

# Finding Greater Happiness, Peace, and Rest in the Covenant of Marriage

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A Collection of Blogs by The Doctrine Lady

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Finding Greater Happiness Peace and Rest in the Covenant of Marriage  
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## INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask a large crowd of women, “How do you feel about the covenant of marriage today?” the responses would be incredibly mixed. I’d have young women in the throes of being in love—soon to be married, and newly-weds still basking in the glow of a brand-new relationship. I’d have women of all ages in various stages of enchantment and disenchantment. Some would be considering divorce. Some would be separated. Some would be seasoned women in the later years of their marriages who had persisted through dark times. I’d have women who were rebuilding their marriage. Some would have been through more than one divorce. I’d also have single women who’d never been married and who had already lost the hope of being married.

Since I have been in nearly every one of these women’s shoes, I have written many blogs about my journey—and what I’ve learned from God—about how to understand these times, endure them, overcome them, and use them as

scaffolding to a happier, more peaceful, and more *restful*<sup>1</sup> life. I've gathered some of them together into this book. No matter where you are, how old you are, or who you are, there's a chapter for you.

But, before I send you on, let me first teach you a critical piece to every blog that you'll read. It's what every person on earth should know about the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage. It's the origin of the covenant and where it fits within God's plan for you.

## The Purpose of Marriage in God's Plan

If we're going to be honest, many of us dream of marriage for very good reasons. But they aren't always the best reasons. Let me explain.

We often want to get married because we want to be loved. We want to have kids. We want to be a mother, or a father. We want to make our own way of life. We want a companion to be there for us through all the good times and the bad. We want these things for us, because we believe they will make us happy. And they certainly have the potential to do just that.

However, the best reason to want to get married is because we want to become like God. The good reasons we normally use as our motivation are actually the blessings that come as a result of becoming godly. Thus, we tend to seek the blessings and try to cultivate the desire for godliness thereafter. It has worked this way in some marriages. Some get their desires reoriented early on and neither is ever the wiser that they started backwards.

But a larger percentage of us fight against God's pull toward godliness until trial, heartache, and struggle between us and our spouses leads us back to Him asking for help. His replies always turn us back to the covenant and to developing the characteristics of godliness. He's trying to get us turned back around. It can be painful. It's a deconstruction process.

If you think about it, the only real marriage is God's marriage. All other ideas of marriage cease to exist when this life is past. Thus, the only way to remain

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<sup>1</sup> *Rest* in this context is referring to coming into the presence of God.

married beyond this life is to have God’s marriage. And yet, we can’t actually have God’s type of marriage—ultimately—unless we become like God.

Even getting married in the temple isn’t sufficient to guarantee us eternal family. Receiving the ordinance doesn’t guarantee our eternal marriage and family any more than baptism ensures our salvation. We still have to progress spiritually as the Lord has commanded and *become* more like Him. Thus, the ordinance signifies and marks our intent to become godly, but the ordinance itself doesn’t make us godly. It grants us the potential to become godly.

Let’s look at a great example. Abraham was a faithful member of God’s church and one who loved the gospel. Yet, he realized that there was more than just basic membership, there was exaltation.

*And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.<sup>2</sup>*

You’ll note that Abraham desired to be like God, a father of many nations, a prince of peace. He also wanted the power to offer the same opportunity and blessings to others, “the right whereunto [he] should be ordained to administer the same.” This was his motivation for seeking the highest ordinances and covenants of the gospel.

We know Abraham married Sarah. But he went looking specifically for a covenant wife. She turned out to be so beautiful that Abraham had problems with people seeking his life so that they could steal her. But her primary draw

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<sup>2</sup> Abraham 1:2

for him was that she also wanted to become godly. She wanted to keep the covenant.

The marriage of Abraham and Sarah is legendary in many ways. They endured much. They saw miracles. They loved each other. They were asked to accept hard commandments from the Lord. And it worked. It worked because they both wanted to become like God and therefore, they submitted wholly to His will (individually and jointly), not their own. Did their personalities still manifest? Absolutely. But they never lost sight of their goal.

So, the purpose of marriage is to become like God. That is its primary opportunity and draw and the best reason for us to seek it. The blessings that we receive from the ordinance and covenant—the ability to be fathers and mothers, to have eternal relationships and posterity—all come from becoming godly—not simply from becoming married in the temple.

## Remember the Covenant

Every marriage consists of two very imperfect people. If a marriage is threatening to end, the only way it can actually end is if one of the parties involved refuses to keep their covenant with God. If they ultimately reject you, remember it is God they rejected first.

You might be the primary offender in the marriage, but if you honestly desire to repent and keep your covenant, it can be saved. But you have to get yourself right with your Father in Heaven. It is Him whom you have offended most. It is to Him you made your promises.

If you are not the primary offender in your marriage, and your spouse refuses to keep his/her covenant, you can't save the marriage. You can't force the obedience of another. But you can keep your covenant and still maintain all the blessings. Your covenant is between you and God. Even if your spouse abandons their covenant with God, if you stay true to Him, He is bound<sup>3</sup> to grant you every blessing pronounced upon you. He is God and must keep His promise to you.

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<sup>3</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 82:10

I say to any who read this book: what matters most in your marriage (future, current, or past) is *your covenant* with the Lord. Even though you entered into the covenant with your spouse, the covenant is still individual. You didn't covenant to each other, you covenanted to God. Your promise was to Him. Remember that. It's about you becoming like Him. You can't lose any of the blessings as long as you say "Yes!" to, and stay true to, the covenant you made with Him.

## SAY YES TO THE COVENANT

In Matthew 19:3-8 we read:

*The Pharisees also came unto [Christ], tempting him, and saying unto him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"*

*And [Christ] answered and said unto them, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?' Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."*

*They say unto him, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?"*

*He saith unto them, "Moses **because of the hardness of your hearts** suffered you to put away your wives: but **from the beginning it was not so.**"*

## From the beginning it was not so

Lesser laws: they are what receive we when reject God's highest ordinances and covenants. Lesser laws always come with rough consequences, merciless micromanagement, and what appear to be unfair rules. But, if we will not accept God's perfect laws which lead to happiness, peace, and rest, what then do we expect when we reject them? Lesser laws cannot give us the same peace and happiness that higher laws give. Wickedness never was happiness.<sup>4</sup>

The original covenant God gave to Adam and Eve was that they were to be man and wife—one flesh. They were commanded to keep the covenant of eternal marriage which included: multiplying and replenishing the earth (having children and teaching them the gospel), and acting as stewards over the earth.<sup>5</sup>

This was the covenant. **There was no divorce given as a lesser law until God's highest laws were rejected.** It was fear and selfishness, on the part of mankind, that brought about something other than what God intended. It is we that choose to have less than what God wants to give us. It is we that choose laws and systems that cannot endure.

## Marriage is a power and a responsibility

From the beginning, marriage has been about a covenant with God. It has been about having families and teaching them God's plan. It has been about joining God in His work and glory.<sup>6</sup> It has been about being wise stewards over the resources of the earth that we may have what we need to nurture, raise, and care for our families and lead them to God. His plan is for us to form family units that can last forever. His plan is for us to become like Him, and He has

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<sup>4</sup> Alma 41:10

<sup>5</sup> Moses 2:26-30

<sup>6</sup> Moses 1:39

eternal family. **His plan is for us to develop the attributes that He has that make true love and eternal love a reality, not merely a whim for the movie screen or a classic novel.**

But, over time we have turned marriage into an institution. We have turned it into a “nice tradition.” We have turned it into a romantic gesture. We have turned it into a selfish attempt to force a commitment. We have made it into something to serve the individual instead of to serve God. Thus, under such selfish oppression marriage cannot endure as it was meant to do.

Now, I’m most heartily an advocate for romance and true love. But what I have found (and what God is always trying to teach us) is that true love and romance—of the highest and best kind—are only available when we enter marriage as it was intended from the foundations of the earth: as a covenant.

## Seeing marriage as a covenant changes all the rules for dating and romance

We all grow up waiting to run into our *one true love*. We date without looking very much into the spiritual depth and personalities of the individuals courting us. We focus solely on physical appearance and putting our best foot forward. We focus on expectations instead of realities. We make assumptions based upon the feelings of love and infatuation that have no root in eventual reality. We try to pretend to be someone we aren’t simply to get the attention of those whom we admire. We look forward to that all important first kiss.

We all formulate dreams of eternal bliss that begin with specific wedding colors, the perfect dress, the perfect bride/groom, and flower petals strewn across an aisle while family members weep tears of joy and happiness as they prepare to pose for wedding pictures in perfectly coordinated outfits.

Parents often are worse off than their offspring, building up materialistic ideals for wedding receptions, honeymoon locations, and other social events as they plan to “give their daughter or son away.” The fact that two people are about to embark on one of the most difficult, though potentially the most rewarding,

covenants and ordinances the earth has ever known seems to garner no attention whatsoever. No time is devoted to its understanding and instruction.

Many never stop to wonder if they are prepared for more than the whirlwind romance that has led them to an altar. They are spurred on by the anticipation of all that marriage holds little understanding what it will take to hold that dream together. And, despite how God intended it “from the beginning,” most people carry in the back of their minds the very modern reality that divorce can be easily obtained and is a valid option if they ever get to feeling the least bit “out of love” or if their spouse makes any seriously wrong moves.

**Seeing all dating and marriage as the build up to the keeping of God’s highest and holiest covenant and ordinance changes everything.** Dating should become a true practice in getting to know the personality traits and spiritual depth of others. Making friends and learning to find those that share our testimonies of God and His plan should become a familiar practice. We should practice learning the difference between infatuation and physical attraction (which are of course important) and the ever critical spiritual and intellectual attraction.

Dating in this way should prepare us to find the person with whom we share all three: physical attraction, intellectual attraction, and most critically, spiritual attraction. If we are attracted to someone and share commonalities in thinking but we have no confidence in their desire (or ability) to keep God’s highest covenant (whether they hold a temple recommend or not), how could we ever have confidence in making such an attempt at marriage with them? To step into the covenant with such a poor foundation is a treachery. Do we think we can force a marriage to work by solely romantic ideals?

Being equally yoked is far more about spiritual attraction and unity than anything else. **The common goal of both persons entering marriage should be to enter into and keep the covenant.** For spiritual commitment to God is always a prerequisite to the capacity to create an environment for true love within a relationship. And yet, if the spiritual connection is there but there is no intellectual or physical attraction, that too would be an unwise match.

The goal is to find someone who loves and adores us and who will, as God always intended, remain loyal to God, the marriage covenant, and to us. The goal—how God intended it—is for both persons to understand *the covenant*, desire to accept *the covenant*, and be willing to sacrifice all that may be necessary in their own lives, goals, and agenda to keep *the covenant*.

Marriage is about two individuals remaining individual but giving their will over to God. Their unity comes from understanding that marriage is about giving their will to God, and they both do it together. Thus, they don't lose their lives to another person, they lose their life to God.<sup>7</sup>

## The marriage covenant is all about agency

Another false belief that many romantics hold is that there is only *one true love* for them. Marriage as a covenant completely obliterates this belief. Covenants require agency, faith, and grace. If there was only ever one true love for any of us, and that person existed separate from our ability to choose, exercise faith, and receive forgiveness; then agency, faith, and the atonement of Jesus Christ could not exist.

**Any time we expect that something can happen to us without us actually choosing it and without us acting to make it real once it has happened to us, we are deceived.** Choice is the power that makes a person *right* for us. Agency is that powerful. And if there were only ever one true love for us and we failed to choose them, or recognize them, or maintain our relationship with them, then a loss of it would ensure that we could never attain true happiness in this life or the life to come. Such a reality would render all of life unjust and eternity unsalvageable.

However, the atonement of Jesus Christ is real, meaning that we can repent when we mess up. Thus, ensuring, that if we screw up a relationship or abandon a covenant, we can sincerely repent and try again. The fact that the atonement of Jesus Christ exists demands that we can be fixed, healed, and

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<sup>7</sup> Mark 8:35

restored. And that also means that we can find true love by choosing it and acting upon it to make it real, and valid for this life and the life to come.

Because marriage is a covenant, it is something we have the power to keep, perfect, and retain for eternity. Because it is a covenant, if we mess up it can be worked on. If we make mistakes or sin, we can repent and through faith make it right. **The covenant is the focus. Not the other person.** We do all that we do to keep our covenant with God, not solely to hold on to or please the other person (who may very well never manage to please us as we would ultimately wish).

## The marriage covenant is made together but the covenant is individual

God's plan is that we become as He is. All of that cannot be accomplished in this mortal sphere. However, there are many godly powers and blessings that God can dispense to us in this life, and He does so through ordinances and covenants. Ordinances and covenants grant us portions of God's powers and attributes in this life; powers and attributes that once attained can be maintained and perfected in the next.

In the beginning, divorce, abortion, infidelity, fornication, adultery, abuse, and murder were made possible in this life because of the gift of agency; just as marriage, children, fidelity, chastity, charity, and the creation of life were all made possible because of the gift of agency, as well. Thus, though many people usurp godly powers through the formerly mentioned sinful acts (tampering with life and death), there will come an end to their ability to do so. Those able to retain the powers to create and exist in family units (beyond this life) will be those who have entered into and kept God's ordinances and covenants. Thus, marriage as a covenant, is what allows each of us (if we keep the covenant) the privilege of existing in family units beyond the grave.

The marriage covenant, unlike all other gospel ordinances and covenants, can only be entered into between a man and a woman, together. Because it is together that they create life, nurture the life created, and help those souls

through God's plan. However, the covenant and promises they make are not to each other. God gives them both a covenant, the same covenant, and each individually chooses whether or not to accept that covenant *with God*. They promise God to keep the covenant *to God*. The covenant then requires that each party accept the covenant *with God*, for it must be kept together, but the accountability for the keeping of the covenant *with God* is individual.

If we keep our individual covenant with God, the blessings promised to us cannot be forfeited by the rebellion of our spouse whose accountability is separate. If our spouse refuses to keep his/her individual covenant of marriage with God they cannot, by association, remove our blessings. Only we can do that. Agency is that powerful.

## Say YES to the covenant

Romance is great. I'm a fan. Falling is love is great. I'm a fan. But, if we would ever truly change the trend of declining marriages and family relationships in this world (and even within the Church of Jesus Christ), then, we must return to the doctrine that can save them.

We must teach our children to prepare not for marriage, but for *the covenant*. Marriage is not meant to be simply a contract between two people that encourages them to stay committed for this life for financial and psychological purposes. **Marriage is a covenant that is about accepting God's covenant to have families and guide them through the plan.** It is not solely about finding an eternal partner. It is about finding a person that understands God's covenant and who wishes to keep it by our side.

We must teach our children to dream of *the covenant* and not simply the person they will enter into it with. We must teach our children to date and to court for marriage by looking for the kind of individual who understands *the covenant* and wishes to keep it. We must ensure our children understand the covenant and have a desire to keep it.

**We must remove our focus on the social events surrounding the wedding and instead make *the covenant* the star of the occasion.** That we might be

willing to subtract such events from our wedding visions and replace them with covenant preparation and instruction, would be ideal. Do we have the courage to stop trying to please others (and ourselves) and start trying to ensure we, and our children, make the covenant more important than anything else? We must return the sacred nature to marriage and family. We must get better (as married couples) at understanding and keeping *our covenant* with God and set better examples for our children.

I could wish that a trend would begin in all Christians, but especially Latter-day Saints; that **instead of people saying, “Will you marry me?” that they would instead say, “Will you say YES to *the covenant* with me?”** That might make a bigger change than anything else could. Because the other party would then truly consider just what it was they were saying yes to.

## Conclusion

Whether we have made *the covenant*, are struggling currently with *the covenant*, or are pondering entering into *the covenant*, we should stop and study it. We should remind ourselves what the covenant of marriage is (especially the sealing, or New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage). We should decide if we merely want to get married (create a temporary commitment), or if we are actually ready for *the covenant*. We should remind ourselves of our promise to God, and what that promise entails. We should remind ourselves of the blessings and powers that come to us if we keep it. We should ponder (especially if we are struggling in our marriage) what we can do to keep our covenant with God instead of focusing on what our spouse could, or should, be doing to keep their covenant.

The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage was instituted by God. It is His power and privilege as God to keep this covenant, Himself, eternally. And He offers it to us IF we too will say YES to and keep *the covenant*.

Note: Because of the wickedness of mankind, because of our selfishness, abuse, infidelity, and neglect, there are times when divorce is not only necessary, it is the best option. I know because I've been through a divorce myself. This choice to divorce, however, is between each individual and God. And, this article is intended to help us all improve, better

understand the covenant, make better individual choices and use wisdom, so that we might prevent the necessity for such a thing, where possible.

If you aren't sure whether or not you should seek for a divorce, please read the chapter titled Spiritual Ultimatums.

## HOW TO FIND YOUR ONE TRUE LOVE

Is there only one perfect person out there for you? Is there such a thing as a soul mate?

Well, when I met my first husband, at the ripe age of 19, I was certain he was “the one.” After all, he was a return missionary, he was tall, he played sports, he was super fun to be around, he had a killer smile, was charismatic, and I’ll never forget the first time I heard him bear his testimony. I felt strongly that, “this man knows the Lord.” And I know he did. And, I suspect he still does.

In fact, though I nurtured a crush on him, it wasn’t until he bore his testimony that I fell in love with him. After that, I didn’t really worry about it. I felt he was “the one.”

And, even after our 11-year marriage ended, it wasn't because I had decided he wasn't the one. It was because he decided that I wasn't right for him. All things considered, perhaps I wasn't. But it didn't mean it couldn't have worked out. In fact, it could have. He could have remained the right one.

Once that marriage failed, I had to ask myself a lot of questions I had never asked before. And as a Latter-day Saint woman these were highly significant questions. Questions like:

- Why did God let me marry him if it wasn't going to work out in the long run?
- Did I misinterpret the peace, the answer I thought I got to marry him?
- If I did, does that mean personal revelation is bogus?
- Could I have done something to save the marriage that I hadn't already done?
- Did the marriage fail because I wasn't good enough? Pretty enough?
- Were my eternal marriage covenants still valid for me? Or did the other party ruin it for me?
- Did I want to ever get remarried?
- Would I ever get remarried?
- Did I need to get remarried to receive all the blessings God had promised me during the covenant ordinance?
- Was there only one right person for me, and if so, had I lost all chances for happiness?

The list of questions was a lot longer than this, but these were the general strains of thought I went through.

