

FAITH

(a talk given in the Deerfield Ward in Alpine, Utah, on 18 September 2021)

I'm speaking in church.
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though when he called me,
Jeff Lyman was tired.

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These calls are inspired,
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Jeff Lyman was fired.

But before the firing, while he was still in the bishopric and inspired, he asked me to talk about faith. And I think he was inspired because I'll probably say some things about faith that others might not.

I've heard many stories from this pulpit about athletics, usually from people who are much more athletic than I am. Let me try a story like that.

Suppose you are inspired by gymnasts who perform amazing routines and then land on both feet and throw their hands in the air, holding that pose for a second or two in a moment of breathless triumph. You've seen a few awkward landings, unsteady landings, landings where the gymnast hits the ground with both feet and knees bent and you can tell that they're thinking "Okay, okay body, keep your balance! Mainly, look like you're keeping your balance! Don't wreck it now! Stand up straight like everything's just fine! Raise your hands! Make it look like you meant to land this way!" You've seen those. But the perfect landings inspire you.

So you drag a chair to the middle of the living room floor and practice jumping off and landing perfectly. It doesn't go well at first, but after many hours of concentrating mainly on two feet hitting at once and then getting just enough bend into your knees that it looks realistic, and then raising your arms in a way that's triumphant but not arrogant, and then, finally, the smile, the brave smile. And then you go the extra mile that champions go. The extra mile that very few Olympians dare to go. You practice and practice and practice until that smile stays on your face all the way to the sideline, maybe all the way out of the stadium.

You all know what's wrong with this picture. Simply that for the perfect landing to have any meaning, it has to be connected with a complete performance. You actually have to be a complete athlete, not just a good lander. In fact, focusing on any aspect of the gymnast's art is ineffectual without becoming an actual gymnast.

I believe this goofy illustration can help us understand something about faith. There is only one kind of faith that saves us, and that is faith in Jesus Christ and His atonement. It's the first principle of the Gospel.

Alma pled with the poor among the Zoramites, "If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words."

(This scripture is loved by all missionaries, from the beginning until now.)

"Compare the word unto a seed. If ye give place that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—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."

Alma is speaking of faith in Christ, and his words remind us of the glorious fruit Lehi and Nephi were allowed, in vision, to pluck from the Tree of Life. When Nephi asked the meaning of the vision, he was immediately shown the birth of the Savior, six hundred years in the future.

And an angel said “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?”

And Nephi answered him, saying “Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.”

And then the angel said “Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.”

The image of these two faithful, intelligent beings, a youth and an angel, grinning and agreeing on the beauty of the Savior just makes me happy.

And the meaning of the tree, the love of God “which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men,” reminds me of a passage in the 88th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord is describing the Light of Christ, another thing that shines like that tree.

“This is the light of Christ, who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space,”
(Remember “the love of God which sheddeth itself abroad” like a tree the size of the Universe.)

“The light which giveth life to all things, even the power of God.

I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you...”

(by Him whose light and love gives life to all things) “...is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead.”

All this is all about faith in Christ and His resurrection, whose light, governing and giving life to all things, the grass, Andra's alpacas, all our fingernails and beating hearts, will allow us to move the mountains that impede our progress toward glory. This is the core of President Russell M. Nelson's address in the last General Conference, in which he mercifully revealed “The Lord does not require perfect faith for us to have access to His perfect power. But He does ask us to believe.”

Let us now make a connection between the art of the gymnast and the art of the believer. Knowing how to land is essential to the success of the gymnast. Knowing how to exercise faith in Christ is essential to the success of a child of God. But the successful gymnast is a whole athlete, with their beautiful landing being the culmination of the athletic discipline that perfects their athletic nature. You can't be a gymnast in only one respect. You have to “put on” the nature of a gymnast. Likewise, can you really succeed at having and exercising faith in Christ if you haven't “put on” the nature of a faithful person, by discipline and exercise?

Stephen Jay Gould, the American paleontologist, wrote this in an essay for the New York Times two weeks after the horrific attacks on September 11, 2001. “The tragedy of human history lies in the enormous potential for destruction in rare acts of evil, not in the high frequency of evil people. Complex systems can only be built step by step, whereas destruction requires but an instant. Thus, in what I like to call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness. ... Good and kind people outnumber all others by thousands to one.” That's what Stephen Jay Gould wrote.

And this is what I wrote in response: “The Great Asymmetry. I believe this of humanity. I believe this of America. I believe this of China. I believe this of Afghanistan. I believe this of our government... I believe this of people whose views radically differ from mine. I believe this of people who worship differently from me, and of those who don't worship at all. Thus I tend toward trust.”

I want not only to have faith in Christ, but to be a faithful person, someone whose attitudes and relationships and beliefs and expressions are characterized by faith and trust.

A certain kind of person is said to negotiate disagreements “in good faith.” I love that phrase. A certain kind of person is known to conduct their business “in good faith.” A presumption of “good faith” is necessary if any kind of unity, in the Kingdom of God or in the world, is to be achieved. The prophets have warned us against nurturing divisions among us, of letting the cares and loyalties of the world, and our differing understandings of challenges we face as a church and as a nation, and as, in the words of President Nelson, “global citizens” erode our trust in one another’s good intentions. Our bishop is an absolute hero in his obedience to this warning.

It is, of course, dangerous to trust too much. We will be failed by the arm of flesh. Our leaders in the nation, our popular idols, our friends, and even our families may betray our faith in them. But with steadfast faith in the infallible love of Jesus Christ, I implore all of us to risk it. Risk faith in one another. Risk trust. If we are wounded, we will more deeply appreciate the wounds of Christ, Who has more faith in us than any one of us has in Him.

Someone gave me good advice. They suggested I look back over my life (which at my age is a major undertaking) and make a list of events and feelings and relationships that have strengthened my faith. I did. I made a long list. But because it’s what I do, I took from the list the most meaningful memories and wove them into a song, so I could call them to mind more easily. The song is pretty much for me, because each phrase or image reminds me of a significant moment in my life. But I’ve shared it with a few people, and some of it might mean something to you, if only as an example of a faith-nurturing list that you could make as well. I hope I can remember it without a guitar in my hands.

The eyes of eternity lying on me
as the mountains arise and the morning unfolds, (that’s one)
my reason retreating when I whisper his will, (that’s another)
walking my way through the pages of gold, (and another)

a blanket of light, songs that say what is right,
a glow on the white hair, bare thanks in the cold,
bees by the water with Jesus and God,
tears at ten years when the Spirit was bold,

These are my islands of peace in the storm,
and where I remember the truth.
Here are the embers that keep my faith warm
and fathom the flames of my youth.

The love of good women, good brothers, and friends,
the good in my children, the gift of my wife,
the flight of all fears when the blessing appears,
the witness of peace at release from this life,

The beauty of angels who rally the troops
and descend on the battlefield burning with love.
They smile from the walls of the temples of truth
and breathe in my dreams like the stars up above.

These are my islands of peace in the storm,
and where I remember the truth.

Here are the embers that keep my faith warm
and fathom the flames of my youth.

The shining of Jeffrey, of Henry, and Hugh,
of Maxwell and Dallin and Dylan and Clive,
sweet Jesus calling to me and to you
and hauling us out of this tempest alive,

These are my islands of peace in the storm,
and where I remember the truth.
Here are the embers that keep my faith warm
and fathom the flames of my youth.

Let us have faith in Christ. And let our faith in Christ flow naturally and organically from hearts that are hospitable to faith, that know faith, that love faith. This is my prayer for you and for me, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

LETTER FROM THE HOME TEACHER

(I had a last-Sunday-of-the-month appointment with a good guy I home teach. He was unable to keep the appointment because of conditions flowing from a frightening mystery illness that's troubling him. So I wrote him a note, enlarged very slightly for posting here.)

Harvey (name changed to protect the innocent),

You may wonder why this is coming so early--I mean, there are still 23 hours left in the month. But this is the message I was going to share last night.

I've been reading in Third Nephi about how the believers felt about knowing that the Savior was finally walking the earth. They were really glad. The signs of His coming had literally saved their lives. They knew He was the Son of God, they knew He was healing and teaching. They had even heard that He was going to die for them. But He hadn't, yet. I wonder if they thought much about that last part. Those in the old world who walked right by His side didn't. For us today, it's a matter of spiritual history, fulfilled prophecy, and clouds of witnesses. For them, it wasn't. Yet.

But for Him, it was. Always. If we choose a certain perspective, we can look at all He did through the lens of the Atonement. But we don't have to. He had to. I found myself wondering what it must have been like for Him to know in every moment of His ministry where it all was heading. What would it be like to know that you were going to suffer a death more painful than anyone before or after you? He had seen deaths that would sicken us and freeze our blood. (I'm thinking of times He just stopped it so He wouldn't have to see any more--the flood, the burning of Sodom & Gomorrah, the cleansing of Canaan, and the annihilation of Mormon's Nephites. After the dark hours of destruction that accompanied His crucifixion, the Savior's voice was heard all over the land, declaring that city after city had been destroyed "that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them.") He had seen the worst pain and killing imaginable.

He invites us to see one another as He sees us, and to see all of Creation as He does—with love, compassion, and joy. I wonder if that also means that we're invited to see Him as He saw Him—to see Him cleansing a

leper, knowing that He was going to feel the pain of leprosy in the garden, to watch Him write in the dirt, knowing that He would suffer the betrayal and shame and self-loathing of both the woman taken in adultery and the stone-throwers. He knew both the horror of looking down the barrel of a muzzle-loader trained on the heart of a prophet, and the damning rush of pulling the trigger. Horrible things, but He said something about having "descended below them all."

The disciples must have felt unutterably appalled and hollowed-out when the Lord was crucified. The mercy for us is that we never have to go through what they did. We know what happened on Sunday morning.

Of course, the more deeply we are able to feel the sorrows of the garden and the cross, the more deeply we'll feel the wonder and joy of the empty tomb. Sometimes I'm awake enough to imagine that everything that touches us for good or ill is a generous invitation into that depth, and that light--an invitation to feel and understand and appreciate the Atonement of Christ.

In the interest of chilling a little, I don't think the arithmetic is 50/50. I have a hope that's tantamount to testimony that someday we'll see all sorrow, even His (which was Ours), as the dark eye of the needle through which we enter into a joy that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man," and into a peace "that passeth understanding." C. S. Lewis opined that all of Hell, which seems vast and limitless to the folks who are there, can be contained in the smallest chink between paving-stones on the outskirts of Heaven.

Heaven is good. See ya there. M.

PIONEERS

(Notes for a Sacrament Meeting talk I gave to the Alpine 1st Ward on 13 July 2008)

It's a universal principle that if humans aren't permitted to breathe, they will die. It's true across the globe, and we ought not to have to say any more about it than that—you should just believe it. But the way to get this universal principle to become very important in your lives would be for me to pinch your nose and put my hand over your mouth for a minute or two. It's by exploring very specific situations that we really come to learn very general truths. Some folks don't feel that the experience of the pioneers is particularly relevant to their lives, because they're not related to any. And it was a long time ago. And they dressed unattractively. Nineteenth-century pioneering appears to be a situation that isn't specific to everybody. I want this to be relevant, and I want to speak to a situation in which each of us, specifically, finds ourselves.

In 1842, two years before the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, four years before the departure of the saints from Nauvoo, one year after the temple was begun, the prophet gathered a council of fifty leaders of the church to discuss where the saints should settle in the Rocky Mountains. He made particular mention of "The Valley of the Tampanogos." The spelling was wrong, but the meaning was obvious. In 1776, the Catholic fathers Dominguez and Escalante had come to this valley and considered it, hands-down, the high point of their lengthy expedition. They were in the valley for two days and made it as far north as Lindon. The Indians here were called Timpanogotzis, named after their mountain, Timpanogos, an Aztec word meaning "stone person." In the first hours of the fathers' visit, the Indians were taught the rudiments of the gospel and, almost as one, wanted passionately to be baptized. Dominguez said that priests would be sent back to the valley within the year, along with Spanish settlers intent on building four large communities, one each along the four rivers flowing out of the Wasatch mountains above us, and that the Indians would be baptized and cared for then.

Political trouble in New Mexico prevented that return, and the next Europeans they saw in any numbers were the Mormons, 71 years later.

The records and maps made by the Catholic expedition were accurate and extremely well detailed. But in 1842, they were not widely known. Still, Joseph knew. He saw this place.

On a spring morning in 1820, the boy prophet may not have been thinking of monumental migrations of Christians at all, but on that morning a stone was cut from the mountains without hands, to roll forth and expand and fill the earth. Well, fill it with what? Not rock. I think the substance of that planet-sized stone is dreams--a dream of zion, a dream of living forever with the kind of beauty and love that our Father enjoys, a dream of angels speaking again to the children of the earth. It was in pursuit of dreams, not of gold or of richer soil, that a few adventurous souls 162 years ago became pioneers.

How big a deal was it? By the numbers:

The number of Mormon pioneers? Men, women, and children? 70,000.

Number of pioneers who walked the entire trail? Certainly the vast majority.

Number of pioneers who came by handcart? 3,000, or 4%. (There are reasons why the handcart pioneers loom large in our imaginations. We'll talk about them in a moment.)

Frequency of deaths on the trail? One in eighteen. (One in maybe 23 would have died had they stayed home.)

Period of the exodus? Twenty-two years.

Number of companies? Two hundred.

Number of companies a giant eagle high above the planet might see, stretched out along the trail, all at once, in an average September? Nine, averaging 350 souls in each.

Number of pioneers born as Americans? One in every four.

