcomes us home with a radiant smile, beckoning us with open arms to be enfolded in His boundless love.³⁶ How gloriously sublime this experience will be if we can feel worthy enough to be in His presence! The free gift of His great atoning sacrifice for each of us is the only way we can be exalted enough to stand before Him and see Him face-to-face. The overwhelming message of the Atonement is the perfect love the Savior has for each and all of us. It is a love which is full of mercy, patience, grace, equity, long-suffering, and, above all, forgiving.
32. The evil influence of Satan would destroy any hope we have in overcoming our mistakes. He would have us feel that we are lost and that there is no hope. In contrast, Jesus reaches down to us to lift us up. Through our repentance and the gift of the Atonement, we can prepare to be worthy to stand in His presence. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen

21. John 19:34.
22. Matt. 27:51, 54.
23. "In Humility, Our Savior," Hymns, no. 172.
24. See John 15:26.
25. See Alma 42:22–25.
26. See 2 Ne. 25:23; Alma 34:15–16; Alma 42:22–24; Moro. 10:32–33.
27. John 11:25.
28. See Acts 24:15.
29. *The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1943), 118. See also John 5:28–29.
30. "As Ye Sow . . . ," [Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year] (3 May 1955), 7.
31. Isa. 55:7.
32. See Alma 7:11–12.
33. Name Withheld, "My Journey to Forgiving," *Ensign*, Feb. 1997, 42–43.
34. Alma 7:12.
35. See Alma 7:11.
36. See Alma 26:15; Morm. 5:11; Morm. 6:17; Moses 7:63

Supplemental Readings:

Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," *General Conference, October 2006*

1. The Savior said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
2. Many carry heavy burdens. Some have lost a loved one to death or care for one who is disabled. Some have been wounded by divorce. Others yearn for an eternal marriage. Some are caught in the grip of addictive substances or practices like alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or pornography. Others have crippling physical or mental impairments. Some are challenged by same-gender attraction. Some have terrible feelings of depression or inadequacy. In one way or another, many are heavy laden.
3. To each of us our Savior gives this loving invitation:
4. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"
(Matthew 11:28–30).
5. The scriptures contain many accounts of the Savior's healing the heavy laden. He caused the blind to see; the deaf to hear; the palsied, withered, or maimed to be restored; lepers to be cleansed; and unclean spirits to be cast out. Often we read that the person healed of these physical ailments was "made whole" (see Matthew 14:36; 15:28; Mark 6:56; 10:52; Luke 17:19; John 5:9).
6. Jesus healed many from physical diseases, but He did not withhold healing from those who sought to be "made whole" from other ailments. Matthew writes that He healed every sickness and every disease among the people (see Matthew 4:23; 9:35). Great multitudes followed Him, and He "healed them all" (Matthew 12:15). Surely these healings included those whose sicknesses were emotional, mental, or spiritual. He healed them all.
7. In His early sermon in the synagogue, Jesus read aloud from this prophecy of Isaiah: "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). As Jesus declared that He was come to fulfill that prophecy, He expressly affirmed that He would heal those with physical ailments and He would also deliver the captive, liberate the bruised, and heal the brokenhearted.
8. The Gospel of Luke contains many examples of that ministry. It tells of the time when "great multitudes came together to hear [Jesus], and to be healed by him of their infirmities" (Luke 5:15). On other occasions it records that Jesus "cured many of their infirmities" (Luke 7:21) and that He "healed them that had need of healing" (Luke 9:11). It also describes how a great multitude of people out of Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Sidon came down to the plain "to hear him, and to be healed" (Luke 6:17).
9. When the Savior appeared to the righteous in the New World, He called for persons to come forward who were lame or blind or had other physical ailments. He extended the same invitation to those "that are afflicted in any manner" (3 Nephi 17:7). "Bring them hither," He said, "and I will heal them" (v. 7). The Book of Mormon tells how the multitude brought forward "all them that were afflicted in any manner" (v. 9). This must have included persons with every kind of physical or emotional or mental affliction, and the scripture testifies that Jesus "did heal them every one" (v. 9).
10. The Savior teaches that we will have tribulation in the world, but we should "be of good cheer" because He has "overcome the world" (John 16:33). His Atonement reaches and is powerful enough not only to pay the price for sin but also to heal every mortal affliction. The Book of Mormon teaches that "He shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11; see also 2 Nephi 9:21).
11. He knows of our anguish, and He is there for us. Like the good Samaritan in His parable, when He finds us wounded at the wayside, He binds up our wounds and cares for us (see Luke 10:34). Brothers and sisters, the healing power of His Atonement is for you, for us, for all.
12. His all-encompassing healing power is sought in the prayerful words of our hymn "Master, the Tempest Is Raging":
*Master, with anguish of spirit
I bow in my grief today.
The depths of my sad heart are troubled.
Oh, waken and save, I pray!
Torrents of sin and of anguish
Sweep o'er my sinking soul,
And I perish! I perish! dear Master.
Oh, hasten and take control!
(Hymns, no. 105)*
13. We can be healed through the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Jesus gave His Apostles power "to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matthew 10:1; see also Mark 3:15; Luke 9:1–2), and they went forth "preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere" (Luke 9:6; see also Mark 6:13; Acts 5:16). The Seventy were also sent forth with power and direction to heal the sick (see Luke 10:9; Acts 8:6–7).
14. Although the Savior could heal all whom He would heal, this is not true of those who hold His priesthood authority. Mortal exercises of that authority are limited by the will of Him whose priesthood it is.