It's very easy when at a crossroads like this to question the foundation of our beliefs, especially as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When all that we have relied on is directly tied to personal revelation we feel that we have received, our first instinct is to question the revelation, God, and in consequence, our beliefs.

# The Atonement Helps Us Find True Love

Just as it is in every lesson, talk, and scripture, the Atonement of Jesus Christ is always preached as the answer to everything. Sin, use the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Hurt, sorrow, emotional pain, use the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Grace, grace, grace...

Well, as I wondered down this path of questioning, it was thankfully not my first instinct to curse God for letting me enter a marriage that would fail. I certainly was upset that it had failed, but it was not my natural inclination to blame God. Sadly, my natural inclination was to blame me. I tore myself apart and, of course, was shown quite clearly how I might have been better in some aspects. God didn't hide truth from me. But He also taught me two very important truths that I had been unable to consider up until this point after the divorce.

First, the divorce wasn't about me. It was about covenants. God taught me that though I'd been "let go," that it was actually He who had been divorced from the other party. The covenant we had made with Him together was what mattered. The covenant was what had made the love true.

When the covenant was abandoned by my spouse, God had been abandoned. God had been abandoned before me, and in place of me, in a sense. And when God was abandoned the love ceased to be true.

Second, that because I had been willing to keep my covenant, though extremely imperfect and certainly not faultless, my connection to God had not been severed. The covenant I kept held me to Him. Therefore, only one party had removed themselves from the marriage. It was both God and I who had been divorced.

Third, the thing that allowed me to still hope for true love was the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

You see, Christ's Atonement and its power (grace) can fix anything. But it would be rendered pointless if there was only one person in life we could find

eternal happiness with. Missing out on a relationship that has the potential to be eternal is just like all other aspects of life. We can miss such relationships. We can mess up. We can let people go we should have stuck with. People can let us go when they should have hung on. It's still a mess up. And, if we could not repent from, heal from, or recover from such an unwise mishap in our lives, then what would be the point of life? What would be the point of grace? There would not be one.

Thus, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the principle of grace that we apply to sin, suffering, sorrow, and so many other things, is also the very thing that preaches to us that there being only one true love in the whole wide world for us is a false doctrine.

We can't miss out on true love if we understand that it doesn't reside in a person. **True love resides in God and in His covenants.** So, when we think about trying to find the "right one," what we are really looking for is someone who will remain true to their covenants with God, no matter what. If they will stay true to God then they will stay true to us.

**I'll say it again, true love resides in the covenant of marriage, not in the person you make it with.**

## How to Find Your One True Love

Dallin H. Oaks talked about the doctrine of good, better, and best in the October 2007 General Conference. President Gordon B. Hinckley also often referred to this principle: that there are many options available to us to choose from but that some are good, some are better, and some are best.

The principle works like this. On any given day there are several things we can choose to do. Most of the activities we engage in are not evil. But, at any given moment there are good things we can do, better things we can do, and best things.

For example, we can get up and eat a donut for breakfast. That's a good thing. Delicious! But, it's even better to get a little exercise first and then eat

something a little healthier. We'll feel better. And we'll have a delicious day by avoiding the guilt and physical after-effects of that donut. But it's best if we first get down on our knees and offer a meaningful morning prayer, ponder a verse of scripture, then get a little exercise, and eat a healthy breakfast.

Just like on any given day we can choose any number of good, better, or best choices, I believe strongly that at any given time in our life there are also good, better, and best choices of relationships for us. God can take any choice we make—and if both parties are willing—lift it up and turn it into a best relationship. But there is always a best choice for us and we can't miss it if we own the choice. We have to own the responsibility for making that best choice.

Let me explain.

## What is the False Doctrine in Having Only One True Love?

Believing that there is only one person meant for you takes all the responsibility for the relationship and the marriage covenant off of you and places it on the person you think you're seeking. Or, it places the responsibility on God, or someone else's advice. When we do this, we ultimately make the decision for true love about getting lucky enough to meet a certain person. This is a fruitless way to view love. It can't produce fruit because it's false.

Albeit, this is a romantic view. But, it's a temporary, untrustworthy, and unkind view. I have found from experience that it is quite a bit more romantic to trust in God than in people. And with God, true love is about faith, repentance, sacrifice, service, humility, persuasion, long-suffering, and so on. Even the sexual chemistry we feel toward others must transcend the physical and dig deeper into the spiritual and intellectual. It must reach God's view.

God's view is the correct view. And, it is hard. It's nigh upon Abrahamic (meaning as hard as being asked to sacrifice your son). But, it's also the ONLY view that can bring us—you, me, everyone—the love that their heart truly

desires: true love. A love that lasts must bind people together. And the only thing on this earth and in heaven that binds is covenant.<sup>8</sup>

## The Answer at Last

So, how do you find your one true love? There are only two steps.

1. **Become a covenant keeper.**
2. **Find a covenant keeper.**

Christ's love is true and can't be severed from us because His love has been bound by sacrifice and covenant.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

After my first marriage ended and I discovered the doctrine behind "true love" I went looking for a covenant keeper. Then I stopped looking (actively) though when approached for dates this was my most critical requirement. Then, at the age of 35, God finagled a way to get my current husband into my life.

The man I met is not perfect. But he is a covenant keeper. He keeps his covenants daily. He tries to make better and best choices daily. And because he is a covenant keeper, he has my adoration, my trust, my love, my long-suffering, my forgiveness, my patience, my honesty, and my heart.

We can all find the best person for us or take our current relationship and make it best by loving God first, and by so doing becoming faithful covenant keepers. It begins and ends with our decision to keep covenants and to find another who does the same.

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<sup>8</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 82:10

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:35, 39

## TRUE LOVE AND HOW TO GET IT: PART ONE

The definition of Charity is available in both the New Testament and The Book of Mormon. It is *the pure love of Christ*. It is unselfishness. It has no guile (or personal agenda in its actions). It is not prideful or vain (over pre-occupied with self) or materialistic. It is not easily angered, it is patient and full of love. It has no fear. And perhaps most importantly, if we do not have it we are nothing. Charity is also preceded by and complemented by faith and hope.

For me, the hardest part about all of these attributes, which reflect pure and true love, is that it never explains how to arrive at them all at once—to attain charity. We know Christ embodied all these traits. In fact, it was charity that enabled Him to live a perfect life and ultimately give up that life willingly that each of us might be given grace and the opportunity to be made perfect and

return to live with and be like God. This is the love, housed in a multitude of attributes, which we are commanded to have. This is true love.

This is the love that when sought and attained by a man and woman can produce the true love we imagine and believe exists for us. This is the love that is not natural to us but is the kind that when sought produces the results we expect from the lesser forms of love we are continually failed by. This is the love that has the power to save souls, change hearts, effect reformations and revolutions, and enact change in society.

## Charity is not one, but a multitude of Christ-like attributes

We always talk about charity as one attribute. However, to look at it this way is to try to become everything Christ was all at once. Perhaps looking at it as one feeling or attribute is what makes it so impossible to comprehend and daunting to try to achieve. By seeing it as one characteristic we have basically rendered charity as some idealistic floating bubble of perfection far beyond anyone's reach.

Yet, if we look at the definition of charity in the scriptures, it is clearly broken down into several pieces, or attributes. They are: patience, kindness, contentment, humility, selflessness, not being easily offended or angered, virtuous in thought, rejoicing in goodness, not enticed by iniquity, willing to bear all things, believing, hopeful, and enduring all things.

If we are truly to attain charity, I think it is necessary to look at each attribute of charity separately. It is not one big thing we can pray for and attain. It is something we must tackle a small piece at a time.

### PATIENCE

What is patience? Patience is a natural suppression of restlessness, annoyance, temper, and emotion in the face of irritation, delay, provocation, misfortune, and complaint. Someone who is patient doesn't overreact in the face of what may appear to be something painful, unfair, terrible, unkind, or frustrating.

If this is truly the definition, then it would seem that to be inherently patient a person may need to be emotionless. How else could a person naturally and easily be patient in terrific trials, injustices, sudden distresses, and life-changing problems? In other words, how can we naturally suppress our inherent reactions to life's oppositions? Is it even possible?

When life's troubles and struggles come in waves, especially to the righteous or innocent, some people will ask, "How can God not intervene? How can He let this happen? Why hasn't He helped us, or them?" How is God, who is supposed to love us unconditionally, able to allow us to suffer in the ways we do here in mortality? How can He be so patient?

Since God is love and full of emotion, then there must be another reason God is patient, because it seems as if it is love and emotion which leads us to *not* be patient. Remember Christ was petitioned to come when Lazarus was dying. He could have arrived before Lazarus died. Yet, He didn't. He was patient. He took His time doing the things He knew needed to be done as He made His way to Bethany. How could He be so unemotionally driven? Why did He delay?

As far as I can tell through Christ's example, the answer to patience is eternal perspective. With God all things are present, even our past and our future. He can see what was, what is, and what will be. He can see our state of existence beyond our current trials, sins, and weaknesses. He knows where every choice and trial will lead us. He also knows what effects all kinds of opposition will have on our faith and spiritual and mental growth.

So, why doesn't God act impatiently? Because with Him we are presently forgiven, presently saved, presently changed, presently healed, presently resurrected, and so forth. We are in one moment. But while He suffers with us in our present moments He is also able to simultaneously see our healing and salvation in the future. Therefore, He can patiently lead us through our trials and through this life.

Eternal perspective is a frustrating principle for those of us currently in this very temporary and emotional mortal state. Clearly, without divine

intervention and/or revelation, we mortals are incapable of remembering clearly too far into the past. We are also easily overwhelmed by the emotions of a moment. Additionally, we cannot see into the future, and what hopes we have for the limited future we can imagine, are easily dashed by opposition.

How then can we become patient if we are not omniscient? As far as I have been able to tell, the key to patience is an unshakeable and immovable testimony of God's eternal plan of salvation and incredible faith in the atonement. This kind of testimony, or faith, is not built upon a cursory understanding of the plan, nor is it built upon casual and convenient obedience. An unshakeable and immovable testimony of Gods plan must be built by obedience, study, prayer, faith, and perseverance.

The plan of redemption is situated perfectly upon the atonement of Christ, which atonement overcame both physical and temporal death. The atonement overcame weakness, it overcame sin, and it overcame all suffering and opposition. It has saved, *past tense*, all who will repent both now and in the future. It has healed and resurrected all who have and who will die or suffer physical pain or deformity. Because of this infinite atonement, God's plan was meant to have opposition, suffering, trials, and temptation. We were meant to learn patience by strengthening our knowledge, understanding, and testimony of His plan.

Some people are afraid to pray for patience because they are afraid of what God will allow to come into their lives to answer this prayer. They are afraid to seek this attribute of charity. However, fear is not necessary. Patience is not about being put through trial after trial in some morbid way until we submit to despair and resignation—which is the mortal idea of patience. **Patience leads to peace and joy, not misery.** Patience is about using whatever experiences God allows in our lives to strengthen our faith in the atonement and His plan. **The stronger our testimony of the plan of salvation the greater our capacity to wait upon blessings, to wait upon wayward loved ones to return to God's covenants, and to wait upon psychological, emotional, and physical healing.**

Those with patience understand not only in their minds, but in their hearts, that they do not have to worry about if or when blessings will come. This is because that they have sure faith; they know and feel with a surety that all things are part of God's plan and that all will be completely fixed, explained, made clear, or restored in God's timing. As well, **the knowledge of God's timing doesn't bring them anger, resentment, despair, or bitterness. It brings them hope, reserve, and peace.** They don't worry about *if*. They only wait patiently for *when*.

If you have a difficult spouse, do you wonder when he/she will repent and change? Or do you exercise patience while you wait for when they will? If you have a child who is ungrateful, unkind, or wayward, do you wonder how you can make them grateful, kind, or repent? Or do you exercise patience while you wait for when they will learn it on their own? If you have lost a job or your health, do you agonize over when these cups of opposition will be removed? Or, do you exercise patience while you peacefully wait for your promised blessings—whenever they are ordained to come?

Anything in your life that causes you a feeling of unrest and impatience can be turned into a question like those above. Faith, hope, and charity are interconnected. To attain the patience that is a deep part of charity, we must first have faith in the atonement and firm hope in the plan of salvation, and also that God has an individual plan for each of us. For faith and hope in these things will make patience possible.

## KINDNESS

What is kindness? Kindness is the quality of being innately generous, considerate, and friendly.

While many of us can go through the motions (or appearance) of kindness, it is not necessarily something that comes naturally or easily. Nor are the motions of kindness evidence of an innate charitable-kindness. I have often wondered why this is. Why isn't it easy to be kind? Why do I have to force myself to serve? Why do I often feel annoyed when I know I need to show kindness? Why is the natural man (or woman) usually the opposite of kind?

I have seen many examples of people who find it easier to be kind to animals than to humans. I have seen people who find it easy to be generous with children but not with their adult peers. I have myself often struggled to be considerate to those whose personalities tend to annoy me. I don't wish them ill, but neither do I naturally want to go out of my way to bless their lives. *If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?*<sup>10</sup>

Kindness is so simple a trait that it is overlooked more often than not. But, in my experience, it is not the simplicity of the trait that leaves kindness so underperformed. **It is that kindness is not solely an action but a condition of the heart.** A heart condition of kindness is much more difficult to create. It requires us to *become* kind, not to simply act kind.

Christ was kind. He embodied kindness. It was *who He was*. He was kind to all, without regard to their actions toward him. As He was being crucified, did He not say, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?"*

If kindness is not an action but a condition of the heart in the doer, the level of complexity jumps up to Godly standards; standards from which I have often shrunk. I have often felt so frustrated. How could I get my heart saturated with kindness that I didn't have to force there?

There are likely many reasons for an unkind heart. However, for myself, I found that kindness came much easier when my motivation for giving kindness changed. Because kindness requires emotional, spiritual, and almost always physical effort, the motivation for kindness is important.

Often, we are kind because it's a commandment. We think in the form of an equation: be kind = blessings. We do to receive. This isn't evil. It is good. It's the natural course of growth and is usually the first step toward becoming kind at heart, but it isn't charity.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:46

When I was younger, still a teen and young adult, I keenly remember my mother giving a talk in sacrament meeting on charity. Like me, she had always struggled to “like people.” She certainly loved people as children of God, but because she didn’t always like them as friends and as such, she struggled to be actively kind. In her talk she talked about a spiritual epiphany she’d had about charity. “For me,” she said, “charity is helping people through the plan,” meaning the plan of salvation. This was also a revelation to me.

If I think about going out and serving someone, just to be kind for the sake of keeping a commandment, I’m not likely to be excited about it, or to feel a genuine ease of doing so in my heart. There are all sorts of excuses I can make, such as: this person doesn’t care about or need my kindness, or, someone else will do it, or, they don’t like me anyway, so going over there to help probably won’t make them happy, and so forth. It’s a commandment, but why keep it with slothfulness? Isn’t that worse than not going? Or, wouldn’t I feel more prompted to go if it was important?

Being kind to just to keep a commandment cannot always produce the heart-changing motivation I need. This is because the motivation is self-focused. It’s me doing something to keep my own report card looking good. It’s about *me* keeping a commandment so *I* can get the blessing.

However, if I think about going and serving someone in the hopes that my kindness will open their heart to the Spirit, to truth, to a step forward in God’s plan for them, that is something I can get excited about. The reason why this motivation is different is because it’s not focused on me. It’s focused on the possible outcomes I can help create by helping another through the plan of salvation. I’m thinking about them, not my own checklist or desired blessings.

**The minor change in my motivation makes a huge difference in the condition of my heart.**

Kindness is a commandment. But it not something we do simply to get blessings, to check it off a list, or to feel better about ourselves. We do it because our acts of kindness toward others are a key part of helping them to get through God’s plan. Whether we help them move, take them meals, bear

with their idle chatter, weed their garden, forgive their lack of tact, visit or minister to them, donate money or resources, etc.; we do it not because they are our favorite people or because we have a specific friendly emotion in our heart, but because we want them to have the help and resources they need to get through the plan of salvation. We want them to have access to God's covenants. Certainly, we don't want to be the reason their journey through the plan is delayed. Kindness...it's about God's work and His merciful plan.

Christ said in 3 Nephi 27:7 (as well as in many NT scriptures):

*Behold, I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that **I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.***

Like Christ, we to have come into the world to do the will of our Father, because our Father has sent us. Once we embrace the gospel ourselves, God has commanded us to take upon us His work and glory for our own. Like Christ's life, no matter our powers, talents, or graces, all was meant to be consecrated wholly to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of our fellow man.

Now, there are those who have a genuine spiritual gift to like people in general, to envelop them in their social circle, and to show kindness and befriend them with little effort. These individuals have an incredible gift and are critical examples to those of us who struggle a bit more. However, even for those who find kindness is already a part of them, they still have to act to use this God-given trait in a purposeful, powerful, and God-focused way: to help people through the plan. A talent is of little worth unless it is invested and multiplied in God's service. That's why the talent was bestowed to begin with.

**Christ was kind to all because He saw clearly His role in their lives. He was there to help them recognize their Father in Heaven.** He was there to help them have the knowledge, physical strength, spiritual boost, or necessary Christlike reprimand to get them on the path to eternal life. Kindness was as much in His heart as it was in His stewardship. So it should be also in ours.

## CONTENTMENT: CHARITY ENVIETH NOT

To be envious is to have a feeling of discontentment or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck. It can also be the idea of possessions, qualities, or luck. Simply by our preoccupation with the blessings of others, or blessings we covet, we become discontent with our own life. We may even feel denied a particular blessing by some secret divine decree; one we are certain we should be given. After all, we have fasted, prayed, acted, done our part, and yet the desired blessing hasn't come, and we feel entitled to it.

The day I realized I was full of envy was the day I read the definition. Two words popped out at me: resentful longing. Now, I would never venture to say that longing by itself is wrong. But resentful longing certainly is. For me, resentful longing was a deep, very well-hidden ache that plagued me about several blessings which I desired. For all intents and purposes, I knew I was living as God wanted me to. I often felt peace regarding my standing before Him; and yet, deep within was a resentful longing for things I felt I had been denied.

There are many righteous, faithful saints who have as yet not received blessings they may feel they have earned by obedience and hard work. How many sisters are childless despite years of desire and efforts? How much money and stress have they invested in medical assistance? How many men have never achieved a desired profession or level of education, or expertise or rank in their chosen career path and its accompanying paycheck? How much money and effort have they expended in additional education and work experience to arrive and yet no one seems to recognize them from among job candidates? How many righteous, willing, single saints date and date and date and yet never feel a confirmation of the Spirit that those they are in company with are a satisfactory eternal companion? After all, they are following prophetic counsel. They have even been willing to settle or compromise.