Number of pioneers who began the trail immediately after crossing the Atlantic Ocean? Two of every three. Now these Mormons did not arrange to meet in small groups at the docks and buy tickets on ships that were bound for America, hoping they might meet another nice Latter-day Saint family to pal around with on deck. No. They chartered whole ships and filled them--every soul a Latter-day Saint, except the captain and crew. And more often than not, when the ship finally landed, every soul was a Latter-day Saint.

How many ships? Ninety-seven. Eighty-seven from Liverpool, six from Hamburg, four from London. Among them were The Argo, The Olympus, The Ellen Maria, The Forest Monarch, The Golconda, The Old England, The Germanicus, The Rockaway, The Emerald Isle, The Chimborazo, The Caravan, The Enoch Train, The Horizon, The Tuscarora, The William Tappscott, The Monarch Of The Sea, The Antarctic, The Amazon, The Caroline, The Arkwright, The S. Curling.

Average number of saints per ship? 434.

Distance from Liverpool to New Orleans, where more than half landed? 5,000 miles.

New Orleans to St. Louis? 1,173 miles up the Mississippi River.

St. Louis to the trailhead at Kaneshville or Florence, where Winter Quarters stood? 620 miles.

Winter Quarters to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake? 1,035 miles.

Length of the journey for most? 7,828 miles.

Minor interruptions in the flow of pioneers:

1846, war between the United States and Mexico.

1854, war between the United States and the Sioux Nation,

1858, war between the United States and the Mormons,

1862, war between the United States . . . and itself.

So what is the appeal of handcarts? Were the hardships stiffer or the sacrifices greater for them than for the others? Generally not. Brigham Young, who got the idea from seeing street merchants selling things from carts in the cities of the east--carts that were never meant to travel farther than the few blocks between the merchant's home, the source of his supply, and his spot on the sidewalk--promised the handcart pioneers that they would come to the valley cheaper, faster, and be more healthy when they got there than the wagon companies. He was right. It was obviously cheaper. The handcart companies averaged 25 miles a day to the wagon companies' 20. And the travellers were not only stronger by the end, but a whole lot more of their children survived the trail, not having been run over by wagons--the leading cause of death among pioneer children.

There were ten companies over the years of 1856 and 1857. Eight were hugely successful. Two were not. A company led by James Willie began their trek in the latter half of August, 1856, followed shortly by a company led by Edward Martin. It was a bad idea. Everybody voted in favor but one. Levi Savage boldly objected, saying that he thought it the height of foolishness to set out that late in the season with so many untrained pioneers. But then he went on to say that if they went, he would go with them, help them, suffer with them, and even die with them, should it become necessary.

John Watkins, a mason from Britain, had a strange dream just before the day of decision. He dreamed that all six hundred saints were gathered in a room about 40 feet square (in a dream, that's possible), and an angel turned a crank on a rotating cage in which were six hundred slips of paper. Then, one by one, each of the six hundred drew out a slip, and on the slip was written whether or not that pioneer would live or die. When John Watkins drew out his slip of paper, he folded it over without reading it and said, "I am willing to take my chances with the rest." He was bugler for the company.

They set out. The weather was fine. They were in a hurry. They did what they thought was wise. To lighten their loads, they tossed out heavy blankets, heavy coats, extra boots. Barely into September, the deepest, earliest, harshest winter in anyone's memory hit them like a freight train. They weakened. They slowed. They stopped. The Willie company stopped at a point on the wide Wyoming highlands later called St. Mary's Station. The Martin company, in no communication with the Willie company, fatally stalled at about the same time, seventy miles behind on the alkali plain east of Devil's Gate, a plain called by the pioneers "the valley of the shadow of death."

Food was virtually gone, and there was no shelter at all. All of them would have perished, every one, were it not for the fact that some weeks earlier they had been passed by a party of returning missionaries in a fast horse-drawn carriage, who themselves shortly experienced the rigors of the winter.

The missionaries got to Salt Lake just in time for Brigham Young to stand up in the Saturday session of General Conference and require a rescue. On Tuesday, the wagons were rolling eastward through deep snow.

The Willie company was found on the open Wyoming highlands and driven over Rocky Ridge to a more sheltered camp at Rock Creek, where 11 died the first night. Their mass grave was dug by two men whose own graves are only a few yards away. The 15-mile march took 27 hours, killing many and saving many more. The Martin company was taken to Martin's Cove, where their dead were buried in the snow and ravaged by wolves. At Echo Canyon, a rescued Martin company pioneer named Squires gave birth to a baby girl, who was kept alive by being wrapped in the still-warm temple garments of one of the rescuers. Sister Squires, perhaps wanting her baby to appreciate the horrific and triumphant circumstances surrounding her birth, named the child, "Echo." Margaret Dalglish, a 29-year-old single Scottish sister somehow showed up at the brink of the descent into the Salt Lake Valley with her handcart intact--most others' had disintegrated or been burned for firewood or simply been left behind much earlier. She thrust her cart into the ravine beside the trail, sending the earthly treasures she had brought from the British Isles and pushed across the plains crashing end over end into the stones and snow. Then she stuck out her chin and threw back her shoulders and, with nothing but the rags on her back and the faith in her heart, marched down into her new home. That's what eyewitnesses saw. But I see her as a treasure galleon, with banners waving and a hold rich with gold and spices and silk. I imagine her having learned, through unutterable trial, the poverty of material things relative to spiritual wealth.

Some of us have the notion that the Mormon pioneers saw the world in bold strokes of black or white, while we moderns squint through myriad shades of gray. If you read the pioneers' journals, those blacks and whites are bold and clear, but the surprise is what arched in between—not "shades of gray" at all, but a rainbow of passions and fears, dares and enormous presumptions. Their "trail of dreams" paralleled, often at a stone's throw, two rivers that have taken on mythic proportions—the Platte and the Sweetwater—and along each of them the pioneers traveled upstream.

By the side of the Sweetwater today lie countless dull stones. Toss them into that bracing current and suddenly they are the deep blue of the night sky, the gold of sunset through clouds of dust, or the pink-white of snow, or stars. So it was with the lives of common souls who plunged into the river of pioneers and walked their thousand miles upstream into the valleys of the Wasatch to make us a home.

The Spirit has helped me imagine that the pioneers would plead with us that these valleys (very much including the valley of the "Tampanogos") not become ordinary. The "valleys of the saints," be they shaded by the Wasatch, the Appalachians, the Andes, or just very tall Iowa corn, should never become ordinary.

The whole idea of pioneering was (is) to leave Babylon behind. The trail along the south bank of the Platte was crowded with travelers pursuing richer soil and gold. The trail along the north bank, the rougher trail, was blazed by Latter-day Saints pursuing the dream of spiritual bounty and beauty. The south-bank trail ended in the rich Willamette Valley of Oregon and the gold fields of California. The north-bank trail ended in a desert waiting to blossom as a rose. To allow any stretch of real estate that has been consecrated as Zion to become ordinary, be its borders as tight as four walls and a door, is a betrayal of the dreams that drove Pioneers to pay extraordinary prices to get there.

To get here. To get wherever Zion is. Or to wherever it was imagined or commanded to be.

LOGIC OF THE FALL

(These are notes for a lesson I taught the 14-year-olds in Sunday School.)

God's work and glory is for us to become like He is, eternally married, eternally creating and procreating, and eternally joyful in seeing His children love each other. But God is up against some fundamental paradoxes: You can't be like God until you learn how to do what God does. You can only learn to do what God does by doing it.

But in all eternity, only God can do what He does, so you can't learn how.

So God needed to make a place where this rule could be broken just long enough for us to practice doing what He does—marry, create and procreate, and taste the joy of seeing our children love each other. He made us the earth. Only if we discover here how these godly things feel can we have a fair choice between accepting or rejecting God's dream for us.

But how to get us into this temporary, broken-rule practice-place?

God can't break rules, nor can he tell us to break them. If He did, He would cease to be God. Only we can choose to dive into a world that's based on a broken rule, where our attempts to practice godhood will pretty much fail, but will help us understand in a candle-sized way what it feels like to be God. This Eve chose to do, for herself, her husband, and all her unborn children.

We call her choice "The Fall" because the children of God literally fall into a world where we will fail at doing what in all the rest of Eternity only gods can do. Marry, create and procreate, and help our children love each other.

But we will learn and we will qualify, by experience, to choose what we want for the rest of our endless lives.

Great. But having chosen, how do we get out of this place? First of all, the tools we were given to learn with, our bodies, crumble to dust, and so we wind up at death with just enough sweet knowledge and desire to go on doing what God does, but without the one tool He always had and we didn't, a body. Eve saw this physical death coming, and made her choice anyway, because she wanted the knowledge of good and evil that would help her become like God, knowledge that comes only with some good long years of laughing and living and hurting and dying.

Second, our struggles to learn, our trials and errors and misunderstandings and pride, have left our spirits scarred and seared and stained. We have lost our innocence here and we have become, to one degree or another, friends or prisoners of the Anti-God, Satan. Eve might have seen this spiritual death coming, too, and made her choice anyway.

With the stage set for the great wrestle with the earth, with desire, with death, and with the Adversary, God showed our first parents the Way out at the end of it all, not the way back to where they'd been, walking parallel with Him but never on His plane—He showed them the Way out to where He is, to where only those who are like Him can go, where only those who are like Him would even want to be.

The Way out is a Person, God's Son Jesus. He came into this broken-rule world and never allowed His spirit to get scarred, seared, or stained. And because the father of His body was God, Jesus had the power to raise His own body up from the dust—and, having done that, to raise ours, as well. He offered, before the earth was made, to absorb and suffer all the sorrows, sickness, and pain that arise from all our errors and foolishness, man by man and woman by woman and child by child, so that He would have the knowledge to judge us and the authority to forgive us. (Because the mother of His body was an earthling girl, getting this knowledge and

authority hurt Him immeasurably.) But His forgiveness heals and cleans us and, with our sacrifice of self and proven desire for God's quality of joy, finally clears the way for us to be "at one" with our Father.

The idea is not to get back to the Garden, or try to hop from there to Heaven, but to fall from it into the trying and dying world and then be lifted from there above all gardens and earths to live in the light of God, now knowing a little of what He knows and having lived, with those we love, at least a pale copy of what He lives.

Everything I believe is based on the beautiful idea that God loves us enough to want us to have all the happiness, power, and opportunity He enjoys. It's the keystone of my testimony, without which all the weighty theological blocks cave in on themselves. It's the purpose behind our descent into this hostile and hazardous universe, and only faith in Christ justifies the vastly presumptuous risk.

RESTORATION

(I gave this talk to the men in church 30 January 2005.)

I think the Restoration of the Gospel is both bigger and smaller than we usually see it. We talk about how great movements in the world like the Protestant Reformation, the discovery of America, and the establishment of the United States are all part of the Restoration, all preceding Joseph's vision in the grove. But what about significant developments in the world after the grove?

There's a family history software company that's had the vision to use as its theme "It's what computers were invented for." They were using that line even before the appearance of the Internet. Now LDS.org or Meridian Magazine or the Family History Department or, perhaps very soon, the Missionary Department, can say the same thing, with some reasonable authority: "It's what the Internet was invented for."

I happen to think that spreading and celebrating the Restoration of the Gospel is what the modern musical theatre was invented for. I can even stretch that idea to say that it's what the C.F. Martin Guitar Company was invented for.

By the gift of heaven, man makes tools. Often man doesn't know what the tools are for. He just starts pounding or sawing or typing or strumming away at whatever projects ignite his passions. But God knows what the tools are for.

If, in the centuries preceding Joseph's prayer in the grove, we might have found merely a hammer or tongs or maybe a compass or a set of simple scales in some metropolitan marketplace, now we virtually live in a vast combination Home Depot, Ultimate Electronics, and Musician's Friend.

Is it too much to imagine that all this invention is a consequence of the Spirit of the Restoration moving in the earth? We freely acknowledge that the otherwise inexplicable passion for family history in the world is a consequence of the Spirit of Elijah moving in the earth.

The stone may have been cut from the mountain without hands, but its inexorable progress and expansion across the globe is lubricated and accelerated by tools that weren't here before Joseph prayed.

Another thing that wasn't here before Joseph prayed is between 60 and 70 percent of the total population of the earth from the beginning of time. That's the proportion of father's children who are said to have come to earth during this latter-day Dispensation of the Fulness of Times (nothing very arbitrary about the timing of the Restoration).

If we allow that the light given to humans to empower the development of technology might be part of the Restoration, what about the light given to humans to empower the development of compassion, reason, courage, beauty, and charity. Just as we honor and respect the reformers, the framers of the constitution, and the inspired inventors, so many of whom were not Latter-day Saints, and insist that the Lord has used them to advance the Restoration of His Gospel, ought we not to honor and respect those nurturers of compassion, reason, courage, beauty, and charity who are also advancing the essence of the Savior's gospel, be they Latter-day Saints or not, and celebrate the notion that the Lord is using them? It's certainly not their fault if they don't know their work is part of the Restoration.

But I suggested that the Restoration is smaller than we usually think it is, as well. To understand this, we need to think of Apostasy and Restoration as principles and personal patterns rather than merely as history.

I used to imagine that the Apostasy occurred because the Savior's original apostles were killed and their message corrupted, and that it took at least a couple of centuries to happen. But I remember Elder Neal A. Maxwell suggesting that the Apostasy occurred not because the apostles were taken, but that the apostles were taken because the apostasy had already occurred.

We usually think of "apostasy" meaning that the priesthood has been withdrawn. But this withdrawal of priesthood can be very personal.

D&C 121

41 No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned...

37 That (the powers of the priesthood) may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

Didn't the Apostasy of old have these precise causes?