Consequently, we are told that some whom the elders bless are not healed because they are “appointed unto death” (D&C 42:48). Similarly, when the Apostle Paul sought to be healed from the “thorn in the flesh” that buffeted him (2 Corinthians 12:7), the Lord declined to heal him. Paul later wrote that the Lord explained, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Paul obediently responded that he would “rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me ... for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9–10).

15. Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a “healing” cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are “healed” by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us.
16. The people who followed Alma were in bondage to wicked oppressors. When they prayed for relief, the Lord told them He would deliver them eventually, but in the meantime He would ease their burdens “that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses ... that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions” (Mosiah 24:14). In that case the people did not have their burdens removed, but the Lord strengthened them so that “they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (v. 15).
17. This same promise and effect applies to you mothers who are widowed or divorced, to you singles who are lonely, to you caregivers who are burdened, to you persons who are addicted, and to all of us whatever our burden. “Come unto Christ,” the prophet says, “and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32).
18. At times we may despair that our burdens are too great. When it seems that a tempest is raging in our lives, we may feel abandoned and cry out like the disciples in the storm, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). At such times we should remember His reply: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (v. 40).
19. The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality.
20. After I gave a general conference talk on the evils of pornography (see “Pornography,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2005, 87–90), I received many letters from persons burdened with this addiction. Some of these letters were from men who had overcome pornography. One man wrote:
21. “There are several lessons I’ve gleaned from my experience coming out of the darkness of a sin that so thoroughly dominates the lives of the people it ensnares: (1) This is a major problem that is unbelievably difficult to overcome. ... (2) The most important source of support and strength in the repentance process is the Savior. ... (3) Intense, daily scripture study, regular temple worship, and serious, contemplative participation in the ordinance of the sacrament are all indispensable parts of a true repentance process. This, I assume, is because all of these activities serve to deepen and strengthen one’s relationship with the Savior, one’s understanding of His atoning sacrifice, and one’s faith in His healing power” (letter dated Oct. 24, 2005).
22. “Come unto me,” the Savior said, “and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29). That heavy-laden man turned to the Savior, and so can each of us.
23. A woman whose marriage was threatened by her husband’s addiction to pornography wrote how she stood beside him for five pain-filled years until, as she said, “through the gift of our precious Savior’s glorious Atonement and what He taught me about forgiveness, [my husband] finally is free—and so am I.” As one who needed no cleansing from sin, but only sought a loved one’s deliverance from captivity, she wrote this advice:
24. “Commune with the Lord. ... He is your best friend! He knows your pain because He has felt it for you already. He is ready to carry that burden. Trust Him enough to place it at His feet and allow Him to carry it for you. Then you can have your anguish replaced with His peace, in the very depths of your soul” (letter dated Apr. 18, 2005).
25. A man wrote a General Authority about how the power of the Atonement helped him with his problem of same-gender attraction. He had been excommunicated for serious transgressions that violated his temple covenants and his responsibilities to his children. He had to choose whether to attempt to live the gospel or whether to continue a course contrary to its teachings.
26. “I knew it would be difficult,” he wrote, “but I didn’t realize what I would have to go through.” His letter describes the emptiness and loneliness and the incredible pain he experienced from deep within his soul as he sought to return. He prayed mightily for forgiveness, sometimes for hours at a time. He was sustained by reading the scriptures, by the companionship of a loving bishop, and by priesthood blessings. But what finally made the difference was the help of the Savior. He explained:
27. “It [was] only through Him and His Atonement. ... I now feel an overwhelming gratitude. My pains have been almost more than I could bear at times, and yet they were so small compared to what He suffered. Where there once was darkness in my life, there is now love and gratitude.”
28. He continues: “Some profess that change is possible and therapy is the only answer. They are very learned on the subject and have so much to offer those who struggle ... , but I worry that they forget to involve Heavenly Father in the process. If change is to happen, it will happen according to the will of God. I also worry that many people focus on the causes of [same-gender attraction]. ... There is no need to determine why I have

[this challenge]. I don't know if I was born with it, or if environmental factors contributed to it. The fact of the matter is that I have this struggle in my life and what I do with it from this point forward is what matters" (letter dated Mar. 25, 2006).