So, how do we beat down these feelings of disappointment, discouragement, and resentful longing? How can we change our propensity to compare our

current circumstances, bodies, incomes, clothes, educations, talents, and smarts to others? How can we become inherently content?

Instinctually, we might answer this question with the commandment to be grateful, to have gratitude. But, like kindness, gratitude is not a forced mindset, nor will unenthusiastically vocalizing thanks create in us a content and grateful heart, though it certainly helps and is a good habit to get into.

I have often struggled with a sense of envy throughout my life. I didn't see it as envy for a long time, because in general I felt quite grateful for all that I had. I could easily count my blessings. I could easily recognize where I had been protected and blessed. I could easily see and verbalize my gratitude for things I had been given that others had not. But, my ability to count or recognize my blessings didn't actually create in me a content heart. It didn't remove the deeply hidden resentful longing.

When I think of Christ, I try to imagine what He may have longed for that others had. When we compare Christ to anyone else, He always comes out ahead. So, does that mean He was not tempted to be envious of anything? Was His ability to be content a piece-of-cake?

As a member of the church, I was raised keeping the word of wisdom. However, in my youth, when most people are tempted, there was never a desire in me—to any extent—to experiment with drugs, alcohol, tea, or even coffee. I had opportunities, but the opportunities held no power or enticement over me. I simply had no interest. I didn't see the draw.

However, in my adult years I experienced a few heartbreaking trials. These trials were accompanied by very real and crippling emotional and psychological wounds. Like any physical wounds, they needed time to heal. The healing did not happen quickly, and it couldn't be rushed. Its progress was to a great extent, beyond my ability to control. Though I did all I could to try and speed it up.

Now, when I go to the dentist, I happily accept all forms of pain killers. I get the shots that keep me from feeling pain when work needs to be done. And, I

certainly accept with gratitude any prescribed pain medication that will hide the pain of my dental work while my body heals. The same goes for other medical issues and visits to a physician. When pain is anticipated or caused, I happily fill my approved prescriptions to kill the pain.

On the other hand, during the trials of my life, when I have been under very real intense emotional and psychological distress and pain, it has occurred to me that there are no prescribed pain killers for this stuff. Not only did the trial come and enact upon me a very real injury without any anesthetic, but when the unfair procedure was done, I was given nothing to kill the pain while I healed. It has been in these times that I have joked with those closest to me that, being a Latter-day Saint, I can't go out and kill the pain. Because I know what's right, I can't go get drunk or take drugs or sleep around to hide my emotional and psychological pain while I heal. Because I know what's right, I must grin and bear my struggles and find righteous ways to apply healing salve to a wounded soul.

It was during these healing years that for the first time I understood the draw for alcohol and illegal drugs. I didn't desire to break any commandments, but there were days when my psychological and emotional pain was severe enough that I resented those that could drown their sorrows without guilt. If I were to go out and try to drown my sorrows in the same ways I would be left with guilt. I couldn't do what they could do because of what I knew and what I had been taught. I had resentful longing to kill my own pain.

Now, I'm not advocating that Christ looked longingly upon pigs and wished that He could have some bacon—since they were forbidden in the Israelite diet. But I am suggesting that His burden was so heavy, His calling so elevated and taxing, and His love so great, that it might have been tempting to long for, or envy, a lesser cup. If it be thy will “let this cup pass from me”, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26:39

Christ was ridiculed throughout His life. He was treated unkindly, inhumanely, and He was the subject of abject hatred. I can't presume to know what He felt, but since like His Father, Christ was the embodiment of love, it is possible that His righteous longing would have been for a return of that love: to look upon His brothers and sisters who were preparing to betray and kill Him and long for them to recognize Him, to realize what He had done for them, to love Him in return so that He might save them.

Did Christ have longing? Certainly. But fortunately for us it was never resentful. He understood His role and while He longed for many things, He never resented His role nor the stations or possessions of others.

The truth is, though Christ was likely tempted, He didn't waste any time resenting His role, His mission, or even His sacrifice. Though He may have been tempted, He didn't dwell on the fact that His path was the hardest any would ever be called to take. He didn't resent the fact that despite all the service He rendered, He still had very few friends in comparison to others. He genuinely rejoiced in those who did call Him Lord, Savior, and Friend. He embraced His role in God's plan and therein He found His joy and fulfillment.

As I have struggled with envy, I have found it most easy to diminish and overcome when I stop comparing my life to others. I have had to stop wondering why God has given others the blessings I clearly want more (or so I think) and have worked for. **I have had to gain a testimony that God has a specific mission and plan for my life and that if it doesn't entail what I desire or feel entitled to then there is a good reason.** Not a reason I should resent, but a reason I should embrace and trust.

God has a plan for me! He has a mission for me! No matter my perceived gifts or abilities, no matter my efforts or focus, no matter my powers or capabilities, God has a plan for them and it's His plan I should seek out, embrace, and do with all my heart. That is what Christ did.

This is one way I have found out how to be content and to envy not.

## HUMILITY

To be humble is to have or show a modest or low estimation of our own importance. It is to inherently be able to see our own role and mission, talents or gifts, as the property of God and not of ourselves. It is to get to a point where we stop comparing ourselves to anyone but Christ.

The problem with the idea of humility is that it often gets confused with self-deprecation. People misunderstand the idea of “modesty” or “low estimation” as the need to devalue and degrade themselves. In an attempt to not be overly self-focused or prideful they merely change their act of pride, comparison, and self-focus. Instead of finding themselves better by comparison, they use comparison to focus on their faults in an effort to be humble. Thus, they are still prideful and self-focused in a manner which is sometimes more destructive than the first.

I have discovered that the key to humility is to remember that “it’s not about me.” Now, the world would turn this phrase upside down and inside out and accuse me of telling people they don’t matter, that their lives don’t matter, that their efforts don’t matter, and that they should take up some sort of religious obsession in place of normal everyday life. The world would argue that by preaching the idea of “losing self” I’m convincing people to neglect their self-esteem and self-worth and in effect destroying them as they get run over by other people and by life.

Therefore, before anyone begin to think I’m encouraging self-deprecation or unhealthy religious obsession, let me explain what I mean.

Christ was the most powerful being to ever walk this earth. He was more intelligent than us all. He was capable of being an infinite and eternal sacrifice. It would have been easy for Him to be prideful. For, certainly He had all power. Yet, though His mission was central to the Father’s plan—indeed, without His atonement there would have been no plan—He didn’t focus on Himself and how wonderful He was being. He knew His mission. His power was not about Him. It was about ‘the Father’s plan.’ It was about us.

He didn't place Himself as a God to be worshipped. He gave the glory to God, the Father, and pointed us to Him. He didn't claim a greater reward because of His greatness. He used His greatness to bring us the chance of the same reward, in Heaven. As great as Christ was, He was still the son of God. His mission was still ultimately about God, the Father, and His plan.

On the other hand, though Christ gave all the glory to God, the Father, He also never put Himself down. He never made a big deal about being lesser than the almighty. Rather, He rejoiced in His station. He also never diminished His own role in God's plan. He owned it, did it with confidence and surety, and yet never tried to exceed it.

He didn't back away when people wept on His feet and then wiped them with their own hair. He never turned away gratitude and gifts. He accepted all "charity" with grace and yet never made people feel awkward for giving by a show of arrogance or self-deprecation.

Each of us has specific talents, abilities, smarts, intelligence, knowledge, and spiritual gifts. Some of us are gifted in many ways. Some of us are gifted in fewer ways. But ultimately, no matter how many gifts or talents we've been given; no matter how intelligent or knowledgeable we are, our gifts are not about us, and they were never meant to be. All that we have is about God and His plan for His children. As small or as great as we may often feel, none of what we have matters in comparison to others because what we have is not about us. It's about God and His plan.

It doesn't matter that we can't play the piano or sing like someone else. It doesn't matter that we can't teach or speak like someone else. It doesn't matter that we aren't PhD's like someone else. It doesn't matter if we don't have a knack for gardening, canning, and food storage like someone else. It doesn't matter if we have 20 million dollars or 20 dollars. It all belongs to God and He expects us to use it in His service. Whether they had one talent or ten, the servants of the Lord were expected to own their gifts, invest their money, and return it to their Lord with usury.

It's tempting to think we keep a commandment better than others. It's tempting to think we are better teachers, speakers, leaders, piano players, church administrators, parents, or missionaries than others. It's also equally tempting to think others are better, by comparison, and that we have been given so little that we are nothing. It's tempting to beat ourselves up emotionally and psychologically in order to make sense of our lack of testimony or of our value to God.

It's tempting to think that motherhood is unfair in comparison to fatherhood. It's tempting to think that being born in an affluent home or country is better than being born elsewhere. It's tempting to resent not being born in an affluent home or country. It's tempting to resent others who appear, by comparison, to have been born to privilege or money when we've been born to abuse and poverty. It's tempting to compare our efforts for a job or career versus someone who already has what we want and seems to have achieved it at so much less of a personal cost.

Comparison looking down or up can consume our lives. It will do so, to some extent, until we are able to see that our lives are swallowed up in God's plan. **Our individual lives, whatever their content, are about God and His plan.** Whether it's God's plan for our individual salvation and exaltation, or whether it's God's plan for how we are to use what He's given us to lead others to salvation or exaltation, it's never about us. It's always about God and His plan.

## SELFLESSNESS

To be selfless is to be more concerned with the needs and wishes of others than our own. At first glance selflessness appears to be similar to humility. But, while humility is an absence of incorrect comparison and an inherent understanding of our place in God's plan, selflessness is a condition of the heart that leads us to forget ourselves within that plan. In other words, we stop worrying about missing out on something. We stop worrying about what we want, what we may be denied, and what we may or may not get.

In the New Testament, Mark 8:35 we learn: *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

I find that the key to this scripture is “lose his life for [God’s] sake”. We aren’t asked to lose everything simply to make a show of loss. We aren’t asked to sacrifice and to take stripes in order to have evidence for our righteousness. We are expected to be willing to put others first because we recognize that nothing offered, given, sacrificed, or missed out on ‘to help others through the plan’ is actually lost. It is lost/given for God’s sake; for His plan’s sake. In fact, **anything we sacrifice is multiplied each time we give it up. The more we give for the sake of God’s plan the more we shall receive.**

A good friend and sister I knew in my home ward growing up said something to the effect of: you can’t give God a slice of bread and not get a loaf in return. God knows how to give good gifts to His children. Christ said in Matthew 19:29:

*And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

So, how do we overcome our natural preoccupation with getting and receiving? How do we eliminate the worry of losing out on some blessing or opportunity that we are certain is the best path or opportunity for us? We’ve even given God a list of how many amazing things we could do in His name, if He would only grant us this thing! How do we put off the natural man and lose our life for God’s sake?

Each of us has in our mind’s eye a life plan of some sort. We have dreams and desires. We imagine the joy of arriving at some future rest. This may take the form of a dream job, a dream house, a dream educational degree, a dream family, or a dream situation of some kind. We have this dream and we naturally design our lives around arriving at this future rest.

As we dream, we come up with ideas of how to get what we want. We focus on these paths to our dreams in attempt to have what we want in the way that we think is best to achieve that desire. This is a natural process, and certainly not inherently evil. In many ways, it is a good mental effort and helps us to be anxiously engaged in a good cause and to bring to pass much righteousness.

Then, life happens. Trials, the agency of others, health issues, mistakes, oversights, and other unforeseen issues begin to barricade the path to the rest we have dreamed of. What is our reaction? Panic. Whether we express it moderately or to extreme, we begin to panic. We begin to problem solve. How can we find the shortest route around this barricade, this issue? We become preoccupied with our destination. We work to get it back at almost any cost to the people around us. We are solely preoccupied with getting our way back on track to our rest.

Or, on the other hand, life is great. We are headed forward toward our dream with relatively minor setbacks and we are on a roll. During our leisure time we begin to add detours and side trips to our future rest. Things are going so well we see no need to look around at what we can do for others. Instead we create bigger and bigger dreams for ourselves.

Whether we are in panic mode or in excessive dream mode, we are selfish. Our own perceived needs make the needs of others appear far less important. We plan to help others, or to serve God better, once we have gotten what we believe we need and want first. We are far from selfless.

God has a plan for each of us. This plan is tailored to make us like Him and includes receiving all that He has, worlds without end. Yet, sometimes we get comfortable with our own dreams and plans, which in general are far beneath what God has imagined for us. We think we know what will bring us true joy and current happiness. Or, sometimes our path to our future rest takes seemingly unfair and devastating detours and we get sidetracked troubleshooting to get back to something that God already has a plan for restoring.

It's like a child wanting a tiny, cheap sucker from a road-side candy stand, when the Willy-Wonka candy paradise is a 20-mile walk down the road. Yet, that child sees the sucker and is so worried about not receiving anything sweet that it throws a fit, gets mad, yells unkind things at its parents, picks a fight with a more patient sibling, and so forth. In the moment, this child is so preoccupied with self and what he wants that what's available or how everyone is being

affected never crosses his mind. He is blinded by his own selfishness and lack of trust. He will not be denied his sweet!

The parents may say, you have to walk 20 miles and be nice to your sister, but at the end you can have 1 billion suckers if you want. But, the longer you delay, you keep not only yourself from Willy Wonka land, you are slowing down our progress and your sister's progress to receiving it also.

We become selfless when we lose our fear of missing out or being overlooked. **We become selfless when we come to know for ourselves that every blessing and joy we could ever imagine and more can never be denied us if we follow God's plan and example for us.** Giving a generous fast offering will not cripple us financially nor will it enable the lazy. Giving our used car to a needy family member or friend rather than selling it for a profit is not going to cripple us. Will we miss the money we might have made on the purchase? No. For we have enough and having more won't make us happier if we leave another in need.

## NOT EASILY PROVOKED

To provoke someone is to try to anger them, exasperate them, stimulate a rise or response, or to purposely vex them. To be easily provoked is to be like a dry pile of hay. One spark and you become a raging inferno. To be easily provoked is to be easily offended. It is to perceive offense even when none is intended. It is to look for reasons to get offended. To be easily provoked is to have a negative mindset that merely waits for a possible provocation and to act on it with the inherent belief that the actions of others is what has caused you, and given you right, to be vexed.

Charity is not easily provoked. This means that it is nearly impossible to provoke someone with charity. Instead of a dry pile of hay, a person is a wet log with no dry kindling nearby. Instead of perceiving offense, charity assumes none or sees instead that others are hurting which is why they are lashing out—charity doesn't take it personally. **Instead of looking for justification to be vexed and to lash out, charity sees no purpose or value in taking things personally or in an outward show of anger.**

So, how do we do this? Does this mean that feeling angry or hurt or offended is wrong? Again, do we have to cease having emotions at all to avoid getting provoked? Especially when a person does it on purpose? Certainly, it is much harder to avoid becoming vexed when purposeful offense is given.

It is important to note that because of the gift of agency, the actions and words of others have real impact on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is because of this real and valid impact that the atonement was necessary. Our actions and words have to matter or we could not sin, nor could we do good (which people often forget...the power to do good is part and parcel with the power to sin). Agency is what makes the plan possible. Purposeful action is what makes God's plan work.

Therefore, when people give purposeful, or even perceived, offense, it is a natural reaction for us to feel hurt, slighted, and offended. It is natural to feel a sense of anger. However, those who are easily provoked respond to these valid feelings in a self-focused manner. They feel the impact and choose to take it personally.

They want to lash back. They want to judge, or punish. They want a sense of revenge or restitution. Or, they are looking for justification to act on some other sin or negative action, and because they are focused on self, they use the offenses of others to provide their justification.

Sin is not compulsory (or in other words, we can't be made to sin).

Christ certainly felt hurt, anger, frustration, and offense. How then did He keep from getting provoked?

Though we are allowed to have our natural feelings and responses, **we are expected to learn to respond to them unselfishly. We are expected to view our response in how it will help others through the plan.** If I am angry and I choose to yell and scream, belittle and demean, and cause fear in those around me, how does my reaction bring those around me a chance to participate and embrace God's plan for them? It doesn't. But, if I am angry and yet I choose to

openly forgive, to have courage and be kind, or to righteously rebuke, then while my anger was understandable, my response was Christ-like.

When Christ entered the temple and found moneychangers and unrighteous financial dealings, He was certainly angry. I venture He felt hurt and betrayal for the sacredness of His Father's House. He certainly dealt out a righteous rebuke. But even in His reprimand He did not purposefully belittle, injure, or act with tyranny. He taught firmly, "Ye have made it a den of thieves."<sup>12</sup> The Jews knew better, for they had "been given much" and therefore received "the greater condemnation."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 19:46

<sup>13</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 82:3

# TRUE LOVE AND HOW TO GET IT: PART TWO

Continued from True Love and How to Get It: Part One

## Thinketh no evil

Charity “thinketh no evil.” However, the term evil is too generalized for us to correctly interpret what it means to think evil. We all have different ideas on what evil is. So, let’s define it.

Evil = profoundly immoral (or morally bad), wicked, malevolent, depraved (perverted), criminal, etc.

I don’t think a lot of people dwell on morally bad, wicked, malevolent, depraved, or criminal thoughts. And, whether or not we have such thoughts briefly (or are tempted to think of them based on a response to our feelings

and environment) it is not, in my opinion, what it means to “think evil.” So, what might it mean to think evil?

Just as our ability to take note of the fact that a woman or man is attractive is not evil; to be aware of evil, or to be able to notice it mentally, does not make us an “evil thinker.”

However, while it is acceptable to notice a woman or man is attractive, to continue to appraise them and purposefully entertain sexual thoughts about them is lust, and by the law of Christ, adultery in our heart. Lust and adultery in our hearts and minds is certainly evil thinking.

Thinking evil = to desire to and to purposefully hold onto and entertain morally bad, wicked, malevolent, depraved (i.e. perverted), or criminal thoughts.

Proverbs 23:7 teaches us that “as a man thinketh so is he.” But again, we’ve all had plenty of evil thoughts cross our minds momentarily and we still seem to be basically alright. So, what I believe Solomon is trying to say is: the thoughts we purposefully choose to engender and entertain are those that direct our ultimate desires and actions, and by consequence those thoughts that slowly mold us into who we are.

So, how do we avoid thinking evil?