Well, anyone who has ever repented will know that restoration can be just as personal, certainly as intimate, if not always as spectacular, as was Joseph's experience in the grove, where he did battle with the Prince of Darkness, held conversation with the Creator of the Universe, and heard the Father of Light speak his name. And how ought we to feel about the Restoration, big or small, universal or personal? This is part of how Joseph Smith felt, as shared in a letter to the saints.

D&C 128

19 Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring glad tidings of good things, and that say unto Zion: Behold, thy God reigneth! As the dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon them!

20 And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book! The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna

river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times!

21 And again, the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times, and in divers places through all the travels and tribulations of this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! And the voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope!

22 Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! 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.

23 Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy! And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever! And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms, principalities, and powers!

25 Brethren, I have many things to say to you on the subject; but shall now close for the present, and continue the subject another time. I am, as ever, your humble servant and never deviating friend,
JOSEPH SMITH.

The more we know about the nature of and reasons for apostasy, and the nature of and reasons for restoration, the more we understand this pattern, the better equipped we will be to live.

FIRM, STEADFAST, AND IMMOVABLE

[A talk I gave to the men in church 25 January 2004]

3 Nephi 6:14 "...the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord."

Being firm, steadfast, and immovable suggests to me resistance to some force that would move me. In the sixth chapter of Third Nephi, there are listed a few very specific things to resist. They are pride, disputings, railing against railing, seeking for power and authority, and distinguishing by ranks based on income and education. If we don't resist these things specifically, the church may be broken up. Not only may the church be broken up, but wards, primary classes, families, and friends may be broken up, and all still attend the same sacrament meetings and sing the same hymns together. And they would look, to the careless observer, entirely un-broken up.

The Lamanites in our theme text were united with each other and with the Lord because they were immovable against the forces of pride, persecution, class division, and railings. This kind of firmness is only any good if we are absolutely, constantly, fluidly movable to the will of the Lord. As king Benjamin might have said of these Lamanites, they became "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."

The Savior said that no one who has not become as a little child can enter into His kingdom.

If being Firm, Steadfast, and Immovable, a very masculine and grown-up posture, seems in disharmony with the image of a child, or a sheep, or of baby chicks running single-mindedly and wholeheartedly to the shelter of their mother's wings (all of them ways the Lord has said he wants us to be) this metaphor may be useful.

Imagine a tower of stone, firm, steadfast, and immovable, with winds and hail beating against it and thunder raging around it. Inside, where embers glow in the hearth and candles flame unwavering in the stillness, a little child is kneeling by his mother's knee while she whispers to him words that, when he prays them softly, will reach the listening ear of his Father in Heaven. The tower is you. The child inside is you. The mother may be the Holy Ghost, whose whispers will be heard, unaffected by the storm outside.

Sometimes the firmness precedes the gentleness, and prepares us for it. Those who so tightly grasp the Iron Rod as they struggle toward the Tree of Life, resisting steadfastly the jeers from the rich and popular, the enticements to relax, let go, and hide their sins in the mist, clinging always to keep themselves from slipping backward on the rising path, finally release the rod and wrap their fingers instead around the white fruit. In this picture, there's no fruit on the path, and no rod at the tree.

I looked into the Ensign magazine for examples of firmness and steadfastness, and my eyes fell immediately on the picture of the young woman standing in front of the movie theatre with her friends and saying, "Can we see a different movie instead?" She was standing firmly, immovably, against the hail and wind of uncleanness.

But what is "unclean"? Well, that movie, I guess. And certainly the pornography that was resisted by young men in the same article. We are taught to resist unclean speech, unclean humor, unclean actions.

The Lord told Aaron "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations... that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean." It feels here like "clean" means "holy" and "unclean" simply means "unholy."

Paul said, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1) Alma directly asked, "How will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you?" (Alma 5:22) And any number of prophetic voices warn that no unclean thing can enter into the Lord's presence. Who can be that clean?

There's a verse in Isaiah that I've known and loved since I was a missionary, but only the other day did I pay any real attention to what preceded it, the part that reveals who the Lord was talking to. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats...

"Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies... my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

"And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

"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." (Isa. 1:10-18)

The rulers of Sodom, and the people of Gomorrah. This cleanliness is required even of them, and available to them. All the chicks are invited to run to the safety of wings, all the children are welcome to wash in the river of Christ's love. Not all do.

Nephi taught "that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." (2 Ne. 25:23) I imagine that "all we can do" might include standing firm, steadfast, and immovable against enticements, business opportunities, internet convenience, the crushing torrent of public opinion, and even social coercion to violate the commands of God and become (or remain) unholy, which is unclean.

King Benjamin says, "I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them." (Mos. 4:29) Although he valiantly tried. Balancing that, though, consider the words of Jesus, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40)

Three chapters later he says even more simply, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren" [fed them, befriended them, clothed them, or visited them] "ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40) And suddenly one attitude, one set of actions, satisfies both commandments, and, in a sense, all of the commandments, for without these charitable and gentle attitudes and actions, the most steadfast keeping of all the other commandments is like "sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal," just a lot of noise that profits us nothing. (1 Cor. 13)

Our theme exhorts us to stand firm, steadfast, and immovable against pride, power-seeking, and either material or spiritual snobbery specifically. But may we also stand firm, steadfast, and immovable against the filthiness of apathy toward our brethren and their families, resist with masculine strength the uncleanness of being ungentle with our wives and children, and may the grace of the Redeemer cleanse from our garments the blood that testifies of our violence (in word, deed, thought, or inexpressible feeling) against the innocent stranger, and against the guilty stranger—against the innocent neighbor, brother, child, parent, or companion, and against the guilty neighbor, brother, child, parent, or companion.

I love my church. I love my ward. I love my quorum. I love my family. I would share in our Savior's sorrow if any of them were to be "broken up."

I'M NOT A "NON-YOU."

[This is a presentation for a stake conference session on 12 December of 2002. My wife and I were asked to speak together, and since we're both actors, we wrote ourselves a script.]

LAURIE

We've been asked to talk about working toward unity in the community of a marriage by trying to understand differences between spouses and showing respect for those differences.

MARVIN

We're not going to talk much about what the differences are. If you don't know what the differences are, wait until the next time you feel like saying to your spouse, "That's the most ridiculous idea I've ever heard."

LAURIE

Chances are, you will be face-to-face with one of those differences, and ought to consider saying something else instead.

MARVIN

There are obviously some differences that a spouse will never be able fully to understand.

LAURIE

In such cases, the appropriate response is to respect the difference, which one can do without entirely understanding...

MARVIN

...remembering that respecting a person's point of view or way of living is simply a very real way of respecting that person.

LAURIE

But though some differences deserve respect, even without understanding, other differences demand a whole-hearted attempt at understanding, beginning with respect.

MARVIN

Sheri Dew, in October conference, said that Satan...

LAURIE

"would have us believe men and women are so alike that our unique gifts are not necessary, or so different we can never hope to understand each other. Neither is true. Our Father knew exactly what He was doing when He created us. He made us enough alike to love each other, but enough different that we would need to unite our strengths and stewardships to create a whole. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. No marriage...is likely to reach its full potential until...men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths."

MARVIN

Again, we're not here tonight so much to explore what these different strengths are, as to suggest how to feel about them.

LAURIE

If you suddenly find yourself watching your spouse do something a lot better than you could do it, you're probably face-to-face with one of them.

MARVIN

Some broad guidance comes from "The Family: A Proclamation To The World."

LAURIE

"By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners."

MARVIN

A child might say, "If I'm the dad, I'm in charge of getting money to buy food and clothes and a place for us to live. And I need to try to keep us safe from harmful things and unkind people."

LAURIE

"If I'm the mom, I'm in charge of teaching and feeding our children, and helping them to know that we love them. But we should help each other in all these things, because we're both just as important in our family. Sometimes if one of us gets sick or dies, we have to change those jobs around. Our grandmas and grandpas and aunts and uncles and cousins should help us, if we need it."

MARVIN

Nephi said, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men..."

LAURIE

Or women.

MARVIN

"...save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."

LAURIE

That "way" the Lord prepares in each of us, consisting largely of talents and desires and modes of thinking, is what makes the real difference between men and women.

MARVIN

How foolish we are, or at the very least, irreverent, when we bellow and fume about some way of seeing or way of feeling that is different from our way of seeing or way of feeling, when those "ways" were placed within the spiritual genetics of our spouse to enable her,

LAURIE

or him,

MARVIN

to become more like Heavenly Father,

LAURIE

or Heavenly Mother.

MARVIN

Elder Ballard said in October conference that he doesn't want to be thought of as a "non- Catholic" or a "non-Jew."

LAURIE

But isn't my husband really saying, when he's frustrated with my womanhood, that what's bothering him is that I'm a "non-Man"?

MARVIN

And might I continually frustrate her by being, in her mind if not in her words, a "non- Woman"?

LAURIE

Wrong as it may be, we may feel disinclined to show respect for the outlook of someone not of our faith, imagining they would feel differently if they were members of the "true church."

MARVIN

But when we are disinclined to show respect for the outlook of someone not of our sex, is it because we imagine they would feel differently if they were members of the "true sex"?

LAURIE

Of course, the silliest accusation is probably the one most often made.

MARVIN

It's when we say, every day,

LAURIE

in a thousand different ways,

MARVIN

"What's wrong with you is that you are a non-me."

LAURIE

(turning to Marvin)

"Hi, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Laurie. And you?"

MARVIN

"I'm not you."

LAURIE

"Well, that explains a lot. Another 'non-me.'"

MARVIN

Like Elder Ballard, I'm not a "non" anything. I am a lot of things, and the main thing I am in this marriage is a man.

LAURIE

He may not always succeed at the tasks that are expected of the man, but he has inherited from God the talent to succeed, and the desire to succeed. I need to help him to succeed, and that help begins with respect for how he is different from me.

MARVIN

This is directly opposite the spirit of a question I heard earlier this week, "If a man speaks in the forest, and there is no woman there to hear him, will he still be wrong?"

LAURIE

We need to rejoice in our diversity, relish the differences between us, and see every mis-match in perception as a chance to learn about one another. In doing so, we are learning about God. Sheri Dew would say we were learning to be "perfect or complete."

MARVIN

This is from my journal on our wedding day:

"I remember a fresh and fierce desire to know Laurie's mind and heart. [The officiator] told me that if I could see her for the glorious spirit-child she is, I would be amazed, and I felt that the Holy Ghost was reminding me that her beautiful form is animated by a self far older and more beautiful."

LAURIE

We are, of course, far older than we can imagine.

MARVIN

And for that long, we have been men and women. Again, from the proclamation:

LAURIE

"All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."

MARVIN

It's no good asking, with Professor Henry Higgins, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"

LAURIE

Or a man more like a woman. We ought rather to ask, with the psalmist, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? ...for thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands..."

MARVIN

And, with the psalmist, I ought to praise the Lord, for my wife is "fearfully and wonderfully made...and that my soul knoweth right well."

LAURIE

May we take the simplest principles of civility home with us, respecting and learning from and complementing our differences, is our hope in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE!

(I gave this talk at my son Joshua's missionary farewell on 7 June 1997.)

Josh excites me—his power that so clearly comes from the Lord, his mind that so earnestly seizes light. His past excites me, because it's so full of victory and love—his future because the clear destination of his countless daily choices is glory.

I am excited about the myriad things he will learn on his mission, but at this moment I am most excited about something he began learning long ago. He has learned to pay the price to be able to share what's in his heart. And in his heart there throbs a "joyful noise."

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," wrote the Psalmist (100:1-2). And the Prophet Joseph sings "ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy!" (D&C 128:23)

I want to read some history.

30 April 1978

Joshua Jordan Payne was born at sunrise this sabbath day. We held him in our arms and pondered over his name, remembering how each of our other sons had seemingly come with names already given them, and needed only for us to discover them. So we prayed, right there, for a name. "Joshua" came quickly, and when I recalled aloud the stand that the biblical Joshua took, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," I nearly choked on some tears at the beauty of it, and there was no going back. Then we waited, listened, pondered, and "Jordan" came, a place-name that'd never entered our minds. But the power of the metaphor for commitment, conversion, and covenant, and the peace of the word, sealed it up. And so we found out his name.

Joshua is a brilliant spirit, come among us disguised as a baby.

23 October 1982

(Four years old) This morning Eliza is playing the kazoo with great abandon. Joshua was weaned to a kazoo.

12 May 1989

Today in his fifth-grade talent show, Joshua played on guitar a nice classical minuet that he learned by the notes in a couple of days. His progress on the guitar is amazing. He's eleven years old and he can frail on the banjo! I learned when I was about thirty-five.

6 March 1993

Josh played with the High School All-state Jazz Band at BYU this afternoon and brought the house down. I had to stand in line to congratulate him.

22 May 1994

(Fourteen years old) Yesterday Joshua won the Utah Classical Guitar Society competition. Walking home alone from church today he took some time to slide in the irrigation ditch, arriving home soaked from the tie down. He said he wanted a little Huck Finn experience—that's Huck Finn who didn't even play classical guitar.

19 November 1995

(Senior in High School) Watched Josh as the darling of Synthesis, the premier jazz band at BYU, send into ecstasies the audience that was packed to the rafters of the deJong Concert Hall.

27 October 1996

Tonight we filled our home with people we love and ordained Joshua an elder. A salient element in the blessing was the charge to safeguard the quality that makes Joshua most like the Savior, his sensitivity to beauty and the feelings of others.

I wrote a song for Josh when he was pretty young:

Joshie is a good bitty boy, and I'm glad he's a friend of mine.
Joshie is a faceful of joy, down at the end of the little-boy line.
And he was born to play--to make that piano shine.
There's a price to pay, but he doesn't mind.

Joshie is a good bitty boy, and I'm glad he's a friend of mine—
eyes all squinched, tongue sticking out, punching the keys 'til breakfast time.

Josh has for many years practiced music for several hours a day—three to six, sometimes more. In junior high school the time wasted in class trying to guess what the teacher was thinking or listening to his noisy friends finally got to him, and he persuaded his parents to let him go to night school at A.F. High with the juvenile

delinquents so he could do schoolwork at a faster independent pace and have more time to practice. It was his joy to find the treasures within and learn how to share them. That kind of focus and dedication demanded our respect, although legions of experts and even other parents might have thought it very strange of us to allow it. Now he has chosen to answer the call to serve as a missionary. That kind of focus and dedication, that unrelenting drive to make a joyful noise, demands our respect, though all the world might think it strange.

When the people, dwarves, and talking beasts of Narnia stand just inside the gates of Heaven, they look about at the shining trees and glowing fruit, and see in the distance towering beautiful mountains and glistening waterfalls like veils of stars, and they hesitate to go "further in and higher up" because they can't imagine such pleasure would be allowed.

But "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

Finally, and I quote, "We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant... talented and fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God... born to manifest the glory of God within us... in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." —Marianne Williamson

Joshua is not afraid of the light within himself, because he knows its source is in the very person of his Savior, "which light giveth life to all things," to which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

TESTIMONY

(This is a talk I gave in church. I don't remember when, but I'm certain it was in the past.)

We are a "do it yourself" people, which is mostly good. We are self-reliant, accountable, and responsible. An early visitor to the West looked out over the well-cultivated and neatly civilized Salt Lake Valley in the company of Brigham Young. He said something like "My, President Young, it's miraculous what you and the Lord have done with this desert valley!" and Brigham Young said, "You should have seen it when it was just the Lord's." We try to grow our own food, we publish our own scriptures, and we don't pay anybody to preach to us. We even have the idea we could get perfect if we could just manage to get organized. This is mostly good.

But how does a "do it yourselfer" get a testimony? If a testimony of Christ were simply a matter of learning something, we would just read it off a page, close our eyes and try to remember it, look again, close our eyes and say it over to ourselves, and maybe after an hour or two of concentrating, we'd have it. Except for the fact that they can't read, it's what our primary kids do. That seems reasonable and natural. But in 1 Cor. 2:14, "... the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

My sister recently brought me from Hawaii a lovely little seashell lei. If you were to see it, you might want it. How would you get it? Would you imagine yourself having it until all of a sudden it was yours? Would you somehow "work" at having it until suddenly it was around your neck? Of course the only way you could have this thing is if I gave it to you. Because it's mine. If I were wise and kind, and felt that it would bless you to have it, it would please me to give it to you. The key word here is "give." You can neither take, make, nor "build" a testimony. You are given one. If the Lord feels that it would bless you to have one, He'll give you one.

And apparently, it would not be kind of Him to give one, on demand, to everybody. There is an amazing passage in the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 46, verses 13 and 14, which some have found threatening, some have found confusing, and others have found deeply comforting (and of course, some have simply not found).

“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.”

The people who find this threatening are those who think they have a testimony, act like they have one, and think that it would be sinful to pretend to be a Latter-day Saint without having one. The people who find this passage confusing are the "do it yourselfers" who can't imagine why anyone without a testimony wouldn't just "build" one. The people who are deeply comforted by this passage are those who are 19, 29, or 63, who love the work, want with all their hearts to know of its truthfulness, but who cannot honestly say they have a testimony. The comforting part is not that they are "off the hook" and can say "It's the Lord's fault if I don't know." People who would be comforted in that way generally leave the work early, because it's hard to spend a lot of time in an environment where something you don't have is talked about so much, an environment in which everybody seems to have it but you. No, the real comfort comes in the last phrase "... they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.”

Let's read "faithful" the way a lover reads the word. To the lover, there's no question at all that his beloved exists. In that sense, there's really nothing to "believe in." "Faithful" to the lover means remembering the beloved, counting on the beloved, reserving one's intimate affections for the beloved, and above all else, being loyal to the beloved. This is, in fact, the faith the gods have in each other. They have a complete knowledge of each other's existence. But C.S. Lewis points out to us that the gods have much more important things to do than "merely to exist." Yet Joseph Smith, in his "Lectures On Faith" teaches that the gods do everything they do by faith. He must mean this loyalty kind of faith rather than the mere believing kind. Jesus teaches us this meaning of "faith" when He calls the church his bride, and in his heartbreak when the Old Testament saints left Him, their first love, to go "whoring" after other gods. In natural life, the virgin, man or woman, dreaming of the marriage, having been "faithful" to the beloved, is finally invited into the bridechamber and is given direct and intimate knowledge. In spiritual life, Ether said that the righteous are given that which they have first seen "with an eye of faith." But as with the newlywed, the knowledge is better than the vision. Paul said "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

This marriage knowledge is, for everyone, a surprise—never something that can be rehearsed or faked or even fully expected. I think it's interesting that the word so often used in the scriptures for this physical intimacy is "know." Anyway, spiritual knowledge, or testimony, is a little like that.

And the really exciting part is in the next verse. "(Eye hath not seen ...) But God hath revealed [or given] them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

So in the meantime, what can you "do yourself"? You can remain faithful, like a lover. Because, again from Ether, "ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith"—faith that is, like the lover's, really loyalty and longing.

Now let me share a principle from theatre.

Learning and knowing, in the "natural man" way, is very much a part of the acting craft. You look at the page, close your eyes and try to remember, look again, see if you can say the words, and after you do that on long walks through the woods and back with the dog several times, shouting out the lines to the trees and birds, you finally know what the character is supposed to say. But nobody buys a ticket to hear you talk like somebody else. They want to believe you're really that interesting other soul for a couple of hours. They want it

to be real. So you imagine. You exercise the "eye of faith" a great deal to understand your character's situation and relationships. You ask "How would I act if I had his feelings?" You ask "Why does this other guy say the things he does? And why does she keep looking at me that way? And what on earth did the writer expect me to mean by this crazy line?" And when those questions, and many others like them, are answered, a lot of actors march onstage with great confidence. But the audience is still getting "pretend." The audience never gets the real thing until the actor puts aside his pride and self-image and need to impress and looks down inside himself and asks "Do I feel in any part of me what my character feels? How do I call up that feeling, give myself to it, and to that extent really be this character?" On a film set the other day, after a poor take, the director came over to me and whispered, "Don't act. Be." And we got a good take. Someone asked me once, "How do you avoid getting emotionally involved with the people you work with?" I said, "I don't. I just get involved." At the root of effective acting is empathy, and you get the confirmation onstage when people believe in what they're seeing.

A lot of work precedes the empathy and the confirmation, which is a gift. The "do it yourselfer" prepares himself to receive the gift of testimony. It's all the "do it yourselfer" can "do himself"! But the thrilling part is that we can prepare ourselves for the quality of testimony we want. Of course, God can reveal his bare existence to anyone. (You remember that "the devils also believe, and tremble.") But again, He has more to do than merely to exist. There is an infinite universe of sweetness, joy, power, wisdom, and grace that we can begin to know by revelation, line upon line. But here is a very big idea: We can only know His goodness to the extent of our own goodness. The "eternal life" we spoke of earlier, that which will be given also to those who continue "faithful," is defined by the Savior in a passionate prayer to His Father found in John chapter 17, verse 3.

"... this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

As with the actor seeking to know his character, we can only know God by feeling His feelings, suffering His sorrow, enjoying His glory.

From 1 John 3:2: "... 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."

And from Moroni 7:48: "Wherefore my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen."

There are things I feel and suffer and enjoy that my younger children cannot feel, suffer, and enjoy. They will, but not yet. I can wish to impress upon my little son the humbling and exhilarating feeling of becoming a father, but try as he might, or want it as he may, he will never know the feeling until he stands by his wife in the moment of childbearing. He cannot, and this is key, have a testimony of that. Nor can we have a testimony of certain godly feelings until we have felt them. What we "do it yourself" types are to do is try to be good, so that when God chooses to reveal a facet of His grace to us, we will feel and know it, and testify of it, rather than be consumed with confusion or mangled by misunderstanding. To prepare for a testimony of God's forgiveness, we forgive. To prepare for a testimony of God's creative power, we create. To prepare for a testimony of God's love, we love. Even to feel God's mercy we must be good enough to be humble. The king of the Lamanites had it right when he said "I will give away all my sins to know thee."

God wants to give us the gift of testimony. He prefers we leave that privilege to Him, and not try to give ourselves testimonies. But as an American colonial poet said (and I paraphrase), "God's hands are round and smooth, that His blessings may freely fall from them upon us, His children."

I should bear my testimony. It's very broad and deep, and includes every beautiful thing I know or have seen. So here is only a part.

I know I love God. I first knew that I finally had that testimony when I realized that I love everything I know about how He is. I love gentleness, peace, healing, mercy, joy, and love. I've never seen Him, but I see these things mirrored in the lives around me. And He is the source and perfect embodiment of all these things.

I know that Jesus has all power to vanquish darkness utterly in our lives, because the deepest shadows in my life have fled before his light many times.

I know the church is true and love it not only because it's beautiful (you know it's occasionally mediocre), not because it works (you know it often doesn't), not even because it's everlasting (you know that when the Savior comes, this organization will evaporate before His kingship). I love the church because it's us. The church is the body of Christ, different members with different gifts and functions. I love the church because it's the Bride of Christ. He loves us, He courts us, He rescues us from the dragon. I love the church because as David O. McKay said, it's "not a museum for the righteous, but a hospital for sinners."

I love the calm assurances I often feel in the councils of the righteous, but I confess that religion is for me much more a matter of longing and hope than it is a matter of knowing. The most joyful moments are when the veil thins and I feel "stabs of desire" for something infinitely sweeter and better and more beautiful, a beauty beyond my reach. As much as I may love feasting on the words of Christ, it somehow feels more correct and seemly in these days of my everlasting life to hunger and thirst after righteousness and happily trust in the Lord that if I gather at His table with the saints, I will, at His pleasure, be filled.

THREE DAYS

(For Joan Clark Koralewski's memorial service, 24 October 2002. Joan is my wife's mother.)

Here is the doctrinal part. I hope I don't blow it. But this is, for us, a holy time, and I feel the Spirit's supervision and pray for his protection from excess and error. I also feel keenly the trust of Joan's family—that has become my family, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, my wife, my children—and thank them, and her, for this honor. Her husband Dave asked me to talk about Family.

I'll start with some notions of what family means to our Heavenly Father, because I think that's the key to knowing what family means to his daughter Joan.

My clearest view of what family means to the Lord comes in the words of the prophets that recently rang out in "Family, A Proclamation To The World." The ideas are radical, bold, and reverberant. I understand them, point by point, like this:

"The Father of love and light and dreams has given us family, so we can stream all our light, spend all our love, and dream all our dreams for them--tasting for the first time in this awesome walk on earth, the sharp sweet joy our Father in Heaven feels.

"If I am a he, I have always been a he, like my Heavenly Father, who loves me and wants me to be like He is. If I am a she, I have always been a she, like my Heavenly Mother, who loves me and wants me to be like She

is. Before we came to earth, we knew and loved them both.

"We chose our Father's dream and came here to have a body and learn to live and love in families, like He does. We can have his joy if we are bound together by his power, in his house, before his smiling angels, at the altar hallowed by his Son, who promises with his blood that we can be like Him.

"The Father's first blessing to the first man and first woman was to invite them into the joy that is closest to the very meaning of his life, his work, and his glory. He commanded them to love.

"The drive and joy of uniting our bodies with someone we will love forever is meant to spark the beginning of children, our children, and we must share that drive, that joy, only with the one we marry.

"As it is with our Heavenly Parents, our work and glory is to lead our children to health and giving, and loving the laws of light.

"I am father—I will love by finding my family what they need to live, and by protecting them from hurt and evil. Their mother will help me. We are equal.

"I am mother—I will love by feeding and teaching my children. Their father will help me. We are equal.

"We will answer to the Father for how we have cared for his children. He will ask. We will answer.

"Our children deserve to be born to a mother and father who have given their lives to each other in marriage, and keep giving to each other the married love they give to no one else.

"The path to joy follows the footsteps of Jesus through faith and prayer, change and forgiving, love and lifting, and families creating together.

"If I am unfaithful to her (or to him) or use my power or anger or fears as weapons against her (or him) or against my children, or if I turn my love away from them, God will ask me why. When families break apart, we and our world will suffer deep sorrows. A loving God has warned us.

"May the leaders of our lands, the keepers of our nations, know and honor that this world is made of families. Whatever wounds and breaks the family wounds and breaks the world. Whatever lifts and saves the family lifts and saves the world."

Whether or not that world, or any inhabitant thereof, believes this is not the point here. The point is that Joan did. She hung another document on her wall, headed "The Koralewski House," describing it as a "house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God." It was sometimes all of those things and always some of those things. It was Joan's hope that it would always be all of those things, but she wasn't the only one living there. She wanted her family to be full of love and light, and sought that blessing from the Source, backing up her faith with the heroic work of trying to create family unity by driving to the ends of the earth together in a friendly but totally unreliable Volkswagen bus and bonding through the adversity of being stranded in ghettos and rain forests, by hiking every inch of every canyon in Utah together, and by insisting that every act of living be somehow creative, from the organizing of flour into fanciful cookies as well as into head-to-toe adornment for her grandchildren, to her demand that every family gathering feature the blowing of piano-sized soap bubbles or the playing of PVC-pipe didgeridoos. For Joan, green Jell-o was not so much a cultural icon as something to finger-paint with. These phenomena existed or occurred only because she loved her family. Her husband has likened her to a bright balloon tethered to the earth by the slightest thread. I believe her keenest (and most frequent) disappointments were when we failed to hover alongside her in the sunshine, blown-up and shiny and

multicolored. She knew what it was like up there.

I believe there are at least two reasons why God would wish to bless our families with such love and light. One is obvious: family is how we get here and family is who we live with, so why not make family as happy and helpful as it can be? The other is only a little less obvious: God wants us to have images, family images, we can use as keys to understand who He is. In his many examples of prayer, God's Son didn't call Him our Heavenly Coach or our Heavenly President or our Heavenly General. He is our Heavenly Father. For us that's not mere poetry. It's real. Jesus meant what He said. And that same Jesus, Firstborn of our Father, is our Elder Brother, who lived his life, died his death, and lives his life again for the lifting and saving of all of Father's family. That would be us.

His caring for us is relentless and passionate, as was Joan's. The psalmist asked, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me." (Psalm 139: 7-11)

Paul, as well, sang, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nor, according to prophets living and dead, will even our sins interfere with that love, except to dull our senses to its steady sweet flow.

Moving from doctrine to mere observation, I will now take a reckless running leap into Joan's heart. But I leap with confidence, because in the last moment I spent with her, on Saturday afternoon when she was past speech (or above speech), she smiled at me with blazing clarity a peace that could arise from nothing less than this testimony:

"I am not ashamed of who I am.
I am a child of God, child of Heavenly Father's dream,
and I belong to Him, and He knows who I am.

I am not ashamed of how I feel.
I know that love is real--love is really all that lives.
I feel my Savior's love, and He knows how I feel.

I caused the scars He wears forever,
yet He is never ashamed of me.

I am not ashamed to say his name.
His name is Jesus Christ--Jesus, light of all my dreams.
I dream I see his face, and hear Him say my name.

I don't wish to discuss deathbed repentance, with its insinuations of wasted years that are not, for now, relevant. But Joan's children did witness some undeniable deathbed realizations. And I think the story Jesus told is relevant.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and

said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour [which is starting to sound like a pretty long workday to me] he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny." (Matthew 20: 1-10) Just like the laborers who were hired in the first hour.

Accounting for twenty-two centuries of inflation, that would be about a bazillion dollars. And those who join the workforce in the last hour of the day get the same wage. What should that matter to those who have worked there all day? A bazillion dollars is more than any of us can ever spend. Father has promised us everything He has. We can never spend it all.

How long does it take to qualify for membership in that workforce so we can claim that wage? Does it take [Joan's] sixty-three years of abject selflessness? It took Alma the Younger an instant, the instant in which, flat on his back in the middle of the road after his thunderous and chastening encounter with an angel, he seized upon the memory of his father speaking of a Redeemer. Grasping that notion, which, happily, is true, changed him utterly. And what diligent and arduous service did he perform in order to fill himself with a joy that he called "exquisite and sweet"? None at all. His heart was transformed from feeling that, in his words, "the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror" to envisioning, again in his words, "God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels...and my soul did long to be there." The entire transformation occurred while he was flat on his back, where he thereafter remained for three days. How many neighbor's driveways did he shovel free of snow during those days in order to feel peace? None. He expressly couldn't move his hands. How many resounding sermons did he preach to the darkened and downtrodden? None. He couldn't speak a word.

Not unlike my mother-in-law, during the time we saw her transformed. Of course, she had already shoveled the countless driveways and spoken the uncounted words of testimony and encouragement, and had known great joy in seeing the blessing of others. But not so much joy, not so much peace, I would guess not even the same quality of joy and peace, as we saw, at times, in the last three days of her stay here among us.

Three days—an encore of Alma. Joan was not like Alma, a delinquent out to destroy the church of God. That's not what makes me connect the two stories. It's the days, three days—it even reminds me of another three days, during which the Lord of Life dove beneath all things and then resurfaced, splashed with glory. Friday through Sunday. I wonder what Joan's last Friday through Sunday would look like from the other side of the veil. (Or maybe her dive was a full sixty-three years deep, a few fleeting seconds against the eternity of her splashing emergence.)

So many souls in this room have learned valuable and durable lessons from Joan, but only a handful has, until now, had the opportunity to learn the most valuable, the most durable, the truest lesson she taught—that it's never too late to lay your burdens at the Savior's feet and bear a song away. That's what she bears now. We can hear the echo.

Most of us are here to celebrate a life, a beautiful life that hundreds, if not thousands, gratefully felt and find well worth celebrating. But some of us are here to celebrate that beautiful life plus three days, and to grasp here, together, for a breath of hope that we may each have our own three days, flat on our backs and capable of nothing but receiving Grace, and thereby be, as was tiny Joan, so hugely enlarged that we may hold the unspeakable glories to come. And we hope it by faith in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

THE POWER TO HOME TEACH

(This is a talk I gave in church sometime in 2001.)

When we were asked if the elders quorum presidency would speak today, the first topic that popped into our heads was Home Teaching. We thought for just a minute and then kicked it out of our heads, because it seemed like something we ought to talk to just the brethren about. And we prepared for a week to talk about something else. Then we met on the back lawn last Sunday evening and the Spirit calmly corrected us and reminded us that He was the one who had popped home teaching into our heads in the first place. Because every soul here today is involved in home teaching. Every girl and boy and mom and dad has a home teacher, and everyone here deserves to know what the Lord has asked your home teacher to do for you, and everyone here deserves to know just how the Lord intends to go about making your home teacher into someone who will amaze, delight, and bless your life.

I once saw a cartoon drawn by Calvin Grondahl in which a man in a suit is gazing down into a baby carriage, talking to a baby that can't be seen. He asks something like, "Oh little child, so fresh from Heavenly Father's presence, what message would you have for us if only you could speak?" Then in the next drawing, the unseen baby shouts up out of the carriage, "Have you done your home teaching?!"

Many years ago, I went to a session of general conference and the bishop's father-in-law (Elder Grant Bangerter) asked who had done their home teaching that month and asked for a raise of hands. Then he said, "The devil taught us to ask that question." Because a monthly visit doesn't mean our home teaching is "done." There's more to it than a monthly visit.

The simple command to home teach is found in Doctrine and Covenants, section 20, verses 47, 53 and 54.

"Visit the house of each member, and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties. ...Watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them; and see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking."

Alma tells us more of what is expected of home teachers, as he speaks to new converts in Mosiah 18:8-9.

"...Bear one another's burdens, that they may be light...mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort."

So the Lord gives the command clearly and simply, with full faith that we can and will keep it. As you can see, there's a little more to it than a monthly "How are ya? If there's anything we can do, let us know." We home teachers are to use our priesthood, somehow, to bless our families in deep, measurable, and lasting ways. To make good on this assignment requires a lot of help from the Lord. This is how Nephi, as recorded in 1 Nephi 3:7, responded to what many would consider a much stiffer assignment, the assignment to get the brass plates from a stubborn powerful guy who didn't want to cooperate, and who, it seems, had a personal army to help him be uncooperative:

"I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."

What is the "way" that the Lord will prepare for us—the tool, like Laban's sword, without which we can never succeed as home teachers? Joseph Smith describes this very sharp and specific tool in his powerful letter which is now D&C section 121. He wrote in verse 41:

"No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned."

What is "love unfeigned"? What is "love un-faked"? Any love that is true and lasting, lifting and empowering, comes only from Christ, by whose love and faithfulness the universe was made and is right now held in motion. Mormon lived in a time of horrifying hatred and cruelty, but Mormon was a friend of God, and so he knew what that limitless love felt like and where (or rather, Who) it comes from. Mormon loved people who were nearly impossible to love, because he felt for them some of the love their Heavenly Father and their sorrowing Savior felt for them. And of course Mormon loved his son, Moroni, and wrote him a letter about this "love unfeigned." A portion of that letter is preserved for us in Moroni 7:47-48.

"Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. Wherefore ...pray with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen."

In another loving letter, this one written by Paul to the Corinthians, there is a list of heroic deeds and bright achievements that will have, when the dust settles, about as little value as loveless home teaching. From 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

I want to testify to you that the Lord will make good on His promise to "prepare a way" for us to "accomplish the thing which he" has commanded us to do. He will give us this gift of charity, without which we will surely fail, making routine, hollow, obnoxious visits that add up on some great list of numbers in some great granite vault, but that have no power to lift and save and comfort. I can bear this testimony because it has happened to me.

More times than I can count, I have been called to serve people who, before the call, were strangers to me. After the call, I have immediately felt something for them that wasn't there before. It's a feeling I couldn't have created, and a feeling I often think I am ill-shaped to contain. But it's real. In our presidency meetings, I've found myself praying for and caring about people whose faces I have not, even yet, seen. If it stays that way, warns James the brother of Jesus, if I never get around to feeding and clothing and lifting them instead of just praying about them, I will have betrayed the grace that the Lord has placed in my heart, and He will withdraw it. But that gift is a place to begin, and will drive whatever service is yet to happen.

Randy Beck and I sat down a couple of weeks ago with our two new families. I only sort of knew them. Of the eleven souls, I had had a real conversation with only one of them. I previously knew the names of four of them. Five of them I would not have known if I'd been shown a photograph of them. But suddenly I loved them. (It helped that they were welcoming and expectant.) I felt a warmth in their homes that went to my heart. Randy and I made promises to them. We promised that we'd be there for them. We asked them for their trust, and promised them we'd try to earn it. We feel confident that we can succeed, because we know that the Lord, Whom we represent, loves them infinitely, and He will use us to bless them if we make ourselves available to Him, and continue to accept the stream of charity He has already turned on.

When I was tiny, we had a great big television with a little tiny black-and-white screen on which I would faithfully watch "Beanie and Cecil the Seasick Sea-Serpent" every afternoon. My family's home teacher (ward

teacher, in those days) dropped in one day during that hour and could not possibly have avoided noticing how upset I was to leave Beanie and Cecil. He told me he would never come again at that precise time of day, and from then on, he had my trust. Perhaps because of that example of simple charity, I'm more likely to notice when young Dallin Mulliner bears a beautiful testimony in church. I haven't told him until now, but Dallin, it was great. Here's a kid who already knows everything I'm telling you, because he knows how to talk to the Lord. Randy and I have heard him.

Well, the Lord has commanded us to home teach, and to be home taught. And, knowing that we could do neither in ways that would bless, lift, and delight if left to our own strengths, He has promised to give us his strength, his greatest strength, the very love that pulses in his great heart. With that love, how can we fail to lift? How can we fail to show up? How can we fail to feel together the joy of living in Zion?

I pray that we will lift, that we will show up, that we will feel the joy, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

LEARNING SELF-CONTROL

(A talk I gave in church in April, 1996.)

Self-control doesn't sound like much fun. The world has conditioned us to feel negative connotations when we hear words like "self-control." The word "righteousness," for example, feels solemn and sour sometimes, even to us, whereas "mischief" (another word for "wickedness") actually feels fun, on a certain level. But because we all know all the time (on a certain level) that self-control and righteousness are good, it's easy to see that the Adversary is trying to plant in us the suggestion that things that are good are unpleasant. And it's working. Haven't most of us heard an outwardly righteous person reporting that some sinner has "gotten away with it"? You will only find that veiled jealousy in people who haven't yet noticed that righteousness is a great deal of fun. It makes us very happy.

And self-control can be fun, if it's part of righteousness. Not all self-control is part of righteousness. G. Gordon Liddy is an unusual man who needs friends very badly. Once he held his hand over a candle until the flesh burned, to demonstrate his self-control. Not an activity designed to produce much joy. And of course it didn't enhance the appeal of self-control for any of us.

Let's look for more pleasant-sounding words.

In my thesaurus, there was only one word listed as a close synonym for "self-control": discipline. "Discipline" comes directly from "disciple." In my dictionary, the first several definitions of "disciple" have to do with following Christ, and in the little note at the end that sketches where the word came from, it says that its ancient root meaning is "to take from," or, in other words, "to learn."

Well, learning is fun! It enhances enjoyment and understanding. My son Sam had a professor at Weber State who said that the best thing about getting an education is that you'll understand so many more jokes. Seriously, I would ask, can a child feel the joy of parenthood? Or the heartbreaking hope in tragedy? Or the thrilling stream of repentance, of spiritual drink after drought? I think, when we are converted, we can go back and feel some of the joys of childhood, but children can't leap ahead to the joys of adulthood. There's simply too much learning in between. Our assignment today is specifically "Learning Self-control."

I think it was wise of the bishopric not to ask for "Having Self-control" or "Deciding to Use Self-control." Because self-control has to be learned, not just decided. We've all heard the very good advice to decide in

advance what our answer will be when faced with a crisis of temptation. But that's about as useful as merely deciding in advance, without practicing, that we're going to win the race when we're finally at the real starting block surrounded by excellent athletes and journalists, or that we're going to play our instrument beautifully when we're finally on stage and the house lights go down and the audience hushes and expects to be transformed. Having decided is good, having practiced is better. Moments in which our self-control may save our souls are moments when we are filled with anger or lust or self-righteous fury, and if we haven't learned and practiced and previously succeeded with self-control, we're likely to go down in flames.

I asked my daughter Eliza, who has more self-control and self-discipline than nearly anyone I know, if she had any ideas about learning self-control. I felt plenty humble enough to ask, since she had just called me up to go jogging with her and I haven't had the self-control to jog for the last several years. Out under the cold stars she said, without even having to think, "Well, it all starts with goals. You set goals and keep them."

But I'm embarrassed to admit that, for me, "goals" is another of those joy-killing words. I see myself as bad at goals. Maybe because a "goal" feels to me like something outside myself, like a set of posts at the far end of a field with lots of large and mean guys in between me and it. But I'm good at "dreams"! Maybe because a "dream," no matter how far away, feels like something that's coming from inside me, and even if there were dragons in the way, I'd want to get there. So please forgive me if I mix up these two words.

If we have a long-term dream that we strongly believe in, it will shape our actions to some extent in moment-to-moment living. The kid who has a goal of becoming an Olympic long-distance runner just might be more likely to refuse a cigarette from his friends after school when they're in the fifth grade. But I recommend the daily pursuit of short-term goals as the most effective way to learn self-control. Start by choosing some righteous goals that are likely to bring you quick joy. I once had a bishop here in Alpine who advised me that the first step toward escaping my financial demons was to go for the "fast paycheck," however small it was. Not only would that fast paycheck buy bread and jam you could actually eat, but it would teach you what success feels like. Our days are filled with opportunities for the "fast paycheck." What if our goals were to make Mom's next few minutes easier? To bring a smile to little sister's face in the next five minutes? To give Dad the gift of quiet until he wakes up? And yet the choices we make to reach these simple goals teach us self-control quickly and joyfully.

These short-term goals remind me of the story in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit down upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The fascinating discovery about these people is that they reached their long-term goal without even seeming to have one! Their refrigerator doors were blank! And yet their short-term goals, to bring relief to the suffering, joy to the sorrowful, mere company to the lonely, were so purely Godlike that they were drawn straight to the shining home of God, and were surprised when they got there!

Well, when we're talking about being like God, we've begun talking about pretty long-term goals.

I think it was Confucius who said that the foundation of all virtues is Humility. How is humility at the foundation of self-control? I think we would be empowered to amazing heights of self-control if we were to see, for just a moment, the beauty and potential for godliness that lies within each of us. And that's all humility is: seeing things as they really are. The most breathtaking (and life-saving) revelations I have received in my life have not been full of specific information and instructions, but are those mountaintop moments when the Lord has simply said, "I am here. Feel who I am, and taste a little of how I feel about you, my son. Look at the singing beauty around you. I made it, and I sustain it. And it's all for you and those you love." Which, in a moment like that, embraces everyone. When I manage to recall and relive those flashes of seeing things as they really are, there's no way I can go about pretending to be bigger than I am. And there's no way I can pretend to be smaller, either. I know in those moments that I am a child of God and that He wants me to grow up, and be like Him. This is a very long-term goal, but that vision must affect every choice I make in some way, strengthening my self-control to choose, in tiny ways and huge ways, happy over sad, kind over cruel, the god in me over the animal in me. And it suddenly seems ridiculous to see God's guiding commandments as harsh or restrictive. Suddenly I understand what David, a "man after (the Lord's) own heart," said. "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The world will always be confused by that image.

Let me tell you about my son Josh. He plays the guitar. In roughly the same sense that the Pope is Catholic. The University of Utah offered him starting quarterback pay to attend their school. He turned it down because he doesn't like the music building. He practices about four hours a day during the school year and can hardly wait until summer, when he can get serious about practicing. For awhile in junior high school he convinced his mother and me that sitting around in classrooms listening to other students' wrong answers was cutting unreasonably into his practice time, so he dropped out of day school and took individual study at night at the high school with the juvenile delinquents.

How hard is it to exercise self-control when you love what you're doing? Here is a good example of the difference between practicing because you have clear goals born of love or you practice because it's hard so it must be good for you. We once lived in a ward in West Provo, out by the lake. One evening we gathered in the gym for a cultural arts night, and a very nice piano lady accompanied her son, who was playing a trumpet solo. Rather than buying two copies of the music, he looked over her shoulder and played the notes that were written for the trumpet on her copy. Some of you may know that the trumpet is what they call a B-flat instrument, which means that on trumpet music the note that lives in the "C" space, for the piano and the rest of the world, is really a B-flat. So they played the entire piece exactly one whole step apart from each other. If you're not musical enough to understand the seriousness of what I'm saying, get someone in your family to demonstrate. I would demonstrate, but it's not the kind of experience we should be having in sacrament meeting. I'm sure the time spent practicing was good for the son's character, but it was devoted to something that no one could ever love. No one, apparently, except a mother.

In acting, it has been common to talk about "motivation." An actor would always ask the director about what was motivating his character to do certain things or say certain things. "What's my motivation?" Now we talk more about "objectives." Imagine a guy running through a large room with an angry bear several yards behind him. Several yards ahead of him is a close-able door. According to the "motivation" school, the guy is running because of the bear. According to the "objectives" school, the guy is running because of the door. I like the "objectives" way of thinking, maybe because life looking over my shoulder at the bear is simply not as appealing as life looking forward to the bright door into deliverance and safety and joy (even if there is a bear behind me). What's really behind me is the fear of Hell. What's really ahead of me is the hope of Heaven. Do I look forward or back?

I said something earlier about jogging with Eliza. In 1978 I was reluctantly convinced by a friend that running a few miles every week would be good for me. So I bought some running shoes that looked really space-age and cost twenty dollars and began running the distance between two phone poles, checking my heart-rate, running to the next pole, checking again, walking to the next pole, checking, running again, then walking some more, then driving to the mall and buying first aid supplies and real running shoes. After awhile,

to keep my heart-rate up in a good training range, I found myself running two or three miles without stopping. Then it jumped to five miles and stayed there for the next twelve years. And somewhere in those years came the mighty change in my thinking that is central to this talk: When I first started, it took a lot of self-control just to walk out the front door and I only wanted to run in order to lose weight and get in shape more. But then an unexpected and amazing thing happened. I got to the point where it all turned backwards (or maybe finally turned forwards). Now I wanted to lose weight and get in shape so I could run better! I had learned to love running. (I still have the love. I just don't have the joints.)

Knowing how that particular change of heart felt, it's easy for me to imagine gritting my teeth and exercising a lot of self-control to choose serving the Lord because somebody said it would make me better at righteousness, and then waking up one morning and finding that what I really want very much is to be more righteous so I can be better at serving the Lord! Having first learned self-control, we can learn to love serving the Lord (home teaching, showing up at ward choir), just as I learned to love running. And just as I felt cheated when the weather kept me from running, we will feel cheated if opportunities to praise the Lord and serve Him somehow slip by us. And we'll be running for the door, instead of running from the bear.

I pray that we all may rush to learn self-control, so that we may live out our lives not so much flailed by fear as drawn by dreams. For all our real dreams will come true. This I believe with all my heart. God simply asks, "What do you want?" We answer that question with our lives. And if we spend our lives learning self-control only to build the strength to abandon it finally and utterly by saying "not as I will, but as thou wilt," the Lord will relieve us of the need for "self-control as we know it," for we will "have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually," and we will see what "Eye hath not seen" and we will hear what "ear hath not heard" and we will feel what has never "entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." I testify to the truth of that bright promise in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

LONELINESS

(This is a short thought I shared in church a few years ago. Or maybe a long thought I shared shortly.)

In the church film "Together Forever" a young man points out that to be accepted by the drinkers, all you have to do is drink. To be accepted by those who abuse drugs, all you have to do is abuse drugs. To join people in a sin creates a kind of bond that, as a counterfeit of real friendship, fools a lot of people. But at least the appearance of acceptance is undeniable.

Is it that simple to be accepted by the saints? Is there one particular virtue that will create the kind of immediate bond that sin pretends to create?

Many among us suffer from the sin of loneliness--not that to be lonely is a sin, but that to make another lonely is a sin. What riches we withhold by simply saving our smiles, keeping our hands in our pockets, hoarding up simple words of greeting, praise, admiration and thanks!

The Savior's passionate prayer before Calvary was that the Father would make us one, even as He and the Father are one. And in another place he taught us that the world would know that we are His if we have love for one another. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." It's a virtue and a mercy to look into the faces of brothers and sisters and feel their goodness and value. But it's the virtue of a song that isn't yet sung, a meal that isn't yet eaten. Let's tell each other. Let's "count the ways." Let's catch the grace the Lord sends us in the smiles and kindness of our friends. Let's be cleansed by the grace He would

send to others through ourselves. Let's begin to feel the unity alongside which the kinship of sin is exposed for the bondage it is, and enjoy a "family of faith" in which loneliness becomes a mildly embarrassing memory.

A SACRAMENT TALK

(This is a talk I gave in church a few years ago. The sacrament is a piece of Easter we can touch each Sabbath.)

Imagine you are lost on a rolling rutted desert fanning out from the feet of bare rocky mountains. Hours ago, long before daylight, you set out with friends and family for a lake lying somewhere along that distant hazy range. At first you were cold and hoping for the sun—you hiked faster than you should have, just to get warm. Then it rose, glorious, and soon you tied your sweatshirt around your waist. Then you took off your hat, because your head was sweating so much. Then you put it back on, because the sun beat on your head and hurt your eyes.

The first time you looked at your watch, imagining it to be lunchtime, it read ten o'clock. Finally you stopped. No shade, but the food was goo—mostly candy bars and chips. Funny how thirsty it made you. But there were still many hours between you and your lakeside campsite, so you drank only a swallow of water from your canteen. Your neck began to prickle with sunburn.

About mid-afternoon you faced a steep swell that blocked your view of the distant mountains. The spidery trail wound ahead toward its summit, but your legs had begun to feel heavy. Off to the left a ravine cut into the swell and bent rightward, promising to be an easy shortcut, enticing. The others wanted to stick with the rising trail, but you gave them your canteen and with new energy struck off into the ravine, confident you would meet them on the other side of the ridge. The first turn was rightward, as you had seen, toward the others. But the next was left, and then a sharp right with a long curve left again, long enough that you couldn't tell if you had hiked merely a soft half-moon or nearly a full circle. Then it rose in a long straight line, but steep and rocky. When you emerged on the higher open ground, you saw mountains not ahead of you, but far off to the right, and no trace of trail, or sight of your companions. After the first fear, you began to plan and reached absently for your canteen. Not there. And suddenly a new fear, the worst fear. You struck out at a desperate pace for those impossibly distant mountains. And gradually every feeling was swallowed up in thirst, every idea was shouted down by thirst, every desire was second to wanting water.

The sun began to slant across the sand, then to sink, and you imagined that the dark and cool would ease the thirst. You realized with a nasty start that you would have to sleep out there, alone. Well, maybe sleep would somehow erase thirst. But the evening was long and empty, the night cold and the wind steady and dry, the sand comfortless. Suddenly you woke, stiff in the hot sun, surprised that you had finally fallen to sleep. There was sand in your hair and sand in your shoes, and you imagined fine sand under your eyelids.

Now it's full afternoon, and this day has played tricks on your mind. Its sameness has made it seem at one moment like mere minutes; at another, like years. One foot in front of the other, hour after hour, and the only water is the heavy sweat that runs in salt streams beneath your clothes. Blisters have broken and new blisters grown. More useless water.

But the mountains at last seem larger, and the country around you begins to blend with them, until there are now squat junipers where there were only clumps of sage. You know that somewhere along this range is the lake, and your companions, and water. You know it has to be to the right, so you drag yourself over many flanks of the mountain. It's tortuous travel, because you've wandered further in and higher up than you had

thought. Your reason is about to surrender to the hopelessness of thirst when you hear the sweetest song imaginable, the rippling whisper of water. In the rocky furrow over the next rise is a laughing clear stream. You drink and drink and laugh, and pray your thanks and drink some more. Though your head pounds with the cold, your eyes clear, and downstream you see that the trickle pours into a lake. You scramble down the draw and lose your shoes on the way, then fall like a tree into the smooth cool water, closing around you and easing all your hurts.

And then you hear shouts, because this is your lake, and your relieved companions, camped on the shore, see you and come waist-deep in the water to help you to safety, and rest. Someone hands you a stick of fry-bread, lightly toasted, fresh from the fire, warm and richer than any fabled feast.

You are renewed. You are alive. You are grateful and committed not to stray. Ever again. Remember this story for another few minutes.

Imagine now living in a heavenly family before you came here, before there was even an earth to come to, or deserts to get lost in. All the unity and intimacy you wanted to feel, you felt. You were known—every motion of your heart was understood, every dream respected, every longing for light approved, every word heard exactly as you meant it to be heard. Now, here, all our longing for intimacy and belonging, our need to know and be known, the yearning, reaching, holding, all these hungers and lonelineses ignite desires to re-discover the love and unity that nourished us in the presence of God before we came. We don't think much about what it meant to Father Adam and Mother Eve to lose the physical companionship of their Maker, because we don't consciously remember that companionship. But something in us remembers hearing the conversations of gods as they walked in gardens in the cool of the day. Nearly all we do here, right or wrong, wise or foolish, springs from our need to end the singleness that began when those first parents left the garden. The desire to be one with someone else, particularly with the One Someone Else who will never let us down, is the fiercest desire in the human heart. And in the divine heart as well. The Savior's repeated passionate prayer before Calvary was that the Father would make his followers one, even as He and the Father are one.

But now we see as through a glass, darkly. Think about the people you love: your child, whom you want to hold more tightly than he can bear—literally at first, then figuratively when he is older. (When my daughter Eliza was tiny, she always said "Daddy, hug me more softly!"). Then your spouse, whom you can never hold closely enough. If you're a child yourself, think about how it felt when you first discovered that Mommy was really a different person from you, and how frightened you were sometimes when Mom and Dad had to leave you alone. If you're a mother, remember the pang that came with the end of nursing. (I have often envied women the virtues that seem to flow more easily from them than from us, but I've been awestruck at the intimacy of feeding your child from your own body, and can't begin to comprehend the wonder of sharing your body with a child before it's born.) As close as any two people can get here on earth, it's all the merest echo or hint of what heaven offers, an intimacy we once knew and now try to copy. And of which we are distantly reminded when we love.

Then the Lord sweeps into our poor planet and offers the most daring, sensuous, even alarming poetry to demonstrate his longing for intimacy with us, and his perfect understanding of how badly we want Him in our lives. Beside a lake, after a miraculous feast, He said "...the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them...I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world...Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

It was too frighteningly intimate for many. But those who stayed gathered with Jesus on the night before his death around a table like this one to your right, only lower, and his hands broke the bread, just as the hands of your sons did moments ago, and his hands passed the drink, just as your sons did moments ago. And the disciples ate and drank, just as you did moments ago, and they wondered what He meant when He asked them to remember his body and blood given for them. But that was on the far side of the awesome deed that changed the universe—just hours before, but it might as well have been years, so little did they understand. Then the incredible events unfolded like flowers the size of mountains: the garden, the torture, the cross, the empty hearts, empty promises, empty eyes; then the empty tomb, the Risen Lord in the upper room and on the dusty road, angels, flaming tongues, the trumpeting heroism of converted apostles, believers through dark ages of apostasy, like candles in the dark, the glorious dawn of the Restoration and its countless treasures and witnesses. And here we are on the other side of them all, gathered at the table. Because we hunger. Because we thirst. And He fills the table with the fragrant image of Himself. And sanctifies these priests, and sends these deacons among us with trays of poetry, rich reminders of his sacred Self, given for us. Because only He can renew us. And only He offers the understanding, the intimacy, the love and peace of heart that is worth our continual commitment.

THE MT. TIMPANOGOS TEMPLE

(This is a talk I gave in church at the time the Mt. Timpanogos Temple, just down the road, was dedicated.)

I think the Lord wants me to give this talk about the temple. I was officially given the assignment last Sunday, and on Monday morning long before light I lay in bed, my mind filling with feelings about the temple, and clear pictures to share.

I must speak about the temple from a dangerously personal point of view, because the temple is a highly personal experience. Apart from a very few kind words of spontaneous guidance and thanks and many honest smiles of welcome, and of course the words of the ordinances, people don't speak much to each other in the temple. It's wonderful to be there with your family, and of course the sealing ordinances focus you deeply into other people's lives. Ward and stake temple days have remained in my memory as especially sweet. In fact, I remember lots of good moments in the temple primarily by who I was there with. The dress and movements in the temple are designed to combine in a bright model of community and unity of heart. But usually the people around you are absorbed in their own very private hopes and dreams, their own very particular reasons for seeking sanctuary there. So I have to be personal, hoping that my lens will not distort what we're looking at, praying that the Spirit may be the ultimate corrective lens through which we'll finally see all things.

Of course, one of the primary challenges is that I'm supposed to talk about things that you're not supposed to talk about outside the temple. If the visions and feelings of the temple could be experienced fully outside the temple, there wouldn't be much reason for going there.

What happens inside the temple? Many who haven't been there don't know. Many who have been there don't know. Once I was given the task of explaining it to children, and it went something like this:

"In the temple you learn about animals and stars and rivers and flowers and a magical garden long ago where you could hug tigers if you wanted to, and they would just purr. And about Heavenly Father and Jesus looking down on the world and loving the children they sent to live here. When you go to the temple for the first time, no matter how big you are on the outside, remember that on the inside you're still Heavenly Father's little child, and the whole temple will be more wonderful, even fun sometimes, and all the time full of surprises and wonder! You learn about angels who came to visit the Grampa and Grandma of all the world

and how Jesus, the Prince of Light, chases away the Prince of Darkness! Imagine a dark night when a cloud clears the moon and you see someone you love coming to you across the lawn, someone who gives you great big hugs and holds your hand when you walk. That's what the temple is for. When you go to the temple and say, 'Heavenly Father, this is my family. See how I love them? See how kind we are to each other?' then Heavenly Father says, 'If that's how you feel, I seal you together forever,' so that the hugs can always be there. And when you reach out for a hand to hold, your fingers will touch the warm skin you love the most. How much does Heavenly Father love us? Enough to teach us how to do all the huge and happy things He does!"

That's really kind of all I can say. But I can share some feelings (from my journal) about the temple.

8 January 1978

"Last Friday morning I drove through a pre-dawn snowstorm down to Manti, to witness a wedding. Downstairs in the temple I took a wrong turn somewhere and wound up in the celestial room about twenty minutes before everybody else. There had been no sessions through, and the lights were even still off, just the soft grey through the windows, really quiet, really peaceful. I heard a faint, steady voice. I walked over to the closed door of a sealing room. It was a temple worker inside, in the dark, memorizing the words of the endowment." (That felt magical. I felt like an observing angel, unperceived, but recording silent service.)

22 March 1980

"Couple of comforting hours in the temple last night. The officiator in the prayer circle prayed for the hostages in Iran...It struck me clearly that all the maneuverings and machinations of governments could not have the good effect of that prayer, a handful of priesthood bearers and their wives approaching the Lord in His house. It was a holy moment. I was impressed that the final responsibility for these kinds of things rests with us. I felt again where the real power is."

13 May 1980, in the Manti Temple

"The great preponderance of patrons were grandparents. In the terrestrial room the sisters' veils were backlit by the arched windows, impressions of blue sky with white clouds. Very holy feeling. It would have seemed very natural to have seen departed loved ones serving with us."

14 June 1980

"Went to the temple Thursday morning and spent a lot of time in the celestial room, listening. With all the virtue and 'deseret-ness' of keeping busy, a person needs lots of time to listen for answers, gather unthreshed impressions, be thankful, shut their mouth and receive blessings."

1 November 1986

"Several nights ago the members of the Tabernacle Choir and their spouses were asked to the upper room of the Salt Lake Temple to sing. There was no audience, and the only church officials present were President Hinckley and the president of the temple. The choir was there to sing to the Lord."

8 November 1986

"Served in the Logan Temple for the first time. Afterward, I walked away through the snowy streets, looked back at that monument to pioneer faith high on the hill, and wondered if I'd really been inside it."

26 March 1984

"Attended the Hawaii Temple. Simple, elegant. I saw the cloud-dusted green ridges of the Koolau away beyond a building so white you have to squint. The patrons and workers were marvelous colors."

7 May 1994

"Last night I took Laurie to the temple and felt at home there." (Then I asked her to marry me.)

3 August 1994

"We went to the temple and were asked to be the witness couple. That was a thrill from one end to the other. I am unutterably grateful that no longer are the holiest places also the loneliest."

Journals of the early saints are charged with a feeling of urgency about the temple. Mosiah Hancock was a young teenager in 1846 Nauvoo.

"Although I was very young, I was on guard many a night, and gladly did I hail with many of the Saints, the completion of the temple. On about January 10, 1846, I was privileged to go in the temple and receive my washings and anointings. I was sealed to a lovely young girl named Mary, who was about my age, but it was with the understanding that we were not to live together as man and wife until we were 16 years of age. The reason that some were sealed so young was because we knew that we would have to go West and wait many a long time for another temple."

These people had been in a passionate rush to finish the temple, under the bizarre certainty that it would shortly be abandoned and probably defiled. Levi Jackman wrote:

"I went to work on the temple and continued until I was wanted to work in the wagon shop to help make wagons for our removal to the mountains. About this time in the late fall, the temple was so far finished as to allow the giving of endowments. My wife was taken sick about this time but seemed to get a little better so that she could be taken to the temple and we received our endowments. A short time after, she was taken worse and finally died January 24, 1846."

The pioneers began crossing the icy Mississippi out of Nauvoo, beginning the greatest escape since Moses, on February 4. My own great-great-grandfather (curiously enough, also my wife's great-great-grandfather, though she's descended from another wife) was John Brown. He wrote:

"I now commenced to labor on the farm for a season but was soon called to another field. Two elders came from Nauvoo with an epistle from the Twelve calling in all the young, middle aged and able bodied men to help build the temple; to carry with them their arms and ammunition."

There was good reason for those instructions. Let me read Mosiah Hancock again:

"Father had a great deal of opposition in Nauvoo. One day as father and I were walking down Water Street, and we came within twenty feet of the Mansion [a hotel], an east window raised up, and Francis M. Higbee [an apostate] took deliberate aim with a rifle, and shot father in the left breast. I was walking on father's right side, and I saw the shot fired, and heard the thud as the bullet struck, but father stopped and picked up the bullet from the ground, and reaching it toward heaven with his right hand, said, 'I thank thee, O God the Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, that thou didst destroy the power of this bullet.' As soon as the shot was fired, the window was shut down. I suppose Higbee thought father was gone this time for sure, but father had been shot at many times by the mobbers and apostates. Father had had the temple in his care for sometime, and some were jealous of the honors conferred upon him.

"Once while I was in the temple, Brigham Young came to me and said, 'I perceive that you are a sober boy and quick to observe, but do you think you can remember all you have seen and heard in this temple?' 'I think I can,' I said. 'Be sober and remember all you can, for great things will be expected of you,' he added. He examined my rifle while I was on guard... and he guessed it to be a 44 caliber; I thought he was good at guessing."

Sarah Rich wrote:

"The temple was finished and dedicated unto the Lord, and the work of giving endowments commenced. President Young chose many brothers and sisters to come to the temple and assist in giving endowments. Among those chosen was Mr. Rich and myself; we were to be there at seven in the morning and remain until work was done at ten or twelve o'clock at night. So we got a good girl, Mary Phelps, a wife of my husband's to stay and take care of the children; and we helped in the House of the Lord to give endowments for four months, until the house was closed; and we as a people commenced to prepare ourselves to depart for the Rocky Mountains.

"For by this time the devil was mad, and the lives of many of our brethren were sought by the mob that had assassinated Joseph and Hyrum. But many were the blessings we had received in the House of the Lord, which caused joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows, and enabled us to have faith in God, knowing He would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us.

"For if it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the help of the Spirit of the Lord, our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark. In the winter as it was, and in our state of poverty, it would seem like walking into the jaws of death. But instead of sorrow we felt to rejoice that the day of our deliverance had come."

Wandle Mace wrote:

"A short time after we camped [just across the Mississippi, having escaped the mob] and a little while after dark, Brother William Pickett reached our camp in a disguise. He had fled from Nauvoo bringing us the news that the Church had made a treaty with the mob, for the surrender of the city and its immediate evacuation by the remnant of the Saints...free from all molestation and personal violence. Hostilities to cease...The mob [then] immediately entered the city. They defiled the temple in an outrageous manner, with drunkenness, gambling and ribaled song, they paid no attention to the stipulations of the treaty. They ransacked wagons for arms, drove men across the river at the point of the bayonet. Father John Stiles, as we familiarly called him, an old man, and others were forced to the river at the point of the bayonet and baptized face downward in the name of Tom Sharp the leader of the mob, and editor of the Warsaw Signal.

"Farewell Nauvoo the Beautiful, The City of Joseph! The home of so much joy and happy contentment, and also of the most exquisite sorrow and anguish; here I enjoyed the association of our beloved Prophet, and Patriarch; they died for their friends, and for the cause of Christ Jesus.

"Farewell to the temple upon which I have labored with so much pleasure. The order of architecture was unlike anything in existence; it was purely original, being a representation of the Church, the Bride, the Lamb's wife. John the Revelator says, 'There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.' This is portrayed in the beautifully cut stone of this grand temple. It was said by some that the state of Illinois could not have built such a costly building without bankrupting the state. Yet this was built by the energy, tithes, and offerings of an honest, although a poor, persecuted people."

That temple was clearly a monument to the love those early saints felt for their Father In Heaven. Now in these days we have left our guns in the closet or over the door. We have, most of us, kept our hands clean of the dust of construction, but by faithful strokes of our pens on checks have built a new temple, named for a mountain we love.

The Lord said we have to build temples, and so faithfully we do. But having cheerfully taken on that yoke, mightn't the more correct feeling be that we *get* to build them? The Mount Timpanogos Temple provides the perfect pair of images for exploring this idea: the mountain, and the temple. First, something about the size and majesty of Mt. Timpanogos. We think it looks big from I-15. But listen:

A few weeks ago, Laurie and I hiked to the summit of Wheeler Peak. It's thirteen thousand feet high, and on its slopes grow forests of bristlecone pine, the oldest living things on earth, some between three and four thousand years old. Some of those trees, that are this very afternoon springing tender green needles and dropping fertile cones that drip with sap, were clinging to those rocky slopes and combing the wind when, far away, David swung his sling at Goliath, four-and-a-half centuries before Nephi began writing the Book of Mormon. From the summit of Wheeler Peak, on a clear day, you can see Mt. Timpanogos. Wheeler Peak is in Nevada.

4 June 1981

"I'm on the backside of Timpanogos, on the trail above Aspen Grove. The many waterfalls are shouting, the snowfields are shining, bright clouds are moving through the saddle like so many ships, and above me the pines are standing like gods."

1 July 1989

"Eliza and I hiked halfway up Timp. We discussed how the Lord will change, purify, and beautify the world as a home for the righteous. We guessed He wouldn't change the north slope of Timpanogos much."

25 July 1992

"Very top of Timp. Looking almost straight down into Emerald Lake, thousands of feet below. This is glorious. There are no words. [I was out of breath when I wrote this entry. That might be why these sentences are so short.] There are mountain goats on the cliffs. Mostly I hear wind and thunder. I've never seen wildflowers so plentiful. Seeing mountain goats is a good thing. Seeing mountain goats where other people don't is a better thing. Showing someone mountain goats is the best thing."

1 August 1995

"Hiked with Laurie up to the big snow-filled meadow on Timp that's just below the saddle. I saw more wildflowers than I'd ever seen, and a wilder, more wonderful variety. Because of late snows, there were waterfalls and streams everywhere, and a couple of surprise lakes. Part of the trail made me think I was hiking in Hawaii."

1 August 1996, three weeks ago

"Just got back from a big Timp hike. Quite intent on going up, we got just below the Chimney [very near the top] and met a family of mountain goats quite intent on going down. We were close enough to look into each others' faces and try to measure each others' intentions. We came down the glacier [really a permanent snowfield] in rather a hurry, the first thirty yards being nearly vertical, and all thereafter never much close to horizontal. We finished in a rich, thundery rain."

When the Provo Temple was built, we were pretty excited. We attended the dedication and knew that the Lord had accepted it as his house. But when we stood back from it and lifted our eyes to the incredibly wild and majestic and intricate canyon that rises like a giant's cathedral right behind it, some of us imagined that the Lord, as he had done at Sinai, could have chosen to make that his house instead. I wrote these lyrics back then.

The rocks on the hillside are holy.
The trees on the mountain are, too.
So we put them together to make a fine house
for the maker of me and of you.

He fashioned the wild rocky mountains.
He carved out the seas with his hand.
But he's asked us to build him a shelter or two.
And we're doing the best that we can.

Were you there when we raised up the house of the Lord
when the prophets and the people were shown
that the best we can do stacking bricks, boards, and stones
is more dear to the King than a throne in the canyon?
More dear to the King than a throne.

What we built is the Mt. Timpanogos Temple. What He built is Mt. Timpanogos. We may regard the temple as a monument to our love for God, but its presence in the shadow of Timpanogos says more about His love for us than about our love for Him. I have faith that He will accept it. I believe it is nearly the best we can do, and I think it's beautiful. He may regard it as we regard the fingerpaintings of our children, but in mercy He will dwell there and thus make it more beautiful than we could ever have dreamed.

Yesterday morning I helped with the tours at the new temple, hoping some helpful insight would come to me that I could share with you today. So I just smiled and pointed and warmed up my little corner by the elevator, and listened. Halfway through the shift, I was moved and given the task of saying goodbye to the people as they walked out of the temple. Because the elegant main doors were reserved for people entering, the tour emptied them out into the sunshine by a rather inelegant side door in a stairwell that after dedication will only be used for emergencies. I loved it. I could have done it for many more hours. One gentle old brother recognized me from a couple of church films and said something like "Boy, a movie star stuck out here by the servants' entrance." He wasn't right about the movie star part, but he nailed the next part more squarely than he had intended. Every door into the House of the Lord is a servants' entrance.

PATTERNS OF HEAVEN

(This is a talk I gave in church on 1 April 1990.)

I want to talk to you for ten minutes on a subject I know practically nothing about. I hope that doesn't make you feel insecure. The subject is Heaven.

The world knows even less about it than we do. Somehow crowns and harps figure in prominently, and if you believe in the film "Heaven Can Wait," you might expect soprano saxophones there. Brigham Young said flatly "There are no fiddle players in Hell," so I guess you'll find those in Heaven, too.

Beyond that, we know practically nothing about Heaven. This probably shouldn't puzzle us too much, because as Isaiah wrote "... my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9) Indeed, the ignorance in which we are kept is merciful; we remember the Prophet Joseph saying that if we could see into even the Telestial Kingdom we would be so drawn to its beauty that we would kill ourselves to get in.

That Heaven is beautiful is beyond question. It is the glorified Earth, made pure and clean and described as a "sea of glass," a living lens into which we may gaze and behold all things, things so glorious it would break our hearts to see them with mortal eyes. I had a good friend who felt that the "sea of glass" image also suggested boundless peace, in the more literal sense of an ocean at rest, like glass. My friend has since died, and I imagine learned more in the first moments after his death than all of us could guess at in a lifetime. Somehow we feel an urgent need to know about Heaven. But needing to know (or even acting like we know) is not the

same as knowing. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [his] thoughts higher than our thoughts."

Why should something about which so little has been revealed seem so important to us? Why do we have to know? Left-wing propagandists during the depression accused ministers of promising people "pie in the sky" in order to distract them from present troubles. But in a completely different spirit, the Apostle Paul said, "If in this life only we have faith in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19) and even "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

A couple of quotes might be helpful -- first, from James E. Talmage, who said "There is a filial passion in man that flames toward heaven." In less poetic terms, we long for Heaven because we came from there. Most of us have nearly memorized Wordsworth's lines,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

(from "Intimations of Immortality")

Wordsworth was homesick, and so are we. Mary Lee Bennett brought a great thought to Brother Gifford's Sunday School class one Sunday last June: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience—We are spiritual beings having a human experience." (Teilhard de Chardin)

The idea that we lived before with Heavenly Parents and want to get back is a great gift of the Restoration. When Wordsworth wrote his lines in the first decade of the nineteenth century, he was required by certain "good and pious persons" to apologize for them. But he did not retract them, because he believed them. Within the church, however, it is unthinkable to apologize for this glorious insight into our heavenly connections.

My wife likes the old southern hymn lyric "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through." That's because she knows she's just a stranger here. Paul writes of the faithful children of Israel, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (Heb. 11:13-16)

Another gift of the Restoration is the glorious vision which the prophet was commanded to write "while yet in the Spirit," Section 76, where in soaring language is described the degrees of glory in infinite number, the several modes of Heaven adapted to the capacity of each soul for glory and service and joy. The giver of the gift was Jesus himself, for, "we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; and saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: that he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and

daughters unto God." (20-23) After a description of the kinds of souls who will dwell in the varying degrees of glory, the record goes on to testify that more was revealed, more answers to the questions that burn in us but "which are not lawful for man to utter. Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows upon those who love him, and purify themselves before him; to whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves." (115-117)

But one of the most merciful gifts of the Restoration is that the Lord has provided us "patterns of heaven" adapted to our ability to understand. He has always given His children forms and patterns and ways of life that have value in themselves, but more value when they are seen as types or copies or foreshadowings of heavenly things. Let us consider just three that are characteristic of, if not unique to, the Good News of the Restoration.

First, priesthood is the order of Heaven, the government of Heaven, the power by which the worlds were made and redeemed and the power by which Pat Vreeland (I'm her home teacher) lost her last earache. If we study the 121st Section of the Doctrine and Covenants and learn how the priesthood cannot be used to cover sins or gratify pride or to exercise control or unrighteous dominion, but can only operate by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile, and that charity and virtue alone shall invite the doctrine of the priesthood to distill upon our souls as the dews from heaven, if we accept with joy that the author and finisher of our faith showed us the meaning of priesthood as He wrapped a towel around his waist and washed the feet of the disciples, then we will begin to know what the power of Heaven feels like.

Second, the economic laws of Zion are those of Heaven. When Enoch's people were brave enough to forsake the false doctrine of ownership, they were taken into Heaven because their society was in very basic ways already Heaven. At all crucial points of history, a Zion economy of consecration based on purity of heart, the unrestrained sharing of material blessings that make the very idea of poverty obscene, has been instituted by the Lord. Read about the city of Enoch, the disciples of Christ in the old world, the United Order in the morning of the Restoration, and about the Golden Age of the Nephites, who for generations following the Savior's ministry "had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift...And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God." (4 Ne. 3,15-16) The majority of us have covenanted to live the economic law of Zion, and to the extent that we are successful, we can know what the security of Heaven feels like.

Third, family is a sensible, fulfilling, challenging, and joyful idea even if it's only for mortality. But a gift of the Restoration is to know that family can be forever, and that when we call God by the name of "Our Father in Heaven" it's not just poetry, but real. We alone among the Christians of the earth believe this. On some of our refrigerator doors it says "Home can be a bit of Heaven." That couldn't be more true if it were carved in stone on Sinai by the finger of the Lord. The love between a man and a woman that blossoms into family is the best image of Heaven. To the degree to which we love one another at home we can know what the joy of Heaven feels like.

I believe in these "patterns of heaven" afforded us by the mind and mouth of Jesus in the Latter-day Restoration of his Gospel. I know that we don't have to wait for Heaven, but that we can feel it now. I know this because so much of what people in this room have said and done have felt to me like nothing this world can offer, and have stabbed me with a joyful longing for that society in which our sweetest sharing and bravest loving and meekest honesty will prevail. And at times when Heaven has seemed to me like a fairy-tale or shadow of smoke, I have felt the grace of Christ and the dream and realization of Heaven have combined in a moment. Yet with all this, I remember with Paul that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered

into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Cor. 2:9)

I pray that we may be counted among them that love Him and go to Heaven, and amid the heartbreaking surprise find it somehow familiar.

GIVING THANKS

(The following is a talk I gave in church on 22 November 1998.)

I can imagine no happiness that isn't swimming in gratitude. I can imagine no happiness that centers in me. Gratitude, and therefore happiness, always turns me outward to someone else.

This is about giving thanks. Giving thanks is a reason why I keep a journal. It's a reason why I do what I do for a living. It's why one of the most meaningful moments in every day for me is when I sit down to some food and can't start until I've bowed my head. Sometimes it's the only reason at all to pray. One winter's night several years ago I felt so besieged by worldly cares that I was driven out the door, up the street toward East Mountain, and into the woods. I knew I needed to pray, and prayed as I had been taught in Primary. I called upon the Lord by name, and then began to thank Him for my blessings. I never got past that part. Thanks just kept cascading out until I was too cold to go on, and I pretty much forgot the list of what I wanted to ask Him for. Since then, I have sometimes on purpose prayed just thanks. If there's a single good idea in all these words, this is it. If you haven't tried it, you're in for a treat. Because the Lord likes us to thank Him, and He'll help you know what to say. And even how to feel.

There are lots of things to be thankful for that we never think about. We all know about the ten lepers and the one of them who turned and gave thanks to the Savior. But what about the ten thousand in the town who were never lepers? Did they thank Him? How many of us, right now, have earaches? How many have ever had one? How thankful are we that they're gone?

Dr. Seuss gave us twenty more examples in a book called "Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?" My favorite example is about the Borfin that shlumps. The Borfin is a huge cylindrical machine made apparently of iron, but that seems to have the flexibility of bulgy fabric. I read:

And poor Mr. Bix!
Every morning at six,
poor Mr. Bix has his Borfin to fix!
It doesn't seem fair. It just doesn't seem right,
but his Borfin just seems to go shlump every night.
It shlumps in a heap, sadly needing repair.
Bix figures it's due to the local night air.
It takes him all day to un-shlump it.
And then...
the night air comes back
and it shlumps once again!
So don't you feel blue. Don't get down in the dumps.
You're lucky you don't have a Borfin that shlumps.

Here's a more realistic "what if." We're not likely to be awakened any morning soon by citizens of Provo pouring over the hill behind the south stake center, brandishing weapons with which they intend to kill us. But this scenario is absolutely characteristic of most of human history. The Book of Mormon is full of it. A lot of us still bear the wounds of losing family members and friends in war. Here we are, at peace, when many of our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world are at this moment actively killing each other. Do we thank the Lord for this peace? How? What we are doing with the peace? When we don't have an earache, isn't that the time to make and listen to music, and kind words?

Are we thankful for the vastness of the earth, and, conversely, for the ease with which we are able to move through that vastness? I was visiting Mormon Trail sites with some friends and wrote this in my journal.

27 September 1996

"At Martin's Cove we could see across the country to the west a pioneer landmark called Split Rock. Someone said it was a day's march. Of course we subsequently drove to it in twenty minutes. I honestly don't believe our distorted ideas of distance can be unlearned--at least, not easily."

The Willie Handcart company, seventy miles ahead of the Martin company, were marched over Rocky Ridge by their rescuers, who felt they needed better shelter at a place called Rock Creek, and who also felt that if they weren't forced to get up and move many of them would die where they sat in the snow. The journey was fifteen miles. It took them twenty-seven hours.

Here's a story about giving thanks. I was in a play once with a woman who sang in the Tabernacle Choir. She told me about a particular evening when the choir was instructed to gather in the assembly room on the top floor of the Salt Lake Temple. Besides the choir, no one was there except a handful of General Authorities. They had gathered for one purpose: to sing to the Lord. There didn't need to be any one else there. There may be people here today who were part of that experience. I was thrilled by that idea. For me, that's a primary reason to sing in a ward choir. We work to help invite the Spirit into sacrament meetings, but every rehearsal is, in fact, a joyful worship service, because we sing for the Lord, giving Him thanks for our lives and for His endless gifts to us. When the Savior rode into Jerusalem, the multitudes waved branches and sang praises to Him. Some suggested that He rebuke the singers, and He answered, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." (Luke 19:40) Indeed, the Prophet Joseph sings, in Section 128, "ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy!" The psalmist, the songwriter of ancient days, wrote "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

I think the most appropriate way to thank the Lord is to live excellently, to seek out and reflect those things which are "virtuous, lovely, and praiseworthy."

And yet "We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant... talented and fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God... born to manifest the glory of God within us... in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Those are the words of Marianne Williamson.

To those of us who genuinely suffer from the delusion that we're ordinary, let me read from Psalm 139. "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." A hundred years ago at BYU I was introduced to this scripture by a woman to whom I was Home Teacher. She was fifteen years older than I, had a couple of college degrees, had served a mission and a hitch in the Canadian Air Force. She had sought out and found excellent ways to serve, some of them unusual ways, because the more typical ways, as wife and mother, had been denied her. She was, according to current fashion whimsy, extraordinarily plain. Outwardly. In one of our visits to her and her roommates, we casually asked for favorite scriptures, and she gave us, from memory, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made:

marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

Let me finish with D&C 59. Listen for the cycle of blessing, which leads to thanks, which leads to more blessing, which leads to more thanks, in an upward spiral.

"Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things. And inasmuch as ye do these things with thanksgiving...with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance...the fulness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth; Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards; Yea, all things which come from the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man."

And, jumping to 1 Corinthians (2:9), "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

For which I have begun to be grateful. And the degree to which I am grateful is the degree to which I am happy.