29. The persons who wrote these letters know that the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the healing it offers do much more than provide the opportunity for repentance from sins. The Atonement also gives us the strength to endure "pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind," because our Savior also took upon Him "the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11). Brothers and sisters, if your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an

affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden.

30. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," the Savior said, "and I will give you rest ... unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29).
31. As we struggle with the challenges of mortality, I pray for each of us, as the prophet Mormon prayed for his son, Moroni: "May Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, ... and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25).
32. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who invites us all to come unto Him and be perfected in Him. He will bind up our wounds and He will heal the heavy laden. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *General Conference, October 1995*

1. In April of 1847, Brigham Young led the first company of pioneers out of Winter Quarters. At that same time, sixteen hundred miles to the west the pathetic survivors of the Donner Party straggled down the slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains into the Sacramento Valley.
2. They had spent the ferocious winter trapped in the snowdrifts below the summit. That any survived the days and weeks and months of starvation and indescribable suffering is almost beyond belief.
3. Among them was fifteen-year-old John Breen. On the night of April 24 he walked into Johnson's Ranch. Years later John wrote:
4. "It was long after dark when we got to Johnson's Ranch, so the first time I saw it was early in the morning. The weather was fine, the ground was covered with green grass, the birds were singing from the tops of the trees, and the journey was over. I could scarcely believe that I was alive.
5. "The scene that I saw that morning seems to be photographed on my mind. Most of the incidents are gone from memory, but I can always see the camp near Johnson's Ranch."¹
6. At first I was very puzzled by his statement that "most of the incidents are gone from memory." How could long months of incredible suffering and sorrow ever be gone from his mind? How could that brutal dark winter be replaced with one brilliant morning?
7. On further reflection I decided it was not puzzling at all. I have seen something similar happen to people I have known. I have seen some who have spent a long winter of guilt and spiritual starvation emerge into the morning of forgiveness.
8. When morning came, they learned this:
9. "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."²
10. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."³
11. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."⁴
12. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."⁵
13. When the prophet Alma was young, he spent such a time "racked," as he said, "with eternal torment, [his] soul ... harrowed up to the greatest degree."⁶
14. He even thought, "Oh, ... that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body."⁷
15. But his mind caught hold of a thought. When he nurtured the thought and acted upon it, the morning of forgiveness came, and he said:
16. "I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.
17. "And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!"⁸
18. Letters come from those who have made tragic mistakes. They ask, "Can I ever be forgiven?"
19. The answer is yes!
20. The gospel teaches us that relief from torment and guilt can be earned through repentance. Save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fulness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness.
21. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." That is, Isaiah continued, "if ye be willing and obedient."⁹
22. Even that grace of God promised in the scriptures comes only "after all we can do."¹⁰
23. You may tell yourself that your transgressions are not spiritually illegal. That will not work; neither will rebellion, nor anger, nor joking about them. You cannot do that. And you don't have to do it.
24. There is a way back. It will not help if, out of tender regard for your feelings, I avoid telling you about the hard part.