Well, I could offer a lot of suggestions here, but ultimately, first we must not desire evil. But not desiring evil is not a good enough solution. We must also replace evil desires with the desire to be selfless. For all evil thinking is centered in selfishness. We must want to remove selfishness and replace it with selflessness (See section on Selflessness in True Love and How to Get It: PART ONE).

Those who engender evil thoughts do so because they are afraid that they will miss out on gratification, justice, love, peace, and other forms of fulfillment. They selfishly entertain evil thoughts in their minds (and often ultimately act on them) to “get the feelings” they desire, and feel destitute or robbed of.

For example:

We entertain thoughts about immorality with pornographic pictures or with the last attractive man or woman we saw in an effort to satiate our selfish desire for the euphoria for sexual fulfillment. We may justify our fantasizing or eventual physical fornication or adultery as a way to selfishly compensate for emotional, psychological, or spiritual issues/fulfillment that we have not correctly dealt with.

For example:

We entertain thoughts about physical abuse, winning arguments, seeing people suffer for their actions, sexual abuse, and other forms of dominance, revenge, and control. We justify these thoughts (and often eventual actions) by the selfish needs we have to conquer pain, to be right, to avoid perceived embarrassments, to enact our version of justice, to feel loved, etc.

Now, though our pains and struggles may be real and valid, their validity does not justify selfishly exploiting others (even if only in our minds) to satiate our needs.

So, the goal is to identify and eliminate “evil thinking.”

We can identify evil thoughts easily enough if we catch ourselves turning other people into “objects” to alleviate our issues. As people are not objects, but the creators and users of objects, evil thoughts spawn happily when we allow our minds to head down the path of objectification. This is the root of selfishness: using others as objects to attain our own ends. Selfishness is the true antithesis of charity.

Those who murder, plunder, abuse, violate, and exercise unrighteous dominion, etc., do so to alleviate their own issues and fulfill their personal passions, hungers, or wants. This objectification is necessary to selfishness because it is the only way to justify their actions. If they allow themselves to see others as sons and daughters of God, as potential deities, as people with

families, talents, hurts, and emotions, then they cannot in good conscience assault them. It's much easier to wrong an object for our own selfish needs than a real, living, breathing Child of God.

Now, even if we aren't prone to objectifying others very often, let me also suggest that we can objectify ourselves. Many people turn themselves into objects (or lesser beings, or animals, etc.) in order to justify selfish actions and sins against their own bodies and spirits. Sometimes psychological issues (undealt with) cause self-objectification. Sometimes abuse by others causes self-objectification. But the sooner we recognize that we are "thinking evil" (whether intentionally or unintentionally), the sooner we can repent and change.

All of us have, at one time or another, justified sinful actions and thoughts against our own bodies and spirits by ignoring who we truly are. We have starved ourselves, dressed and acted immodestly, eaten unhealthy, attempted suicide, used habit-forming substances, committed unchaste acts, and beaten ourselves up verbally or mentally. But we were able to do so by first turning ourselves into an object who's worth and purpose could be easily debated.

So, it's important to note that objectification takes place anytime we remove our primary identity and worth as a child of God (or another's primary identity and worth). Christ, the Lord, gave His immortal life willingly which rendered us priceless and granted us nearly unlimited potential. If we do not truly believe and value ourselves or others by our true identity (children of God), then all other forms of identification and self-value systems can easily turn us (or them) into objects of evil thinking.

So, two possible ways to overcome and avoid evil thinking:

1. Desire to be selfless (see True Love and How to Get It: PART ONE)
2. Do not allow yourself to objectify yourselves and others, i.e. always see yourself and others primarily as children of God.

## Rejoicing in goodness and not enticed by iniquity

To rejoice is to feel great joy and delight. Note: We're not talking about excitement and temporary euphoria here. Rejoicing is deep, pure, and consistent even during sorrow and difficulty. Rejoicing is not a cursory feeling, but a condition of the heart.

Therefore, to rejoice in goodness is to feel great joy and delight when we experience and witness goodness. Also, it is important to understand that this type of innate rejoicing in goodness is a critical precursor to get to a point where iniquity is no longer enticing.

Addiction recovery programs often call doing good but not desiring good White Knuckling. This means people go through the motions of good, but they still desire the evil addiction/action in their hearts. Scripturally, White Knuckling is preceded by "worldly sorrow."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is only a matter of time before White Knucklers return to the addiction/action because they still deeply desire it. Therefore, because they still desire the addiction, and mourn its absence in their lives, and have only quit because they've been—in a sense—caught, they will eventually lose their White Knuckle grip on their attempt at righteousness, fall into a strain of "evil thinking" and then soon find themselves again deeply submerged in their addiction.

We have all been White Knucklers at times because we have not yet learned to rejoice in goodness.

But, let's face reality. Deep down, we all have a love-hate relationship with sin. It's universal. And, we each exhibit this love-hate relationship differently.

Many sins seem not so bad and so we like to hold on to them. We rejoice in our relationship with these lesser sins. We enjoy them. Sins that seem to be worse sins we don't particularly rejoice in, but sometimes neither do we hate them. We try to avoid these worse sins because of the warnings of others, but

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10

when the temptation to engage in them comes knocking at our door, we find that they are not nearly as abhorrent to us as they should be. Finally, there are a few sins we all love to hate. They are not enticing. They are loathsome. But they are too few.

We all hate murder. We all hate rape. We all hate extortion and blackmail. We hate physical, verbal, and sexual child abuse. But the question is, why do we hate these sins so easily? The answer might be because these horrific sins create an immediate host of victims. Their consequences are immediate, widespread, ugly, impossible to bypass, and they injure free will in the most horrific ways. They are, in effect, sins that it is almost impossible for anyone to make palatable to even the basest human. We can't dress these sins up and make them look enticing. Atheists, Agnostics, and the God-fearing alike can agree that the actions that fall in this group are wrong.

So, why don't we hate all sin the way we hate these gross crimes against humanity? Why don't we hate even the little sins and the worse sins with the same vehemence?

We likely don't hate lesser sins as much because of the very reasons we find it easy hate the horrible sins. The consequences of smaller sins are rarely immediate and often delayed in visibility and scope. In lesser sins the consequences don't seem to extend as far in their negative reach. Lesser sins, and even worse sins, can be made to look okay. We sometimes unwisely think there are no consequences, and that free will is somehow still preserved in ourselves and others for these lesser sins. The lesser and worse sins can be made to look palatable to even the most righteous/good people.

In order to rejoice in goodness in the way Christ did, we must learn to find all iniquity unpalatable—even disgusting. And, the only way to do that is to take the time to see all sin, even the itty-bitty ones, in their horrible, ugly reality. We must force ourselves to stop and take the time to ponder the full scope of the sins we like, love, sort of dislike, and even those we hate to love—but we do. We must refuse to be distracted by their pretty costumes and lying faces.

## FACTS ABOUT ALL SIN

All sin has impact not only on ourselves but others. We cannot do anything sinful that will not injure or hurt those around us. This is because all sin affects the very core of who we are and how we act—even in small ways—and so even if others don't know about them, they suffer by association with us.

All sin is addictive to some extent—meaning that because it is the wrong way to get the good we desire, it can never permanently satisfy us. If we do not repent and seek the right way to get the good we desire, we will become powerless to the sins we embrace. We know we are addicted to a sin if we can't imagine living without it and if it easily trumps better and best things we know we should be doing.

All sin is offensive to God; from a tiny off-color joke to the heinous crimes we all can agree to hate together. No sin, no matter how small, is acceptable in His presence. If you find yourself justifying that one of your sins can remain a part of you and you get still become like God, then you have deceived yourself.

We can't take joy in any sin if we desire to have charity—the pure, true love of Christ. If you take joy in a sin, and you are aware of it, then if you seek charity you must be willing to desire charity more than you desire your sins. Otherwise, you are damned (stopped in progress) in becoming godly until you can part with your sin.

We can't balance our righteousness against our sins and come out ahead. Grace is not earnable.

We can't barter with God about what's right and wrong. We can't make our sins okay by changing or altering commandments simply because we don't understand them. His righteousness is the only true righteousness that exists.

One solution is to stop dressing up and justifying our lesser and worse sins for ourselves. God can see through the costumes and disguises. It's time we got up the bravery to see past them too.

It's time we asked our sins to take off their costumes and masks. It's time we asked ourselves how even the little sins are hurting ourselves and others. It's time we asked ourselves what needs we have that could be truly satisfied by seeking them in the proper way. It's time we stopped judging offensiveness by our own standard and place our lives in front of God's light so that He can reveal what in our lives offends Him. It's time to find out why we still take joy in and desire certain sins. It's time to find out if we are subconsciously balancing our good deeds with our bad ones. It's time to find out if we are trying to get God to submit to our idea of good, instead of us submitting to His standard of good.

If we ask the Lord to reveal to us the ugliness and consequences of our sins all sin will begin to become clear to us. We will see the horrible troll behind the enchantment making it look like a prince or princess. We will become disgusted by it. We will no longer be enticed by iniquity.

Then, as we embrace the right way to pursue all the good we desire, and we experience real fulfillment, peace, joy, and happiness; we will be able to then rejoice in goodness! We will see good not just as a list of unfair rules that we have to abide by. We will see good as glorious fulfilling light that leaves all of our past ideas about joy in the dust.

## Willing to bear all things/Endures all things

To bear = carry, support, endure. Note the three very different words: carry, support, and endure. Carry implies to bear the entire weight of something on behalf of someone else. Support implies helping someone else bear the weight of a burden. Endure means to bear with something for an undetermined amount of time. All of these things define what it means to "bear." Part of charity is being willing to bear all things, and to endure all things.

Christ was willing to carry all our sins. Christ was willing to support the plan of His Father selflessly. Christ was willing to endure the pains, suffering, ridicule, and misery that was part of His role in God's plan for all of us. He was willing to bear all things that we too could bear all things.

Though we don't like it, and often fail to preach it, life is meant to be hard. Life is a proving process. Through time and a host of mortal conditions, we prove to ourselves what we love, what we want, and who we really are. This is the process of being tested. We are not tested so that God knows what we are made of. He already knows. We are proved so that we know what we are made of.

Charity is willing to bear all things because charity understands that to become like God we must be willing to do as He did. Now, we will not ever have to perform the atonement as Christ did for us. But, each of us, according to our own capacity will be tried as Abraham.<sup>15</sup>

To be tried as Abraham doesn't mean we will be asked to offer up one of our children as a sacrifice. Yet, God, the Father, had to do such that we might all have the opportunity for immortality and eternal life.<sup>16</sup> To become godly we must submit to godly conditioning.

While the righteous are promised blessings because of their faithfulness, it doesn't mean they are promised no problems, no sorrows, and no suffering. However, the conditions and weaknesses inherent in mortality are still part and parcel of the whole "becoming like God" gig. The righteous will still get sick, suffer persecution, lose jobs, struggle with personal issues and weaknesses, lose children, die, be injured by others actions, and more.

To be tried as Abraham means to be willing to submit to whatever God allows in our lives.<sup>17</sup> It means to submit with patience. It means to submit with faith and hope. It means to submit without resentment and loss of trust in God. It means to take what comes and maintain trust and faith in the glorious future that awaits when this life passes.

All we are asked to pass through in this life is not insignificant or unimportant. In fact, it is quite the opposite. All that we suffer is significant and important

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<sup>15</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 101:4

<sup>16</sup> Moses 1:39, John 3:16, Doctrine and Covenants 34:3

<sup>17</sup> Mosiah 3:19

inasmuch as it proves us. But, though “bearing and enduring all things” is extremely difficult and sometimes feels impossible to overcome, it will one day seem but a “small moment;” and then if “we endure/bear it well” God shall exalt us on high.<sup>18</sup>

Now, this is hard doctrine. It’s not the fluffy stuff we all would prefer to hear.

When I have struggled through life’s curve balls, debilitating mazes, unfair sufferings, and horrible experiences, I have often heard the older and wiser people around me say things like: this too shall pass, or time heals all wounds. When they have said these things I have often felt angry and resentful. “Don’t they realize how NOT comforting that is!” I have thought.

But, then, despite the fact that I didn’t like their “hard doctrine,” time did pass, my troubles passed, time did help with healing, and soon all things turned out exactly as they said with their little sayings. So, I grumbled about their lack of sensitivity. But what I was really grumbling about was that they told me the truth. I wanted fluffy promises even if they wouldn’t really come true. But what they gave me was tough love, true love—the only kind that really helps.

It was after some of these struggles had passed that I realized that bearing, enduring, and submitting to all that comes our way in life is the only way to overcome. It is the only way to find peace. It’s to stand in front of the mountain wave and say, “Here I am. Let’s get this over with.” That’s what Christ did in Gethsemane.

Christ has already overcome all the problems we are presently facing, have faced, or will face. Because He has already “won” for us, our only job is to endure the problems and to do so with as much grace as we can. Whether our sufferings are caused by our own sins or the sins of others, we can still learn from the suffering. It can still add to our understanding and spiritual resources. There is nothing that we experience that isn’t for our profit and learning. That’s

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<sup>18</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 121:8

why our mission in gaining charity is to simply learn to bear with and endure ALL things.

## Believing and Hopeful

Now, if you're an optimist, you may expect this section to be about having a super-positive attitude. I'm sorry to disappoint. I do believe optimism—in general—is a good thing. But charitable belief and hope is much deeper (in my opinion) and has to carry much more power than a simple sunny perspective on life.

First, belief and hope are precursors to faith. Faith is a principle of action and power. People often use faith and belief interchangeably, but in the true gospel sense, they are not the same.

Belief and hope are so intertwined it is hard to define them separately. In fact, most dictionary definitions of belief include the word hope. Hope is an expectation and so belief is often the extension of hope or the precursor to it. So, as you can see, I don't think it's possible to believe and not have hope except in very rare circumstances, none of which I can postulate.

So, when we believe in something and hope for it, it is then that we tend to exercise faith—meaning that we act with the expectation that what we believe and hope for will be the result of our action. Those that believe and hope but do not exercise faith are much more likely to fall into the category of disappointed hope. Belief and hope not accompanied by action/faith rarely produce results. So, charity must believe and hope all things in order to produce perfect faith.

However, most important in this concept of charitable belief and hope is that it has to be exercised toward something within our limited personal reach of agency. This is because belief and hope must be followed by faith/action. We can believe in others and have hope for them to varying degrees, but rarely are we capable of bringing something to pass on their behalf. This life, for the most part, rarely accepts vicarious offerings. We can rarely exert vicarious righteousness on another's behalf. And, even if we are allowed to do some

vicarious work (like saving ordinances, fasting, praying), the people for whom we offer the vicarious actions still must exercise their own agency to believe, hope, have faith, and to accept what we offer.

Our belief, hope, and faith is never wasted. But its reach is limited by the agency of others and God's will. So, be optimistic—yes. But it is important to note that charitable belief and hope are based in correct knowledge accompanied by eternal (not merely mortal) expectations. Charitable belief and hope know (and do not resent) that God's will reigns, and that all His promises will be fulfilled in His own way, and in His own time. This kind of belief and hope leads to faith in what will come to pass—as it's only a matter of how and when.

## TRUE LOVE AND HOW TO GET IT: PART THREE

There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demoniac it will be if it rebels. ~George MacDonald~

I was reading *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis this week (for probably the third or fourth time) and was particularly impacted, on this particular read-through of chapter 11. It might be easy to get confused by the title of this book without knowing what it's about. The title however was chosen as an antithesis to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake. C.S. Lewis's title is a play on Blake's title and makes the point that no such marriage is possible. That in fact, at some point in all of our lives (and in God's over-arching plan) there will be nothing less than a final great divorce between heaven and hell.

George MacDonald, Lewis's primary inspiratory and muse said:

*No, there is no escape. There is no heaven with a little of hell in it—no plan to retain this or that of the devil in our hearts or pockets. Out Satan must go, every hair and feather.*<sup>19</sup>

And, it is upon this that I will begin my thoughts.

True love is heaven. God is love. And, not only is He the definition of love and the embodiment of love, but He is the teacher, author, and example of perfect, true love. We cannot even begin to conceive of true love without loving its Author.

So, taking George MacDonald's words, we might make any number of translations using the word love.

There is no true love with a little of selfishness in it.

There is no true love with a little lust in it.

There is no true love with a little illegality in it.

There is no true love with a little immorality in it.

As selfishness, lust, criminality, and immorality (among other things) are all pieces of hell, we cannot ever expect to find true romantic love, true motherly love, true fatherly love, true friendship love if we are determined to arrive at and achieve such with a "little of hell" in whatever type of form it may take in our particular lives.

Society would argue that all love is good. And, perhaps they might be right, in a manner of speaking. But I would correct them by saying, "All love starts out good, but it may not end up good." And George MacDonald and Lewis would, I believe, back me up. And my reasoning is that because God is the source of true enduring love (of all kinds), any exercise of love that does not lead us to

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<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics, The Great Divorce*, ©1946, C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. Copyright renewed 1973 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd.

love Him and convert us to follow Him, is essentially polluted. Polluted love is love that is attempting to be true while also fettered with a bit of hell. And as such, that polluted love cannot last. It cannot endure, and it will in fact eventually be shaken by some hellish variable. Polluted love cannot achieve a fullness because it loses power when it ceases to lead us to the source of true love—God. It ceases, in fact, to be love at all and begins to be a form of eventual hell.

Moroni 7:13-14 instructs us very clearly:

*...that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every [love] which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.*

Alma 41:10 reminds us that, “wickedness never was happiness.”

Doctrine and Covenants 132:5, 13-14

*For all who will have a blessing, [or love], at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing [or love], and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.*

*And everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men, by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down, and shall not remain after men are dead, neither in nor after the resurrection, saith the Lord your God.*

*For whatsoever things remain are by me; and whatsoever things are not by me shall be shaken and destroyed.*

**True love is, in other words, the only *real love*; and anything else becomes merely a temporary state of mind.** Which, because of its temporary-ness and lack of real-ness is why it is eventually lost or corrupted and becomes hellish.

This descent into hellishness may take minutes or years, but it will happen, if it is not real and true.

George MacDonald, as C.S. Lewis's Teacher, in *The Great Divorce* says:

*Hell is a state of mind-ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind-is in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is a reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakeable remains.*

In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis observes a ghost who is visiting sort of a place between heaven and hell. It's like a ghost on a "holiday from hell." This ghost is a woman, who in her mortal life lost a son to death. And, her idea of motherly love (in both life and now in death) has ended up being an obsessive, selfish love. She, who believes she has loved truly, is deceived in her ideas of true love.