25. John Breen did not come to that morning at Johnson's Ranch simply by desiring it. He wallowed and clawed his way up over the pass, suffering every step of the way. But once he knew he would survive and the suffering would end, surely he did not complain at the ordeal. And he had help all the way down. He was with rescuers.
26. When an offense is minor, so simple a thing as an apology will satisfy the law. Most mistakes can be settled between us and the Lord, and that should be done speedily.¹¹ It requires a confession to Him, and whatever obvious repairs need to be made.
27. With sincere repentance as a pattern in our lives, measured by our willingness to "confess them and forsake them,"¹² the Lord has promised that we may "always retain a remission of [our] sins."¹³
28. Alma bluntly told his wayward son that "repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment."¹⁴
29. The punishment may, for the most part, consist of the torment we inflict upon ourselves. It may be the loss of privilege or progress.¹⁵ (For further information, see additional text in this endnote.) We are punished by our sins, if not for them.
30. There are some transgressions which require a discipline which will bring about the relief that comes with the morning of forgiveness. If your mistakes have been grievous ones, go to your bishop. Like the rescuers who brought John Breen down from the mountaintops, bishops can guide you through the steps required to obtain forgiveness insofar as the Church is concerned. Each one of us must work out individually forgiveness from the Lord.
31. To earn forgiveness, one must make restitution. That means you give back what you have taken or ease the pain of those you have injured.
32. But sometimes you cannot give back what you have taken because you don't have it to give. If you have caused others to suffer unbearably—defiled someone's virtue, for example—it is not within your power to give it back.
33. There are times you cannot mend that which you have broken. Perhaps the offense was long ago, or the injured refused your penance. Perhaps the damage was so severe that you cannot fix it no matter how desperately you want to.
34. Your repentance cannot be accepted unless there is a restitution. If you cannot undo what you have done, you are trapped. It is easy to understand how helpless and hopeless you then feel and why you might want to give up, just as Alma did.
35. The thought that rescued Alma, when he acted upon it, is this: Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.
36. When your desire is firm and you are willing to pay the "uttermost farthing,"¹⁶ the law of restitution is suspended. Your obligation is transferred to the Lord. He will settle your accounts.
37. I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ.
38. How all can be repaired, we do not know. It may not all be accomplished in this life. We know from visions and visitations that the servants of the Lord continue the work of redemption beyond the veil.¹⁷
39. This knowledge should be as comforting to the innocent as it is to the guilty. I am thinking of parents who suffer unbearably for the mistakes of their wayward children and are losing hope.
40. Some members wonder why their priesthood leaders will not accept them just as they are and simply comfort them in what they call pure Christian love.
41. Pure Christian love, the love of Christ, does not presuppose approval of all conduct. Surely the ordinary experiences of parenthood teach that one can be consumed with love for another and yet be unable to approve unworthy conduct.
42. We cannot, as a church, approve unworthy conduct or accept into full fellowship individuals who live or who teach standards that are grossly in violation of that which the Lord requires of Latter-day Saints.
43. If we, out of sympathy, should approve unworthy conduct, it might give present comfort to someone but would not ultimately contribute to that person's happiness.¹⁸
44. In the most tender of sermons in the revelations on kindness and long-suffering, on meekness, gentleness, on love unfeigned, the Lord instructs us to reprove "betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then [show] forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved."¹⁹
45. The Lord provides ways to pay our debts to Him. In one sense we ourselves may participate in an atonement. When we are willing to restore to others that which we have not taken, or heal wounds that we did not inflict, or pay a debt that we did not incur, we are emulating His part in the Atonement.
46. So many live with accusing guilt when relief is ever at hand. So many are like the immigrant woman who skimmed and saved and deprived herself until, by selling all of her possessions, she bought a steerage-class ticket to America.
47. She rationed out the meager provisions she was able to bring with her. Even so, they were gone early in the voyage. When others went for their meals, she stayed below deck—determined to suffer through it. Finally, on the last day, she must, she thought, afford one meal to give her strength for the journey yet ahead. When she asked what the meal would cost, she was told that all of the meals had been included in the price of her ticket.

Week 17 – Come Unto Christ and be Perfected in Him

Scripture and Other Readings: Moroni 7—10, Philippians 3:12-15; Hebrews 2:9-12; 6:1-3 (JST), 17-20.

Invitation Week 17:

Ponder what it means to be perfect. Seek the Lord’s counsel to know and understand those things that are holding you back from being perfected through the Savior’s atonement. Make a list of two things you want to receive help from the Lord to overcome. Seek for those gifts of the Spirit that will help you in your quest to become perfected in Christ

Elder Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *General Conference, October 1995*

1. If I were to ask which of the Lord’s commandments is most difficult to keep, many of us might cite Matt. 5:48: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” 1
 2. Keeping this commandment can be a concern because each of us is far from perfect, both spiritually and temporally. Reminders come repeatedly. We may lock keys inside the car, or even forget where the car is parked. And not infrequently we walk intently from one part of the house to another, only to forget the reason for the errand.
 3. When comparing one’s personal performance with the supreme standard of the Lord’s expectation, the reality of imperfection can at times be depressing. My heart goes out to conscientious Saints who, because of their shortcomings, allow feelings of depression to rob them of happiness in life.
 4. We all need to remember: men are that they might have joy—not guilt trips! 2 We also need to remember that the Lord gives no commandments that are impossible to obey. But sometimes we fail to comprehend them fully.
 5. Our understanding of perfection might be aided if we classify it into two categories. The first could pertain uniquely to this life—*mortal* perfection. The second category could pertain uniquely to the next life—*immortal* or *eternal* perfection.
- Mortal Perfection**
6. In this life, certain actions can be perfected. A baseball pitcher can throw a no-hit, no-run ball game. A surgeon can perform an operation without an error. A musician can render a selection without a mistake. One can likewise achieve perfection in being punctual, paying tithing, keeping the Word of Wisdom, and so on. The enormous effort required to attain such self-mastery is rewarded with a deep sense of satisfaction. More importantly, spiritual attainments in mortality accompany us into eternity.3
 7. James gave a practical standard by which mortal perfection could be measured. He said, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a *perfectman*.”4
 8. Scriptures have described Noah, Seth, and Job as *perfect* men. 5 No doubt the same term might apply to a large number of faithful disciples in various dispensations. Alma said that “there were many, exceedingly great many,” 6 who were pure before the Lord.
 9. This does not mean that these people never made mistakes or never had need of correction. The process of perfection includes challenges to overcome and steps to repentance that may be very painful. 7 There is a proper place for chastisement in the molding of character, for we know that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”8
 10. Mortal perfection can be achieved as we try to perform every duty, keep every law, and strive to be as perfect in our sphere as our Heavenly Father is in his. If we do the best we can, the Lord will bless us according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts. 9
- Eternal Perfection**
11. But Jesus asked for more than mortal perfection. The moment he uttered the words “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” he raised our sights beyond the bounds of mortality. Our Heavenly Father has eternal perfection. This very fact merits a much broader perspective.
 12. Recently I studied the English and Greek editions of the New Testament, concentrating on each use of the term *perfect* and its derivatives. Studying both languages together provided some interesting insights, since Greek was the original language of the New Testament.
 13. In Matt. 5:48, the term *perfect* was translated from the Greek *teleios*, which means “complete.” *Teleios* is an adjective derived from the noun *telos*, which means “end.” 10 The infinitive form of the verb is *teleiono*, which means “to reach a distant end, to be fully developed, to consummate, or to finish.” 11 Please note that the word does not imply “freedom from error”; it implies “achieving a distant objective.” In fact, when writers of the Greek New Testament wished to describe

perfection of behavior—precision or excellence of human effort—they did *not* employ a form of *teleios*; instead, they chose different words. 12

14. *Teleios* is not a total stranger to us. From it comes the prefix *tele-* that we use every day. *Telephone* literally means “distant talk.” *Television* means “to see distantly.” *Telephoto* means “distant light,” and so on.
15. With that background in mind, let us consider another highly significant statement made by the Lord. Just prior to his crucifixion, he said that on “the third day I shall be perfected.” 13 Think of that! The sinless, errorless Lord—already perfect by our mortal standards—proclaimed his own state of perfection yet to be in the future. 14 His *eternal* perfection would follow his resurrection and receipt of “all power ... in heaven and in earth.” 15
16. The perfection that the Savior envisions for us is much more than errorless performance. It is the eternal expectation as expressed by the Lord in his great intercessory prayer to his Father—that we might be made perfect and be able to dwell with them in the eternities ahead. 16
17. The Lord’s entire work and glory pertains to the immortality and eternal life of each human being. 17 He came into the world to do the will of his Father, who sent him. 18 His sacred responsibility was foreseen before the creation 19 and was foretold by all his holy prophets since the world began. 20
18. The atonement of Christ fulfilled the long-awaited purpose for which he had come to the earth. His concluding words upon Calvary’s cross referred to the culmination of his assignment—to atone for all humankind. Then he said, “It is finished.” 21 Not surprisingly, the Greek word from which *finished* was derived is *teleios*.
19. That Jesus attained eternal perfection *following* his resurrection is confirmed in the Book of Mormon. It records the visit of the resurrected Lord to the people of ancient America. There he repeated the important injunction previously cited but with one very significant addition. He said, “I would that ye should be perfect *even as I*, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” 22 This time he listed himself along with his Father as a perfected personage. Previously he had not. 23
20. Resurrection is requisite for eternal perfection. Thanks to the atonement of Jesus Christ, our bodies, corruptible in mortality, will become incorruptible. Our physical frames, now subject to disease, death, and decay, will acquire immortal glory. 24 Presently sustained by the blood of life 25 and ever aging, our bodies will be sustained by spirit and become changeless and beyond the bounds of death. 26
21. Eternal perfection is reserved for those who overcome all things and inherit the fulness of the Father in his heavenly mansions. Perfection consists in gaining eternal life—the kind of life that God lives. 27

Ordinances and Covenants of the Temple

22. Scriptures identify other important prerequisites to eternal perfection. They relate to the ordinances and covenants of the temple. 28 No accountable individual can receive exaltation in the celestial kingdom without the ordinances of the temple. Endowments and sealings are for our personal perfection and are secured through our faithfulness. 29
23. This requirement also pertains to our ancestors. Paul taught “that they without us should not be made *perfect*.” 30 Again, in that verse, the Greek term from which *perfect* was translated was a form of *teleios*. 31
24. In latter-day revelation, the Lord was even more explicit. His prophet wrote: “My dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation. ... They without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect.” 32