In this in-between place, a messenger of sorts, a Bright Person, comes to teach her so that if she is willing to re-educate herself on what true love is and accept it, she can go on to heaven and be with her son again.

The poor character, named Pam, is met by her brother Reginald. She is disappointed to be met by him and not her long-deceased child, Michael.

*"I did think Michael would have come," said the Ghost; and then, almost fiercely, "He is here, of course?"*

*"He's there—far up in the mountains."*

*"Why hasn't he come to meet me? Didn't he know?"*

Pam complains to her brother that she should be allowed to see Michael. But Reginald tells her she's not ready yet. She doesn't understand, so he tries to explain.

*“I’m afraid the first step is a hard one,” said the Spirit. “But after that you’ll go on like a house on fire. You will become solid enough for Michael to perceive you when you learn to want someone else besides Michael. I don’t say ‘more than Michael,’ not as a beginning. That will come later. It’s only the little germ of a desire for God that we need to start the process.”*

*“Oh, you mean religion and all that sort of thing? This is hardly the moment... and from you, of all people. Well, never mind. I’ll do whatever’s necessary. What do you want me to do? Come on. The sooner I begin it, the sooner they’ll let me see my boy. I’m quite ready.”*

*“But, Pam, do think! Don’t you see you are not beginning at all as long as you are in that state of mind? You’re treating God only as a means to Michael. But the whole thickening treatment consists in learning to want God for His own sake.”*

It’s interesting to note the point Reginald makes. Love for anyone should lead us to love God “for His own sake.” True love is not to love God as a means only to get to love the people we want to be with. **True love is to love God first. Then, and only then, can our love for others become unselfish, chaste, legal, and eternal—in both the mortal and eternal sense.**

We so often cast off our love of God in an attempt to save our relationships with others, only to find that those relationships never flourish. Some relationships may die, initially, when we decide to love God first. But we will find that in the long run, they will rekindle or transform into something far greater than the quality of relationship we initially tried to save by casting God aside. Or, they disappear and a better relationship is brought into our lives.

The account continues with Pam complaining that Reginald wouldn’t talk to her so if he understood what it was to be a Mother. Her brother then goes on to tell her that motherly love is meant to lead to a love of God. And that when it doesn’t, it ceases to be love but an obsession.

*“Pam, Pam—no natural feelings are high or low, holy or unholy, in themselves. They are all holy when God’s hand is on the rein. They all go bad when they set up on their own and make themselves into false gods.”*

Pam refuses to see Reginald’s explanations as pertaining to her. She argues, over and over how much she loved Michael. But, in the end, she refuses to see any love as love except the love she had for her son. In loving him she rejects love of God, and love of the rest of her family. Her love of Michael superseded love of God and as such became an idol, keeping her from eternal progression.

Pam’s next tactic in talking to her brother, Reginald, is to make God the problem by saying He isn’t a god of love if He doesn’t let her have Michael on her terms. Because He is love, she feels God shouldn’t have terms for the eternal relationship with her son that she so desires. She forgets of course that her kind of love is not true and thus would only continue to drive away those she so desires *to have*. Such love cannot, and will not ever be, a part of heaven. Only by submitting to God’s terms of love, true love, could Pam ever even begin to hope to have her loved ones, especially Michael, forever.

We so often do this in our lives. We demand God allow us to love whom and how we wish on our terms which may, or may not, be very close to His terms. Then, when such relationships struggle, we either blame the other person or God. We rarely take the time to look at ourselves and evaluate the terms upon which we were trying to retain the love we sought. We rarely see where we were determined to keep a little hell in our heaven.

One of my favorite quotes from this book is this:

*“...There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demoniac it will be if it rebels. It’s not out of bad mice or bad fleas you make demons, but out of bad archangels.*

How many people justify away their chastity by the high nature of being in love because it is, often, such a high level of natural affection. And yet, by itself is it not true or pure once it goes on *for its own sake* instead of for God's sake.

That we often feel high forms of love is certain. But ultimately, if we pursue them selfishly, illegally, lustfully, or immorally, they cannot be true, and they will not last. They will be *shaken*.

Pam (the Ghost) loved selfishly and obsessively. Thus, her "love," which she felt was true, was not. And, it did not lead to peace, joy, or a love of God (much less an increased love for the rest of her family). Pam was miserable in life and her love never resembled charity, or even self-sacrifice. It was always obsession and resentful longing, and even, I suspect, manipulative pity or a spiritual temper tantrum. Thus, by its fruits, it was clear that it was not true love. And, it could not endure. Pam could not have Michael "forever," if she insisted on persisting in that type of false love. The requirement to "have Michael," was that she first learn to love God so that her love for Michael might be purified and perfected.

The same goes for all kinds of love: romantic, familial, friend, and so forth. If it does not lead us to love God first, then it ultimately will fail and will not endure. And, if we do not come to love God more than anyone else, then we will never be able to love those around us (in any type of relationship) as we could, and should, in the long run. And thus, it will not endure.

It is not coincidence then that the first and great commandment is to love God;<sup>20</sup> because then, and only then, can we learn to love our neighbor, spouse, father, mother, children, friends, and others *as ourselves*.

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew 22:37-38



## WHAT WE LOVE SHOULD CHANGE US AND THE WAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES

There is another person's story that I wish to share to communicate the power of change that love should bring into our lives. And that man's name is Abraham. Abraham descended from "the Fathers" meaning the patriarchal line of Adam (through Shem). But his own immediate father and grandfather had turned to idolatry. So, their gospel instruction was likely poor and their priesthood authority totally inactive.

Somehow the records which had been handed down from Adam came into Abraham's hands, and he found out that "there was greater happiness and

peace and rest” available to him through God’s highest ordinances and blessings.<sup>21</sup>

Abraham was already righteous. But he found out that God had more for him. That God loved him and, let me say it again, had more in store for him! It is clear that Abraham, through his study of these records, developed a love for God that changed his desires. He says:

*And finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations (i.e. to enter into the New and Everlasting Covenant, Doctrine & Covenants 131), a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.<sup>22</sup>*

Notice how Abraham was already righteous and knowledgeable. But, his love for God made him desire to be more righteous and more knowledgeable, to be even like unto Melchizedek and others of “the fathers” before him. His love for God changed him because that love changed his desires. And because of his love for God and an increase in his desires, he became more. He entered into those covenants and made himself worthy and became ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood and became a High Priest.

There are so many things in our lives that we love. But, which of those loves are powerful enough to change our desires? Which of those loves are powerful enough to motivate us to sacrifice so that we can maintain and even strengthen that love, or pass it on to others?

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<sup>21</sup> Abraham 1:2

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

People who are converted to Christ usually feel so much love for God and for their new faith that they feel the desire, and find the power, to give up education, career paths, fiancés, and more to serve missions or fulfill other calls from God. Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* is so affected by the love shown to him by the priest that he desired to be more than he was. Thus, he dedicated his life to showing the same love to others and to become more than he was.

If the love we have felt or the love we have for something isn't powerful enough to change us, then that means we still love something else more. Real love (shown to us, or that we feel toward someone or something) should change us for the better. If it doesn't, then we have to ask ourselves, "What do I love more?"

## It is Possible to Love Something a Lot, but Not Enough to Change Us

Love is often developed in stages. So, even if we love something, we may not yet love it enough that it has the power to change us. And that's okay. As long as we know what it is that we love more.

If we are struggling to accomplish something in our lives, or to progress, or to conquer something, and we are continuing to fail at it; it may simply be that we need to keep practicing and trying. But it may also be that our motivation, our desires, aren't fully supporting us. It may be that we love something else more; so much so that loving that thing prevents us from forward and upward progression.

Maybe we love French fries more than we love the idea of losing weight. Maybe we love maintaining the idea that we are always right more than we love doing what is right, or best. Maybe we want to stop cussing but we love the idea of looking cool around certain people more than we love being right before God. I could make a very long list, but the principle is the same no matter how it is applied.

Let me give you an example. I have often heard people say to me, "I really wish I could quote scripture like you do." And, I think that in their minds the idea of

being able to do that really appeals to them. But they haven't yet begun assimilating scripture into their lives because there are things they love more. I don't know what those things are, and it's not my place to judge. But, if they really wanted to be able to quote scripture, then they must first come to love the scriptures more than they love other things. Then the desire to read and study their scriptures (because of their love for them) would naturally result in the scriptures and the words of God becoming part of their daily thought, conversation, and vocabulary.

I certainly don't claim to be able to quote scripture at every turn. But I do love the scriptures, the word of God. It is the greatest treasure in my life. I love to read and study the scriptures. I love to go to them to find answers. I love the Spirit I feel teach me when I'm immersed in them. If that results in me often using scriptures in my daily speech and conversation, then that doesn't make me special. It makes me a lover of God's word.

Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son through his first wife, Sariah. Isaac, you remember was a miracle baby, born to Sariah long after she should have been able to bear children. To complicate the request further, Abraham's own father attempted to sacrifice Abraham to idols.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, Abraham had some emotional and psychological baggage tied to this request from God. First, he was doing very nearly what his own idolatrous father had done to him. Second, Isaac was his birthright son; the one God had promised him, and which had come through miraculous means. God was asking him to basically start all over. Then, to even make the matter more complex, Isaac himself agreed to be the sacrifice (once Abraham filled him in on what God had asked).

The only explanation for any of this was for Abraham to learn, to really learn, just how much he loved God and exactly how willing he was to do God's will. In the end, both he and Isaac proved that they loved God more by their willingness to sacrifice and to be sacrificed; foreshadowing, of course, the

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<sup>23</sup> See Abraham 1.

eventual atonement of Jesus Christ, of whom Isaac was a type, and God, the Father, allowing it, of whom Abraham was a type.

God and Jesus Christ loved all of us more than themselves. Thus, “God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son...”<sup>24</sup> And Christ gave His life freely.<sup>25</sup> He was not forced. He loved us more than Himself. He loved God more than His own life. Their love for us was witnessed in their actions.

Had either God, Jesus, Abraham, or Isaac chosen otherwise than they did, it would have been because they loved something else more. If God had loved only one of His children more than all the rest, He wouldn't have allowed Jesus to perform the atonement. If Jesus had loved Himself more, then He would have saved Himself rather than to accept the bitter cup. What implications His love had!

Thus, we can see that love, true love, should (and can) change us. It can give us power to be something or to do something we might otherwise not do. It has the power, through the grace of God, to change our inherent desires and to aid us in becoming more. And, if we can't find the power to do something, it may be because we love something else more.

## Conclusion

What can love do? What does love do? It changes us—for better or for worse. Better, if that which we love leads us to change our desires and our actions. Worse, if that which we love leads us to hold onto destructive desires and actions, or if it doesn't lead us to make any progress at all.

What do you love? Who loves you? What change is it creating in you? If you want to create the power to change your desires and your ability to progress, you simply have to change what it is you love.

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<sup>24</sup> John 3:16

<sup>25</sup> John 10:18

## MAKING PEACE WITH PLURAL MARRIAGE

I'd like to preface this chapter with what I call a spiritual disclaimer. What I'm about to share is the abridged personal revelatory process I went through during my own struggle to understand the Lord's law of plural marriage. I share this process because I have been asked to do so, and also because I hope it will help any of you who are seeking for that same peace—and doctrine. But, no matter how accurately I convey what I have come to know for myself, it is still a testimony that you have to receive from the Holy Spirit for yourself.

Here are some of the doctrines you will find in this chapter. Read through them. Be familiar with them. Look for them.

1. God loves all His children.
2. God knows how to give good gifts to His children and will give them better blessings than anything they can imagine.

3. God loved us so much He gave His Only Begotten Son to preserve our opportunity to receive eternal joy and salvation.
4. God is bound by eternal laws and can't break those laws or He ceases to be God.
5. Whom God calls He qualifies.
6. God prepares the way to keep His commands.
7. Knowledge of God's character and establishing a deep, personal relationship with Him is critical to trusting His promises.
8. God's goal is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life.

At some point in every Latter-day Saint woman's life, there comes a time when you have to make peace with the fact that God has at times during history (both ancient and more modern) commanded righteous men to take multiple wives. God has at times extended the call to righteous women to accept this role and raise up righteous seed (i.e. build up His church and kingdom) on the earth.

Some women try to ignore that plural marriage ever happened because they have a testimony of every other part of the gospel and they feel this contradicts all that they feel is true. They push it aside out of discomfort. They are afraid to find out the reasons behind why God would command such a thing. They are afraid they will be asked to live it. They are afraid what they find will shake their testimony. Some of what they have heard is already shaking their testimony.

To all women I say, "Stop being afraid." Fear is Satan's tool, and Satan's tool alone. He wants you to fear plural marriage and will happily use it to deceive you and turn you away from a path that leads to eternal happiness.

So, let's be clear. Plural marriage is not something you can dance around. You need to attack it and ponder it head on and with faith, not fear. You need to trust the God you do know to instruct you, or at the least, give you peace. He's your Father. He's not your enemy.

I was one of those women who pushed aside, or avoided, coming to peace with polygamy until my own unplanned and undesired divorce after an 11-year temple marriage. It was easy to pretend that plural marriage didn't exist. Sure, people who were not members would bring it up sometimes, but it was easy to say, "Well, we don't do that anymore," rather than to admit that I didn't understand it or have a testimony of it. Turns out if you feel the need to avoid something you've likely felt injured by it<sup>26</sup> whether the injury was intended or not. Avoidance is the first sign and step that you need to seek understanding, healing, and peace.

Why is this something Latter-day Saint women, and in fact all women, need to face? Because, we are a powerful force. This is our time in history to rise up and testify. These are the last days. We have a sacred duty to show the women of the world that we know our religion, we know our God, we trust Him, and that they can trust Him too. It is time for us to rise up and be heard and save souls.

So, during the aftermath of a very life-changing divorce I had all sorts of issues. I can't list them all or go into them in detail. But, as many women do, I was suddenly quick to judge all men as inherently unfaithful, disloyal, and carnal. I determined to continue faithful in the things I knew to be true, but as I read my scriptures it seemed all the worst injustices to women stood out. There were moments I began to doubt the God I thought I knew and His feelings and purpose for His daughters.

Now, as anyone who has passed through such emotionally-wrenching years should know, and what any woman in the midst of such trials should learn, is that you're mortal. Psychological and emotional issues are going to color your view of the world, and heaven. You should know that this is part of the healing process. You have to get angry and confront an issue before you can press onward to healing.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Five Stages of Emotional Healing, retrieved from <http://susannabarlow.com/healing/the-five-stages-of-emotional-healing/>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

You need to recognize that your view of the world *is* colored. You need to be careful to use that colored view to seek knowledge, to learn, to act in healthy ways, and to grow; but not to cast final judgments on life, yourself, God, or others. Your vision will begin to clear in time, you will have spiritual epiphanies. But you have to give it time. How much time, you ask? It's different for everyone. But the sooner you start the process the sooner you can hope to rise above your struggle.

Despite my internal struggles, because I remained faithful in the things I knew to be true, I was called to teach early morning seminary. This was my second time being called to this position, so I was ready. Well, I thought I was. Then, when it came to time to teach the Doctrine and Covenants the issue of plural marriage was literally thrown right into my path. I knew I could avoid it no longer. If I was going to give peace to my female seminary students, I had to find peace for myself.

Now, from here on the process I went through took a few days, because I had to teach the topic that week. However, the material for pondering and learning I had gleaned over the course of my life; most especially in my own personal study since my divorce. I can't go into all the details and sources. But I will try to put in as much as I can for those who want to research and ponder for themselves.

So, as I sat in my house on a Sunday evening preparing my seminary lessons for the week I had to step back from my emotional issues, my colored vision, and my heart's penchant to defend against hurt. I had to get down to what was really the crux and doctrine of the matter. And, that matter was God.

When it came to polygamy, He was really the one with whom I had the problem. I had to confront Him and what I understood about Him. Why? Because it was His eternal promises of my joy and happiness that were called into question. As my trust had so recently been jeopardized mortally, my spiritual trust was dangling by a thread. So, as I pondered God and my relationship with Him, I asked myself a series of questions:

- What do I know about God? What about His character am I certain of? What am I uncertain of?
- Has God given any other related commands that go against our innate sensibilities and feelings?
- Why would God occasionally command something that is normally forbidden by Him?
- How does this “why” fit within the character of the God I know?

Now, I’m certain there were more detailed questions that fit into this list that I pondered, but I believe these will suffice. So, let me tell you what I did. I pondered my life, my spiritual witnesses, my spiritual experiences, and I wrote down what I knew about God. As I am prone to do, these pondering moments brought several scriptures to my mind including, but not limited to:

- 1 Nephi 11:17- Nephi says He knows God loves His children, but he doesn’t know the meaning of all God does or everything in God’s plan.
- St. John 3:16 - God loved the world so much that He gave His Only Begotten Son that whoso believed in Him would have everlasting life.
- 2 Nephi 26:24 – Everything God does is for the benefit of the world, because He loves the world.
- Jacob 2:31-33 - God delights in the chastity of women and is angered when men injure their delicate hearts and spirits.
- Doctrine & Covenants 132:20 - Those who abide God’s laws become gods themselves.
- Doctrine & Covenants 98:3 - We can’t even begin to imagine or dream of the blessings God has in store for us if we are obedient to His commands, indeed it is impossible for us to comprehend the eternal glory God has in store.
- Moses 1:39; Excerpts from D&C 76, & 88 - God spends all His time in total servitude trying to lead us toward eternal life—life like Him in highest degree of celestial kingdom—and joy, but if we reject that He will still give us immortality—resurrection and a lesser level of celestial or other kingdom of glory.

- JST, Matthew 16:28 - If we lose our life in this mortal existence, we will gain it in the next life.
- Matthew 7:11 - If men, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, then for goodness sakes certainly God knows how to give good gifts to us.

Now, one of the scriptures I have recently pondered is Moroni 7:10. It says: *Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good: neither will he give a good gift.*

Now, when God says evil here, he means evil intent. A person with evil intent and ungodly goals cannot translate that evil intent into something good. It's contrary to the person's intent. I say intent because nowadays people are afraid to call anything wicked or evil for fear that they are labeling. But, though no one likes to say it, regular everyday people who in general desire good and do good things are still quite capable of being evil, or wicked, in some ways by acting with evil, or wicked, intent.

So, let's flip this scripture around. Let's reword it to say: *Wherefore, a man being good cannot do that which is evil: neither will he give an evil gift.*

Thus, a man with good and righteous intent cannot make a gift into something evil if that is not the intent. In this case, it seems it really is "the thought that counts."