Encouragement from the Savior’s Example

25. Our climb up the path to perfection is aided by encouragement from the scriptures. They hold the promise that we shall, if faithful in all things, become like Deity. John the beloved Apostle wrote:
26. “We should be called the sons [and daughters] of God. ...
27. “... When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
28. “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” 33
29. Continuing encouragement comes as we follow the example of Jesus, who taught, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” 34 His hope for us is crystal clear! He declared: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.” 35 Thus, our adoration of Jesus is best expressed by our emulation of Jesus. 36
30. People have never failed to follow Jesus because his standards were imprecise or insufficiently high. Quite to the contrary. Some have disregarded his teachings because they were viewed as being too precise or impractically high! Yet such lofty standards, when earnestly pursued, produce great inner peace and incomparable joy.
31. There is no other individual to compare with Jesus Christ, nor is there any other exhortation equal to his sublime expression of hope: “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” 37
32. This divine entreaty is consistent with the fact that, as begotten children of heavenly parents, we are endowed with the potential to become like them, just as mortal children may become like their mortal parents.
33. The Lord restored his church to help us prepare for perfection. Paul said that the Savior placed in the Church Apostles, prophets, and teachers, “for the

perfecting of the saints, ... for the edifying of the body of Christ:

34. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a *perfect* man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." [38](#)
35. The *perfect* man described in Paul's quotation is the completed person—*teleios*—the glorified soul!
36. Moroni taught how to gain this glorious objective. His instruction stands in any age as an antidote for depression and a prescription for joy. I echo his plea: "Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; ... love God with all your might, mind and strength ... [Then] ye may be perfect in Christ, ... holy, [and] without spot." [39](#)
37. Meanwhile, brothers and sisters, let us do the best we can and try to improve each day. When our

imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws in ourselves and among those we love. We can be comforted and forbearing. The Lord taught, "Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now ... ; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected." [40](#)

38. We need not be dismayed if our earnest efforts toward perfection now seem so arduous and endless. Perfection is pending. It can come in full only after the Resurrection and only through the Lord. It awaits all who love him and keep his commandments. It includes thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions. [41](#) ... I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Supplemental Readings:

Elder Paul V. Johnson, "Be Perfected In Him," *General Conference, October 2022*

1. Our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, have the power to save us and transform us. They can help us become as They are.
2. A few years ago, one of our young grandsons, Aaron, began having health problems. He became fatigued, had quite a bit of bruising, and did not look healthy. After medical testing, he was diagnosed with severe aplastic anemia, a disease where his bone marrow stopped producing red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Without treatment and an eventual cure, his blood could not clot properly or fight off infections, so even minor falls, injuries, or illnesses could quickly become life-threatening.
3. For a period of time, Aaron received regular platelet and blood transfusions to keep him out of danger. The doctors explained that the only cure for the disease would be a bone marrow transplant, and the best chance for success would be to have a sibling as the donor. If one of his siblings were an ideal match, the outcome of the transplant could be lifesaving. His four younger brothers were tested, and one, Maxwell, was deemed a perfect match.
4. Even with a perfect donor match, a bone marrow transplant still poses a serious risk of complications. The process required that Aaron's own cells in his diseased bone marrow be destroyed by a combination of chemotherapy and radiation before receiving the stem cells from his brother Maxwell's bone marrow. Then because of Aaron's compromised immune system, he needed to be isolated in the hospital for several weeks and then at home for several months with special protocols, restrictions, and medications.
5. The hoped-for outcome from the transplant was that Aaron's body would not reject the donor cells and that Maxwell's cells would gradually produce the needed red and white blood cells and platelets in Aaron's body. A successful donor transplant causes a very real physiological change. Amazingly, a doctor explained

that if Aaron committed a crime and left blood at the crime scene, the police could arrest his brother Maxwell. This is because Aaron's blood would come from Maxwell's transplanted cells and have Maxwell's DNA, and this would be the case for the rest of his life.

6. Aaron being saved by his brother's blood has spurred many thoughts about the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and the effect of His Atonement on us. I would like to focus today on the permanent, life-giving change that occurs as we allow the Lord to work miracles in us.
7. Aaron did not have the power in himself to overcome the disease. His body could not make the blood cells needed to sustain his life. No matter what he personally did, he could not heal his bone marrow. Just as Aaron could not cure himself, we cannot save ourselves. No matter how capable, educated, brilliant, or strong we are, we cannot cleanse ourselves from our sins, change our bodies to an immortal state, or exalt ourselves. It is only possible through the Savior Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement. "There is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God." It is His atoning blood that cleanses us and sanctifies us.
8. Although Aaron could not heal himself, in order for the transplant to work he needed to be willing to do what the doctors asked—even very difficult, challenging things. Although we can't save ourselves, when we submit to the Lord's will and keep our covenants, the way is open for our redemption. Like the remarkable process of the very DNA of Aaron's blood cells changing, we can have our hearts changed, have His image in our countenances, and become new creatures in Christ.
9. Alma reminded the people of Zarahemla of the previous generation that had been converted. Speaking of his father, Alma explained that "according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart." He then asked, "Have ye experienced this mighty change in

your hearts?” It wasn’t the people who changed their own hearts. The Lord performed the actual change. Alma was very clear about this. He said, “Behold, he changed their hearts.” They “humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God ... [and] were faithful until the end ... [and] were saved.” The people were willing to open their hearts and exercise faith, and then the Lord changed their hearts. And what a mighty change it was! Think of the difference in the lives of these two men named Alma before and after their hearts were changed.

10. We are children of God with a majestic destiny. We can be changed to become like Him and have “a fulness of joy.” Satan, on the other hand, would have us be miserable like he is. We have the ability to choose whom we follow. When we follow Satan, we give him power. When we follow God, He gives us power.
11. The Savior taught that we “should be perfect.” This can seem so daunting. I can clearly see my personal inadequacies and am painfully aware of the distance between me and perfection. We may have a tendency to think we have to perfect ourselves, but that is not possible. Following every suggestion in every self-help book in the world will not bring it about. There is only one way and one name whereby perfection comes. We are “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.” Our perfection is only possible through God’s grace.
12. Can you imagine how overwhelming it would have been for our young grandson Aaron to assume he had to understand and perform all the medical procedures associated with his transplant himself? We should not assume we need to do what only the Savior can do in the miraculous process of our perfection.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect -- Eventually,” *General Conference, October 2017*

1. The scriptures were written to bless and encourage us, and surely they do that. We thank heaven for every chapter and verse we have ever been given. But have you noticed that every now and then a passage will appear that reminds us we *are* falling a little short? For example, the Sermon on the Mount begins with soothing, gentle beatitudes, but in the verses that follow, we are told—among other things—not only not to kill but also not even to be angry. We are told not only not to commit adultery but also not even to have impure thoughts. To those who ask for it, we are to give our coat and then give our cloak also. We are to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, and do good to them who hate us.¹
2. If that is your morning scripture study, and after reading just that far you are pretty certain you are not going to get good marks on your gospel report card, then the final commandment in the chain is sure to finish the job: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father ... in heaven is perfect.”² With that concluding imperative,

13. As Moroni concluded his record, he taught, “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.” What a comforting and powerful truth! His grace is sufficient for me. His grace is sufficient for you. His grace is sufficient for all who “labour and are heavy laden.”
14. With medical treatments like Aaron’s, there is always some uncertainty of the outcome. In fact, Aaron needed a second transplant when the first one had complications. Thankfully, with a spiritual change of heart, we don’t have to wonder if it will happen. When we live according to His will, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save,” there is a 100 percent guarantee of being cleansed by the Savior’s blood and eventually being perfected in Him. He is “a God of truth, and [cannot] lie.”
15. There is no question that this process of change takes time and will not be completed until after this life, but the promise is sure. When the fulfillment of God’s promises seems far off, we still embrace those promises, knowing they will be fulfilled.
16. The miraculous change in Aaron’s health has brought great joy to our family. Imagine the great joy in heaven as mighty changes happen in our souls.
17. Our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, love us and have graciously offered to change us and perfect us. They want to do this. It is central to Their work and glory. I testify They have power to do this as we come to Them in faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

we want to go back to bed and pull the covers over our head. Such celestial goals seem beyond our reach. Yet surely the Lord would never give us a commandment He knew we could not keep. Let’s see where this quandary takes us.