Now, not only is God more than a man, He is perfectly good. His intent regarding our lives is clear. He wants to give us all that He has and He wants us to have eternal Joy. So, if that is true (and I know for myself that it is), then nothing He commands us to do will lead us to a bad gift, a bad ending, or a miserable eternal existence. It simply isn't in His nature, or His intent, to do so.

After studying these and many other verses, the Holy Spirit testified to me that God was who I thought He was—and more. I felt keenly that I could trust Him. I don't know if I can describe the feeling of certainty as one of complete and immense healing, but I felt a profound sense of relief and a feeling of intense and perfect logic.

So, then it was onto the next question. Has God given any other related commands like plural marriage which are normally forbidden by Him? It didn't take long to come to a resounding yes.

- 1 Nephi 4:8-18 - The Lord commands Nephi to kill Laban so that he may obtain the records.
- Exodus 33:2; 1 Samuel 15:2-3, etc. - The Lord commands the Israelites to go to war and drive out the unrighteous people in the land of promise; the Lord commands King Saul to destroy Amalek and his people: man, woman, child, and beast—pretty horrific.

So, then I came to the question how? How could the God I know command murder, and make an exception to His own standard laws from time to time? I could ask the same thing about the flood. I mean, we read the story often, but it's actually rather barbaric unless you consider some critical factors that make God different from men.

<b>Mankind</b>	<b>God</b>
Is imperfect	Is perfect
Has limited, finite perspective and knowledge	Has infinite perspective and “there is not anything save He knows it” (2 Nephi 9:20)
Usually kills out of anger, fear, revenge, ambition, or passion.	Takes life when it will serve His righteous purposes.
Has no power to restore life after taking it.	Has power over life and death.
Has no power to restore virtue after taking it.	Has power to restore virtue.
Has no lasting authority to preserve marriage and family.	Has power to bind families for time and all eternity.

First, God has power over life, death, marriage...well, everything. We cannot make one hair black or white (permanently), but He can.<sup>28</sup> We cannot restore virtue, but He can. We cannot restore life, but He can. We cannot do much, but He can do all. So, not only the fact that God is our Father and that He loves

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<sup>28</sup> 3 Nephi 12:36

us, but that He is all powerful and has perfect righteous intent gives Him authority over His own commands.

If His intent with such commands is good, then no matter how we may perceive it, it will lead to happiness and to blessings we can't fathom, because He can't give a bad gift. The reason why God is god is because He knows how to do what's right and best in all things.

We, on the other hand, can't be trusted to make exceptions to God's standard laws and commandments because of our finite and imperfect state. If God gave us leeway on the regular marriage commandment or on the regular "thou shalt not kill" commandment, on a regular basis, how many of us could be trusted not to abuse them in fits of anger or in times of intense sensual temptation? Our imperfect perception and vision would ensure that we'd abuse such commands. If you consider the level of difficulty in righteous implementation, it also helps us to understand why it's always hard to actually carry off plural marriage correctly when the Lord does command it. The selfish and unrighteous always find ways to abuse God's laws—all of them—not just plural marriage. Thankfully, the Lord knows how to perfectly restore and compensate any of His children whether in this life or the next. Because of the Atonement, it's all already covered.

So, the point is, God doesn't abuse His own laws because He won't, it's not in His nature. But also, He can't abuse them if He wants to remain God. Doctrine and Covenants 88:21-22, 34-41 clearly specifies that power and glory is preserved and protected by law. The same laws that bind God to bless us when we keep His commandments<sup>29</sup> also bind Him to righteously use His power. Otherwise, He would cease to be God.

So, here's a side-by-side comparison of what I prepared for my seminary class. It's drastically summarized, but in conjunction with this chapter hopefully it will make sense.

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<sup>29</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 82:10

## Thou Shalt Not Kill

1 Samuel 15:2-3, 1 Nephi 4:5-13, Exodus 33:2

Sometimes there are appropriate reasons to kill and God commands us to do so when those times arise

The Lord slayeth the wicked to bring about his righteous purposes

It is never okay to kill unless it is commanded by God

## Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery

Jacob 2:27-32; D&C 132:28-29,34-37

Sometimes there is an appropriate reason to have more than one wife and God commands us when those times arise

The Lord will command his people to raise up a righteous nation/seed

It is never okay to have multiple wives unless it is commanded by God

So, now we get down to the final avoidance issue that must be confronted. Would you be willing to live this law of plural marriage if the Lord commanded you, because it would serve His righteous and eternal purposes and plan? Do you trust God with your happiness enough to obey?

Well, if you don't know, let me ask you these questions:

- Would you be willing to kill someone if God asked you to?

- Would you be willing to take one of your children and sacrifice him to God if God asked?
- Would you be willing to kill one child that the rest of your children might be saved?

Now, don't ever say, "Well, God won't ask me to do that. He may have done that to Abraham, but He wouldn't do that now." God has repeatedly shown throughout the history of the scriptures that He does and will ask all of us to do things we never expected to do. Something that we have decided is somehow reserved for only a few prophets, here and there.

The scriptures teach that all of us must be chastened and tried even as Abraham.<sup>30</sup> And, as Latter-day Saints we believe, claim, and preach that "God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever".<sup>31</sup>

Here's what you need to know. **The real question you have to answer has nothing to do with plural marriage. It has everything to do with your willingness to do all the things which God commands you.**<sup>32</sup>

Just as Abraham was asked to give up his only son by his first wife, his birthright son, to God; so also each of us will be asked at some point (or points) in our mortal lives to sacrifice something of incredible value to us: a tradition, a belief, a weakness, our health, or a sin. Why? Because God himself had to be willing to sacrifice His Only Begotten Son that the rest of us might have a chance at eternal life. How can we expect to aspire to godhood if we cannot do what God would do? We have to sacrifice our fear of losing something ourselves to save others; and we must do it in faith that it will produce an end result and blessing far more glorious and wonderful than the one we would have ended up with otherwise.

If God had reneged on the idea of a Redeemer when Christ asked for the cup to be taken, then none of us would ever have had the chance to become

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<sup>30</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 101:4

<sup>31</sup> Mormon 9:9

<sup>32</sup> Abraham 3:24-26

anything more than a spirit with limited, or even completely impeded, eternal progression. God would have saved the life of one son only to damn all the countless others. What joy would there have been in that for Him or us? Why do you think we allowed Christ to volunteer as Redeemer? Why do you think we accepted this plan in the pre-mortal life? Because we understood that a fullness of joy comes with a fullness of sacrifice.

With our limited vision, we think that if we preserve one good ideal that we hold to that this one good ideal will bring us infinite joy. God knows that one good ideal may actually limit our joy. But, because we can't see what He does, we think we know better than Him. It's rather foolish of us, if you view it that way.

When God asks us to do things, He knows exactly the blessings that will come to us if we are willing to abandon our limited understanding and trust Him to give us more blessings than what we actually thought we desired or asked for.

**He is only limited in His ability to bless us by our limited ability to trust Him and give our life to Him.**

This is a topic that each of us must ponder for ourselves. Whether we are willing to live the law of plural marriage is more about us than it is about God, and yet we make it all about God. It's not about who He is, it's about who we are and what we want to become. It's about our ability to trust Him.

But, it's easy to see why it's hard for us trust, since mortal men and women are very difficult to trust. But God is the one being whom we can test and prove and He will show us that He can be trusted. I invite you to test Him. And when He proves His trust, then you must go on and trust Him. Malachi 3:10 says, "and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." And that's just about tithing. But it applies to all commandments.

But, now onto some more comforting words. Here is some good news. Unless the Lord has asked you to live this law then you don't need to spend time

worrying about it. What a waste of time to worry about something that you have not been asked to do or that you may never be asked to do. Not everyone's faith is tested in the same ways. Not everyone's Abrahamic trial is exactly like Abraham's.

The only purpose in continuing to hash this plural marriage topic around in your mind is because Satan wants you to remain in a state of unrest and doubt about the God you love. He wants you to doubt God. He wants you to doubt God's purposes and plan. He wants you to doubt your faith. He wants you to doubt yourself. For doubt is the perfect breeding ground for the seed of fear which is the antithesis of faith. It is also the antithesis of peace and joy. And Satan certainly doesn't want you to have peace and joy.<sup>33</sup> He wants you to be miserable. Are you feeling miserable, untrusting, and faithless? Then, you can be certain of the source, and it's not your Heavenly Father.

**If people outside the church ask why the church practiced polygamy you hopefully can and should say: Because God commanded us so that we might build up His church and kingdom upon the earth.** And, you need to be able to say it with confidence. You need to know for yourself that God loves you. That He has clearly set precedence for this law by commanding other difficult things—when they support His loving purposes. He also is the only being with the power and the authority to command such things.

It's important that you dismiss all unimportant and unnecessary mortal speculation regarding plural marriage. A lot of educated (and uneducated) people have read this or that, or teach this or that, about how they've made sense of why God did it. They quote isolated scriptures and speculate, "It's because so many men were killed..." or "It's because in heaven we'll all be part of plural marriages..." or look at this scripture, etc. None of these answers are based in doctrine.

This speculation is purposeless and damaging. Why? Because though we, as mortals, can sometimes kill two birds with one stone, God can accomplish a

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<sup>33</sup> 2 Nephi 2:27

billion and one things with one action. For us to suppose that we can truly comprehend His purposes and goals is unfruitful, because we can't. When we try, we end up with more confusion and polluted doctrine.

God's vision, knowledge, and understanding is so far above ours that there is no way for us to fully understand it.<sup>34</sup> If we ponder such possibilities on our own as we move toward peace, that's fine. But we should never preach it to others and we should never accept others musings as absolute truth or doctrine.

I want to add just a few more comments to those who will continue to sit around and stew about whether or not they'll have to live this law in the celestial kingdom. I want to you remember the most important and fundamental principle of the gospel: agency. **God will never force you to do something you don't want to do.**

Also, consider this. If you really think that you'll spend your whole life hoping for pure joy and get to the celestial kingdom and be miserable, that somehow all you hope and dream of will somehow fall short, then you need to go back to the first issue: your relationship and knowledge of the character of God. John 17:3 says, "For this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true god and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

Just reading this chapter isn't going to automatically change your understanding of God if you haven't already put in the work to come to know Him. This is something you must do in faith.

Now, to close, I will make a few more comments. First, just because this is how I came to this conclusion and peace doesn't mean that reading this post will lead you to the same conclusion. Part of the process of gaining peace is going through your own process of discovery and receiving a witness of peace from the Holy Spirit. I can't give you what I have worked hard to obtain. But I can give you the fodder to press forward if you've just begun. I can give you another witness to the one you are already receiving, are seeking, or have

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<sup>34</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9; Proverbs 14:12

received. And, I can start you on the path if you are ready to gain a witness, to stop avoiding your fears and to confront your concerns. But, ultimately, you are going to have to study and ponder and ask God if the things that you have read here in this post are true—the things about Him and His character. You are going to have to seek your own witness or at the minimum, validate what you've felt.

So, in summary I suggest the following:

After reading this chapter, study these principles and doctrines and seek your own witness.

Strengthen your testimony of God's love and character. Understand Him better and you will have more confidence to do whatever He may ask of you. Not knowing Him was why the five foolish virgins were turned away<sup>35</sup> and why Laman and Lemuel fell away too.<sup>36</sup> So, make this a priority.

Don't sit around stewing about whether or not God is going to ask you to someday walk 1000+ miles across the plains, to sacrifice your first-born child, or to live the law of plural marriage. When, and if, that moment ever comes; if you have come to know and trust God and His character in your life, you will understand and be given power to do what you need to do when harder sacrifices are requested of you. God provides a way to keep His commandments.<sup>37</sup>

Enjoy the life and blessings you have been given. Ultimately, if you boil down mortality, its entire purpose is to help us gain bodies and help each other learn and grow, become like God, and return home to live *like* Him.

In closing I leave you with my witness that I know God loves His daughters. I know that He can and will command us to do things that are hard. What those

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew 25:12

<sup>36</sup> 1 Nephi 2:12

<sup>37</sup> 1 Nephi 3:7

things are only He knows, and it does no good to sit around dreading them or presupposing what they may be. When our Abrahamic trials come God will qualify us and prepare the way that we may accept them and do His perfect will. We can trust Him. I know that He does such things that we may fully comprehend and become that which we need to become; to comprehend and receive the unspeakable, unimaginable blessings that He has in store for each of us. I know that whatever He gives us will be far and above whatever we think we have imagined for ourselves. We simply can't comprehend the glory, power, honor, and joy that awaits those who keep God's commandments. We need not fear God. We need not fear the world. We need only gain a witness and stand strong.

## THE NECESSARY DEATH THAT SAVES ALL RELATIONSHIPS

I never thought I would ever want to give up chocolate—regular chocolate that is. Now, some people may not like it, but I believe, on the whole, most people like some form of chocolate. Myself, I prefer dark chocolate.

When I met my husband, the first thing he warned me was that if I hooked up with him, I would lose all desire for regular, store-bought chocolate. Why? Because he makes his own chocolate. He sources the beans, he roasts them, cracks them, turns them into chocolate liquor, adds a few ingredients, and then grinds the whole thing into the absolute best chocolate I have ever eaten.

It's hard to describe my husband's chocolate to most other people. And this is simply because they've never had anything like it. So, when I say, "It's really good. It's way better than other chocolate," they simply smile and nod—

humoring me, of course. I know what they're thinking because it's the same thing I thought when my husband told me the desire for all other chocolate would die after having his chocolate.

Arrogant? No. Boastful? Maybe. True? Yes.

And, so it must be for other people. If they wish to have the "best chocolate" they must be willing to let the desire for the "regular stuff" die. And the same goes for love. There's regular, over-processed, homogenized (made to taste all the same every time you eat it) chocolate, which is a great comparison for "being in love." Then, there's the bean-to-bar chocolate, which is a great comparison for "true love." The former always leaves you wanting more and never is enough because it's pleasures just can't seem to last. The latter, however, is so "real" that it provides something lasting.

## Being "in love" is not all it's cracked up to be because it is not "true"

For all relationships, there's a sort of "in love" period. I fall in love with my four-year-old every day. She'll do something absolutely adorable or amazing or intelligent beyond her years and I simply swoon. Best friends (plutonic) have beginning moments where they find they have so much in common and trust in each other gets reinforced, and it's very like a type of "in love" feeling. BFF necklaces are exchanged and they can't spend enough time together. Then, especially romantic relationships start with infatuation and transition (often quickly) to being "in love."

But, in every relationship, this "in love" feeling always eventually gets challenged by what I like to call "reality." My four-year-old succumbs to an irrational fit. A best friend finds an interest apart from us, or fails to be there when we need them. And, especially, in a romantic relationship, the infatuation begins to wear off when the person holding our romantic interest does something that goes against our expectations or some of their negative traits begin to show up more frequently. Basically, we get hurt. All relationships hurt us, then the walls of "in love" come crashing down.

And this is when being in love suddenly becomes a problem. Because it is a drug of sorts; a euphoric haze that has us living in an idealistic cloud world. It's awesome. There's no denying it. But the higher we jump the harder we fall. And, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we shouldn't jump high. But I am merely indicating that the capacity for hurt increases in proportion to the bliss.

The bliss, we signed up for. The hurt, not so much. And this is where a very critical relationship death must take place in order for us to move beyond being "in love" to a very special thing called "true love."

In other words, being "in love" cannot be our main goal. If it is, we will consistently settle for mediocre chocolate instead of graduating to the "real stuff." And, let me tell you, mediocre chocolate never satisfies. We always go back for more and more, often bingeing on what is a very good treat. But in bingeing we end up sick, and very likely overweight.

In a literal way, when we binge on the idea of being "in love" we end up with continual disappointment and the heavy weight of emotional issues. We focus all our efforts on producing the ideals (in ourselves or another) that created our in-love feelings to begin with. Losing weight, new clothes, more time together, more expensive dates, more expensive jewelry, and yet...it just doesn't seem to last.

Perhaps the worst thing about "being in love" is that it can never be "true love." **It can only lead to true love. It is, as nearly as I can figure, a necessary beginning to true love—because it leads us to make promises and commitments—but it can never be, in and of itself, true love.** Being in love puts us in a haze so that we will make covenants, commitments, and bind ourselves to other people. Then, when the haze of "in love" wears thin, or off completely, we are bound by the promises we've made when "in love" even though we no longer feel in love. It is from this point, this death of "being in love" that we have at last placed ourselves within the range to progress toward true love.

## True love requires the death of being “in love”

Now that I have had amazing chocolate, I can tell you from experience that the depth of taste, flavor, and nutrition of high-quality chocolate (true chocolate) is such that I am satisfied after a one-ounce bar. And I can bask in the glow of the experience easily rather than running back to the bowl for another fix. How? Because I am not attempting to recreate a feeling that has long past. The effects of it are still with me.

True love is the same. Because true love proceeds from a depth of understanding, a deliberate use of free will, and personal character development, it provides an ongoing security and satisfaction that being “in love” can simply never match. It stays with us. **It doesn't fade as long as we deliberately choose it.**

True love is a result that comes from depth of understanding about people. People who find true love understand that no person, no matter how wonderful, can be perfect. No person can satisfy all of another person's needs and should not be expected to. No person can be exactly what he or she has always dreamed of and expected him/her to be.

True love is also a result that comes from a depth of understanding about self. People who find true love understand that they, themselves, can't be perfect either. They understand that they can't be another person's all any more than the reverse; and that no amount of perfection on their part makes them more or less worth being loved by another.

Now, this understanding doesn't mean that individuals don't need to try to be their best selves. But that is something that is individual, and not controllable (ultimately) by the other individual. No successful relationship can exist when one or the other individual presupposes that any amount of perfection on his/her part (or manipulation or coercion) will produce the ideal in the other.

This is why it is so key to be careful who we fall in love with. A commitment is not lessened because we allowed ourselves to fall in love with someone who

is not the kind of person we can live with. It only makes the commitment more difficult. We *can* control who we fall in love with, or at least minimally, who we make commitments with.

**True love results from you, or me—once we understand our own and other’s imperfections—deliberating choosing to love anyway.** We see an imperfect individual—once beyond the haze of being “in love”—and we choose to love them anyway. We choose to love someone even though they don’t meet all of our needs. We choose to love someone anyway even though they have the potential to hurt us at times—and often do.

Why would we choose to love when faced with reality instead of going back to finding another “in love” experience? Because **learning to love as an act of our own deliberate will, rather than because a mere feeling compels us to do so, results in something that has the power to last.** We can’t make any “in love” experience last. But we can make our own love last forever. And, such a deliberate choice to love allows us to experience a fundamental and godly change in our very natures and internal character.

When we learn to love because we want to be a loving person, and because we genuinely want to influence others to be their best no matter what we receive in return, we experience a depth of peace and strength in our personal character that can’t be undone. True love becomes about us in an unselfish way because it is no longer dependent upon the actions of others. True love is freeing! We also begin to become godly and our power to influence others for good increases exponentially because our love can’t be wiped away simply by a change of feeling.

Haven’t you ever wondered how God can be so loving and so powerful at the same time?

Let me quote some C.S. Lewis here to make my point:

But what, it may be asked, is the use of keeping two people together if they are no longer in love? There are several sound social reasons...

But there is also another reason of which I am very sure, though I find it a little hard to explain.

It is hard to explain because so many people cannot be brought to realize that when B is better than C, A may be even better than B. They like thinking in terms of good and bad, not of good, better, and best, or bad, worse, and worst...

What we call 'being in love' is a glorious state, and, in several ways, good for us. It helps to make us generous and courageous, it opens our eyes not only to the beauty of the beloved but to all beauty, and it subordinates (especially at first) our merely animal sexuality; in that sense, love is the great conqueror of lust. No one in his senses would deny that being in love is far better than either common sensuality or cold self-centeredness.

But, as I said before, 'the most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of our own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs.' Being in love is a good thing. But it is not the best thing. There are many things below it, but there are also things above it. You cannot make it the basis of a whole life. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling.

Now no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all. Knowledge can last, principles can last, habits can last; but feelings come and go. And in fact, whatever people say, the state called 'being in love' usually does not last. If the old fairy-tale ending 'They lived happily ever after' is taken to mean 'They felt for the next fifty years exactly as they felt the day before they were married', then it says what probably never was nor ever would be true, and would be highly undesirable if it were. Who could bear to live in that excitement for even five years? What would become of your work, your appetite, your sleep, and your friendships? But, of course, ceasing to be 'in love' need not mean ceasing to love.

Love in this second sense—love as distinct from ‘being in love’—is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by the grace which both partners ask, and receive, from God. They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other; as you love yourself even when you do not like yourself. They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be ‘in love’ with someone else. ‘Being in love’ first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it.

People get the idea from [media] that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on ‘being in love’ forever. As a result, when they find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change—not realizing that, when they have changed, the glamour will go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one. In this department of life, as in every other, thrills come at the beginning and do not last... The thrill you feel on first seeing some delightful place dies away when you really go to live there. Does this really mean it would be better not to live in the beautiful place? By no means. ...if you go through with it, the dying away of the first thrill will be compensated for by a quieter and more lasting kind of interest. What is more, it is just the people who are ready to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest, who are then most likely to meet new thrills in some quite different direction. ...the man who has settled down to live in the beauty spot will discover gardening.

This is, I think, one little part of what Christ meant by saying a good thing will not really live until it first dies. It is simply no good trying to keep any thrill: that is the very worst thing you can do. Let the thrill go—let it die away—go on through that period of death into the quieter interest and happiness that follow—and you will find you are

living in a world of new thrills all the time. But if you decide to make thrills your regular diet and try to prolong them artificially, they will all get weaker and weaker, and fewer and fewer, and you will be a bored, disillusioned [person] for the rest of your life.<sup>38</sup>

## Death is not the end, it is the beginning

In gospel of Jesus Christ, the ultimate belief is that Christ's death brought about the reality of eternal life. **Death brought about life.** The atonement of Jesus Christ (which encompasses His suffering for and paying Justice for our sins as well as His resurrection which vicariously allows us to be resurrected someday) is about sacrificing something to gain our greatest desire—life. And since God's love is that which, by His will, brought about the death and resurrection of Christ,<sup>39</sup> and God *is* love, then it would naturally follow that true love of any kind (paternal, friendship, or romantic/marital) must follow the same pattern: the death and sacrifice of being 'in love' puts us in a position to progress toward real love, or love that is true.

Whether it is a child, sibling, friend, relative, or a current/future spouse, no love can be true until we are willing to stop pursuing the 'in love' feeling. If we do all that we do, in relationships, to seek that 'in love' feeling, we will consistently find ourselves disappointed. We will find that we are manipulative, selfishly motivated, easily offended and hurt, and possibly abusive (in many ways).

If we wish to save any relationship, we must begin by first divorcing ourselves from our 'in love' ideals; that other people will meet our expectations or eventually act the way we wish. Or that if we continually re-invent and re-imagine ourselves (superficially) they will somehow return to us, or recreate all of the sentimental in-love experiences we remember from the past.

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<sup>38</sup> The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics ©2002 by C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. | Mere Christianity ©1952, C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. Copyright renewed ©1980 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., Christian Behaviour, Christian Marriage, pp. 92-94.

<sup>39</sup> John 3:16

We must learn to love truly. We must learn to love because we wish to be loving, not because we are trying to manufacture a certain type of relationship or a certain feeling within that relationship.

True love is, and always will be, independent of our feelings. And only when we let the 'in love' feeling die will we at last open ourselves up to the ability to experience love in more powerful, and ultimately more exciting and lasting ways.

So, it's about time to let go of your "store-bought" chocolate (i.e. love) and open yourself up to the idea that while some things are worse than regular chocolate (going without, I suppose), that does not make it great and most certainly not the best that there is available. Let your desire for only being 'in love' die and begin the process of seeking for the kind of love that builds, sustains, secures, heals, and nourishes forever.

## SPIRITUAL ULTIMATUMS

A study of the scriptures will reveal that God is a god of spiritual interventions and ultimatums. God is not, nor has He ever been, an enabler of sin. These three terms (intervention, ultimatum, and enable) are often used but loosely understood. So, let's define them:

Intervention: come between so as to prevent or alter a result or course of events.

Ultimatum: a final demand or statement of terms, the rejection of which will result in retaliating action or a breakdown of relations.

Enable: give authority or means to do something.

Whether we believe it or not, whether we like it or not, this life is not simply about learning to become good. The majority of the people who come

to this earth are good to varying degrees—naturally. Therefore, this life is about what level of goodness we want and our potential path to godhood. **We are here to prove whether or not we want to become more than good.** We are here to prove whether or not we want the power and accountability that come with the high and holy responsibility of godhood.

All of God’s plan is set up to ensure we have agency to pass through this process with complete honesty, validity, and personal accountability. His commandments are about becoming godly. His covenants are about becoming godly. So also, His use of spiritual intervention and spiritual ultimatums, and His **unwillingness** to enable us in sin, are about leading us to godhood.

God does not actually intervene in our lives without some act of agency on our part. But He does do all He can to open us up to His counsel, which if accepted and followed, will alter the course of our lives toward the path of godhood. His enticements are what open us up to the available intervention He offers. He does this by providing multiple opportunities—daily—for us to receive spiritual guidance and counsel. These include:

- Prayer
- Promptings and inspiration from the Holy Ghost
- Callings and opportunities to serve
- Commandments and instructions on how to become godly
- Scriptures—His words
- Wise friends and family
- Trials and struggles
- Uplifting music
- Church meetings where we are taught and instructed
- Dedicated temples (His house) available for us to become worthy to enter and receive guidance

We accept God’s intervention in our lives by inviting Him to make it. We do this by making and keeping covenants. Once we are in this “covenant zone,” we have willingly given our lives over to God, meaning that He can, in some

ways, act to intervene, and give us a chance to alter our course toward godhood. Note that God doesn't force us to change course. But He does have the authority we've given Him to offer frequent interventions, which allow us to act, or choose, to get back on course for godhood.

**Interventions** = help us straighten our course to avoid leaving the covenant path

**Ultimatums** = our final chance to get back on the path because we refused all God's interventions and got off

If we start to get off the straight and narrow path—which we covenanted with God to follow—God will frequently call us up and offer interventions. If we get completely off the path, God will eventually issue spiritual ultimatums. Basically, if we are not trying to keep the covenant which we promised Him we would keep (and invited Him to help us keep), He will not let us sit around and twiddle our thumbs or make light of our relationship and covenant with Him. He will issue a final demand or statement of terms, the rejection of which will result in the loss of blessings, power, and most certainly a breakdown and loss of our covenant relationship with Him.

It is very important to understand what happens when we abandon covenants with God and we fail to respond righteously to His ultimatums. God will release us from our covenant and in consequence withhold blessings. **He is not an enabler. He will not give us the authority or the means to use His blessings and powers in our pursuit of sin.**

However, this loss of privileges, powers, and our close relationship with Him does not mean we step outside of His love. He will take back from us those gifts and privileges from Him that we didn't want, didn't honor, and took for granted. But He will continue to offer back to us as much as we will receive.

The scriptures are, backwards and forwards, a record of spiritual interventions and ultimatums. They are issued to families, individuals, children, regions,

wards/branches, and even the entire church, when such exhibit outright rebellion and are on the path to ultimate physical and spiritual destruction.

Here are just a few (a very few) examples:

- Laman and Lemuel received spiritual ultimatums from Nephi to repent or be cast off.
- The Nephites repeatedly received spiritual ultimatums from their prophets to repent or be swept off the promised land by the wicked nations around them.
- The Israelites constantly received spiritual ultimatums to repent or be destroyed by the heathen nations around them.
- Chief Captain Moroni offers a spiritual intervention with the Title of Liberty, allowing Nephites the opportunity to rise up and defend their religion and their freedoms.
- Alma and Amulek issued spiritual ultimatums to the people of Ammonihah to repent or be wiped out by the Lamanites.
- Jonah issued a spiritual ultimatum to Nineveh to repent or be destroyed.
- An angel issued a spiritual ultimatum to Alma the Younger to stop trying to destroy the church or he would be cast off eternally.
- Abinadi issued a spiritual ultimatum to King Noah that the people needed to repent or they would be driven to and fro and made slaves by their enemies.
- Paul often offered spiritual interventions in his many letters to the churches.
- Lehi frequently pled with Laman and Lemuel and offered spiritual interventions, and asked them to accept.
- God sent an angel to Laman and Lemuel (who were beating their younger brothers nigh to death) to intervene.

So, why talk about spiritual interventions and ultimatums and how to NOT enable? What does this have to do with our relationships? Our marriages?

Each of us is already offering interventions issuing ultimatums of our own. We do it all the time. We do it without godly direction. As well, many of us who try to be forgiving and well-meaning end up enabling those who sin against us to continue to sin against us, and God. Thus, we all need to understand a little better how to offer interventions, issue ultimatums, and to not enable. As we do, we may find that our relationships improve and agency is more fully honored.

Now, each of us is part of some type of human relationship. Either we are a devoted friend, a caring brother or sister, a worried mother or father, a hurting and struggling spouse, a faithful minister, a bishop, or the head of a presidency serving in the auxiliaries of the church. Sometimes we are bosses in a work environment. In all of these relationships, spiritual interventions and ultimatums are necessary and appropriate, but in order for them to be effective they need to be done correctly.

My first suggestion is for each of you, as you study your scriptures, either tonight or in the coming weeks, to pay attention and pray to notice the spiritual interventions/ultimatums. When you come upon them, take the time to stop and make note of:

- Who they are offered/issued to
- Why they are offered/issued
- How they are offered/issued
- When they are offered/issued
- What happened to the person(s) who offered/issued the intervention/ultimatum
- What happened to the person(s) who received the intervention/ultimatum

Over time, you will be taught by the Spirit the things you need to know to offer spiritual interventions and to issue spiritual ultimatums in the relationships in your life. You will also be taught by the Spirit the things you do currently—when you try to offer/issue—that are not helpful.

# Spiritual Ultimatums

Here are some basic principles and doctrines regarding the spiritual ultimatums God offers:

- A godly ultimatum states clearly and concisely the sinful actions of the sinner and that they have broken a specific covenant.
- A godly ultimatum is not apologetic, it is not prefaced by “I’m sorry to say this...” or “Please forgive me that I have to do this...”
- A godly ultimatum is not full of resentment, vengeance, or overt hurt and emotion (other than righteous anger). Who has sinned and how, and who hurt who when, is not in question. The ultimatum is about a lack of repentance (purposeful rebellion) and a person’s clear intent to not keep their covenants.
- A godly ultimatum includes immediate consequences and removal of blessings that cannot be restored without repentance during a probation period.
- A godly ultimatum includes a final, or ultimate, consequence for failure to repent within the probationary period.

Now, here is one (and only one) example of a Marriage Covenant Ultimatum. Please take the time to look for and identify each of the principles and doctrines of a godly, spiritual ultimatum in this example.

Example: Marriage Covenant Ultimatum

Mindy is an abused wife (of 2+ years). Her husband, Mark, doesn’t beat her physically, but he is addicted to pornography and in consequence sexually abusive and verbally abusive. He consistently sins against Mindy and his marriage covenant and makes insincere apologies that turn into guilt sessions where Mindy is left feeling that if she seeks divorce she is abandoning her own marriage covenant.

Mindy has tried to confront Mark with his lack of repentance and unwillingness to treat her with love and respect. She has even gotten Mark to meet with her and the bishop a few times. Yet, while the

bishop has called on Mark to repent and become better, he also keeps telling Mindy to not withhold sex from Mark. Mindy is barely clinging on to hope.

While Mindy has urged Mark to repent and tried to express how he is hurting her feelings, her offered interventions (as well as the bishop's) have been ultimately rejected. Mark is now a rebellious, knowing, sinner who is refusing to truly repent and embrace the covenants he has made with God. Therefore, it is now time for Mindy to issue a spiritual ultimatum.

She must issue a final demand or statement of terms, the rejection of which, by Mark, will result in Mark losing his relationship with Mindy.

Such an ultimatum may sound like this: "Mark, you have repeatedly shown that you have no desire to quit using pornography, to quit sexually and verbally abusing me, and to keep your marriage covenants. As of tomorrow, (no matter what you say or do) I am moving in with my parents for 6 months. If you love God and me, you will use these 6 months to truly repent, seek counseling and addiction recovery help, and embrace your marriage covenant. After the 6 months is up, if you have not done these things and shown that you sincerely desire to repent and change, I will file for divorce."

It's important to note that **the ultimatum cannot be changed except by meeting the terms**. If Mark apologizes after the ultimatum has been issued, Mindy is still going to move in with her parents and give him six months to meet the terms. An apology is not meeting the terms. An apology is only Mark admitting that he indeed is not keeping his covenants.

## Interventions, Ultimatums, and Learning NOT to Enable are about Proper Use of Agency

Agency is the most important thing God has given us and it is the one thing we should all protect. This is what godly interventions and ultimatums do. They do not try to manipulate people into a course of action. They invite them to

act. Then, the choice and accountability are left up to them—not to us. As well, **interventions and ultimatums are as much about us letting go as they are inviting others to act.**

The whole point of an intervention or ultimatum is to invite a person to act on their agency. It is to invite them and provide conditions (which includes immediate consequences) that encourage a person to decide what they truly want and to act on it. It is not our job to protect others from consequences, nor allow them to continue to receive blessings if they do not merit them. It is also not our job to enable them to continue in sin or by appropriating accountability through micromanaging their actions—which is akin to trying to change their innate desires and repent for them.

If you offer an intervention or an ultimatum without being prompted and guided by the Holy Ghost to do so, or validated by the Holy Ghost when you express your plan to God, then you will likely offer it unsuccessfully.

If you do not pray, study, plan, and prepare before offering your intervention or issuing your ultimatum, you will not have the confidence to back it up or the ability to react in a godly manner if it doesn't go how you expected.

If you do not stick to your plans when you issue your ultimatum and avoid inappropriate emotional responses and micromanaging, then it is no longer an ultimatum or intervention. It is an argument. You must own what you can do and let them own what they can, or are willing to do. Offering interventions and issuing ultimatums are not about making statements of who's right and who's wrong. It's about making a statement that will not change based on what happens after it is issued.

If you design your intervention or your ultimatum to guilt someone into choosing the right (or what you want them to do) by dramatic statements and exhibitions of emotion, then you are trying to get them to act in fear and pity rather than by the true desires of their hearts. This is a manipulation of agency. Whether they desire good or evil, you must allow them to choose what they want and then allow them to be accountable for what they choose.

In all things, we must learn to forgive others for their sins and trespasses against us.<sup>40</sup> But, in relationships, forgiving others does not mean enabling them to continue trespassing against us and God's commands. It means letting go of our resentment and anger toward them and not seeking retaliation or vengeance. **Interventions and ultimatums must not enable the sinner to continue sinning. There must be stated consequences and we must follow-through on those consequences.**

God forgives us any time we sincerely and truly repent.<sup>41</sup> God loves us always.<sup>42</sup> But, He does not enable (give us authority or means) us to live against His will. This is why He continually offers interventions and issues ultimatums.

## Spiritual Interventions

A spiritual intervention is different than an ultimatum. Remember, the goal of an intervention is to keep people on the path, not to give them a final choice whether or not they get back on the covenant path. But it is still an invitation to exercise agency.

Here are basic principles and doctrines about spiritual interventions:

- A godly intervention follows the recognition of covenants and blessings being at risk because of complacency or poor choices.
- A godly intervention states clearly and concisely a warning, what will eventually happen if a person doesn't make alterations in their current course of action.
- A godly intervention is by invitation. "I know you're struggling with X. I invite you to act, to do Y before this causes a breach in our relationship."
- A godly intervention is reminder of the covenants an individual has made, and what those covenants entail. "The covenant you made was

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<sup>40</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 64:9-11

<sup>41</sup> Mosiah 26:30

<sup>42</sup> Romans 8:39

X. The Y you're doing doesn't align with the covenant. You need to do Z in order to get back on track."

- A godly intervention includes a warning about future consequences and potential loss of blessings. "If you continue on this path, the time will come when..."

Chief Captain Moroni offers an excellent intervention. I quote some of it here:

*Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.*

*And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.*

*Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression.*

Note how **the intervention is a call to action**, a call for the Nephites to use their agency. "Whosoever will maintain this title [of liberty] upon the land, let them come forth..." The response to the intervention was an act of agency and a renewal of covenants with the Lord. Moroni's intervention was a reminder. It got the complacent Nephites thinking and invited them to act—not to sit in a grey area—for the benefit of themselves and their country.

Our spiritual interventions should look similar to Moroni's. Here's the process of Moroni's intervention:

1. He recognizes that Nephite complacency and internal bickering has put the country at risk to be conquered by the Lamanites.
2. Chief Captain Moroni sees that the people need a reminder. He prays to God for help.
3. Moroni makes a "title of liberty" or a sign to remind the Nephites of their covenants and what is at stake if they don't pull themselves together spiritually.
4. Moroni openly shares the title with the Nephites. He then invites them to act, to actually come forth and do something to show that they will support the title.
5. Those that support the title of liberty respond to the call to act.

It is usually only after several intervention attempts, when the other person in the relationship does not respond to the invitation to act, that a spiritual ultimatum becomes necessary.

## Do Not Enable

We all want our relationships to work. But even the best relationships require spiritual interventions and ultimatums. We are on this earth to act, not to be acted upon.<sup>43</sup> Spiritual interventions and ultimatums are invitations to exercise our agency. They are also invitations for us to free ourselves from accountability. The scriptures testify that some things have to be said in order that we are not accountable for the sins of others.<sup>44</sup>

In the final year of my first marriage, before my divorce, I was prompted, repeatedly, to deliver truth to my spouse. It got to a point where it was no longer a conversation. It was simply me reminding him of things he knew to be

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<sup>43</sup> 2 Nephi 2:14

<sup>44</sup> Mormon 9:35

true. He agreed that they were true. In the end, I thought those truths would change him. But what they ended up doing was ridding me of accountability.

Enabling is allowing others to continue in sin, when we have the position in their lives to intervene. I find it interesting that God's main punishment for sin is the retraction of His presence, blessings, and guidance. We always have His love. But when we refuse to repent, we do lose the benefit of His presence—that includes blessings. Being “cut off” is a frequent consequence for the unrepentant.

When we refuse to warn those in relationships with us that they will be “cut off” from our presence if they continue in sin (intervention), we enable them to continue sinning. When we refuse to retract our presence, blessings, and guidance in a spiritual ultimatum, we also enable another to continue in sin.

Are we accountable for the sins other commit? No. But we are accountable for having the position and power to help another repent and not using it.

Unfortunately, enabling another person in sin usually results in negative consequences for ourselves. We get used by the other person. We get taken advantage of. We get taken for granted. We get injured emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We literally throw ourselves in front of the speeding car they are driving instead of calling in the police.

God does not enable. Neither should we.

## GOD'S POWER IS NOT ABSOLUTE

Good people literally cover the face of the planet earth. Sure, we all have some flaws and weaknesses, but in general, with a few exceptions, most people are basically good.

So, if most people are basically good, then what's the purpose of religion? Why get baptized into any church? Why conform to any commandments? Religious people can sometimes be the most unforgiving, unkind, bigoted, prejudiced, and judgmental people. They have all these rules and if you don't keep them, then you are suddenly a bad person. Right?

I hear people say all the time that religion doesn't have to be in a church. And, they're right. It doesn't. Religion is: the belief and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God (or gods).

We can believe in and worship God anywhere. This is a fundamental truth that God Himself preaches. In Alma 32:10-11 we read:

*Behold I say unto you, do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only?*

*And moreover, I would ask, do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week?*

As well, much of our Christlike service and prayers are to be personal, and in secret...or in other words, not publicly broadcast or touted.<sup>45</sup>

So, if God Himself is okay with worship outside a church, why then do we go to church? Why do we get baptized, partake of the sacrament (communion), and receive temple ordinances and covenants? Is it just to get some perceived blessing of eternal families? Is that all ordinances, covenants, and Sabbath worship are for?

I could say, "Yes," and for some, that would be enough. But, let me get to the doctrine.

People outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints get antsy and uncomfortable when we talk about our beliefs of "becoming like God." When they think of God, they think of absolute power. And, in the hands of a man, we are all fairly certain that absolute power corrupts absolutely. It does.

But what if I said that God's power is not absolute? Yes, **God's power is not absolute**. Why? Because God can't do whatever He wants with His power. His power cannot be used for selfish gain, to gratify His pride, to exercise compulsion or unrighteous dominion...<sup>46</sup> **God's power is protected and preserved by His own covenants and eternal law.**<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Alma 33:7; 1 Nephi 13:6; Matthew 6:6

<sup>46</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 121:37

<sup>47</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:34

Does not God say to us, “I the Lord am bound when ye do what I say...”?<sup>48</sup> That means if we keep God’s commandments He has to bless us. He can’t not bless us or He would lose His power. He can’t wield His power without law and covenant. Indeed, His work and His glory is to use His power to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life.<sup>49</sup>

God Himself said, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”<sup>50</sup> Then, He calls Himself “the greatest of all.”<sup>51</sup>

So, why get baptized? Why partake of the sacrament? Why receive temple covenants?

**Covenants are how God dispenses His power.** We don’t go to church just to be good. We are, most of us, basically good. So, going to church is not only about being good, it’s about making and keeping covenants that we might progress in our journey to become like God.

What is God like?

- God is immortal = He has a perfected, glorified, resurrected body and so He can’t die, or get sick...
- God has eternal family = God has an eternal wife and children who are bound to Him for eternity. Plus, He has begotten us spiritually and so we are His literal spirit children.
- God is perfectly loving, just, merciful, etc.
- God has a perfect knowledge of everything...there is not anything save He knows it.

God became God, and achieved these perfections, by binding Himself to covenants!

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<sup>48</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 82:10

<sup>49</sup> Moses 1:39

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 23:11

<sup>51</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 19:18; 29:1; 38:1, 39:11; Exodus 3:14

So, we can become better a little at a time and remain basically good by worshipping anywhere—at home or in our hearts. We can serve and love and give of ourselves. And, we will be blessed by God for so doing. But if we want to become godly. If we want to remove every mote and beam in our lives. If we want power to become greater for eternity, then we need godly power.

## To access godly power, we must make and keep covenants

The baptismal covenant includes the ordinance (or sacrament) of baptism. It is a physical rite that we go through, symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ. We emulate Him by so doing and symbolically give ourselves to Him and to His service by letting the “old us,” which was not bound by covenant, go, and coming forth a “new us,” bound by covenant.

For binding ourselves in this way, both publicly and personally, God grants unto us not only forgiveness of sin which cleanses us and a new beginning, but a gift of the companionship of a member of the godhead: the Holy Ghost. This constant trickle of truth and power refines us in a godly way. It gives us the capability—if we honor the conditions for having His presence—to not only be good, but to change our very natures—over time—into something godly: perfectly loving, just, merciful, etc.

We can be good without covenants. **But we can't become godly without the gift of the Holy Ghost.** He is the baptism of fire which can purify and remove all dross from us. He is the great sanctifier—and can make us holy—in time—whether now or in the eternities. This is something we can't achieve without making a covenant.

The sacrament is a weekly covenant which helps us to remember and renew our baptismal covenant. It helps us to review our lives and see what we've done better and what we need to do better. It helps us weekly to report and be re-cleansed; to renew our relationship with the Holy Ghost; to renew our access to this godly power.

Temple covenants, like baptism, help us bind ourselves closer to God and to His will. Thus, enabling Him to grant us more of His power.

When we enter the sealing covenant, we are granted access to the godly powers of procreation both now and in eternity. We can exercise these powers outside of covenant. But, when we do so without God's sanction, no matter how good our intentions, our power is limited to mortality only. It cannot last forever.<sup>52</sup>

The power of eternal family is God's power. It comes with covenant and responsibility. Those who do not enter this covenant cannot have this power to remain united or to continue to procreate after this life has ended; "till death do they part..."

**So, God's power is "all-powerful." But it is not absolute. He cannot wield it outside of covenant or He would "cease to be god."**<sup>53</sup>

So, also, we cannot become godly without binding ourselves to ordinances and covenants. We cannot reach beyond a certain level of goodness without it. We can worship God without brick or mortar. We can do good and serve and be blessed without organized religion. But we can't attain unto perfection and godhood without ordinance and without covenant.

Going to church isn't about the perfection of the people in the building. It isn't about perfect sermons. It isn't about perfect leadership and administration. It is about ordinances and covenants. It is about becoming "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."<sup>54</sup>

So, if you are cool with being pretty good, then that is well. You can do that without organized religion. But, if you want to be godly, then the ordinances and covenants of God are necessary to the dispensing of His power and grace that you might become as He is.

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<sup>52</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 132:15-18

<sup>53</sup> Mormon 9:19; Alma 42:13,22,25

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 5:48

## THE PURPOSE OF GRACE

Grace means many things to many people. From covering sins to helping us live a good life, grace is ultimately the power that most of us feel gets us back to God's presence. But I have to ask, why do we even need grace in the first place? Why did God place us here on earth in such a manner, or with a plan, that required grace at all? Isn't that a bit unfair?

So, there has to be a purpose to grace. It can't only be this generic, in-explainable, thing that we accept on blind faith for so long. At some point our faith has to be fed by understanding—by doctrine.

In Romans 8:15-17 we learn that God's intention for us is to be led by His Holy Spirit to live in such a way that we can—through grace—become joint heirs with Christ and partake of the same glory if we “suffer with Him”. It teaches us that we are the spirit-children of God. Latter-day Saints believe that as children

of God each of us has the potential to become as God is, or indeed, joint-heirs, at some future point as we learn to be like Christ.

However, this is often all people hear about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and they write it off thinking we are nuts. I mean, after all, who can truly become a God? That's for mythology and movies, right? Doesn't absolute power corrupt absolutely? Has our religion paid attention to world history, even a current look at humanity? Sure, there are some good people. Sure, there have been some "saints." But, are we really crazy enough to believe that all of us could really become a god?

Yet, I repeat, what's the purpose of grace? Why put us here on a planet in the middle of an infinite universe, out of His presence, and then tell us to be good if being good has no purpose but to simply bring us back home again. I mean, what then was the purpose of leaving His presence to begin with? For example, this is what the current accepted purpose of grace is across the world and across many religions, "Hey kids, go outside and play in this big ol' universe and if you are mean to each other I can't let you come back inside the house. You'll have to live forever in the basement. Oh, but if you are really sorry, then in order to get back in I'll have to send my Only Begotten to suffer horrifically for your mistakes and then, if you believe in Him I'll let you back in the house."

Why not just keep us inside the house to begin with? Why would God send us outside at all if He knew one step onto the porch would make it so we couldn't come back inside? Why purposefully create a need for something like the atonement, where His son would have to undergo some incomprehensible suffering to get us all fixed back up and back in the house?

This scenario only becomes sillier when we consider the vast, incalculable amount of human suffering that comes from being "set loose outside God's house." Injustice practically rules human life. And to what point? Depending on where you're born and into what situation, you are either forever in bondage to poverty, starvation, political injustice, etc. or you are born into a situation where you can attain great wealth and power and use your free will to your own whim, damn the consequences to others. The rest fit somewhere

in the middle of these two extremes—enjoying some peace and happiness, but at best still spend most of their lives in difficult situations. Even the best people ever born on this earth made mistakes, offended others, and caused suffering in some shape or form.

Grace covers injustices, we may answer, but why should it have to? That's the question.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 122 verse 7 we read:

*And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.*

I didn't include the list of things in the verses prior. But, how can so much pain and suffering be for "our good?" As well, any of us could plug any number of less poetic injustices and horrific circumstances into this verse and by doing so the statement "that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good," almost sounds ridiculous and totally unfeeling and un-godlike. Why would God say something like that?

So many times in our lives we ponder the question, "Why does God let this happen?" In fact, it is often the reason people choose to no longer believe in God, or any kind of deity. They choose to abandon the idea of a higher being because this life and all its issues and problems seems to have little purpose especially when we get phrases from God like, "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good."

I have pondered this question for years based in part on the horrific scenes I have heard about in the news or witnessed, and also in part from my own

suffering. Why have the atonement of Christ at all? Why allow all this pain and suffering to happen? Why do we need grace?

But, when you place all this “experience” within the doctrine of Latter-day Saint belief, that we are in training to become like God, suddenly, there seems to be a bit of sense in all of this. For example, consider this thought: who wants a God that doesn’t know what it’s like to have trials, pain, and suffering? To be all-knowing mustn’t one suffer—at least to a certain extent?

Now, I can say that I haven’t suffered all the things the people around me in life have suffered—yet—the things I have suffered have granted me insight into all kinds of terrible suffering: physical and emotional/psychological. I’m not saying I know it all, but I certainly know that having gone through some of the things I’ve gone through has taught me to have a lot more compassion for others who are going through similar, related, and sometimes unrelated issues. Because I know how hard it was to pass through my own trials, I can look at others and be impressed that they are getting out of bed when I believe they have every right to stay in bed and curse the world.

Who wants a God who hasn’t needed mercy and forgiveness and so consequently doesn’t understand the terrific need for mercy and forgiveness? Who wants a God who can’t control himself or herself physically or mentally? Who wants a God who can’t prioritize or who has an incorrect view of justice? Who wants a God who doesn’t have the wisdom to see beyond momentary pleasures into the life principles that bring consistent peace and happiness? I could make a list that could span thousands of pages. A whole lot of things, commandments especially, begin to make a lot more sense if we place them in the context of learning to become like God. Even LDS food storage is no longer about saving for a rainy day or some natural disaster that hasn’t happened yet. It becomes about learning to wisely manage earthly resources so that we have enough for ourselves, enough to share, enough to bless, and enough to fix problems—that’s what God does.

If the whole point of this life is to learn the traits and characteristics that will allow each of us the opportunity to—over a course of eons—become godly (if

we choose to try), then suddenly, there seems to be a bit of sense to the statement, “that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good [as you learn to become like Me].”

So, if God put us on this earth to suffer and make mistakes in a long, eternal process that helps us develop godly attributes; then it makes sense, at least to me, that grace now has a purpose.

What is that purpose? Well, if we have to become imperfect to learn to be perfect and godly, like God, then we have to have a spiritual and physical restoration to perfection after we’ve gained the experience we need to be, and remain, perfect.

The purpose of grace is not as cursory as we might have often believed. It’s not just so we can come back inside God’s house and strum harps and flap around with white, fluffy wings. Grace, bought by the blood, death, and resurrection of God’s Only Begotten Son, was necessary and put in place so that we could learn to be like God (to eventually have our own eternal houses with spirit kids to raise and help become godly) without being condemned by the godly-learning process.

GRACE = LEARN TO BECOME LIKE GOD WITHOUT BEING CONDEMNED  
BY THE GODLY LEARNING PROCESS.

Christ’s atonement overcomes the weaknesses of those who bend their will to God’s will.<sup>55</sup> It allows people to change, over time, a characteristic or personality trait that must be honed to a godly level. It allows people to learn about themselves and what they need to improve upon. It allows the wicked to improve, repent, and become holy; and it allows the righteous to become sanctified and godly. It provides a million-plus do-overs as we wander around figuring out what this life is all about and if we want to use it to become like God—because it takes all of us differing amounts of time to encounter this decision and decide what we will do.

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<sup>55</sup> Alma 5:21; Alma 11:37; 3 Nephi 27:19

So, grace helps us become like God. It allows us to aspire to a level of power that can only be offered to those who have learned to become selfless enough to use it (and to be bound by the righteous laws of self-control and goodness that protect such power). Not everyone wants godhood. However, it is offered to all and everyone can choose it, if they want. Certainly, Heavenly Father wants us to come back inside the house and grow up to become like Him. But, if we really don't want to, we don't have to. But all His efforts are going to be to encourage us to try. And, why wouldn't He?

Some people think Latter-day Saints are rigid and bigoted and behind the times. People think we lack mercy and grace. Yet, they want mercy and grace—indeed godly attributes—without law. To be a god, does there not have to be an ability developed, indeed a willingness, to follow law with perfection and to delight in that which perpetuates the proper use of godly power? Mercy and grace are nice, but what about other aspects of God's power, like the ability to create worlds and manage universal forces? What about His justice, honor, and love?

It doesn't so much matter what God commands but that we learn to do it with exactness and honor, partaking of grace when we need to improve, and granting grace to others without reserve as they also learn to be godly. But grace, as Christ showed in His mortal ministry, was never about condoning sin or tolerance, as we might label it today. Christ's grace was about not condemning, or casting final judgment, on those who had sinned until they had been given the opportunity to repent. He always recognized the sin but because of His love and mercy for the sinner He encouraged them to "go and sin no more." He encouraged righteous, godly behavior with love and mercy and discouraged unrighteous behavior with strict teachings and promises of the consequences of sin.

I think I've made my point, but, if you're still reading, then let me give an example of grace and how it applies to everyday LDS living. Or, how it should apply.

First, I'm convinced that whether or not I drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes matters little to God in the short-term. However, I believe that He commands such restrictions that I may learn to stand apart from "the norm", that I learn to understand the importance of keeping my mind clear in the long-term. I mean, who wants a god ruling the universe while he's drunk or hyped up on caffeine, nicotine, or any other drug? Or, even worse, who wants a god whose rule of the universe is put in jeopardy when he's run out of his latest fix, or who places hot-fudge pudding cake or hard liquor over answering our prayers? Is it really that hard to understand why Latter-day Saints adhere to such restrictions? Health, yes. But far more important is the ability to control our physical appetites and keep our mind clear.

Yet, none of us is born with perfect control over our physical appetites. We need grace as we learn to control ourselves. Some of us Christians smoke, drink, take drugs, struggle with obesity, and all other issues. Yet, little-by-little, because we are commanded and we keep trying, we learn to gain control and understand the importance of the principles behind the commandments. Grace allows us to mess up and yet still change, or improve, and work toward godly attributes.

The purpose of grace isn't just about being basically good. The purpose of grace is to help us become like God.



## EMPOWERED TO BE YOU

Well, you've come to the end of this compilation. It is my sincerest desire that you found some doctrine that brought greater happiness, peace, and rest into your life and into your marriage. It's something we all need.

The point of this book is empowerment. So often in relationships, especially marriage, we feel powerless. However, I have found that doctrine and knowledge about "the covenant" and related gospel principles empowers us to be ourselves and to progress. Even within the partnership of marriage, we can progress forward while still giving grace to the other who said yes to the covenant with us.

There is nothing worse than feeling like you can't progress spiritually because your spouse is holding you back. There is also a terrible guilt and horror that comes with leaving them behind; especially if you haven't used your position

in their lives to give them a chance to act, to change, and to progress alongside you. These chapters were devoted to empowering you to be able to move forward, and to be able to give your spouse a chance to move forward also.

If you had an “aha” moment or a life-changing realization while reading this book, please tell me about it! I want to know how the doctrines presented here have impacted you. Email me directly at [thedoctrinelady@gmail.com](mailto:thedoctrinelady@gmail.com).

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