3. Around the Church I hear many who struggle with this issue: “I am just not good enough.” “I fall so far short.” “I will never measure up.” I hear this from teenagers. I hear it from missionaries. I hear it from new converts. I hear it from lifelong members. One insightful Latter-day Saint, Sister Darla Isackson, has observed that Satan has somehow managed to make covenants and commandments seem like curses and condemnations. For some he has turned the ideals and inspiration of the gospel into self-loathing and misery-making.³
4. What I now say in no way denies or diminishes any commandment God has ever given us. I believe in His perfection, and I know we are His spiritual sons and daughters with divine potential to become as He is. I also know that, as children of God, we should not

demean or vilify ourselves, as if beating up on ourselves is somehow going to make us the person God wants us to become. No! With a willingness to repent and a desire for increased righteousness always in our hearts, I would hope we could pursue personal improvement in a way that doesn't include getting ulcers or anorexia, feeling depressed or demolishing our self-esteem. That is *not* what the Lord wants for Primary children or anyone else who honestly sings, "I'm trying to be like Jesus."⁴

5. To put this issue in context, may I remind all of us that we live in a fallen world and for now we are a fallen people. We are in the *teletial* kingdom; that is spelled with a *t*, not a *c*. As President Russell M. Nelson has taught, here in mortality perfection is still "pending."⁵
6. So I believe that Jesus did not intend His sermon on this subject to be a verbal hammer for battering us about our shortcomings. No, I believe He intended it to be a tribute to who and what God the Eternal Father is and what we can achieve with Him in eternity. In any case, I am grateful to know that in spite of *my* imperfections, at least God is perfect—that at least He is, for example, able to love His enemies, because too often, due to the "natural man"⁶ and woman in us, you and I are sometimes that enemy. How grateful I am that at least God can bless those who despitely use Him because, without wanting or intending to do so, we *all* despitely use Him sometimes. I am grateful that God is merciful and a peacemaker because I need mercy and the world needs peace. Of course, all we say of the Father's virtues we also say of His Only Begotten Son, who lived and died unto the same perfection.
7. I hasten to say that focusing on the Father's and the Son's achievements rather than our failures does not give us one ounce of justification for undisciplined lives or dumbing down our standards. No, from the beginning the gospel has been "for the perfecting of the saints, ... till we ... come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."⁷ I am simply suggesting that at least one purpose of a scripture or a commandment can be to remind us just how magnificent "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"⁸ really is, inspiring in us greater love and admiration for Him and a greater desire to be like Him.
8. "Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him ... ," Moroni pleads. "Love God with all your might, mind and strength, then ... *by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.*"⁹ Our only hope for true perfection is in receiving it as a gift from heaven—we can't "earn" it. Thus, the grace of Christ offers us not only salvation from sorrow and sin and death but also salvation from our own persistent self-criticism.
9. Let me use one of the Savior's parables to say this in a little different way. A servant was in debt to his king for the amount of 10,000 talents. Hearing the servant's plea for patience and mercy, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and ... forgave ... the debt."

But then that same servant would not forgive a fellow servant who owed him 100 pence. On hearing this, the king lamented to the one he had forgiven, "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"¹⁰

10. There is some difference of opinion among scholars regarding the monetary values mentioned here—and forgive the U.S. monetary reference—but to make the math easy, if the smaller, unforgiven 100-pence debt were, say, \$100 in current times, then the 10,000-talent debt so freely forgiven would have approached \$1 billion—or more!
11. As a personal debt, that is an astronomical number—totally beyond our comprehension. (Nobody can shop that much!) Well, for the purposes of this parable, it is *supposed* to be incomprehensible; it is *supposed* to be beyond our ability to grasp, to say nothing of beyond our ability to repay. That is because this isn't a story about two servants arguing in the New Testament. It is a story about us, the fallen human family—mortal debtors, transgressors, and prisoners all. Every one of us is a debtor, and the verdict was imprisonment for every one of us. And there we would all have remained were it not for the grace of a King who sets us free because He loves us and is "moved with compassion toward us."¹¹
12. Jesus uses an unfathomable measurement here because His Atonement is an unfathomable gift given at an incomprehensible cost. That, it seems to me, is at least part of the meaning behind Jesus's charge to be perfect. We may not be able to demonstrate yet the 10,000-talent perfection the Father and the Son have achieved, but it is *not* too much for Them to ask us to be a little more godlike in little things, that we speak and act, love and forgive, repent and improve at least at the 100-pence level of perfection, which it is clearly within our ability to do.
13. My brothers and sisters, except for Jesus, there have been no flawless performances on this earthly journey we are pursuing, so while in mortality let's strive for steady improvement without obsessing over what behavioral scientists call "toxic perfectionism."¹² We should avoid that latter excessive expectation of ourselves and of others and, I might add, of those who are called to serve in the Church—which for Latter-day Saints means *everyone*, for we are all called to serve somewhere.
14. In that regard, Leo Tolstoy wrote once of a priest who was criticized by one of his congregants for not living as resolutely as he should, the critic concluding that the principles the erring preacher taught must therefore also be erroneous.
15. In response to that criticism, the priest says: "Look at my life now and compare it to my former life. You will see that I am trying to live out the truth I proclaim." Unable to live up to the high ideals he taught, the priest admits he has failed. But he cries:

