
*Insights
on
Church
Leadership*

Marcus H. Martins, Ph.D.
Ricks College

Copyright © 1993, 1999
by Marcus H. Martins
All Rights Reserved

*Table of
Contents*

A Few Initial Words	vi
The Purpose of This Study	vi
Section 1 Introduction	
Chapter 1. The Call to Leadership	3
Why Leadership?	3
Callings by Revelation	4
The Mission of Church Leaders	5
Requirements for Leaders	9
Section 2. Personal Qualities Fostering Effective Leadership	11
Chapter 2. The Prayer of Faith	13
Prayers Offered by a Member of the Godhead	14
The Prayer of Faith and the Remission of Sins	15
The Prayer of Faith in the Ministry	16
The Prayer of Faith in the Performance of Assignments	18
The Prayer of Faith and Our Skills	21
The Prayer of Faith and the Will of the Lord	22
Chapter 3. Hope of Better Days	26
A Time of Profound Changes	26
The Temporary Nature of the Mortal Environment	27
Greater Changes Yet to Come	28
The Two Alternatives	29
Waiting Patiently for the Lord's Salvation	30
Chapter 4. Love Unfeigned	33
Acquiring Love	34
Compassion Leading to Miracles	34
Forgiveness: An Exercise in Godliness	36
Forgiving Those Who Apostatize	36

Forgiving Those Who Repeat the Same Sins	37
Forgiving Those Who Oppose the Church	38
Forgiving Those Who Fail In their Callings	39
Interceding In Favor of the People	40
Patience and Courtesy	41
Serving With No Concern For Rewards	42
Chapter 5. What If We Don't Have Some of These Qualities?	47
Chapter 6. The Nature of Perfection	51
Perfection Accomplished in Mortality	52
Stages of Perfection	52
The Problem with Hasty Judgements	53
A Perfect Heart	54
We Need All Those Who Desire to Serve	54
Section 3. Weaknesses That Interfere With Effective Leadership	59
Chapter 7. Pride	61
How Pride Can Be Manifested	62
Conquering Pride	63
The True Nature of Our Accomplishments	65
A Warning Against Pride in Our Prayers	65
Chapter 8. Unrighteous Dominion	67
Covering Sins	67
Gratifying One's Pride and Vain Ambition	68
A Misconception About Inspiration	70
Repressing Free Agency	70
Avoiding Unrighteous Dominion	71
Coping with Someone Else's Unrighteous Dominion	72
Chapter 9. Prejudice	75
Greater Knowledge as Result of Diversity	76
Dealing with Different Cultures	79
Another Insight on Diversity: The Analogy of the Building	80
Chapter 10. Flattery	83
How Flattery Can Be Used	84
The Search for Earthly Honors	85
Escaping the Lure of Flattering Words	87
Section 4. The Knowledge of the Truth	89
Chapter 11. Eternal Truths: Spiritual Nutrition	91
Feeding Spirits With Knowledge	91
Finding a New Dimension in Earthly Life	93

The Risks of Personal Opinions and Beliefs	94
Serving or Disserving Others	96
Chapter 12. The True Doctrine	99
The Knowledge of God	100
The Doctrine of Christ	101
The Things Pertaining to the Kingdom	103
The Learning Process	104
Chapter 13. The Blessings of Good Counseling	107
The Role of a Counselor	108
How to Receive Counsel	109
Valuing the People's Opinions	112
Presidencies Must Exemplify Unity	113
After All This, Are We Free From Error?	114
Section 5. Spiritual Administration	117
Chapter 14. Administration and Ministration	119
Administrative Functions as Spiritual Activities	119
Church Leaders Are Ministers	121
Administrative Meetings as Spiritual Activities	123
Chapter 15. Effective Correlation	125
The Purpose of Correlation	125
A Correlation Agenda	126
The Role of the Auxiliary Organizations	127
A Sample Ward Council Meeting Agenda	129
Section 6. The Exercise of Leadership	131
Chapter 16. Serving the Lord in the Latter Days	133
Representing the Lord	134
Righteous Desires and Attentive Service	135
Chapter 17. Evaluation and Release	139
Evaluating Ourselves	139
Evaluating our Service	141
Preparing to be Released	142
After the Release	143
A Few Final Words	145
The Establishment of Zion	145
Bibliography	149
About the Author	151

A Few Initial Words

I still remember the first time I visited The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a sacrament meeting at the Engenho de Dentro Branch in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on the afternoon of Mother's Day, May 14, 1972. Perhaps because I was just a young man at that time I don't remember many details about that meeting. I can't remember who the speakers were or what they talked about, nor even what time the meeting started or ended.

One of the few things that I can remember well, though, is that there were three men sitting on the stand. Those three men, I soon learned, were the presidency of the church in that congregation. I said "presidency of the church" because in those days I had no idea of what a "branch presidency" was, and as far as I was concerned, those three men presided the church that I had come to know just a few days before through two missionaries. Because of that perception, my family and I immediately respected those men and paid attention to their actions, and to whatever they had to teach. A similar perception came to us in relation to the other men and women who were serving in positions of leadership in the church.

Sixteen years later, on Mothers' Day, May 8, 1988, in another neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, I myself was sitting on the stand of a beautiful chapel of the church with two other men as my counselors, and Mirian, my wife, was president of the ward's Relief Society. Then I realized that any investigators entering that chapel for the first time on that day might have feelings and perceptions in relation to me, my counselors, and other ward leaders similar to those that my family and I had had in the past.

Between those two events, I had the chance to observe literally hundreds of people--men and women--serving in positions of leadership in many parts of Brazil and in the United States. Most of those women and men have positively impacted the lives of those they presided over; but unfortunately, a few had a very negative impact. But all of them without exception were an influence in the lives of those they served. This text is the result of the insights I have been blessed with in many years of observation and research.

The Purpose of This Study

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a number of well-developed handbooks to guide those who are called to serve in any leadership capacity. In this study we will examine a few revealed doctrines and principles of the gospel that might help us increase the effectiveness of our service.

In some of the chapters I will focus the discussion on the exercise of presidency and not on the exercise of leadership in general because presidencies have an additional charge to train other church leaders. However, all topics discussed in the book can be applied in any office in the church, provided that those ideas and principles are adapted to one's sphere of influence.

I am confident that the discussions presented here will be useful even for those who have little or no previous experience in church leadership, including those who are preparing to serve missions, some

of which may serve in leadership callings during their full-time missionary service. And even if they do not serve in leadership capacities, they will certainly will have countless opportunities to influence other members of the church, especially in places where the Church has large numbers of recent converts.

Some may find that I should have explained certain concepts either in a more exhaustive or in a more sophisticated manner. Since it is not my intention to "reinvent the wheel," I avoided detailed explanations on some topics--especially those that deal with basic doctrines of the gospel--because these details can be found in many other books like "Principles of the Gospel," or "A Marvelous Work and a Wonder," or "Articles of Faith."

Since I believe that nothing can substitute the actual one-on-one "relationship" between each one of us and the Spirit of the Lord through the scriptures, many times throughout this text you may feel that I stopped my discussions abruptly, or before the time. I did it on purpose. Another of my goals in this work is to show how much is yet to be learned through the Spirit of the Lord; and I don't feel that I should deprive you from that wonderful spiritual experience. Thus, I will "point the way," but the Lord himself will lead you along--if you allow Him to. I hope and pray that what I have wrote, although concise, will be enough to trigger new thoughts or insights in your mind, and that you will ponder and pray about these thoughts or insights.

I wrote the chapters in the form of personal essays, almost as if we were chatting in a chapel, but I avoided to cite examples that involved persons who are still living because a number of them would not feel comfortable with that. Stories would have enriched every topic of this book; however, I don't like to make up fictitious events just to illustrate a point. Reality tends to be more complex and multifaceted than any fable. But I have quoted the words and the experiences of the ancient and modern-day prophets and proposed a few ideas based on my current understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Also important to mention is the fact that the my personal opinions and interpretations proposed in this book must not be considered authorized official statements from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or from any of its general authorities. I am just sharing insights in which I believe according to the understanding that I have in at this point in time.

I want to express appreciation to those who supported me in this project: our Heavenly Father and my earthly parents, Helvécio and Rudá Martins; my wife, Mirian; our children: Flávio, Natália, and Felipe. And also the support of my in-laws, Manoel and Glória Barbosa. Thank you for bearing with and believing in me all these years. My thanks to Paul Allen and Daniel Taggart, for providing me with an early copy of the computer software Infobases. Also a very special "thank you" to Catherine Thomas, Sheri Dew, Eugene and Charlotte England, William Baker, and Garth Hanson who have all been a great help in this project. There are still others to whom I am also indebted; they have been influences in various stages of my life and have helped me learn great lessons. I will not be able to mention all their names here, but they will always be in my memory.

*Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins
Provo, Utah, USA
June 1993*

Section 1



Introduction

Chapter 1

The Call to Leadership

When we hear the word "leadership," several possible meanings may come to our minds: power, authority, control, and influence. Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will have at some point in time the opportunity to serve in positions of leadership. Even though these callings entitle us to exercise power, authority, control, and influence, unlike in the world, leadership in the kingdom of God on the earth is exercised under principles derived from the gospel of Jesus Christ¹.

Why Leadership?

Since the early days of this dispensation the Lord revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith that the temporal organization of his Church would have a variety of leadership callings. Even though the Lord did not at first explain why that was so, President John Taylor once explained:

"... this organization is a pattern of things in the heavens, and is the mediums or channels through which the blessings of God flow to his people on the earth, and through which intelligence is communicated concerning all subjects with which the Saints are concerned, whether they relate to this world or to the world which is to come²."

Therefore, presidencies and other leadership assignments in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may be seen as imperfect (due to the constraints of mortality) representations of the "heavenly presidency and leadership," composed by the godhead (our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost,) angels, and a still rather unknown variety of heavenly officers, intelligences, potentates, etc. This line of reasoning leads us to consider any calling to serve as a leader, whether on stake or ward³ auxiliary organizations, quorums, bishoprics, stake presidencies--not only as an enormous responsibility, but also a great honor.

¹ Throughout this study I will use the term "world" to represent the philosophies or practices of men that disagree either totally or partially with the word of the Lord revealed through his prophets in these latter days. I will also often refer to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the "Church of Christ," or "the Church," or "the kingdom of God on the earth".

² Journal of Discourses, Vol.7, p.324, October 7, 1859; from this point on referred to as "JD".

³ In those places where the Church still does not have stakes and wards, the terms "stake" and "ward" can be replaced by "district" and "branch." The terms "stake presidency" and "bishopric" can be replaced by "district presidency" and "branch presidency." The principles presented throughout the text apply equally to districts and branches.

What does it mean to lead in the kingdom of God on the earth--i.e., the Church of Christ? A kingdom has a geographical area, a people, a government, with laws and institutions aimed at maintaining or perfecting the status of that people. The Heavenly Presidency, then, oversees an eternal kingdom--eternal because its geographical area is unlimited and in their work the eternal presidency organizes worlds (smaller geographical areas), people them with citizens, and give them government (the priesthood), laws (commandments) and institutions (families and the church) aimed at perfecting these citizens and elevating them to higher, glorified stages of existence.

The reality of this eternal kingdom is temporarily hidden from those who live in a fallen and finite stage of existence. Our mortal experience takes place within this eternal kingdom, but our mortal senses can't see nor feel it, unless we are enlightened by that light or spiritual element that permeates eternity⁴. This spiritual element, the light of Christ, gives us faint recollections of eternity. By this means the Lord inspires and instructs his children with knowledge, wisdom and gifts that will enable them to participate in work of the Heavenly Presidency--although in a infinitely limited and imperfect manner because of the natural constraints of mortality.

A call to leadership service is an invitation to join the Lord in building up a rudimentary version of his celestial kingdom on earth, to help prepare our minds and intellect to understand and enjoy celestial glory. No matter what the specific calling--whether on stake or ward organizations like the Relief Society, the Sunday School, the Primary Association, the Young Women or Young Men Organizations, in a quorum or class, the importance of any particular leadership calling in the overall plan is the same.

When we lead others, we assume the position of agents or stewards of the Lord. It is true that we will use our personal skills to perform our duties, but in the end all the glory must be given to Him who blessed us with those skills⁵.

Callings by Revelation

In the world (i.e., outside the Church of Christ) the call to serve in a leadership capacity may be seen as a form of recognition or award. A manager in a large corporation will reach a position in a presidency as result of superior performance or political clout. A politician will be elected or assigned to serve in a leadership position partly based on his or her personal charisma, and on his or her ability to compromise with opposing constituencies.

In the Church of Christ, however, to serve in leadership means to accept a sacred calling, because these presidencies are called by revelation, according to the will of the Lord. A leader in the kingdom of God does not obtain his or her fundamental power and authority in managerial or political skills, neither through charisma. Throughout history, in all dispensations of the gospel, the Lord called to his service several men to serve in capacities comparable to our modern leadership callings. In several cases, the Lord's chosen were far from what the world would consider a perfect choice.

For example, the Lord called Enoch to be a great prophet and seer, even though at first he was, in his own words, hated by the people⁶. Several centuries later, instead of choosing an experienced and neutral diplomat, the Lord called Moses to deal with the mighty pharaoh of Egypt. Then, in the meridian of times the Lord called Peter, James, and John, fishermen with apparently no formal religious training, to teach the gospel first to the Jews and then to the nations of the world.

⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 88:11-13; 88:43-48; from now on referred to as "D&C".

⁵ D&C 64:29

⁶ Moses 6:31

Analyzing these past callings based on present worldly premises, all these choices would be considered politically illogical. None of those men would be considered as qualified to exercise a presidency under worldly criteria and reasoning. Enoch was a unpopular person; Moses was "persona non grata" in Egypt; Peter, James, and John apparently did not have degrees and prominence, and were not even citizens of a sovereign nation. And if we continue with this worldly analysis, we might see that Isaiah could be considered too literary, at times incomprehensible to the masses; Matthew, as a Publican, exercised a profession that might have made him disliked by the same Jews he had been called to teach. Simon, as a Zealot, probably had political views on Roman dominance that might have been considered far from ideal for an Apostle called to preach to all nations--even to Rome. In modern times, Joseph Smith Jr. also had no academic credentials; a modern-day manager or intellectual would probably not choose a person with his educational background to receive and then publicize the visions of eternity.

However, these men--and all others with comparable callings--were not called based on worldly criteria. They were called because of their faith in the Lord, because they were humble enough to be instructed from on high and thus become wise by receiving eternal truths through the Spirit of the Lord. Eventually, they received the knowledge that makes the "wisdom of their wise and learned ... perish, and the understanding of their prudent ... be hid."⁷

Likewise, we do not receive a calling to serve in leadership because of our professional credentials, neither because of our interpersonal skills, nor our beautiful eyes. We are called "... in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things."⁸

The Mission of Church Leaders

We understand the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as being threefold: to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to perfect the Saints, and to redeem the dead. Everything we do in the Church should be related to this threefold mission.

Still, a number of years ago, in one hot summer afternoon, I found myself in the Bishop's office in my former ward in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, pondering on my responsibilities as a priesthood holder. I asked myself what I was really supposed to do as a Bishop. My counselors and I had so far planned and conducted meetings; had tried to support the work of the full-time missionaries, taken care of the temporal and spiritual needs of the members of the ward, and helped them to receive the temple ordinances and to return to the temple as often as possible. We had also taken care of the ward's finances and prepared all the statistical reports as required. And yet, somehow I wasn't sure of what we had done so far, besides implementing what was written in the church leadership handbooks. I guess I wanted to know what, in spiritual terms, we had been doing.

After much pondering on this subject, I found scriptures that restated the mission of the church in other terms. By studying what the Lord has expressed about His servants' missions in ancient days (throughout the mortal stage of the plan of salvation,) we can have a vision of our own role in His eternal plan. In my current understanding, we may see these steps as the mission of church leaders.

Speaking on the mission of his newly-born son John (later known as John, the Baptist,) Zacharias, the Priest, prophesied the following:

⁷ 2 Nephi 27:26

⁸ 2 Nephi 2:24

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins ... To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."⁹

Following the principle of delegation of authority¹⁰, the Lord restored the Aaronic Priesthood through the instrumentality of the same John the Baptist, and we have received the keys (or specific authorities) of the preparatory gospel: the key of the ministering of angels, the key of the gospel of repentance, and the key of the baptism by immersion for the remission of sins¹¹.

Just as Zacharias prophesied about his son, John the Baptist, we were also sent to this earth on a pivotal dispensation of the Gospel. Since the second coming of our Savior Jesus Christ is close at hand, we may also see ourselves as messengers before the face of the Lord. Under this perspective, part of our mission is to teach the knowledge of salvation (preaching the gospel) and to guide the people to receive sacred ordinances that will enable them to receive Christ, the Prince of Peace¹², and through Him a remission of our sins. We may do these things when we serve either as full-time missionaries or as member-missionaries, and also when we go about our duties as visiting teachers or home teachers.

The next passage of scripture is about Christ and his mission; as church leaders we are servants in the Lord's kingdom, and as servants we represent Christ. Therefore our mission is to be engaged in Christ's own mission. And here is one description of that mission:

"... the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations."¹³

Applying this passage to our several callings, we may understand that first, we have been called "... to preach good tidings unto the meek ...", or to preach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to all those who are His elect, because His elect hearken to His voice and do not harden their hearts¹⁴. Since we do not know who these elect are, we must preach the gospel to all individuals until we have found all the elect.

Secondly, we have been called "... to bind up the brokenhearted ...", or to congregate (or gather, if you will) those who have accepted the restored gospel and received its ordinances from those with authority to administer them. These are the ones who will have forsaken the world and who will be willing

⁹ Luke 1:76-77,79

¹⁰ For an example of this pattern of delegation, check how the Lord preached the gospel in the spirit world after his crucifixion. Read 1 Peter 3:18-20, and then D&C 138:28-30

¹¹ D&C 13

¹² Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6

¹³ Isaiah 61:1-4

¹⁴ D&C 29:7

to offer as a sacrifice "... a broken heart and a contrite spirit ..."¹⁵. To "... bind up the brokenhearted ..." may also mean that we must make sure that these individuals who have been congregated (all of us) are carefully prepared to live higher laws in preparation to live in a higher state of existence among heaven's nobility. This preparation must reach the point at which the Lord will tell to each individual: "... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."¹⁶

Thirdly, in order to enter in this celestial kingdom we must be part of an eternal family. We can take the first steps to assure that we are part of an eternal family by having our earthly family sealed to us in a temple. We must also seek to discover who our ancestors were and perform vicarious ordinances in their behalf. By doing this we will be helping "... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ..."¹⁷

Many times I think about my ancestors. I am sure that many of them, if not all, were good people who lived without a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am sure that while in their mortal stage of existence these individuals tried to live the best they could, and surely many of them died with hopes of having an eternal existence in some type of heavenly habitation. I wonder how these good persons must feel now that they are in another dimension of existence, a place where the ruling power is the priesthood of God; a place where they, exactly by not having this priesthood, are left in spiritual darkness, under the influence of those many spirits who, during their mortal existence, strived to exercise dominion over others as tyrants¹⁸.

I do not want my ancestors to suffer; and just like many others, I also want to have the gospel preached to those who might have accepted it in the flesh¹⁹, even though some of their actions up to the day of their deaths may not clearly confirm that latent desire²⁰. That is why it is so important to us to perform the vicarious ordinances in the House of the Lord in behalf of these individuals; perhaps we can be the means of freeing our loved ones from spiritual bondage.

Fourth, just like Christ, we were also called "... To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ..." This is the day when the Lord himself has started to perform his work again among men; after successive apostasies His kingdom is once more established but this time there will not be another great apostasy. We have been called to participate in a great victory over the powers of darkness.

Fifth, our assignments also involve a call "... to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the

¹⁵ 3 Nephi 9:20

¹⁶ Matthew 25:21

¹⁷ See also D&C 138:18,50

¹⁸ The Prophet Amulek, in the Book of Mormon, suggested that our desires remain the same after we pass to the spirit world: "... that same spirit which doth possess your bodies ... will have power to possess your body in that eternal world." (Alma 34:34).

¹⁹ See D&C 137:7-8 for a revelation on this topic.

²⁰ We may find that some of our ancestors may have engaged in actions so sinful that we may doubt that they will ever accept the gospel. However, the Lord will judge those individuals according to the level of knowledge they had during their lives (Romans 4:15; 2 Nephi 9:25). In my personal case, I have so far found some ancestors who were slaves and others who were slaveholders; but I still want all of them to receive the gospel.

spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." This may also mean that as part of this preparation to be accepted by the Lord we must lay aside false doctrines and concepts that do not give us hope of a glorious resurrection, and that affirm that as imperfect humans we cannot rise above the evil and corruption of this fallen state.

No matter who we are, no matter where we live, no matter what racial or cultural background we have, as children of Heavenly Parents we have all been endowed with the possibility of reaching divinity, holiness, excellence, and perfection; and as surely as the Lord lives, with his guidance and our obedience to his laws and ordinances we can overcome all the evils of this world, and "... inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths ... [and become] gods ..."²¹

Lastly, we are called to "... build the old wastes, [to] raise up the former desolations, and [to] repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations ...". We are called to build the Zion of our Lord; first by "building" ourselves as pure individuals, "for this is Zion--THE PURE IN HEART ..."²²; secondly, by physically transforming this world into a better place and--in the future--by building holy cities unto the Lord.

Part of our work in the Church is--at least temporarily--not visible. Since we are in a mortal and fallen stage of life, the reality of the spirit world is beyond the reach of our mortal bodies' limited senses. We cannot see or hear the spirit world with our mortal sight and hearing. However, modern prophets have testified that the work we perform in behalf to deceased persons in our temples is part of an organized effort carried out in the spirit world²³. President John Taylor taught the following about this organized effort: "And are the priesthood operating behind the veil? Yes, and we are operating here. And we have a priesthood here, and they have one there. Have we a presidency? They have one there. Have we a twelve? So they have there. Have we seventies here? They have there. Have we high priests here? They have there. Have we various quorums? Yes, and we operate in them; and when we get through we join our quorums above."²⁴

Thus we can see that the organization found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is part of an eternal program, the plan of salvation. We can also see that the several presidencies and offices on local (wards and stakes, or branches and districts,) regional, or worldwide level (the First Presidency, The Quorum of the Twelve, and other General Authorities and officers) are counterparts to similar presidencies and offices on the other side of the veil.

President John Taylor further explained how broad is the influence of the kingdom of God restored on earth:

"What else did the Lord do through Joseph Smith? He restored the holy Priesthood. And what is that? It is the government of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth,--the principle and power by which he regulates, controls, dictates, and manages his affairs, his worlds, his kingdoms, his principalities, his powers, his intelligences, and all things that are underneath him and above him, and with which he has to do; ... [the] restoration of that Priesthood necessarily implies a restoration of ... an organization of his kingdom and government on the earth. This, therefore, is that kingdom, and is organized according to the revelations, wisdom,

²¹ D&C 132:19-20; brackets added.

²² D&C 97:21; brackets added.

²³ D&C 138:29-31,33,57-58

²⁴ JD, Vol. 22 p.308, August 28, 1881

communications, or order of God: hence it has its First Presidency, its Prophets and Apostles, its Seventies and High Priests, its Bishops, Teachers, and Deacons, and every appendage that is necessary to completeness, and to promote the happiness and welfare of the human family, and for all purposes of government on this earth and in the heavens.²⁵"

Requirements for Leaders

The Lord promised: " ... I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."²⁶ By this we realize how great an honor it is to receive a call to leadership. It is a proof of the Lord's trust in us, and we ought to do our best to not disappoint him. Therefore, we must:

- ◆ study and emulate Christian qualities and virtues until they become part of our own character;
- ◆ understand and avoid the weaknesses that would disqualify us to be instruments in the Lord's hands;
- ◆ learn the true doctrine of Christ, because this is the knowledge that Christ himself practiced while fulfilling his mission in the flesh;
- ◆ realize that we cannot perform this work alone, that we need to be counseled in order to gain wisdom; and then,
- ◆ exercise our faculties to realize our potential, to become that which the Lord expects us to become.

The following sections of this study will deal with each of these requirements. While you read the ideas presented there, please keep in mind what President Brigham Young explained about our mission in these latter days:

"We are here to live to spread intelligence and knowledge among the people. I am here to school my brethren, to teach my family the way of life, to propagate my species, and to live, if in my power, until sin, iniquity, corruption, hell, the Devil, and all classes and grades of abominations are driven from the earth. That is my religion and the object of my existence. We are not here merely to prepare to die, and then die; but we are here to live and build up the kingdom of God on the earth--to promote the Priesthood overcome the powers of Satan, and teach the children of men what they are created for--that in them is concealed the germ of all intelligence."²⁷

²⁵ JD, Vol.7, p.324, October 7, 1859; brackets added.

²⁶ Jeremiah 3:14-15

²⁷ JD, Vol.8, p.282, June 7, 1860. Also found in "Discourses of Brigham Young," p.88.

*Personal Qualities
Fostering
Effective Leadership*

Certain personal qualities are necessary to exercise church leadership, and without them no one can fully fulfill his or her responsibilities. The Lord said through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "And no one can assist in this work except he shall be full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care."¹ Later, in another revelation, he listed some of the qualities or attributes necessary to the righteous exercise of the priesthood: persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, pure knowledge, charity, and virtue². Since all leadership offices in the Church receive their authority from and are directed by the priesthood³, it is useful to briefly discuss some of these qualities and attributes.

First we will discuss a few ideas on faith; but leaving aside explanations about what faith is⁴, we will concentrate on an particular way of exercising faith: the prayer of faith. Next, we'll discuss the need for hope, and then we will focus on love: how to acquire it, and how it can be manifested through the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, and patience.

In the following chapter we will discuss what should be our attitude if we do not possess all these qualities. At the conclusion of this section we will talk about perfection, and discuss how a clear understanding of the nature of perfection can help us develop qualities like forgiveness and patience.

¹ D&C 12:8

² D&C 121:41-45

³ D&C 107:8

⁴ Specific information on the subject can be found in the Prophet Joseph Smith's *Lectures on Faith*.

Chapter 2

The Prayer of Faith

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel. In most religions, faith is equated with belief. The prophet Joseph Smith defined faith as a principle of power, far more than simple belief:

"... faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings. ... [Faith] ... is the moving cause of all action ... without it both mind and body would be in a state of inactivity, and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental. ... Faith, then, is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence!"¹

The idea that "... faith ... is the moving cause of all action ..." suggests to our minds a dynamic process, and that is probably the reason why the Apostle James stated that the true faith is manifested through works, and that without works faith is dead².

The term "dynamic process" reminds me that it is possible for us to go about our lives asking the Lord whatever blessings we need to our survival or welfare, without ever considering that the bestowal of some of these blessings depends in part of our actions. True faith requires much more than a simple belief in God's ability to help us combined with a formal request made through mechanical, repetitive prayers that sometimes offered mindlessly.

True faith requires a "partnership"³ between us and the Lord. This "partnership" starts with a sharing of ideas; it develops with the design of a plan for solving problems or achieving blessings, and at last, it reaches its maturity with the performance of the accorded actions. This "partnership" is what I understand by "the prayer of faith", a process used to accomplish things that we may consider beyond our natural ability

¹ Lectures On Faith, p.7,10. Brackets added.

² James 2:17-26

³ The idea of a "partnership" implies that a covenant must be established between us and the Lord.

to achieve. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."⁴ Ammon, a great Nephite missionary, testified similarly: "Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things ..."⁵ Like many others, I also have a testimony that there are no limits to what we can accomplish if we have faith and pray in faith.

One of the chief examples of a prayer of faith was given by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Through the Book of Mormon we learn the pattern Christ and his prophets used to minister and administer using the prayer of faith.

Prayers Offered by a Member of the Godhead

The prophet Abinadi prophesied about Christ's mortal ministry saying: "... God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people."⁶ When ministering among the Nephites and Lamanites, Christ introduced himself by saying: "... I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth ..."⁷

In the Book of Mormon we find an extremely summarized⁸ account of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites. There we learn that during that ministry he prayed several times to the Father. I found very interesting the fact that Jesus Christ, a member of the Holy Trinity, the God who created worlds without number⁹, still prays. I suppose he did so both to give us an example, and to show us how to approach the Father and develop a personal relationship with Him¹⁰.

Another particular aspect that always catches my attention is the fact that Jesus always acknowledged the Father's hand in all things. For example, he by himself gave to his new Nephite-Lamanite¹¹ disciples the power to give the Holy Ghost; on the next day, when the disciples received the actual manifestation of the Holy Ghost, Jesus prayed: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen ..."¹²

I feel inclined to write more about the prayers that the Lord Jesus Christ offered during his ministry. However, since my purpose here is to write about prayers of faith offered by his mortal servants, I will not discuss this point in greater length. But read the account of his ministry as recorded in Third

⁴ Philippians 4:13

⁵ Alma 26:12

⁶ Mosiah 15:1

⁷ 3 Nephi 11:14

⁸ 3 Nephi 26:6-11

⁹ Moses 1:33

¹⁰ 3 Nephi 13:9; 18:16-21,24-25

¹¹ We don't know whether all the disciples were Nephites. By the same token, we don't know if the so-called "Three Nephites" were actually Nephites. Mormon and Moroni referred to them simply as "three disciples."

¹² 3 Nephi 19:20

Nephi; until we receive other accounts in greater detail¹³, this is the best source available to learn how the God of the whole earth prays. While reading those chapters, note how the Lord often used prayer either to acknowledge the Father's hand or as a means to increase the spirituality of the people, thus preparing them to receive greater light and knowledge. By analyzing the Lord's prayers we may learn how to use our prayers to achieve the same purposes.

The Prayer of Faith and the Remission of Sins

In the scriptures we find examples of how the Lord's servants in past ages, some of them acting in capacities that resemble modern-day church leadership callings, used the prayer of faith as a powerful tool.

One of these examples we find in the experience of Enos¹⁴. His words suggest that he did not get his blessing (the remission of his sins) as result of a single, mechanical, 30-second long late-night prayer. By using the words "wrestle" and "mighty prayer" (or their equivalents in the ancient Nephite language), Enos suggested that he had to employ all his mental and spiritual capacity to reach up to the throne of grace; in his own words, he had to "pour out [his] whole soul¹⁵".

The process is indeed long and Enos's experience suggests that it took him some time to get the Lord's answers to all his petitions. Only after he had gone through this process many times he finally felt his faith becoming unshaken. At this stage he was then ready to ask greater blessings, even for one specific blessing that would take more than 2,000 years to be bestowed¹⁶. This was probably the same type of faith Enos's father had achieved, by which he and others could even command the elements and be obeyed by them¹⁷.

Other examples in the scriptures show leaders pleading with the Lord for a remission of their people's sins. Moses described how he asked the Lord to forgive the ancient Israelites after their affair with the golden calf:

"... I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm.¹⁸"

¹³ 3 Nephi 26:6-12

¹⁴ Enos Chapter 1

¹⁵ Enos 1:2,4,9; brackets added.

¹⁶ Enos 1:11

¹⁷ Jacob 4:6; remember the experiences of Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the miracles of Jesus and His Apostles (and this list could be much longer).

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 9:24-29; I believe that Moses' action was motivated by pure love, or charity, and I will propose this idea in chapter 4.

This was another passage of scripture that left me deeply impressed, because Moses spent almost a month and a half reasoning and pleading with the Lord not for a personal blessing, but for the forgiveness of his people. Even though the people were clearly guilty, instead of asking the Lord to execute a quick judgment against the sinners, Moses acted the role of the Savior, who is our advocate before the Father, and pleaded the people's cause by asking the Father to spare them.¹⁹ Moses speaks with the Lord as if he were speaking to a friend, reminding the Lord how much negative publicity the destruction of the people would receive from the Egyptian press, and how much power and resources the Lord had already invested in releasing that people from bondage.

We find a similar example in the Book of Mormon, where Lehi, after learning that Jerusalem would be destroyed, "... prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people."²⁰ Again, notice how Nephi qualified the type of prayer Lehi offered by using the words "even with all his heart". This suggests not a "theatrical representation," but genuine feelings.

But placing a petition before the Lord is not all. The prayer of faith requires actions from both members of the "partnership". In the three cases that we have just considered, Enos, Moses and Lehi worked diligently²¹ after they had prayed so that their people could understand how to achieve--and retain--the remission of their sins. In a revelation through the Prophet Joel, the Lord gave the following charge and promise:

"Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: ... Then will the Lord be jealous [or zealous] for his land, and pity [or have compassion on] his people. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen"²²

It is interesting to notice what the Lord promises to send, besides national "self-esteem:" corn, wine, and oil. This promise could be seen both as a temporal blessing (i.e. food,) and as a spiritual blessing. If we assume that corn could be used to make bread, we would see here symbols of the ordinance of the sacrament in its ancient form--i.e. bread and wine²³--and of the Holy Spirit--the oil²⁴. The ordinance of the sacrament and the Spirit of the Lord are fundamental in obtaining a remission of our sins, a preparatory step to enter in the presence of the Lord. According to this scripture, it is the responsibility of those who minister to intercede in favor of the people, thus helping them in their eternal journey.

The Prayer of Faith in the Ministry

Another example of the prayer of faith can be found when Alma, the younger, prayed for himself and his missionary companions. After having seen the iniquity of the Zoramites, he realized the enormity of the task and of the obstacles ahead of his team of missionaries. Instead of balking from the responsibility

¹⁹ D&C 45:3-5

²⁰ 1 Nephi 1:5

²¹ Deuteronomy 10:1,5; 1 Nephi 1:18; Enos 1:19-20

²² Joel 2:17-19; brackets added with footnote information.

²³ See Genesis 14:18; JST Genesis 14:17; D&C 27:1-4

²⁴ See Matthew 25:1-4,8-10; D&C 45:56-57

(perhaps by rationalizing that the people had developed their own religion and that he should not bother them), he sought the Lord:

"... O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul. O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people. O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success ...²⁵"

Then, probably perceiving that his missionary companions would be experiencing the same concerns, he asked for the same blessings in behalf of his companions. Notice how in his prayer he mentions each of his companions by name:

"... and also my fellow laborers who are with me--yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons--yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ. Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.²⁶"

Now, why was Alma asking these blessings? Was he, by any chance, concerned only with the political or military benefits of having the Zoramites converted²⁷? Although the Nephites in general had these worries in mind, Alma was more concerned with their eternal welfare, and the next words in his prayer state this fact:

"O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ. Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.²⁸"

After having prayed for these blessings, was Alma finished? No. Remember that we are comparing the prayer of faith with a partnership; thus it requires action on our part as well as on the part of the Lord. Since Alma had requested certain blessings, and according to the word of the Lord "... without the ordinances ... and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh²⁹", his share of this partnership with the Lord led him to use his priesthood, as one of the Lord's stewards, to guarantee that those blessings would be bestowed by the Lord:

"Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. ... And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions,

²⁵ Alma 31:30-32

²⁶ Alma 31:32-33

²⁷ Alma 31:4

²⁸ Alma 31:34-35

²⁹ D&C 84:21

save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.³⁰"

Alma apparently gave his companions a special priesthood blessing so they could endure the rigors of the assignment they had received. We will not always be present to perform these ordinances; nevertheless, we still can bless and strengthen those who are associated with us by other types of actions. The Apostle Paul, for example, used his prayers and his letters; and only when possible, his personal visits. He once wrote:

"... I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power ...³¹"

As leaders we must follow this same pattern in every assignment in the Church of Christ: pray with all our heart, and then administer, write, exhort, visit, etc., and after doing these things offer another prayer, this time to thank for the opportunity given us to perform those labors and for the blessings received.

The Prayer of Faith in the Performance of Assignments

Another common use of the prayer of faith is in the performance of our several duties in the Church, especially in those assignments that constitute a personal challenge. One of the first examples that may come to our minds is the experience of the great prophet and seer Mahonri Moriancumer³², the younger³³ brother of Jared.

Moriancumer received a commandment to build special ships and cross the ocean with his people. After he had built them he saw that there was no way to renew the air inside the ships, and also that they had no light. Upon asking the Lord for instructions--something Moriancumer might have gotten used to during the construction--the Lord answered only one of the questions, and told Moriancumer how to provide for the renewal of the air. As to the question of the light, Moriancumer asked again the Lord for guidance; however, this time the Lord's answer was puzzling:

"And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire.³⁴"

³⁰ Alma 31:36,38

³¹ Ephesians 1:16-19

³² The name of the brother of Jared was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. See Elder Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*, p.463

³³ Ether 1:33-34. We have this additional piece of information thanks to the translation of the Book of Mormon into Thai, the official language of Thailand. I will refer to that in my discussion on diversity, in chapter 9.

³⁴ Ether 2:23

I don't believe that the Lord was being insensitive with one of His servants. Just as Moriancumer had previously been chastened because he had forgotten "... to call upon the name of the Lord³⁵," it is possible that this time he was being reminded that that information was already available to him³⁶. In his concern over the construction of such unusual ships (at least for his days,) it is possible that Moriancumer did not set aside enough time to the study and ponder on a solution, by which process he might find (and whereby he apparently did find) an idea to solve his problem.

What we have today as the Book of Ether, as part of the Book of Mormon, is just an abridgement, a condensed version of about 1,600 years of Jaredite history and prophecies made by Moroni. Since we do not have the details of what happened, we may assume that it probably took the Brother of Jared some time to figure out what to do. How long? Perhaps hours, or even days. After he had developed an idea of what to do, he had to find the necessary materials, and build a furnace. He had to find the right type of mineral, and who knows whether the mountain upon which he finally found it was nearby or far? Who knows how high it was³⁷? In those days, to achieve the high temperatures needed to melt³⁸ that mineral he and his associates probably had to work very hard, perhaps blowing the fire with bellows for many hours, or perhaps day and night, until the right temperature was reached, and then they had to continue working hard to maintain that temperature until the mineral was completely liquefied. Besides that, who knows whether the process worked in the first attempt? Who knows whether the temperature was correct; whether he found the right type of mineral at first; whether the clear stones didn't break in pieces while solidifying?

By these suppositions I am not trying to find out exactly what happened in the experience of the Brother of Jared; I am just trying to suggest that besides praying, Moriancumer had to work very hard to solve his problem. The important part of this discussion is that in order to solve some of our most difficult problems we have to follow the same process.

Whenever I read these chapters in the Book of Ether, I ask myself how many times we pass through situations in which the Lord ask us "... What will ye that I should do ...?". It is interesting to notice that after asking this question the Lord pronounced a series of "don'ts": don't make windows and don't take fire. I wonder how many times we have asked the Lord for guidance and instead of the direct answer to our inquiry we have received (either from the Lord directly or through one of his authorized servants, it is the same³⁹) a list of "don'ts". Perhaps in these situations we might even have gotten close to being angry with the Lord (or with his servants), instead of considering this an opportunity for learning and development that would eventually bring us nearer to the presence of the Lord.

It might be useful while in occasions like these to remember that obstacles, problems, diseases, or the acknowledgment of weaknesses, may be given to stimulate our mental and spiritual faculties, and to

³⁵ Ether 2:14

³⁶ According to a footnote in Genesis 6:16 (King James Version of the Bible published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1979), "... some rabbis believed it was a precious stone that shone in [Noah's] ark." In Ether 1:3,6 Moroni states that the Jaredite prophet Ether knew about the early history of the world. If we assume that Moriancumer probably had a more detailed scriptural account of the flood than the one found in the current version of the Bible, we may then suppose that he did find in that part of the scriptures the idea to use shining stones to illuminate the ships.

³⁷ Ether 3:1

³⁸ Notice that the English translation of the Book of Mormon uses the verb "molten" in Ether 3:1, suggesting that the stones were not ready to be used when the Brother of Jared got them on the mountain. I don't know whether editions in other languages use a verb with similar meaning.

³⁹ D&C 1:38

make us draw nearer to the Lord in order to receive greater blessings⁴⁰. By so doing, we will receive the blessing the Lord intended to give us--in general, something much greater than we originally wanted or expected--and he will also provide a solution to the problem, by now turned into a secondary matter.

Two additional points we learn in the Brother of Jared' experience are to acknowledge the Lord's omnipotent power and to ask for something very specific, instead of some unclear, generic blessing:

"... I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea. Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this ...⁴¹"

Moriancumer did not ask the Lord something vague or uncertain like "please, make these stones shine", or "if possible, make them shine". Instead, he said: "... thou hast all power ... [thou] can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man ... touch these stones ... with thy finger ... thou canst do this ..."

Perhaps some of us might say: "Well, this experience happened with the Brother of Jared, a great prophet and seer of old; maybe that would not happen with one of us, simple ordinary persons ...". In answer to this concern I would say that first, prophets, seers and revelators are also "simple" persons; the difference between us and them is in the breadth of the callings they have received in comparison with ours. Secondly, the scriptures have also examples of persons who even though did not have such broad callings they still used the same process we have just seen.

Let's consider the experience of one of Abraham's servants, while on the errand of finding a wife for Isaac. After arriving in Haran, the land where Abraham's relatives lived, he offered a prayer and established the following "partnership" with the Lord:

"And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.⁴²"

Abraham's servant was very specific in his petition, to the point of agreeing beforehand with the Lord on what specific sentences he and the chosen lady would utter. It is not recorded in our current version of the Old Testament, but this man was surely expecting the Lord to use the power of his Holy Spirit to make the lady pronounce those exact words. He studied in his mind, he developed a plan and presented it before the Lord; he agreed with the Lord on what to do, specifying what exactly he would do and asking what he thought only the Lord could do. Then, having had from Abraham the assurance that the Lord would send messengers before him⁴³, he acted as he had planned.

⁴⁰ Ether 12:27-28; D&C 88:63

⁴¹ Ether 3:4-5

⁴² Genesis 24:12-14

⁴³ Genesis 24:7

We cannot affirm that the Lord will in every occasion respond in such a detailed manner as He did with Abraham's servant; since the Lord works with us according to our faith⁴⁴, He will measure the strength of each individual's faith to determine how He will choose to respond⁴⁵. And we should emphasize that these spiritual manifestations come not because we want, but according to the Lord's will⁴⁶. However we can affirm--and in fact testify--that the Lord will always respond at some point in some way, according to His infinite wisdom and mercy.

The ways by which two groups of Nephites were rescued from Lamanite bondage reveal a little bit of how the Lord works according to the faith of the people. The first group was composed by King Limhi's people. After a period of repentance⁴⁷ they were delivered by means of a stratagem⁴⁸. The other group, who had followed Alma, was delivered from bondage by the Lord's direct intervention⁴⁹. So we learn that at times the Lord allow us the opportunity to use the wisdom we have already received from him and find a solution for ourselves, while in other circumstances He may answer our requests by direct intervention.

If we feel that the Lord is apparently not answering our prayers, we should not be alarmed or discouraged⁵⁰. In some occasions the plan of action we presented before the Lord may have flaws that we have not noticed, and in these cases all we have to do is to ponder a little more and present either an updated or a completely new version of our plan before the Lord.

The Lord may also at times try our faith, and withhold answers and blessings for some time, just as He did with the people of Alma⁵¹. It is rather easy to be faithful and to show love for God when things are going well. Part of our mortal test involves proving ourselves to be faithful and loving when things are going against our desires. When heaven seems closed to us, when we cannot feel the sweet influence of the Spirit of the Lord, and we just don't feel the desire to pray or to attend church--circumstances like these are excellent opportunities to show how much we are devoted to our Heavenly Father. When all we have is the remembrance of how good it was when we used to feel the Spirit of the Lord, we should allow that thought to occupy our minds, to drive us to faithfulness in the middle of uncertainty. Soon, after days, weeks, or months--only the Lord knows--heaven will open again and "angels [will come] and [will minister] unto [us]."⁵²

The Prayer of Faith and Our Skills

When performing our part of the action in a "partnership" with the Lord, we must strive to use those tools we are most familiar with. We can see the importance of this in the experience of the young king-

⁴⁴ 2 Nephi 26:13; 27:23; D&C 10:47,49,52

⁴⁵ We should not try to measure who among us has more or less faith, because only the Lord can accurately evaluate the strength of one's faith. See 2 Chronicles 16:9; Nahum 1:7; D&C 33:1; 38:2,7.

⁴⁶ D&C 63:9-12

⁴⁷ Mosiah 21:13-15,32-34

⁴⁸ Mosiah 22:5-8

⁴⁹ Mosiah 24:16-23

⁵⁰ We may also incur in the Lord's displeasure because of sin; but that is still not a reason to be discouraged because except for the unpardonable sin (Alma 39:6) repentance is always available.

⁵¹ Mosiah 24:12-15

⁵² Matthew 4:11; brackets added

to-be, David. After accepting Goliath's challenge, and expressing his vigorous faith that the Lord would deliver him out of Goliath's hands⁵³, David was prepared by King Saul to battle in the most logic way (according to the wisdom of the world):

"And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.⁵⁴"

There are occasions when the most logic way of doing something, according to the wisdom of the world, is not the most appropriate way of doing it according to the wisdom of the Lord. In David's experience, using an armour, a helmet, a coat of mail and a sword was something he apparently had not done so far; therefore, when he tried for the first time he apparently did not feel confident or comfortable because he was not accustomed with the weight of that military apparatus. At that moment, the most effective way for him to participate in a "partnership" with the Lord against Goliath and the Philistines was to adhere to those gadgets he was familiar with: stones and a sling⁵⁵. In the examples we have considered so far, the tools used were rocks and a furnace (the Brother of Jared), a specific dialogue (Abraham's servant), preaching (Moses, Enos, and Paul), and priesthood ordinances (Alma).

In our assignments, as well as in our lives, we need not only to use those tools available to us at the moment we need, but also develop the ability to use other tools. Going back to our previous example, David could not be effective using the military apparatus at the time he defeated Goliath; however, he later learned to use those weapons, and in time he became as skilled in their use as he had been with the sling.

Likewise, we can improve our abilities, learn new skills, acquire more knowledge and use these for the benefit of those under our responsibility: our families, our church, our communities. To refuse to do so, in my opinion, is comparable to denying our own divine origin, and according to the principle suggested by the Lord in the Parable of the Talents⁵⁶, we will be held accountable if we do not fully use our capacity.

The Prayer of Faith and the Will of the Lord

The Apostle James wrote: "... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."⁵⁷ Yet, we should remember that in order to receive according to our desires one important condition must be met: whatever we are requesting must be in accordance with the will of the Lord. Because of our limited understanding of the ways of the Lord, there will be occasions when we will ask certain blessings that the Lord will see fit not to bestow upon us at that time.

⁵³ 1 Samuel 17:26,32,36-37

⁵⁴ 1 Samuel 17:38-40

⁵⁵ Under a worldly logic, David's action could be considered suicide: a young man fighting against an experienced warrior who was about 10 feet (or about 3 meters) high, whose spear's head weighted about 20 pounds (or about 9 kilograms)! No wonder Goliath ridiculed David in front of the armies, "... Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" (1 Samuel 17:42-43)

⁵⁶ Matthew 25:15-30

⁵⁷ James 5:16

For example, after many years on the Lord's errand Moses humbly asked for a very simple blessing: an opportunity to cross the river Jordan and enter the promised land⁵⁸. Remember that Moses was a man to whom God had spoken "... face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend ...⁵⁹", and that through him the Lord had performed mighty works that even after 3,000 years still astonish the world. And yet, when asked to grant this great prophet the blessing of planting his feet on the land about which he had preached for about four decades, the Lord said: "... thou shalt not go over this Jordan."⁶⁰

Thus we see that not all our desires will be granted--even those that we may consider as righteous desires. But how can we know what to ask for in our prayers? In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord specified the conditions to learn what we should ask:

"... ye shall call upon me while I am near--Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; And if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation ... He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh."⁶¹

The word "expedient" means "tending to promote some proposed or desired object; a means to an end; proper under the circumstances; appropriate; advisable." Thus, something expedient for us is something that can help us accomplish our purpose (or end) on this earth, which purpose Amulek identified as our preparation to meet God⁶².

Let us refer once again to the Parable of the Talents⁶³: in that parable, the talents that the servants received belonged to their lord, and the increase that the first two servants acquired was also given back to their lord. Thus, it seems that those talents, far from possessions that belonged exclusively to the servants, belonged to their lord, and the servants were mere stewards handling those talents.

The same pattern appears in the examples we have considered so far. None involved any selfish desire; none included anything that could be considered a personal possession of the persons involved. In those examples the establishment of the Lord's kingdom was behind the blessings requested. Enos wanted remission of sins to him, to his people and even to his enemies; the retaining of this remission of sins brings eternal life, which is part of the work and glory of God⁶⁴; such was also the case with Moses, Lehi, and Alma the younger. Abraham's servant was seeking an elect lady who, with Isaac, would perpetuate the Abrahamic covenant, through which all the families of the earth would be blessed⁶⁵. David was restoring the faith in

58 Deuteronomy 3:23-25

59 Exodus 33:11

60 Deuteronomy 3:27; for Moses' ages, see Exodus 7:7 and Deuteronomy 34:7

61 D&C 88:62-65; 46:30

62 Alma 34:32

63 Matthew 25:15-30

64 Moses 1:39

65 Abraham 2:11

God and paving the way to magnify Israel in its position as a covenant people⁶⁶. And if these examples were not enough, we still find the one of Hannah, who prayed for a son and soon became the mother of Samuel, a prophet of such a caliber that the Israel of his time had not seen so far⁶⁷.

That does not mean that we should not ask for our daily necessities. Amulek taught some repentant Zoramites that they should ask for temporal blessings as well; but he added that those prayers should be accompanied by service rendered unto others⁶⁸ (a way of administering temporal salvation, also a part of the Lord's work.) And the Savior taught that we should not use vain repetitions, because our Heavenly Father knows all our necessities "before [we] ask him."⁶⁹ In my opinion, this admonition means that we may ask our Father in Heaven for food, clothing, and other necessities; but even during a time of adversity, we should exercise our faith in such a way as to not make our requests for temporal necessities become the only topic of our prayers.

Perhaps one of the most powerful examples of asking according to the will of the Lord was given by John, the Beloved Disciple. During the Lord's ministry, John, his brother James, and their mother, approached the Lord and asked for a very unusual blessing: "... She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on the left, in thy kingdom."⁷⁰ By their words (Mark recorded that James and John also expressed this desire) it is clear that they had faith. They really believed that Jesus was the Christ, and that eventually he would ascend again to his throne in the courts of glory. However, instead of a benevolent answer like "... great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt"⁷¹, he said: "Ye know not what ye ask ... to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give ..."⁷².

Later, after his resurrection, the Lord offered his disciples the opportunity of asking for anything they wanted. This time, John knew what to ask for: "And the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee."⁷³ But this time John was not asking for a blessing that would satisfy any desire of self-aggrandizement; he did not want to have power over death just to remain on the earth as a supernatural being⁷⁴; he wanted to remain on the earth to work in the Lord's vineyard. This time, the Lord's answer was positive: "And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people."⁷⁵

⁶⁶ 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 24:20; 25:28

⁶⁷ 1 Samuel 1:11; 2:26; 3:1,19-20

⁶⁸ Alma 34:17-29

⁶⁹ Matthew 6:7-8; 3 Nephi 13:7-8. Brackets added.

⁷⁰ Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:35-37

⁷¹ Matthew 15:28

⁷² Mark 10:38

⁷³ D&C 7:1-2

⁷⁴ 3 Nephi 28:19-22; D&C 7:6

⁷⁵ D&C 7:3

With the help of the Lord, obtained through the prayer of faith, we can also achieve much. However, we must always remember that these mighty works are must be for the purpose of establishing the kingdom of God, and that all the glory belongs to the Lord, not to us.

Chapter 3

Hope of Better Days

Both Paul and Mormon taught that there are three main virtues to be acquired in mortality: faith, hope, and charity¹. But Mormon went one step further and asked: "what is it that ye shall hope for?"² His answer was that we should have hope of achieving eternal life through the atonement of Christ. We usually tend to center our hopes in more "down-to-earth" types of objectives because throughout our mortal journeys we face temptations, trials, tragedies, and all sorts of problems and unpleasant experiences.

Sometimes when we are suffering we seem to forget that we are not the only ones in that predicament. But perhaps the most serious consequence of forgetting this idea is that we also forget that the Lord will allow us to pass through sorrow for a wise purpose. In his words to the Prophet Joseph Smith, "... know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good."³

Unfortunately, it is hard to keep these words in mind when we are in profound pain. When we can't even sleep well at night because of economic setbacks, extreme poverty, or a chronic illness, we tend to focus our hope solely in being delivered from the source of our pain. In moments of such extreme suffering we may even momentarily forget our purpose on this earth and our eternal possibilities. Sadly, some people start to believe in the false notion that the Lord cannot save them from their temporal problems, and they then try to find solutions by taking shortcuts. Many good persons have been lost in this process⁴. Now I invite you to let your mind wander together with mine for a few minutes while we consider this issue.

A Time of Profound Changes

We live in a very unique time. Miracles are happening everywhere, everyday. Computers, instant communication via satellite, transplants, genetically-engineered medicines, things we did not even dream about 20 years ago are now part of the daily lives of many of us, and they indirectly benefit the lives of many

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:13; Moroni 7:1

² Moroni 7:41

³ D&C 121:7. Notice that the Lord did not say that those things would "serve" as an experience, but rather that they would "give" experience. That being the case, it seems that no one is exempted from having problems. Sorry for the bad news ... but to compensate that, read 2 Corinthians 4:15 and D&C 58:4.

⁴ 1 Nephi 8:28,32

others, even those who do not possess some of these resources readily available. Blessings beyond our present dreams will be part of the daily lives of many more of us 20 years from now.

The restored religion has also experienced a fast development, although not in such a visibly widespread manner. When I was a recent convert in the Church of Jesus Christ, one week after my baptism, I didn't know or understand much about the gospel, and kept wondering if one day I would understand. Today, after all I have experienced and done in the Church, I still don't know or understand much, but now I have a testimony that one day I will understand everything--and that's definitely a progress⁵.

Today we live in a moment of profound changes. Throughout the world societies are changing--slowly abandoning old prejudices and condemning old unfair practices. All this is part of the preparations for the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom. It is true that the greater part will be performed at or soon after the time of his return, but the presence of some minimal requisites is necessary, and one of these requisites is the existence of a people "minimally" prepared to live in a new type of society.

Yet, in today's society, money and smartness are still two of the fundamental requisites to success--meaning a mixture of power, influence and wealth. There are all kinds of wicked shortcuts to achieve these requisites: corruption, crime, fraud, flattery, etc.

In the future, the priesthood and the pure knowledge from God will be the fundamental requisites, and there are no shortcuts to obtain them. Anyone who wishes them must first enter the strait gate of repentance and baptism and receive the sacred ordinances of the House of the Lord. He or she must also learn to use the power of the Holy Ghost to comprehend the mind of the Lord, thus obtaining knowledge--and it is impossible to do this without righteousness, for the Spirit of the Lord does not dwell in unholy temples⁶.

There is no way to get these requisites through fraud, because the priesthood cannot be used--it does not work--under hypocrisy or guile⁷. It is also impossible to flatter the Lord; he is indeed pleased with our adoration, but to the flatterers he reserves the unpleasant surprise of hearing from his lips the terrible words: "... Ye never knew me; depart from me ye that work iniquity."⁸

The Temporary Nature of the Mortal Environment

Sometimes we get so involved in the things of this life that we forget to look upward and consider the things pertaining to the eternity. This is a finite space in which we are temporarily placed to have certain types of experiences. This is not our place; this is not our home. In a certain sense we do not own anything here; all we have is a "temporary ownership", or rather, "stewardship" of the basic materials that have always belonged to the Lord.

The piece of land in the American continent where my home is located--that official documents from the Brazilian government prove to be mine--is not really mine. It is possible that about 2000 years ago

⁵ D&C 121:26,28-32; 130:8-11

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:16; Mosiah 2:37

⁷ D&C 121:42

⁸ Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:33; from now on, "JST". Notice the difference between this translation and the one found in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. Christ knows all things; therefore, it is unlikely that he would have said "I never knew you" (KJV Matthew 7:23). It is precisely because he knows these individuals that he is going to reject them. Their rejection is based on the fact that *they* did not know Christ. This agrees with what the Lord later said in prayer: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

a Nephite lawyer might have claimed that very piece of land as his, and he also might have had an official document proving his ownership. And what if about 3000 years ago a noble Jaredite had that same piece of land as part of his domains? He also might have had a document proving his ownership of that land--or he might have used his sword to convince others of the truthfulness of his claim. We still don't know completely what happened before the flood, about 5000 years ago, but a civilization might have flourished in that same area of this continent for about 2000 years. If I were to speculate, I would say that there might be lots of people claiming rights over that same piece of land, and all I know is that I was the last one to arrive.

All these titles, rights and concessions are temporary, finite. They only serve for the short period we spend in this world⁹. Is it worthwhile to work for these titles, rights and concessions? I think so; but not at any cost. It is not worthwhile to compromise that which is eternal for that which is temporary. The world teaches that in this life "anything goes," but this is the attitude of those who seek shortcuts, and there are no shortcuts on the road that leads to the presence of the Lord.

Greater Changes Yet to Come

Today most of us may be considered "the weak things of the world," but the day is quite near when the priesthood of God will be the governing influence in the world, because Christ's millennial kingdom will be based on the authority of the priesthood. When that time arrives all books will be opened, and nothing will be hidden. What then? All our "hidden" acts will be clearly exposed, either to our glory or to our shame.

I strongly believe that we are approaching the time in which we will all see opportunities be opened before us that will exceed our most sublime dreams. I don't believe it to be worthwhile to forgo these future opportunities in exchange for a handful of coins. One day our lives will be researched by our descendants, because they will certainly want to know what kind of people we were in this corrupt age. One of the qualities they will surely praise will be our patience in waiting for the Lord.

Today, some people bash the ancient Israelites who lost great blessings just because they could not wait for Moses to get down from Mount Sinai. Their reasoning at that time was probably like this: "My goodness! Moses has already been up there for more than a month. Nobody can let all this people waiting nobody-knows-what for over a month! A true leader must act quickly, and Moses still hasn't said what's in his mind. Maybe it is time to go back to Egypt..." Sometimes we act in this same manner when the Lord retains, or rather, retards the bestowing of some of his best blessings for some time. But when we consider the mercies of the Lord towards us we see that Egypt (or the way of the world) is not a valid option.

Some people believe that miracles and other great manifestations of the Lord's power only happened in "biblical times," and that the ancient people lived in better or holier environments than ours. That is not true. We have also been called to live holy lives (without becoming fanatics), and we are entitled to inspirational experiences with the manifestations of our Heavenly Father's power. Those who believe that the lives of the ancient saints or of the early saints of this dispensation had some sort of "mystical" characteristic, will probably be surprised when they learn how 300 years from now their descendants will narrate their ancestors' lives in the late 20th century. Every moment in our life is already part of history, and part of some sacred scripture that will be published in the distant future. The good news is that if we don't like the way this future accounts of our lives are currently being written, we still can--thanks to the atonement of Christ--change them.

⁹

Time is going fast, and for some of us old age is coming, but this cannot be a reason for despair, since despair comes because of iniquity, not because of righteousness¹⁰. Our children need role models to be followed, and if these role models are not us, and if our personal role model is not the Lord, things will be all right for some time, but eventually they will be all wrong¹¹.

When we leave this stage of our eternal existence we will understand clearly that the Lord was extremely wise in laying things in this manner. Who knows whether some have little because they have the capacity to achieve much, and others have much because perhaps they don't have the capacity to endure the need? In this way the Lord has prepared the minimal conditions for the salvation of both groups, and the day will come when all of them will possess everything--forever¹².

The Two Alternatives

In the face of all this, what will we do? Trust the world or trust the Lord? Many have chosen to trust the world. In ancient times the people chose to trust in their buildings, or in their temples; but the prophet Jeremiah admonished that this was not a good alternative:

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.¹³"

At another occasion the ancient people of the covenant placed their trust in their institutions, thus trusting in their academic titles, in their military ability, and in their economic wealth; once more, Jeremiah cautioned against this practice:

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches¹⁴"

The search for safety and comfort in material wealth is not new. We can find statements from several prophets on the subject. President Wilford Woodruff said:

"There is no man that has an understanding of the blessings that God has promised ... but what will desire that in preference to the fading enjoyments and empty honors of this world. You may surround any man or woman with all the wealth and glory that the imagination of man can grasp, and are they satisfied? No. There is still an aching void. On the other hand, show me a beggar upon the streets, who has got the Holy Ghost, whose mind is filled with that Spirit and power, and I will show you a person who has peace of mind, who possesses true riches, and those

¹⁰ Moroni 10:22

¹¹ 3 Nephi 27:11

¹² D&C 76:55; 84:34

¹³ Jeremiah 7:3-7

¹⁴ Jeremiah 9:23

enjoyments that no man can obtain from any other source. ... It is better for a people to be wise, to get righteousness, to be the friend of God, than to occupy any other position in life.¹⁵

On another thought on this same subject, President Brigham Young criticized the selfish search for riches:

"A man or a woman who places the wealth of this world and the things of time in the scales against the things of God and the wisdom of eternity, has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to understand. What are riches for? For blessings, to do good. Then let us dispense that which the Lord gives us to the best possible use for the building up of his kingdom, for the promotion of the truth on the earth, that we may see and enjoy the blessings of the Zion of God here upon this earth ... I look around among the world of mankind and see them grabbing, scrambling, contending, and every one seeking to aggrandize himself, and to accomplish his own individual purposes, passing the community by, walking upon the heads of his neighbors--all are seeking, planning, contriving in their wakeful hours, and when asleep dreaming, "How can I get the advantage of my neighbor? How can I spoil him, that I may ascend the ladder of fame?" That is entirely a mistaken idea ... the man who seeks honor and glory at the expense of his fellow-men is not worthy of the society of the intelligent.¹⁶

We should not put our hope in buildings or in mortal, finite institutions. Beautiful buildings, secular (or even spiritual) knowledge, personal assets, or healthy good-looking bodies by themselves will not exalt us. Sometimes some of us may be deceived by the idea that because we have beautiful buildings (or a better educational or economic condition) we are on the sure way to salvation. However, our salvation will come as result of a combination of our faith in Christ, repentance, ordinances, individual works of righteousness (a result of our knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Lord's laws,) coupled with the Lord's grace generated by the atonement. As Nephi, Hanani the Seer, and King Jehoshaphat, of Judah, said:

"For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.¹⁷

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him ...¹⁸

"... Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.¹⁹

Waiting Patiently for the Lord's Salvation

On a certain Sunday, many years ago, in Rio de Janeiro, the late Odmar Bergqvist, former Elders Quorum President of the Tijuca Ward, delivered a talk with a title consisting of one word repeated three

¹⁵ JD, Vol.2, p.199, February 25, 1855. A partial quotation is found in "Discourses of Wilford Woodruff", p.5-6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Vol.15, p.18-19, April 28, 1872. Also found in "Discourses of Brigham Young", p.306-307.

¹⁷ 2 Nephi 25:23

¹⁸ 2 Chronicles 16:9

¹⁹ 2 Chronicles 20:20

times: "Patience, patience, patience." Today I think his words were wise, and they are a key to days yet to come. The Lord said:

"Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. ... But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. ... Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."²⁰

We must trust the Almighty and center our hope in Him, because he is powerful to save, and as a loving and perfect Father he will protect us, although at times we may be prostrated by diseases or suffer accidents; he will grant us our daily bread, although at times we may receive this bread through the instrumentality of other mortal beings; he will answer our prayers, although at times we may have to wait a long time to receive a particular blessing. The Prophet Nahum, King David, and Job testified in this manner:

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."²¹

"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust ..."²²

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation ..."²³

If we develop this type of trust and help those we are serving also develop it, we will have our hope centered in Christ and we will be able to endure all obstacles and evils of this life, and we will finally secure an eternal salvation in the kingdom of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith's words of counsel to the Church were:

"... a very large ship is benefitted very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves. Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed."²⁴

²⁰ Isaiah 40:10,31; 41:10,13

²¹ Nahum 1:7

²² Psalms 18:2

²³ Job 13:15-16

²⁴ D&C 123:16-17

Love Unfeigned

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught under inspiration that the righteous exercise of power or influence by virtue of the priesthood can be achieved only through the fulfillment of certain requirements¹, and love unfeigned was one of them. Now, what is this love? How is it manifested? The adjective "unfeigned" means "sincere; genuine," suggesting that it is not enough just to say that we have love for each other; we must also feel that love and express it in a manner appropriate to our circumstances.

The scriptures provide great examples of this type of love. The greatest of all was given by the Savior. His atoning sacrifice is incomparable; no mortal person will ever match the magnitude of the love demonstrated by Jesus when he, by his own free will, suffered the infinite agony caused by the penalty for our sins. His sinless life and his acts of service (preachings, healings, etc.) are also incomparable because they were performed perfectly. And yet, even though we, as mortals, cannot match the perfect and infinite love Christ had towards his children, we can ask the Lord through the prayer of faith to help us develop this feeling; our part of the partnership² will require us to strive to emulate those acts performed by the Lord.

Both Paul and Mormon described the way Christ expresses his love for his people. Both taught, and Mormon specifically clarified, that "the pure love of Christ" is called charity³. Mormon's words also imply that charity is a spiritual gift. He taught: "... pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he has bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ ...⁴". Mormon's use of the words "... love, which [the Father] has bestowed ..." suggests something greater than a simple process of internal development of this love; he clearly says that this love comes from on high, from the Father. His use of the words "... all energy of heart ..." suggests to my mind that "prayer of faith" that we have already discussed.

¹ D&C 121:41

² See chapter 2 for a discussion on the prayer of faith as a partnership between the Lord and us.

³ Moroni 7:47

⁴ Moroni 7:48

Acquiring Love

Just like the process of developing faith explained by Alma⁵, acquiring love unfeigned (or charity) starts with a desire⁶ to have it, and Mormon gave us a very good reason to have this desire: "... if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. ... cleave unto charity ... for all things must fail--But charity ... endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him."⁷

Our desire to acquire this love will lead us to receive a manifestation from the Lord--a testimony, if you will--that our desire is acceptable before him⁸. The next step is to emulate the actions that will make this desire become a reality⁹. The actions to be emulated are those we learned from the Lord and from his prophets. Then, the Spirit of the Lord will "solidify" those actions in us, so that they will become a natural part of our character¹⁰. At this point those actions will have become "genuine" or "unfeigned." We will then be performing those actions because we will savor that "sweet feeling" that comes every time we perform acts of service towards others without any concern with potential rewards.

This process should not to be confused with deceit. Deceit occurs when someone emulates qualities to cheat or manipulate others, motivated solely by self-interest. When we develop godly virtues, we start with emulation to obey the Lord's will. By and by we begin to experience the sweet fruits of that "seed" we planted; and if we use our free agency correctly by deciding to remain that way, thus incorporating those virtues into our character, we will be giving glory to our Heavenly Father¹¹.

Both Paul and Mormon wrote about the outcomes of charity, or the pure love of Christ. I will not explain their writings, since many authors have already done that. But I still want to emphasize three effects of this pure love that I believe are most significant for church leaders, since they are closely related with the duties to be performed in our callings: compassion, forgiveness, and patience. Without these three qualities we may find ourselves not satisfying the needs and at times even inflicting pain on our brothers and sisters, children of our Heavenly Father whom we have been called to serve.

Compassion Leading to Miracles

Compassion, as exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ implies not only a feeling of pity, but a drive to act promptly using the priesthood and the gifts of the Spirit to bless and comfort those in need. In the scriptures we find the following events related to the Lord's compassion:

"And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick."¹²

⁵ Alma 32:28-43

⁶ Alma 32:27

⁷ Moroni 7:46-47

⁸ Alma 32:28-30,33-36

⁹ Alma 32:37-39

¹⁰ Alma 32:41-43

¹¹ Matthew 5:16; Moses 1:39

¹² Matthew 14:14

"And Jesus ... saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place ... Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. ...¹³"

"Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. ... And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude ... four thousand men, beside women and children.¹⁴"

From these scriptures we see that compassion must be one of the motives behind the use of the power of the priesthood. But far from simple pity--that may produce a feeling of powerlessness--compassion, as exemplified by the Lord, can lead us to understand the current needs of those under our responsibility, to conceive solutions to satisfy those needs, and to use the authority we have received to implement those solutions.

In the scriptures we just read, the Lord healed those afflicted with diseases; he understood and cared for the temporal needs of those who followed him; he also preached the "... pleasing word of God ... the word which healeth the wounded soul¹⁵" to those who had no one to reveal to them the joy of their redemption¹⁶ and the hope of returning to the presence of their Heavenly Father. In two occasions he fed the multitude, or stating in another way, he assumed the responsibility for the welfare of those persons who probably had abandoned their daily tasks (and who might even have lost their wages on those days) to listen to his preaching.

Evidently, we should not forget that the use of the priesthood to bless others is based on our personal righteousness and faith; since none of us is yet perfect in deeds or in faith, the Lord's grace is another element upon which the use of the priesthood is based. In His ministry among those Nephites and Lamanites who were righteous enough to behold his presence¹⁷, the Lord made that fact clear:

"And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. Have ye any that are sick among you? ... Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. ... for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.¹⁸"

¹³ Mark 6:34-37

¹⁴ Matthew 15:32,36,38

¹⁵ Jacob 2:8

¹⁶ Moses 5:10-12

¹⁷ 3 Nephi 9:13

¹⁸ 3 Nephi 17:6-8

Forgiveness: An Exercise in Godliness

While serving in leadership callings we should never act as taskmasters or executioners. Forgiveness is one of the channels through which charity operates. In the scriptures we find the Lord saying this: "... he who has repented of his sins the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."¹⁹ Now, if the Lord Almighty does not remember past sins of which we (or others) have repented, why should *we* remember them? If he who is perfect and has all power to create worlds without number and govern them all forgives our sins and forgets them, who are we, imperfect mortal creatures to dare to say that we will not forgive our brothers and sisters--or even ourselves?

By saying that we can't forgive we may be, in a certain way, denying the power of Christ's atonement; we may be saying that we don't believe in the gifts of repentance and remission of sins. Unforgiveness can be another way to express the false doctrine that says that man is and will forever be evil; we may be denying others the opportunity to change--as if we had the power to revoke a God-given law.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught that unforgiveness is sin: "The lesson stands for us today. Many people, when brought to a reconciliation with others, say that they forgive, but they continue to hold malice, continue to suspect the other party, continue to disbelieve the other's sincerity. This is sin, for when a reconciliation has been effected and when repentance is claimed, each should forgive and forget, build immediately the fences which have been breached, and restore the former compatibility."²⁰

Some may argue that God can forget past sins because he has all power, and that since we are mortals we are not able to do it as he does. In response we can say that although we will never forget so completely as he does, we can still do a lot in that regard, by not allowing mistrust and prejudice to influence our future relations with the repentant individuals. The important point here is that forgetting past sins requires an increased power of mind, increased self-control. Since we will have to exercise and increase our own power, in the process we may become more similar to our Father in Heaven, and acquire a measure of one of his divine powers--the power to forgive.

Forgiving Those Who Apostatize

In our administration of quorums, organizations, wards or stakes, we should keep in mind that whatever wrong actions our brothers and sisters have performed in the past must be completely forgotten as soon as they have truly repented of those actions. We should also receive them not with accusations, but with open arms, in true love.

The Prophet Joseph Smith provided a good example when he received brother William W. Phelps back into the church. Brother Phelps had been accessory in one event that brought a great deal of suffering to the saints, and was excommunicated in 1839. He later repented and in 1841 asked to be readmitted into the church. The words the Prophet wrote him in reply were a model to be followed:

"You may in some measure realize what my feelings, as well as Elder Rigdon's and Brother Hyrum's were, when we read your letter--truly our hearts were melted into tenderness and compassion when we ascertained your resolves. I can assure you I feel a disposition to act on your case in a manner that will meet the approbation of Jehovah, (whose servant I am), and

¹⁹ D&C 58:42

²⁰ The Miracle of Forgiveness, p.284. See also Amos 1:11, where the Lord implies that unforgiveness is a transgression. In chapter 17 I will quote President Heber J. Grant's account of an experience he had with President John Taylor that illustrates this principle.

agreeable to the principles of truth and righteousness which have been revealed; and inasmuch as long-suffering, patience, and mercy have ever characterized the dealings of our heavenly Father towards the humble and patient, I feel disposed to copy the example, cherish the same principles, and by so doing be a savior of my fellow men. ... It is true, that we have suffered much in consequence of your behavior--the cup of gall, already full enough for mortals to drink, was indeed filled to overflowing when you turned against us. ... Believing your confession to be real, and your repentance genuine, I shall be happy once again to give you the right hand of fellowship, and rejoice over the returning prodigal.²¹"

Elder Phelps was restored to full fellowship in the church, and later served as a special messenger of the Prophet Joseph Smith to the Governor of the state of Illinois and to other state officials²².

Forgiving Those Who Repeat the Same Sins

We occasionally may feel frustrated when some individuals under our responsibility consistently make the same mistakes, or deliberately procrastinate their repentance. In such cases some have resorted to the following passage to justify actions against them: "They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble. In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me."²³ But in their concern (and sometimes haste) to execute judgment, they forget to read the next verse in the same section of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord says: "Verily I say unto you, notwithstanding their sins, my bowels are filled with compassion towards them. I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy."²⁴

Later, in that same revelation, the Lord commanded us to do something completely different than to condemn the sinner: "Pray ye, therefore, that their ears may be opened unto your cries, that I may be merciful unto them, that these things may not come upon them."²⁵ Above all, we must remember that the Lord commanded the following: "Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And ye ought to say in your hearts--let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds."²⁶

When we have unfeigned, or genuine love for our fellow beings, we will only want to bless them. We have been called to bring souls unto Christ²⁷. However, because of free agency²⁸ some individuals will come unto Christ faster than others. As far as our responsibilities are concerned, what really matters is to see that those under our care do come unto Christ, or to see that they at least keep looking and moving towards Christ.

²¹ TPJS, p.165, July 22, 1840

²² Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 3:692

²³ D&C 101:7-9

²⁴ D&C 101:9

²⁵ D&C 101:92

²⁶ D&C 64:9-11

²⁷ D&C 15:6

²⁸ D&C 93:30-31

Forgiving Those Who Oppose the Church

Another good example of the principle of forgiveness can be found in the prayer offered at the dedication of the Kirtland temple. Instead of asking the Lord to bring "fire and brimstone" upon those who were engaged in spreading false rumors against the church, the prophet Joseph Smith only asked that they be confounded, astonished and ashamed--if they did not repent--and that the effect of their works be nullified. The Prophet wrote this:

"We ask thee, Holy Father, to confound, and astonish, and to bring to shame and confusion, all those who have spread lying reports abroad, over the world, against thy servant or servants, if they will not repent, when the everlasting gospel shall be proclaimed in their ears; And that all their works may be brought to naught ... that there may be an end to lyings and slanders against thy people.²⁹"

Concerning those who do not know the gospel, the Prophet asked the Lord to spare them for a while:

"And whatsoever city thy servants shall enter, and the people of that city receive their testimony, let thy peace and thy salvation be upon that city; that they may gather out of that city the righteous, that they may come forth to Zion, or to her stakes, the places of thine appointment, with songs of everlasting joy; And until this be accomplished, let not thy judgments fall upon that city. And whatsoever city thy servants shall enter, and the people of that city receive not the testimony of thy servants, and thy servants warn them to save themselves from this untoward generation, let it be upon that city according to that which thou hast spoken by the mouths of thy prophets.³⁰"

The reason for these requests was explained as follows: "O Lord, we delight not in the destruction of our fellow men; their souls are precious before thee³¹". Even those who violently harassed the saints received a word asking for mercy if they would repent:

"Have mercy, O Lord, upon the wicked mob, who have driven thy people, that they may cease to spoil, that they may repent of their sins if repentance is to be found; But if they will not, make bare thine arm, O Lord, ... may thine anger be kindled, and thine indignation fall upon them ... But inasmuch as they will repent, thou art gracious and merciful, and wilt turn away thy wrath when thou lookest upon the face of thine Anointed.³²"

Persecution has been a heritage of the saints in any dispensation of the gospel, and it is not different in our days. However, we have been commanded to love our enemies and pray for them³³; therefore, we will not respond to them in a violent manner. We will seek whatever protection is available under the law of our countries, and if that is not available then we can be sure that the Lord himself will fight

²⁹ D&C 109:29-30

³⁰ D&C 109:39-41

³¹ D&C 109:43

³² D&C 109:50-53

³³ Matthew 5:44-45

for us³⁴. And when that day comes we will not rejoice over the defeat of those who consider themselves as our enemies because they will still be our brothers and sisters, precious children of our Heavenly Father³⁵.

Forgiving Those who Fail in Their Callings

All service rendered in the Church of Christ is voluntary. We can very appropriately consider service in the kingdom as an offering to God. As such, one engage in hasty judgments of others' performances. Those who serve in any capacity in the church are offering something of themselves to the Lord. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "This is the Lord's organization through which we operate. We are dealing with voluntary workers--our Father's children whom He loves, regardless of their mistakes and weaknesses. There must be no force, coercion, or intimidation in our delegation."³⁶

As leaders, especially while serving as members of presidencies, we should have in mind that when persons fail in their assignments they are letting the Lord down, not us; we should not take their actions personally.

Let me share another idea about this matter. First, let us consider that "failure" can be a subjective concept. What can be considered as a failing performance from one person, can also be considered a major accomplishment when made by another³⁷. We must improve our individual performance continually, but always remember that judging others' performance according to our personal measure is not part of our callings. Instead of doing so, we would better judge our own performances as trainers of those we are serving with as presidencies, as President Spencer W. Kimball suggested:

"Unlike the world, when we supervise, it should not be out of a need for status or need to control, but out of the desire to serve others and to help them in a way that increases their righteous capacity. Too often in the past we have called individuals, giving them little or no orientation and little or no supervision. We must begin to do otherwise, if we desire to lengthen our stride in the management of the kingdom at all levels of its operation. ... This means each of us must be more willing to expend more of our time, talent, and means in providing leadership training in the broadest sense of that concept.

... A prudent leader will not complain at the weakness or the inefficiency or the lack of interest of those with whom he works until he is certain that he has presented the program fully, concisely, thoroughly, and understandably, and that he has followed through to keep the matter fresh in their minds, being sure that they understand the program and go forward. He should evaluate his performance before he criticizes others in theirs. His success will be measured not by his brilliance, nor by how much he knows about the program, but by how well he can transmit the knowledge and enthusiasm to others. When one person speaks the people say, 'How eloquent,' but when another finishes speaking, they say, 'Come, let us march.' We who pretend leadership must set on fire those whom we would lead.³⁸"

³⁴ D&C 105:14

³⁵ In Obadiah 1:10,12-13 the Lord chastises the Edomites because they rejoiced in the downfall of Judah. And in D&C 76:26 we learn that when Lucifer was thrust down after rebelling against God, "the heavens wept over him."

³⁶ Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.379

³⁷ See chapter 6 for further ideas on the nature of perfection.

³⁸ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.485-486. October 18, 1967.

Interceding in Favor of the People

Moses offered an excellent example of how we should deal with the Lord in regard to the people we have been called to serve. Once again referring to the occasion when the people failed in their devotion to the Lord by building a molten calf, Moses said:

"And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also. And the Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time.³⁹"

Although I would not recommend anyone to fast for 40 days, still, pleading with the Lord in favor of those we serve is part of our calling as leaders. We occasionally hear reports about individuals who, when asked about the problems being faced by those they had been called to serve, state something similar to this: "What can we do? They are in sin and will not accept our visits. Some of them are even attending other churches. They are all condemned."

Moses had another experience that serves as a good example. This time the people rebelled and did not believe that the Lord would give them victory in their battles; in their desperation they came close to stoning Joshua and Caleb, who insisted that they should go forward. The Lord spoke to Moses and said that he would reject the people and that he would raise from Moses and his descendants a mightier nation. Instead of accepting the Lord's alternative plan, Moses acted the role of the savior and pleaded with the Lord in our behalf⁴⁰. He wrote:

"Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin⁴¹".

Other prophets have also dealt in a christlike manner when faced with the possibility of having their people destroyed. In the Book of Mormon we find Lehi and Enos, for example praying in behalf of others:

"... my father, Lehi, ... prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.⁴²"

"... I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them. And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. ... And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be

³⁹ Deuteronomy 9:18-21

⁴⁰ D&C 29:5; 38:4. See also Jacob 5:26-28,49-51

⁴¹ Deuteronomy 9:25-27. I quoted this passage of scripture in chapter 2, as an example of a prayer of faith.

⁴² 1 Nephi 1:5

unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites. And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith.⁴³"

Mormon provides a touching example of a prophet interceding in favor of his people. Even knowing that the Nephites were doomed he still pleaded with the Lord in their favor:

"Behold, I had led them, notwithstanding their wickedness I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and my soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long for them; nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts."⁴⁴

Again, notice the choice of words to describe the quality of prayers offered: "with all his heart," "pour[ed] out my whole soul," "struggling in the spirit," "many long strugglings."

Patience and Courtesy

At times many of us may lose our patience with other persons. That may very well happen because each one of us seems to have an individual scale of priorities. We have full agendas, several meetings to attend, decisions to make, and we feel that we just don't have time to spend with those persons that will come to us with those same old problems that never change. Other times we may get angry when we are approached by persons who, in our judgment, have made no effort to solve their problems, despite our counsel.

At times some may get carried away in the idea that their managing the affairs the kingdom will "make the church grow", which idea I consider in part wrong. Why? Because in my understanding the real growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the sum of the individual growth of each of its members, and the members' growth comes in and out of the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ, not through any mortal and imperfect managerial skill. The Apostle Paul clearly stated his role and importance as a priesthood leader:

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."⁴⁵

As the Lord's agents, endowed with his authority, we represent the Lord--but we are not the Lord. The Lord can make the church grow in these last days even without our efforts; however, he decided to call us to work for and with him, and if we labor diligently we will receive our reward as faithful servants⁴⁶.

We must take time to listen to the people, paying careful attention to their words. We must take time to pray together, and to rejoice together by receiving the "... pleasing word of God, yea, the word that

⁴³ Enos 1:9-12

⁴⁴ Mormon 3:12

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

⁴⁶ Matthew 25:23; Jacob 5:75

healeth the wounded soul.⁴⁷" In times of distress--which may occur several times in our mortal journey--any person may feel weak; he or she may feel an aversion to prayer or may think that the Lord is not listening. During times like these, that person will go to church looking for a sign from heaven, a word of relief, a testimony that the Lord is near and that everything will be resolved for the better. Those in leadership capacities must be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit in order to perceive those experiencing such feelings and to determine how use the power of the priesthood and other church resources to help them. This sensitivity is not automatic; although we may be blessed with the right to receive revelations pertaining to our callings, we only receive them after fervent prayer and by carefully exercising our minds so that we can place ourselves in tune with the Spirit of the Lord⁴⁸.

In a revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord taught President Frederick G. Williams, a member of the First Presidency, about some of the responsibilities of his calling as a church leader: "Wherefore, be faithful; ... succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."⁴⁹

Serving With No Concern For Rewards

Helping others through humble service must be our sole purpose in the kingdom of God. The word "humble" means that we recognize our dependence on God⁵⁰, and if we have any other selfish purposes we may very well fail, even if one of these purposes is to get an eternal reward. We should frequently ask ourselves these questions: "What if there were no rewards involved? Would I be faithful out of pure love for God and his gospel?" The prophet Lehi said that we would not be able to exercise free agency without opposition⁵¹ (in this case, rewards opposed to punishments.) I believe in Lehi, but I still ask myself: should I exercise my free agency based solely on those two possibilities--eternal life versus eternal punishment? President Brigham Young declared his personal feelings about this matter:

"... my heart has been set in me to do the will of God, to build up his Kingdom ... to establish Zion ... and to save the people; and I can say, truly and honestly, that the thought never came into my mind, in all my labors, what my reward will be, or whether my crown would be large or small, or any crown at all, a small possession, a large possession, or no possession. I have never had any thoughts or reflections upon this ...

All that I have had in my mind has been that it was my duty to do the will of God, and to labor to establish his Kingdom on the earth. I do not love, serve or fear the Lord for the sake of getting rid of being damned, nor for the sake of getting some great gift or blessing in eternity, but purely because the principles which God has revealed for the salvation of the inhabitants of the earth are pure, holy and exalting in their nature. In them there is honor and eternal increase, they lead on from light to light, strength to strength, glory to glory, knowledge to knowledge, and power to power.⁵²"

47 Jacob 2:8

48 Moroni 7:30; D&C 43:34; 88:69; 121:45

49 D&C 81:5

50 President Ezra Taft Benson taught that prayer is one way of acknowledging our dependence on the Lord. See *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p.370. April 1984.

51 2 Nephi 2:16

52 Discourses of Brigham Young, p.452. June 28, 1873.

If we have a true interest in the people, not in potential rewards, we won't be impatient with others, and when under the influence of the Holy Ghost we will always know what to do and when to do it. We will gladly spend time and pay attention to those that say the same old things every time.

I remember especially some elderly brothers and sisters that I met a few years ago. Every Sunday, when asked how they were feeling, they would repeat the same answers, and proceed to describe the same headaches, the same problems they had mentioned in all previous Sundays. After I had been ordained and set apart as their Bishop, I felt not only a great empathy and respect for those individuals, but I also understood, to some extent, their pains. No conversation was ever boring, and I tried to meet for a couple of minutes with each member every Sunday morning, just to listen to them. I realized that those conversations were not between them and Marcus Helvécio Martins, but rather between them and an authorized representative of the Lord. This reminds me of the following admonition of the Lord: "Therefore, strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings."⁵³

Besides the elderly, we must have patience with those serving in the organizations, and a great deal of patience with the youth. We are aware of the way worldly leaders treat their subordinates when things don't happen the way they should. We are all experts in the art of reprimanding and it seems that we all hold advanced degrees in the science of "getting our point across." However, punishments and scoldings may not solve most of our problems, and in many cases may create a major problem: enmity between the person that holds the authority to lead and the member who needs a blessing through that same authority. This enmity is definitely a worse problem than whatever caused it.

We have not been called to punish anyone; in fact, I have never seen any form of punishment being prescribed in any of the church's handbooks⁵⁴. We were commanded by the Lord to testify, to counsel, and to warn. When the Prophet Joseph Smith was inspired to teach us to reprove, he also established two conditions to do so: "Reproving betimes [i.e. in good time] with sharpness, *when moved upon by the Holy Ghost*; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved ..."⁵⁵ In addition, the Lord commanded us to take care of these matters privately⁵⁶.

Very few times I have felt that I was being moved upon by the Holy Ghost to reprove someone with sharpness; and I have to confess that in a few occasions I was so quick to reprove that I probably did not give the Holy Ghost a chance to whisper anything in my ear. Incidentally, I have never found a leader who hasn't repented of scolding another member of the Church. President Harold B. Lee wrote:

"... I was taught ... by the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr. ... when I made a remark in his presence that indicated that I had some lingering feelings because of some slight I had previously suffered. He said to me, very quietly, 'Yes, you now have the authority, the whip hand, but you must not use it,' for one holding a position of authority in the church and kingdom of God would

⁵³ D&C 108:7

⁵⁴ If you thought about the disciplinary councils (former church courts) as a form of punishment, hold your stones for a moment, please. I don't consider a disciplinary council as a punishment. In the sad cases of very serious transgressions, if we have to disfellowship or even excommunicate individuals we ought to do so out of a genuine concern over those individuals' eternal welfare, not out of any desire for retaliation. Our mission is not to expel them from the church, but to help them repent and reconcile themselves with the Lord. Later in this chapter I will refer to a passage of scripture from 3 Nephi chapter 18.

⁵⁵ D&C 121:43; brackets added for dictionary clarification.

⁵⁶ Matthew 18:15

surely bring the disfavor of our Lord, in whose service we must never forget we are, as holders of the priesthood.⁵⁷"

In the Church of Christ we are not "leaders" in the sense the world uses this term. We are all fellowservants. That is the term John the Baptist, as a resurrected being, used referring to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery⁵⁸. John, the Beloved, while in the island of Patmos received revelations through glorified messengers who identified themselves also as fellowservants⁵⁹.

Above all, we received a commandment to invite all to come unto Christ. No one has authority to expel anyone from the church. The Lord was very clear about this:

"And behold, ye shall meet together oft; and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not; But ye shall pray for them, and shall not cast them out; and if it so be that they come unto you oft ye shall pray for them unto the Father, in my name. ... And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world; and whosoever breaketh this commandment suffereth himself to be led into temptation.⁶⁰"

What about those cases where we know that a person is not living according to the commandments? Even on a case like this the Lord does not allow us to expel any from his church:

"... therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood ye shall forbid him. Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood. But if he repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered. Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.⁶¹"

As leaders in these latter days, we have not received instructions to punish, but rather to preach repentance, to help individuals reconcile themselves with the Lord and achieve the highest eternal reward from and through him. If we lose our patience and start to act harshly toward others, we will not have the Spirit of the Lord with us, because the Lord said: "Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.⁶²"

⁵⁷ Stand Ye in Holy Places, p.253

⁵⁸ D&C 13

⁵⁹ Revelation 19:10; 22:9

⁶⁰ 3 Nephi 18:22-23,25

⁶¹ 3 Nephi 18:29-32

⁶² 3 Nephi 11:30

Since the Lord will not tolerate that we use his authority without love unfeigned, all our administrative acts, whether releases, or even church disciplinary councils, must be conducted out of love, with the sole purpose of helping the individuals come unto Christ. In those events in which a reprimand becomes necessary, we need to be sure that we are being "moved upon by the Holy Ghost;" in addition to that, we must remember to show "an increase of love towards" the person we have reproved, and that ought to be done in a way that is recognizable to that person, according to the local cultural environment.

What If We Don't Have Some of These Qualities?

For those who think they you don't have all the qualities we have discussed in the previous chapters I would say: welcome to the club. Does that mean we don't qualify for service in the Church of Christ? Absolutely not. That just means that we are mortals and that we still have qualities or attributes to develop or to acquire, and that's one of the purposes of our earthly journey. The slow but continuous development of a heavenly character is one of the goals of our assignments in the Church.

How can we better understand the emotions our Father in Heaven experiences while carrying out the plan of salvation? Well, our leadership callings, especially in presidencies in any level (stake, ward or organizational) may give us a rough or imperfect idea, in a very small and finite scale. As little children, we felt love for almost everybody. Later, as we grew up, and as "... sin [conceived] in [our] hearts ...¹", prejudices, mistrust and other negative feelings grew inside us. When we experience--in a small and finite scale--what the Lord feels, our knowledge about Him increases, and so do our love and appreciation for Him and for our brothers and sisters.

I remember that when I was called to serve as a Bishop, I didn't even know all the members of my ward. I had arrived back in the ward just a few months before, after living for a number of years out of the state. How could I love people who I barely knew? The first time I addressed them as their Bishop, I told that although I had warm and good feelings towards all of them, I still couldn't say that I loved all of them, but I believed that I would soon have that feeling. A few months later, I was pleased to testify that I loved all of them.

What happened? We lived together, we prayed together, we had all sorts of joyful and sad experiences together. By and by, love started to blossom and it became part of our character.

"How do men obtain a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections and attributes? By devoting themselves to his service, through prayer and supplication incessantly strengthening their faith in him, until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they obtain a manifestation of God to themselves."²

¹ Moses 6:55; brackets added.

² Lectures on Faith, p.32

Being children of eternal and perfect beings, we are all born with the seeds of love, forgiveness, patience, charity, and all other divine virtues. As seeds, they need light (meaning the Spirit of the Lord) and nurturing (our acts of selfless service) in order to grow. President Spencer W. Kimball suggested the following to foster this growth:

"We must do more than ask the Lord for excellence. Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is excellence. We must do more than pray for these outcomes ... though we must surely pray. We must take thought. We must make effort. We must be patient. We must be professional. We must be spiritual ...³"

Some people may confuse this attitude of starting to serve others without the proper feelings with hypocrisy. Let me restate here that hypocrites are opportunists; they are not prone to serve others for the sake of doing good to others. Hypocrites are led by their own desires of gaining something: earthly praise, power, votes, favors, money, etc.

Those who strive to serve the Lord by serving their fellow beings need not fear of being considered hypocrites. First, because they are obeying the voice of the Lord, and secondly, because they will eventually develop the qualities they lack. This should not be confused with deceit. Once more: deceit occurs when someone emulate qualities to cheat or manipulate others, motivated solely by self-interest⁴.

The Prophet Joseph Smith received the following instruction from the Lord to William E. McLellin, in the early days of this dispensation: "Verily I say unto you, my servant William, that you are clean, but not all; repent, therefore, of those things which are not pleasing in my sight, saith the Lord, for the Lord will show them unto you."⁵ Even though Brother McLellin did not follow the counsel of the Lord until the end, we see from this verse that the Lord gave him an opportunity to amend his ways, and later in that same revelation the Lord promised that if he remained faithful to his teachings he would have eternal life.

We also have our shortcomings; some of us may be strong on paying tithing and struggle with the word of wisdom, or vice-versa; or we may struggle with inferiority (or superiority) complexes. But no matter what specific weakness we have, with the help of the Lord we can overcome all of them. These words from the Lord to Hyrum Smith may give us some hope: "Behold, thou hast a gift, or thou shalt have a gift if thou wilt desire of me in faith, with an honest heart, believing in the power of Jesus Christ ..."⁶ As we have discussed in an earlier chapter, and also based on the words of President Kimball, to "desire in faith" means more than simply asking for a blessing and then waiting for it to be sent to us from on high. We need to act. The qualities necessary to the ministry are acquired by stages, and we need to be both patient and persistent.

Two other important points to be remembered are: first, that this process of developing qualities is very personal; we should not judge ourselves using other mortal beings as a standard. Our standard has been and will ever be the Savior, the only perfect being that has ever lived on earth⁷. Secondly, that this

³ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.402. President Kimball taught this on October 10, 1975, while speaking to those who then served as faculty and staff at Brigham Young University.

⁴ See chapter 4 for a discussion on a few aspects of love unfeigned, and chapter 10 for a discussion on flattery.

⁵ D&C 66:3

⁶ D&C 11:10

⁷ See chapter 6 for a discussion on how imperfect beings like ourselves may achieve perfection while on this mortal stage of existence.

development never ends; and as soon as we cease to keep the commandments, no matter how much we have done in the past, we will fall. Let us consider these words from President Brigham Young:

"... a man might have visions, the angels of God might administer to him, he might have revelations, and see as many visions as you could count; he might have the heavens opened to him, and see the finger of the Lord, and all this would not make him the President of the Church, or an Elder, a High Priest, an Apostle; neither would it prove that he was even a Saint: something else is wanted to prove it. If you ask me what will prove a man or woman to be a Saint, I will answer the question. "If you love me," says Jesus, "you will keep my sayings." That is the touchstone. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father, you will keep the commandments of the Son--you will do his will. If you neglect to do this, you may have all the visions and revelations that could be bestowed upon a mortal being, and yet be nothing but a devil. Why I use this expression is because when a man's mind is enlightened, and he turns from that light to darkness, it prepares him to be a devil. A man never knew how to be wicked, until light and truth were first made manifest to him. Then is the time for men to make their decision, and if they turn away from the Lord, it prepares them to become devils.⁸"

Therefore, our love towards our Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ is the driving force that can help us overcome our weaknesses and develop or acquire godly virtues. Let us always remember to do our best, to employ our greatest efforts, and to use the prayer of faith. If, after doing all this we, like the Apostle Paul, still find a "thorn in the flesh"⁹, let us not get discouraged: it is just an expedient employed by the Lord to teach us to rely on his grace¹⁰, and our best efforts will grant us the blessing of obtaining mercy in the judgment day.

⁸ JD, Vol I, p.133-134, April 6, 1853

⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:7

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Nephi 4:17-20,26-29

Chapter 6

The Nature of Perfection

Most of us may immediately recall the Lord's commandment: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."¹ We usually interpret this passage of scripture as being a commandment to "do everything right", and I believe that God does not make any mistakes at all; He is perfect in an absolute sense, possessing in fullness all virtues, all knowledge, and all power.

However, since while in this mortal and imperfect stage of existence we do make mistakes, this interpretation may lead us to conclude--erroneously--that the Lord gave us a commandment impossible to be fulfilled while in mortality. In fact, occasionally we may find a few individuals teaching that nobody will ever be perfect on this earth, no matter how hard they try.

Earlier in our discussion² I proposed the idea that "failure" is a subjective concept; that one specific action considered as a failing performance when made by one person, can be considered a major accomplishment when made by another person. In fact, in the Church of Christ it doesn't matter what degree of perfection we have while performing our acts of service; if we employ our best efforts according to the level of knowledge we possess at that point in time, and if our intentions are centered on giving glory to God, our service (or offering) will be accepted by the Lord as perfect.

President Lorenzo Snow taught that European converts who emigrated in the early days of the Church to join the main body of the Saints in the United States were, during their journey across the ocean, perfect:

"... they were as perfect as men could be under the circumstances, and in the sphere in which they were acting; not that they were perfect in knowledge or power, etc., but in their feelings, in their integrity, motives, and determination. And while they were crossing the great deep, providing they did not murmur nor complain, but obeyed the counsels which were given them, and in every way comported themselves in a becoming manner, they were as perfect as God required them to be."³

¹ Matthew 5:48. Notice that in 3 Nephi 12:48, the Lord Jesus Christ, now as a resurrected being, declares that he is also perfect and a model to be emulated.

² See chapter 4 for a discussion on forgiveness.

³ Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.32. April 7, 1879.

Perfection Accomplished in Mortality

According to President Brigham Young, there is a better interpretation for the scripture "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect", and this improved interpretation bring us to the conclusion that to become perfect while in this world is an attainable goal:

"It may appear strange to some of you, and it certainly does to the world, to say it is possible for a man or woman to become perfect on this earth. ... If the ... passage ... is not worded to our understanding, we can alter the phraseology of the sentence, and say, "Be ye as perfect as ye can," for that is all we can do, though it is written, be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect. He cannot be any more perfect than he knows how, any more than we. When we are doing as well as we know how in the sphere and station which we occupy here, we are justified in the justice, righteousness, mercy, and judgment that go before the Lord of heaven and earth. We are as justified as the angels who are before the throne of God. The sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they knew how."⁴

The current canon of scriptures indicates that a few men were considered perfect: Seth⁵, Noah⁶, and Job⁷. It becomes then reasonable to assume that they did the best according to the knowledge available to them, even though they might have made a few mistakes. President Lorenzo Snow taught that we should not get discouraged because our own mistakes:

"A person may be perfect in regard to some things and not others. ... if we could read in detail the life of Abraham, or the lives of other great and holy men, we would doubtless find that their efforts to be righteous were not always crowned with success. Hence we should not be discouraged if we should be overcome in a weak moment; but, on the contrary, straightway repent of the error or the wrong we may have committed, and as far as possible repair it, and then seek to God for renewed strength to go on and do better."⁸

Stages of Perfection

One practical application of this knowledge suggests that we must be sensitive to different degrees of knowledge and different strengths of testimony. Thus, when evaluating each individual performance in the kingdom, we must take into consideration these differences, understanding that one particular task may be performed in different levels of quality by different persons, and both may have achieved excellence, depending on the level of knowledge and skills they had when they performed the task.

One simple but still common example: many of us may avoid participating in church choirs in the fear that our "extraordinary" voices may ruin the choirs' harmony. That's understandable. However, when we consider our participation in the choir as an offering to the Lord by singing praises to his name, then even our singing out of tune will be well received by the Lord, because when he promised a blessing in response to our "song of the heart"⁹ he didn't stipulate that only those who could sing in tune would receive

⁴ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.89. December 18, 1853.

⁵ D&C 107:43

⁶ Genesis 6:9; Moses 8:27

⁷ Job 1:1,8

⁸ Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.33

⁹ D&C 25:12

it. Likewise, if we are presiding or conducting a choir, we should not refuse participation to those who do not sing well¹⁰.

Does that sound too simple? Let us then consider these questions: which would be more praiseworthy--an average Sunday lesson¹¹ arduously prepared and presented by a semi-illiterate person, or an average Sunday lesson easily (and perhaps negligibly) prepared and presented by a college graduate? An average lesson arduously prepared and presented by a recent convert who happens to have a college degree or an average lesson easily (and perhaps negligibly) prepared and presented by another college graduate who attended both seminary and institute?

I don't consider myself competent to answer these questions fairly because several other variables might be involved in each case. For example, the college graduate who attended seminary and institute and presented an average lesson might have spent the previous night dealing with an infirmity in the family--in which case there would have been no negligence. However, the point here is to propose that we should always keep questions like these in our minds--with the intent of avoiding hasty judgments based on insufficient information. Whenever we need to make a judgment--and in the event that a judgment is really needed--we should try to gather all the pertinent facts first.

The Problem with Hasty Judgments

In our leadership assignments we will have to make judgments, or to use another term, evaluations. Perhaps one may think that judging is wrong, based on the scripture that says "Judge not, that ye be not judged."¹² However, in the inspired translation of the New Testament, the same passage of scripture says "... Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged: but judge a righteous judgment."¹³ This is in harmony with these words from the Prophet Mormon: "... my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil ..."¹⁴

But before jumping to conclusions when making judgments, we should pay attention to another counsel found in the scriptures: "He [or she] that answereth a matter before he [or she] heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him [or her]."¹⁵ The way to judge a righteous judgment is to avoid hasty conclusions by exploring all facets shown by the facts available, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"... I preached to the Saints, setting forth the evils that existed, and that would exist, by reason of hasty judgment, or decisions upon any subject given by any people, or in judging before they had heard both sides of a question."¹⁶

¹⁰ Many years ago while serving as a choir director, I would stimulate individuals with a "natural talent for dissonance" to participate actively, although I confess that I would also ask them to avoid singing "too loud." Oh, the paradoxes of an imperfect state ...

¹¹ These questions should be applied to any other type of service in the kingdom: preparation of reports, conduction of meetings or activities, etc. I used a Sunday lesson just as an example.

¹² Matthew 7:1

¹³ JST Matthew 7:1-2

¹⁴ Moroni 7:15

¹⁵ Proverbs 18:13. Brackets added.

¹⁶ TPJS, p.118. May 6, 1838.

Again, we will often be required to make judgments or decisions about issues that most of the time will directly affect the lives of the people. We need to keep in mind the seriousness and the sacredness of the work we are engaged in, and do our best to gather as much information as possible under the circumstances.

A Perfect Heart

There is another dimension of perfection that the Lord considers, and this other dimension is often beyond our natural perception: intention, motive, spirit, or as the scriptures name it, heart and mind. This is the dimension the Lord uses when He makes His judgments:

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts ... Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord ... to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments ... ¹⁷"

While evaluating the performance of others, we must remember that this element, intent, will be hidden from us, except when we are under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord. For example, it is easy to superficially judge or evaluate the quality of any act of service (a class, a visit, etc.) by observing the effort of the individual performing it, or the degree of his or her preparation. However, it is more difficult—if not impossible—to measure or quantify the love or the devotion employed either in the preparation or in the performance of that service. Therefore, our main concern must center on making sure that our motives and our intentions and those of the individuals under our responsibility are pure before God, as President Lorenzo Snow taught:

"... we have come to this earth for the special purpose of preparing ourselves to receive a fullness of our Father's glory when we shall return into His presence. Therefore, we must seek the ability to keep this law, to sanctify our motives, desires, feelings, and affections, that they may be pure and holy, and our will in all things be subservient to the will of God, and have no will of our own except to do the will of our Father. Such a man in his sphere is perfect, and commands the blessing of God in all that he does and wherever he goes.¹⁸"

These elements (i.e., motive or intent, and feeling or affection) will be judged by the Lord himself. If our hearts are pure, and our intentions are correct—if our eyes are single to the glory of God, or in other words, if we have no other objective in mind except to serve the Lord¹⁹, He will accept our acts of service and answer them with blessings; otherwise, He will reject our actions and count them as evil doings²⁰.

We Need All Those Who Desire to Serve

Our efforts to develop patience and to forgive others may be increased by our understanding of what it really means to be perfect. In our organizations, quorums, wards and stakes we frequently want to ensure that everything happens according to our own degree—or understanding—of perfection. There is nothing wrong in having a personal idea of how things should be, provided that we remember and accept the fact that our fellowservants might have ideas slightly (or extremely) different than ours, which ideas are also acceptable because they are based on their degree of perfection.

¹⁷ 1 Chronicles 28:9; 1 Kings 8:61

¹⁸ Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.33

¹⁹ Joseph Smith-History 1:46

²⁰ 2 Chronicles 25:2; Moroni 7:6-10

How to deal with that? Simple. We must start by comprehending that we cannot assume that our personal understanding of a perfect performance is the right one just because we are serving in a leadership capacity. We must be humble enough to acknowledge that the Lord, who knows all things, will always inspire those who serve him in righteousness²¹, including those who do not serve in leadership callings.

When the Lord instructed Moses to build the tabernacle of the congregation, he described in detail the dimensions and the materials to be used in the building and in its furniture. Later, he told Moses that he had inspired certain men from among the people to execute that work:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel ... And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab ... and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle²²"

For this example we may conclude that specifically the members of presidencies may receive inspiration regarding all aspects of their organizations, quorums, wards or stakes; and yet, those called to work under their direction will also receive inspiration—frequently in greater detail than the instructions given to the presidency.

Therefore, in all assignments that will involve many individuals we should discuss our ideas and compose a combined opinion²³ about how the details of a particular task (or program, or meeting) should be executed to be considered perfect. This opinion, or perception of perfection cannot be imposed by anyone, but will belong to the group and will guide all later evaluations. In the end, this exchange of ideas, if—and only if—conducted under the Spirit of the Lord, will become a valuable learning experience for all those involved²⁴.

The Lord judges the desires of our hearts²⁵ and our diligence. If we do our best, the Lord will accept and consecrate our service²⁶, so that even if things do not happen as we would like them to (because of the differences of performance among the members of our group), that service will still produce the results intended. How does that happen? The Apostle Paul said: "... God [gives] the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.²⁷" In addition, the Lord himself indicated that the participation of all is needed to achieve perfection:

²¹ D&C 76:5-10

²² Exodus 31:1-7

²³ See chapter 13 for a discussion on the blessings of good counseling.

²⁴ D&C 50:21-22,24

²⁵ D&C 137:9

²⁶ 2 Nephi 32:9

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:6-7; brackets added.

"Therefore, let every man stand in his own office, and labor in his own calling; and let not the head say unto the feet it hath no need of the feet; for without the feet how shall the body be able to stand? Also the body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together, that the system may be kept perfect.²⁸"

In the Parable of the Sower, the Lord stated that those converted to the kingdom would "[bring] forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold."²⁹ From this statement we learn that we will have different levels of performance in our service in the kingdom. The Lord stated clearly that those who would accept the gospel and bear fruit would not accomplish (or grow) in the same degree. It is also important to remember that we are not alone in this search for the best performance. President Lorenzo Snow taught the following:

"When we once get it into our minds that we really have the power within ourselves through the gospel we have received to conquer our passions, our appetites, and in all things submit our will to the will of our Heavenly Father, ... then the battle may be said to be half won. ... One of the chief difficulties that many suffer from is, that we are too apt to forget the great object of life, the motive of our Heavenly Father in sending us here to put on mortality, as well as the holy calling with which we have been called; and hence, instead of rising above the little transitory things of time, we too often allow ourselves to come down to the level of the world without availing ourselves of the divine help which God has instituted, which alone can enable us to overcome them. We are no better than the rest of the world if we do not cultivate the feeling to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect."³⁰

Let us explore one more aspect of this subject. We should not presume that we will receive eternal rewards based solely on the quality of our performance. Since "God [gives] the increase" the results of our work happen because of him, not because of us. Any blessings and glory we receive will be based on what is in our hearts—our righteousness, desires, and sense of diligence. But diligence is not dependent on our individual skills, abilities or level of knowledge; two persons can be equally diligent and yet perform quite differently from each other.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard³¹ suggests that the Lord will bless and reward us according to our diligence, and not the amount of results from our performance or the amount of time we spent serving³². From this parable we can also conclude that the Lord knows what our individual capacities allow us to do, and that he expects us to perform according to that measure³³. In review, let us consider these words from the Prophet Joseph Smith:

²⁸ D&C 84:109-110; note that the term "head" is sometimes used by the Lord as a symbol for presidencies. See also D&C 28:6; 50:30; 107:55.

²⁹ Matthew 13:8; brackets added.

³⁰ Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.36-37

³¹ Matthew 20:1-16. In chapter 9 I will propose another idea based on this passage.

³² Note that in this same parable the Lord indicated that some would complain because of this arrangement. To us, who live in these latter days, this is a warning that the faithful "latecomers" in the gospel who will receive the same honors as the faithful early workers.

³³ This statement should not be interpreted as a suggestion that we should not seek improvement of our current level of performance. The doctrine of eternal progression suggests that we must increase our knowledge, skills and abilities (see D&C 93:12-14, 20,28,32).

"... while one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard ... We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah; He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family ...³⁴"

*Weaknesses That
Interfere With
Effective Leadership*

In this section we will discuss a few ideas about weaknesses particularly harmful to the exercise of church leadership: pride, unrighteous dominion, and also address some of the problems associated with prejudice and flattery.

It is comforting to know that repentance is always available, and that the Lord will grant us countless chances to purify our thoughts and behavior if we humbly seek his forgiveness. He said: "... as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me."¹ However, if we "... undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or authority of that man."²

Leadership actions and decisions knowingly influenced by such weaknesses are not accepted by the Lord, and can be considered evil:

"Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. ... wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil. Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil ... inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing 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."³

¹ Mosiah 26:30

² D&C 121:37

³ Moroni 7:10-14

Pride

Pride can be manifested in several ways. In this discussion, I will concentrate in one aspect that I believe to be more directly related to the work of those serving in leadership callings.

A possible misconception may exist because of the frequent and generally inattentive use of the word "leader." In the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we interpret this word as "he or she that goes in front of others by showing an example." In many cultures a leader is a commander, a chief, someone in whom the people believe and someone whom the people follow.

While serving in presidencies or in other leadership capacities we are called to be leaders in the gospel sense. But without proper attention, our cultural heritage associated with the word "leader" may play tricks in our minds. The use of the word "leader" is not necessarily the problem. The problem arises when we unconsciously (or not) forget the correct meaning of the word in the gospel context.

For example, when in our organizations (or quorums, wards, or stakes) we find brothers or sisters facing difficult times, we generally feel a desire--or a sense of our responsibility--to "help" them. We then start to use our resources, our faith, prayers, and gifts, to help those individuals. When the problem is eventually resolved, and those persons come to thank us, some may make the mistake of accepting the credit for it, forgetting the true source of the power of our leadership. Instead of reaffirming our belief in being mere instruments in the Lord's hand, we may act as if we had accomplished the solution of the problem by ourselves.

Taking the credit for some of the Lord's actions happens because of our human need for accomplishment. The Savior admonished his apostles on the truth behind our achievements in his kingdom: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."¹

This is not a modern problem. In the New Testament Paul made some comments about the problem, and considered himself as a worker of secondary importance in the conversion process:

"So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. ... I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the

¹ John 15:5

effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ²"

Mormon recorded the appropriate attitude shown by some of the early Nephite ministers: "... and the priest did not esteem himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength."³

In the early days of this dispensation the Lord, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, said the following to a few of the brethren: "... if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation."⁴ And his next sentence was: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation ... assist to bring forth my work ..."⁵ When thinking about doing good unto others, some may view themselves as the primary factor in the process of solving those individuals' problems. The Lord suggests that as leaders, we are a secondary factor in the process. Are we important in the process? Yes! Will the solutions come because of our intervention? No!

By saying "... nothing but repentance⁶...", we will be mere accessories in helping the individual draw nearer to the Lord, who is the only one with power to save and heal, and with wisdom to solve problems permanently. We should then consider ourselves as accessories because long before our intervention the Light of Christ will have guided the individual towards the Lord. Our role in the process will be to testify to the person of the reality of the Lord's love for us--something we may doubt when we are in distress--or in other words, our role will be to "... succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."⁷

How Pride Can Be Manifested

In my view, pride may be manifested in the work of church leaders in the form of feelings of either self-aggrandizement or self-sufficiency, caused by a misinterpretation of the doctrine of foreordination⁸. It is true that in our pre-mortal existence the Lord set us apart to fulfill certain missions while on the earth. However, the thought that "I am the only one that can fulfill these missions" is not accurate. The Prophet Alma the younger suggested that a calling from God is dependent upon faith and good works⁹, not only intellectual ability or other worldly factors, a mistaken principle once believed by Oliver Cowdery and others, as explained by President Wilford Woodruff:

"I heard Joseph Smith say that Oliver Cowdery, who was the second apostle in this Church, said to him, 'If I leave this Church it will fall.' Said Joseph, 'Oliver, you try it.' Oliver tried it. He fell;

² 1 Corinthians 3:7; Ephesians 3:7-8

³ Alma 1:26

⁴ D&C 6:8; 11:8

⁵ D&C 6:9; 11:9

⁶ D&C 6:9

⁷ D&C 81:5

⁸ Yes, it is possible to misinterpret certain aspects of a true doctrine and get wrong conclusions. See chapter 11 for further insights on this topic.

⁹ Alma 13:3,10-12

but the kingdom of God did not. ... We have no chance to be lifted up in the pride of our hearts with regard to the position we occupy. If the President of the Church or either of his counselors or of the apostles or any other man feels in his heart that God cannot do without him, and that he is especially important in order to carry on the work of the Lord, he stands upon slippery ground. ... I say to all men ... that the Lord Almighty has power within himself, and is not dependent upon any man, to carry on his work; but when he does call men to do his work they have to trust in him.¹⁰

So, other individuals with different skills and talents may fill the leadership positions we now occupy and still be effective because of their faith and diligence. In the meridian of times some individuals thought that just because they were literal descendants of Abraham they were the only ones entitled to the blessings of the Lord. John the Baptist made clear that it wasn't so when he said: "And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children into Abraham."¹¹

We are not unreplaceable; for example, even though Paul did a wonderful job with the Gentiles, someone else would have done it if Paul had not accepted his calling on the road to Damascus. The same would have happened in the case of Moses, Isaiah, Peter, etc.

Conquering Pride

In order to conquer pride we must acquire the control of our thoughts. We will be always faced with many thoughts suggesting that "we" did this, or that "we" accomplished that, etc. Whenever that happens, we must immediately expel those thoughts and replace them with the thought that without the Lord (i.e. without his power sustaining and preserving our physical bodies, enlightening our minds, and without his wisdom and blessings) we would not have accomplished anything. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."¹²

In these latter days the Lord made his feelings concerning this matter quite clear: "He that receiveth of God, let him account it of God; and let him rejoice that he is accounted of God worthy to receive. ... And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments."¹³ As church leaders we are still servants; and as mortals we must, as explained by King Benjamin, "... remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and [our] own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards [us], unworthy creatures ..."¹⁴

Whenever the idea of being a "leader" of the people start to come into our minds, we should pause and remember these words:

"... Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your

¹⁰ Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, p.123, April 6, 1890

¹¹ JST Matthew 3:36

¹² John 15:5

¹³ D&C 50:34; 59:21

¹⁴ Mosiah 4:11; brackets added.

servant. ... He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all. Wherefore, he is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son. But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin.¹⁵"

It is interesting to observe that in a construction site only those considered "servants" manipulate tools. It is the same in the kingdom of God: only the "servants" manipulate tools, and in this case the tools are "... the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son", these tools constituting what is called "... the powers of heaven, ... that ... cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.¹⁶"

We should also consider another idea: among those we are serving we can find some that have been chosen to be our own presidents or leaders in the future. I often ponder on the relationship between Abraham and the three holy men who once visited him.

"And the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre. And he sat in his tent door in the heat of the day; And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw, he ran to meet them from his tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said; My brethren, if now I have found favor in your sight, pass not away I pray you from thy servant. ... And he took butter and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set them before them, and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.¹⁷"

We must pause here and try to depict Abraham's situation if he were a member of the church in our days. Let us imagine that he would be living in a remote area, hundreds or perhaps even thousands of miles (or kilometers) from the nearest meetinghouse, as some of our brothers and sisters throughout the world live today. He and his family would not be in a meetinghouse every Sunday, and as a priesthood holder he would have to conduct the meetings for his family by himself. He would not be a Bishop or a Stake President, or a Quorum President, and Sarah would not be a Relief Society or Primary President, although both would carry out all these functions by themselves at home. And yet, because of his faith and righteousness he received great promises from the Lord. Now, going back to the scriptural account:

"And one of them blessed Abraham, and he said, I will certainly return unto thee from my journey, and lo, according to the time of life, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. At the time appointed, behold, I will return unto thee from my journey, which the Lord hath sent me ... And the angels rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the angel of the Lord, said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which the Lord will do for him; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him. And the angels which were holy men, and were sent forth after the order of God, turned their faces from thence and went toward Sodom.¹⁸"

¹⁵ Matthew 20:25-27; Mark 10:42-44; D&C 50:26-28

¹⁶ D&C 121:36

¹⁷ JST Genesis 18:1-3,7

¹⁸ JST Genesis 18:9,14,16-18,23

If we assume that those three holy men were Abraham's priesthood leaders¹⁹, we can see a fascinating relationship being described. Here we would have Abraham's priesthood leaders acknowledging his future position of patriarchal leadership over all nations of the earth. Would there be room in the minds of those three brethren for any feelings of "preeminence" over Abraham? While serving as a Bishop, I often asked myself how many of those whom I was "leading" were going to be my "leaders" in the future, and which ones would bless my life in the future in ways I could not comprehend at that point in time.

I believe that these thoughts--acknowledging the Lord hand in all things, considering ourselves as servants, and considering those we serve as our future leaders--can help us overcome the feelings of pride, or self-aggrandizement.

The True Nature of Our Accomplishments

Some may argue: "What about the experience of the brother of Jared? Didn't the Lord leave him to solve the problem of the absence of light in the barges by his own? Wouldn't that be an accomplishment?" We have to acknowledge that whatever good things we achieve in this life are the result of a partnership between us and the Lord God Almighty²⁰. After all, who gave us a body with a mind and who gave us the powers of intellect? "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."²¹

Moroni's advice to the young Prophet Joseph Smith clearly defines the way we must view our positions in the Church of Christ: "... I must have no other object in view ... but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom ..."²²

A Warning Against Pride in Our Prayers

In the scriptures we find examples of prayers that are not acceptable before the Lord because of implied pride. One of the most widely known was mentioned by the Savior himself in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican:

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as

¹⁹ In the King James Version of the Bible these personages are mistakenly identified as being the Lord. President Joseph Fielding Smith presented the idea that these men were mortals (see *Doctrines of Salvation*, volume 1, pp.16-17). The prophet Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible also clearly indicates that these angels were mortal priesthood holders: "And the angel of the Lord said unto Abraham, The Lord said unto us, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will destroy them. And I will send you, and ye shall go down now, and see that their iniquities are rewarded unto them. ... And the angels which were holy men, and were sent forth after the order of God, turned their faces from thence and went toward Sodom."

Note that in the next verses Abraham is communing with the Lord, instead of talking to the three holy men: "But Abraham stood yet before the Lord, remembering the things which had been told him. And Abraham drew near to Sodom, and said unto the Lord, calling upon his name, saying, Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? ... O may that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked. ... And the Lord said unto Abraham, If thou findest in Sodom, fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." (JST Genesis 18:19-29,39-42)

²⁰ Ether 4:12; Moroni 7:12,22,24

²¹ Deuteronomy 8:17-18

²² Joseph Smith History 1:46

other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.²³"

Another example of an unacceptable prayer is found in the Book of Mormon. When Alma and his missionary companions attended a religious ceremony held by the apostate Zoramites, they heard the following prayer being offered repeatedly:

"Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren ... we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children ... thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren ...²⁴"

As Latter-day Saints, we can--and we must--be grateful for our blessings. However, we must never consider ourselves superior to anyone else. If we are ever tempted to pray like the Pharisee or the Zoramites, and thank the Lord for not being like other people, we should remember that those who do not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives will be judged by the Lord with less rigor than we will. The Lord said: "For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light receive the greater condemnation."²⁵

²³ Luke 18:9-14

²⁴ Alma 31:16-17

²⁵ D&C 82:3

Unrighteous Dominion

According to the word of the Lord spoken by the Prophet Joseph Smith, unrighteous dominion happens whenever we try to use the rights of the priesthood "... to cover our sins; or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness ..."¹

These rights of the priesthood include the privilege of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and of administering its ordinances; or the privilege of participating in the greatest cause on this earth. The Prophet Joseph Smith predicted that this work "... is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family."² When these rights are not used to the glory of God, priestcraft occurs.

Nephi explained: "for, behold priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion."³ Avoiding unrighteous dominion and priestcraft is perhaps one of the greatest challenges church leaders have to face not only during their service, but also after they are released.

Covering Sins

Committing sins is bad, but living in a mortal and imperfect stage of existence, full of paradoxes and ambiguities, we are all inevitably going to sin. When we learn something valuable from these unfortunate experiences, repent, and forsake those sins that we have identified, the Lord forgives us⁴, and we remain on the strait and narrow way that leads to eternal life⁵. A worse problem arises when we do not want to admit that we have committed a sin, and try to act as if nothing wrong had happened, to the point of causing harm in the lives of the people, especially when we try to force them to live with the results of those mistakes we have made. In many unfortunate occasions like this the people have the tendency of starting

¹ D&C 121:37

² TPJS, p.231, May 2, 1842

³ 2 Nephi 26:29

⁴ D&C 1:25-28,31-33; 58:42-43; 82:1,7

⁵ 2 Nephi 31:18-20

to complain, and as it happens in any social group, they tend to discuss that in their conversations and sometimes they even demand a corrective action.

We can read about that even among the ancient Israelites. After failing to consult the Lord, the leaders of the people were deceived by the Gibeonites (one of the kingdoms the Lord had ordered them to destroy), and made a treaty with their ambassadors. The reaction of the people was typical: "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes."⁶

If we are humble enough at this point to admit our sin and then make the necessary restitution, life will go on in order. But on the other hand, if in the height of our stubbornness and pride we insist in justifying our actions, and if in addition to that we try to use the authority of the priesthood to silence the people, we will be exercising unrighteous dominion.

Some may even misinterpret a passage found in the Doctrine and Covenants as a means to silence the people: "Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord ..."⁷ But notice that the verse is only partially quoted. If we read the remainder of the verse, we will find the following addition: "... and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them."⁸ The Lord defends those leaders who did what He had commanded them to do, not those who were trying to hide mistakes under the mantle of authority⁹. For those who may have sinned before the Lord, and did that which was neither appropriate in His eyes nor commanded by Him, the charge is to repent, and not to wrest the scriptures to hide their mistakes

My personal standard, which over the years has guided my performance as a priesthood leader, is that I should live my life and perform my assignments in such a way as to never knowingly give the people even apparent reasons¹⁰ to lift up their heels against me.

Gratifying One's Pride and Vain Ambition

We tend to admire and at times even revere effective world leaders. We quote their ideas, laud their great accomplishments, and in some cases these narratives are repeated and even "expanded" for generations, at times to the point of originating myths and legends. The human desire for accomplishment and recognition may at times induce some to desire to have their names in a pantheon.

While serving in the Church of Christ, are involved in the greatest of all causes. Combine this great cause with that almost unconscious desire for accomplishment and recognition that at times strikes some of us, and we have some of the ingredients for unrighteous dominion.

As I have observed in a few sad incidents, the perspective of being engaged in a work that will last for the eternities, "... a work that God and angels have contemplated with delight for generations past;

⁶ Joshua 9:18

⁷ D&C 121:16

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ That does not mean that we can indulge ourselves in criticizing those in leadership positions who have made mistakes. But I will discuss this other perspective in the last section of this chapter.

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13

that fired the souls of the ancient patriarchs and prophets ...¹¹", is much more than some of us can bear. As the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, "We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen."¹²

Some seem to forget rather easily that God is above all things and operating in all things¹³; that whatever we accomplish on this earth, whatever ideas we have, whatever discoveries we make, we owe it to the Lord, because "... the light which shineth, which giveth [us] light, is through him who enlighteneth [our] eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth [our] understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space--The light which is in all things and giveth life to all things ...¹⁴".

When we cease to acknowledge the Lord in our accomplishments, we are in a way stating that things happened entirely because of us, and couldn't that be considered an initial step towards idolatry? In the accounts of the ancient Israel we find the situation where the Lord commanded Gideon to fight against thousands of Midianites with an army of only three hundred men; and why did he order that? "... lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."¹⁵

So far, we have dealt with the gratification of pride. But how about dealing with the gratification of vain ambitions? Perhaps the most common problem in this area arises when some of us aspire to positions of leadership in the Church. We sigh and think (for most of us would not dare to mention it) "If I were the president (of the Relief Society, or of the Elders Quorum, or of the Stake) ..." and then we think about all the wonderful solutions we would implement to solve the issues faced by the current presidency.

The problem with this practice is this: since we deal with confidential matters all the time--for the lives of the people and their problems are always sacred matters, and must be dealt confidentially--we generally do not have access to all the details of the problems; and above all, since we have not been set apart to that particular position we may be aspiring, we have not received the keys to receive inspiration on those matters. Therefore, our "wonderful solutions" are coming not from the Lord, but from ourselves, and they are most likely destined to fail, because while the work of God does not fail, the works of men do¹⁶.

Besides, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a business; therefore, people are neither "promoted" nor "demoted." A sister serving as an excellent counselor in the stake (or district) Relief Society presidency may very well be called to serve as a secretary in her ward's Primary Association; she may after that be called to serve in the nursery. This sister will be called to serve in positions where she will be able to develop new talents or to use her talents to help others develop theirs. This is the idea behind our assignments in the Church of Christ: personal development for the one who serves and for those who are served.

¹¹ TPJS, p.231, May 2, 1842

¹² D&C 121:39-40

¹³ D&C 88:41

¹⁴ D&C 88:11-13; brackets added.

¹⁵ Judges 7:2,7

¹⁶ D&C 3:1-4

Likewise, a brother serving as a stake high councilor may, after a few years be called as a Sunday School teacher; after that he may be called as a Bishop, and then as a Primary teacher; later, as a member of another stake high council, and finally once again as a Sunday school teacher. Hypothetical case? No; this is exactly what happened with me a few years ago, and I am glad for the opportunities I have had (especially in the Primary.)

A Misconception About Inspiration

Another common way by which unrighteous dominion develops is through a misconception about inspiration. We listen (most often in testimony meetings) that church leaders are inspired. I also testify of that, particularly when I think about the inspiring experiences I have had over the years with many of our General Authorities.

But as for myself as a local leader, I would rather testify that I have *the right to receive* inspiration. If we concentrate on the idea that we are always inspired, we may fall into the trap of thinking that every thought in our minds is a revelation from the Lord. Those who yield to this idea will generally tend to no longer be open to counseling; and their behavior sometimes can be defined by the cliché "don't confuse me with facts, I've already made up my mind."

When individuals find themselves in this sad stage, they tend to see themselves surrounded by "enemies." If their counselors (or others) try to advise them that they might be wrong in some point, they think that their counselors are "conspiring" against them. And anyone who voices a concern in relation to one these leaders' misguided decisions is labeled "rebellious" and accused of not supporting church authority.

That happens because in this sad state these people think that they are the only ones who receive the mind and will of the Lord, and feel that they must be, or (in extreme cases) that they already are the only examples to be followed, and that there can be no one else as an example. Their opinions become--in their judgment--the final word and they demand others to regard their opinions as the mind and will of the Lord, without questioning. As the Lord explained: "Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks [i.e. like punching the point of a spear,] to persecute the saints, and to fight against God."¹⁷

I have seen persons who seemed to believe in the idea that they had been called because they had in their minds the solutions for all problems; almost like saying that they could save the world. To this idea I respond with this sentence: This eternity isn't big enough for more than one Messiah.

Repressing Free Agency

There is another way by which one can exercise unrighteous dominion, and that is by trying to impede others of exercising their free agency. This is a very serious transgression, and one of the reasons why Lucifer, a brilliant Spirit in the pre-mortal world¹⁸, was expelled from heaven¹⁹.

The motto of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--regarding church government or control--is and will always be the one defined by the Prophet Joseph Smith: "... teach the people correct principles and they govern themselves"²⁰. That means that in some cases we will see brothers and sisters

¹⁷ D&C 121:38; brackets added.

¹⁸ D&C 76:25-27

¹⁹ Moses 4:3

²⁰ Quoted by President John Taylor in JD, Vol.10, p.57-58, May 18, 1862

doing the opposite of what the Lord has prescribed, and we will be able to predict the consequences of their actions. These situations are extremely painful, because we will have a desire to prevent them from pursuing those wrong courses of action, but we won't be able to do so--after all, it is their life, and they have to choose by themselves.

Allowing others to exercise their free agency may sometimes be painful. It is certainly painful to see dear brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, or close friends make wrong personal decisions and pursue a course of life that will cause them to suffer. However, that is the way the Lord designed His plan of salvation. And isn't this one aspect of His own experience as our Father in Heaven--to see us making choices that He knows beforehand will make us suffer?

This is a very serious matter, with consequences stretching far into eternity. The Lord revealed the following through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man ...²¹" Since the Lord described his Church as a "true and living church²²", in order to continue as a living entity, its members must be allowed to exercise their free agency, whether for their good or for their condemnation, "... otherwise there is no existence."

Let us consider this: does the Lord--in general--prevent us from doing something? Did he prevent Lucifer from spreading his evil ideas, to the point of influencing one third of the pre-mortal spirits? Did the Lord prevent Adam and Eve from partaking the forbidden fruit? He certainly could have built a high wall around the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Did the Lord ever force anyone to be baptized or to keep his commandments? Has he ever sent fire from heaven over those who break the Sabbath--or broken down the cars of those on their way to recreational activities on his holy day? Has he ever ... well, you can see the point. Likewise, we cannot prevent anyone from exercising his or her free agency, no matter how painful that may seem to us. Doing so would be another way of exercising unrighteous dominion. Let's read the words of two modern Prophets, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young:

"How oft have wise men and women sought to dictate Brother Joseph by saying, "O, if I were Brother Joseph I would do this and that;" but if they were in Brother Joseph's shoes they would find that men or women could not be compelled into the kingdom of God, but must be dealt with in long-suffering, and at last we shall save them. The way to keep all the Saints together, and keep the work rolling, is to wait with all long-suffering, till God shall bring such characters to justice. There should be no license for sin, but mercy should go hand in hand with reproof.²³"

"Gather the Saints, but do not flatter; invite, but do not urge, and by no means compel any one.²⁴"

Avoiding Unrighteous Dominion

There is no need to be ashamed of giving the Lord credit for the mighty works (or the small ones) we perform. We should not only mention that, but also really feel the reality of that. Then, we would use prayers of thanksgiving. Remember how the Lord prayed to the Father among the Nephites and Lamanites, even while those individuals were praying directly to Jesus?

²¹ D&C 93:30-31

²² D&C 1:30

²³ TPJS, p.241. June 9, 1842.

²⁴ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.326. April 22, 1860.

"And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God. And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them, and ... bowed himself to the earth, and he said: ... Father, ... they pray unto me because I am with them. And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words ...²⁵"

The Lord Jesus Christ, could very well have answered the prayers of those individuals, but instead of doing that, he preferred to acknowledge the power and authority of the Father. We must follow this same pattern, and always pray to our Father in Heaven, acknowledging his supremacy over us²⁶. We must also give credit to the Lord before the other persons, instead of simply accepting their compliments. Our dialogues should become somewhat like this:

Person: Congratulations for your class (or talk, or whatever else)! I appreciated it very much.

Us: Thank you for your kindness. But I have to recognize the hand of the Lord in what I did. It is always a great delight to feel the Spirit of the Lord when we talk about his gospel.

Finally, we must pray also for patience to bear the pain for the sins of others. We cannot avoid this pain; but let us remember that this is a feeling we may have in common with prophets²⁷ and angels²⁸ of the Lord.

Coping with Someone Else's Unrighteous Dominion

Some may say that the Lord would never allow someone exercise unrighteous dominion in his true Church; however, President Brigham Young suggested that the Lord may allow it, so that we can learn wisdom²⁹:

"Brother Kimball said, today, when he was speaking, if you suffer yourselves to find fault with your Bishop, you condescend to the spirit of apostasy. Do any of you do this? If you do, you do not realize that you expose yourself to the power of the Enemy.

What should your faith and position be before God? Such that, if a Bishop does not do right, the Lord will remove him out of your Ward. You are not to find fault. As brother Wells has said, speak not lightly of the anointed of the Lord. Yet many rise up and condemn their Bishop. Perhaps that Bishop has been appointed expressly to try those persons and cause them to apostatize. A great many will not apostatize until they arrive here; and who knows but what the Lord has prompted a Bishop to do so-and-so to cause somebody to apostatize. One of the first steps to apostasy is to find fault with your Bishop; and when that is done, unless repented of, a second step is soon taken, and by-and-by the person is cut off from the Church, and that is the end of it.

Will you allow yourselves to find fault with your Bishop? No; but come to me, go to the High Council, or to the President of the Stake, and ascertain whether your Bishop is doing wrong,

²⁵ 3 Nephi 19:18-19,22-23

²⁶ See also 2 Nephi 32:9

²⁷ Acts 17:16; Alma 31:24,26,30-31,33,38

²⁸ 3 Nephi 28:25,30,38

²⁹ This is a rather long quotation, but I find it so important that I decided to insert it here anyway.

before you find fault and suffer yourselves to speak against a presiding officer. I want you to have faith enough concerning myself and my counselors for the Lord to remove us out of the way, if we do not magnify our calling, and put men in our places that will do right. I had the promise, years ago, that I never should apostatize and bring an evil upon this people. God revealed that through Joseph, long before he died; and if I am not doing right, you may calculate that the Lord is going to take me home. He will not send me to hell, but he will take me home to himself. 'I will take you up here, Brigham, and give you a few lessons.' I am going where He is, for I have that promise, and so have many others.

I am telling you these things for your comfort. In all this there are no new principles and doctrines, though it is new to many of you. You must have faith in God that he will lead his people right, in a way to preserve them from every evil.³⁰

Those who exercise unrighteous dominion will still have the opportunity to repent and amend their ways or be condemned. Those who suffer unrighteous dominion will have the opportunity to exercise faith. They will grow through not reviling against those anointed by the Lord, and through praying for those who may harbor negative feelings towards them. They will gain the knowledge that he or she who is acting wrongly still has the power and authority (the mantle) given by God, and since that type of spiritual endowment is sacred, it must be honored even when the person wearing the mantle does not deserve that honor.

An excellent example is found in the early life of king David. After being anointed as the next king of Israel by the Prophet Samuel³¹, David still acknowledged Saul as both his king and as the Anointed of the Lord. Even in the occasions when Saul sought to kill him, David still maintained his respect for Saul, calling him "my lord", and "my father", and referring to himself as "a flea"³². As we can see in experiences like that in David's early life³³, no blessing will be lost by those who endure.

³⁰ JD, Vol.9, p.142-143, July 28, 1861

³¹ 1 Samuel 16:13

³² 1 Samuel 24:10,11,14; 26:17-20

³³ Before you can say '*But look at what happened with David later ...*' let me clarify that the fact that an individual fell in transgression at a certain point in his or her life does not invalidate the righteous actions and good experiences he or she may have performed or lived either before the transgression or after the prescribed repentance process.

Chapter 9

Prejudice

The Prophet Lehi taught that coincidence has no place in the plan of salvation. He said: "... all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things."¹ In the book of Psalms we find the following statement: "O Lord, how manifold [i.e. marked by diversity or variety] are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."²

With the advances in instant communication of the late twentieth century we have engaged in more frequent association with people of nationalities and cultures other than our own than probably any other civilization in the known history. Even in the Church of Christ we see congregations with varying degrees of cultural (i.e. national, ethnic, racial, or linguistic) diversity. This has been a common characteristic of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since the early days in this dispensation, although today the diversity is more along racial and ethnic lines than ever before.

With this diversity comes the need to understand, respect, and accommodate individuals of many cultures in order to build a truly worldwide Zion. But going beyond recent "politically correct" trends, we can use cultural diversity as a significant advantage in the kingdom of God on earth. I suppose that the Lord instituted different languages and cultures to bring not only variety, but also additional light and truth to the world.

Let us use as an analogy the light passing through a prism. Our eyes can see but a small range of the spectrum of the light, and with a naked eye, we see normal light as white. A prism breaks the light into its several component colors, thus enabling us to see red, green, blue, yellow, violet, orange, and indigo.

Because of our different cultural backgrounds we can see several aspects of life somewhat differently from each other, as if each cultural background could see only a few colors, but not all of them. In the scriptures, the Lord compared his word to light: "For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ."³ President Brigham Young taught that as mortals we can't receive a revelation from God with all its perfections. He said: "The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle ... but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low,

¹ 2 Nephi 2:24

² Psalms 104:24; brackets added for dictionary definition.

³ D&C 84:45

grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections. He has to speak to us in a manner to meet the extent of our capacities ...⁴"

In combination, these two quotations imply that the exchange of experiences by individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds may enable them to more fully comprehend the diverse aspects (or perfections) of the Lord's "light". And a revelation given to Nephi⁵ suggests that this exchange of experiences will happen in our age.

In this sense, instead of a hindrance, diversity might become a necessity and wherever we find diversity we will find greater knowledge, and greater knowledge brings us greater power, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught⁶; power that we may use to better live the commandments, thus achieving greater blessings for those under our responsibility, as well as for ourselves and our families.

The influence of cultural diversity in music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, poetry and prose made the world richer in ideas (or in knowledge, if you will). What we call "styles" are the manifestations of different cultural backgrounds. Let's take a look at music, for example. Here is a small list of instruments from around the world: piano, guitar, mbira, tambouritza, violin, shamisen, bagpipe, violin, balalaika, koto, bonang, sitar, zampoña, kora, cuica, saxophone. Now, here is another small list with rhythms or ensembles from around the world: jazz, gamelan, samba, waltz, lakalaka, tango, doina, blues, ceili, bolero, rap, polka, bluegrass, etc. Pres. Brigham Young said the following about music: "There is no music in hell, for all good music belongs to heaven ... Every sweet musical sound that can be made belongs to the Saints and is for the Saints ... who receive them from the Most High."⁷

Greater Knowledge as Result of Diversity

Applying this analogy to the kingdom of God, if as leaders we respond positively to diversity by getting acquainted with saints from different cultures and by striving to carefully understand their backgrounds and experiences in the gospel, we will eventually be blessed with a greater understanding of the world and of the plan of salvation, in a way we may have never experienced before.

A small example of this type of blessing came with the translation of the Book of Mormon into Thai, the official language of Thailand. In that language there is no word for "brother"; one must say either "elder brother" or "younger brother." Thus, when the Book of Mormon was translated into Thai, the Church learned that the Brother of Jared was Jared's younger brother⁸.

In every language we will find words that are unique; they have no parallel or translation in other languages. Those words can act on the minds of the people of that particular environment in a unique way, triggering many different thoughts and feelings. Then, the Spirit of the Lord will operate on those thoughts

4 Discourses of Brigham Young, p.40. July 8, 1855.

5 2 Nephi 29:12-14

6 TPJS, p.217. April 10, 1842.

7 Discourses of Brigham Young, p.242-243. March 6, 1862. President Young never heard ... uh, forget it.

8 In 1983, at a stake conference in the city of Petrópolis, Brazil, Elder Jacob de Jäger then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, told the congregation that President Spencer W. Kimball had received that information through revelation. I was Elder Jäger's interpreter that day.

and feelings⁹ guiding us to the truth, and the revelations will come with details that may vary from one culture to another.

The church as a whole will benefit if Latter-day Saints from different cultures exchange their experiences.¹⁰ And who knows whether or not in the future many great revelations will be given by the Lord in several different languages? This way we might be taught principles that are up to now beyond our comprehension, and by practicing these principles we will receive blessings so far unknown to us¹¹.

Let's take, for example, two distinct cultures whose words we already have: the Nephite-Lamanite culture and the Jewish culture. If we compare the way that some doctrines were recorded in the Bible with the way they were recorded in the Book of Mormon, we will see examples of beams of light being described under different points of view¹². Jacob explained that the manner by which the Israelite prophets spoke was adapted to the cultural heritage of the people they served, a heritage that took pride in scholarship and complexity, thus making the people look for "... things they could not understand."¹³ In the case of the Nephites, their prophets, following the counsel of Nephi, did not prophesy in the manner of the Israelites¹⁴, but delighted in "... plainness unto [the] people, that they may learn."¹⁵ On the other hand, the Nephites did not have a language as powerful in writing as it was in speech¹⁶, thus indicating that there is still a lot yet to be revealed about the Nephites and Lamanites' knowledge of and experience in the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

With these thoughts in mind, consider how the words of the Apostle Paul concerning our need for each other gain a broader meaning and contemporary significance:

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles ... For the body is not one member, but many. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him ...

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary ...

⁹ D&C 8:2; 9:8

¹⁰ 2 Nephi 29:10,12-13. This passage has been commonly used to justify the existence of the Book of Mormon. I am just expanding this interpretation to include a larger number of future sacred texts.

¹¹ D&C 58:3; 76:7-10; 121:26-33

¹² To see how much additional light the Book of Mormon has brought to our understanding, check the references in the Topical Guide--or in any good Index to the Scriptures--for, for example, the first principles of the gospel, or doctrines like the atonement, repentance, etc.

¹³ Jacob 4:14. See also 2 Nephi 25:5

¹⁴ 2 Nephi 25:6

¹⁵ 2 Nephi 25:4

¹⁶ Ether 12:23-25

¹⁷ Let us wait for the Plates of Brass (1 Nephi 5:18) and the Plates of the Jaredites (Ether 3:17-20,25,27-28), just to start. Then, let us see what the Lost Tribes of Israel will offer us when their gathering is completed (2 Nephi 29:12); and then ... see D&C 63:21; 107:57; Moses 6:5; etc.

God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. ... therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.¹⁸

Paul compared the Church with a body, having several different members performing different tasks; no member of the body was to be considered unimportant, no matter its size, composition, or function. The heart is a muscle, but it cannot carry weights; however it can pump blood, without which the muscles in the arms and legs would not work. The hands have more bones and sinews than muscles, but they multiply the number of tasks that the arms can accomplish. The kidneys are small and look fragile, but without them our blood would not be purified and we would die.

A similar process happens with us as a worldwide Church¹⁹. As Germans, Nigerians, Irish, Americans, Koreans, Italians, Australians, Brazilians, Russians, Samoans, Bolivians, Hungarians, British, Japanese, New Zealanders, or whatever other nationality, we all have many things to learn from each other. Our traditions, our level of income, our education, our flora--all these things and many other variables make us understand the gospel with overtones that taken into consideration add to a more comprehensive view of the Lord and his kingdom²⁰.

Some may argue that a few of these cultures will lack enough experience in the gospel to make a significant contribution--because the church have entered in some of these countries late in the 20th century. We may agree with the fact that compared with those who have had the gospel in their countries for over fifty or one hundred years, recent converts in Nigeria, Russia, India, and other countries can be considered as "infants" in the gospel. However, great are the promises of the Lord concerning these "infants." Consider the following words from the Prophet Joseph Smith:

"... it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, ... that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.²¹"

"... We are called to hold the keys of the mysteries of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation of the world until now. Some have tasted a little of these things, many of which

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:13-14,17-18,21-22,24-27; Ephesians 2:19-22

¹⁹ The previous passages of scripture are often quoted relating to other subjects; at this time I am applying them to demonstrate that by not being prejudiced against others we may be blessed with greater knowledge and blessings.

²⁰ D&C 88:77-80

²¹ D&C 128:18

are to be poured down from heaven upon the heads of babes; yea, upon the weak, obscure and despised ones of the earth.²²"

One final thought: if we consider the eternities of the Gods, can we say in good reason that whatever culture we belong to is "the right one"? Who knows how our descendants will describe us 500 years from now? Who knows if at this very moment a person in a more advanced culture somewhere in the eternities is not saying that our technologically enhanced cultures are "primitive"?

Dealing with Different Cultures

A few individuals have acquired the bad habit of considering themselves as members of "superior" societies, and when these individuals think of other cultures they do so with disdain or pity. The words of President Spencer W. Kimball concerning the Lamanites may give us an idea of the right way to deal with other cultures, especially those deemed by a few as "poor, illiterate and undependable":

"This people ask not for your distant, far-away sympathy, your haughty disdain, your despicable contempt, your supercilious scorn, your turned-up nose, your scathing snobbery, your arrogant scoffing, nor your cold, calculating charity. It is a people who, unable to raise themselves by their own boot straps, call for assistance from those who can push and lift and open doors. ... It is a good folk who ask for fraternity, a handclasp of friendship, a word of encouragement; it is a group of nations who cry for warm acceptance and sincere brotherhood.

I give you a chosen race, an affectionate and warm-hearted people ... a people who have intelligence and capacity to climb to former heights but who need the vision and the opportunity and the assistance of the nursing parents. ... If we fully help them, they can eventually soar to greatness. The ungerminated seeds are waiting for the rains of kindness and opportunity, the sunshine of gospel's truth, the cultivation through the Church program of training and activity, and the seeds will come to life and the harvest will be fabulous. For the Lord has promised it!²³"

Exposure to different cultures in and out of the Church of Christ challenges us to abandon our prejudices. In the process of abandonment we will develop the attributes of temperance, patience, kindness and unfeigned love for our brothers and sisters throughout the world, leading us towards charity and an even greater knowledge of God.

"The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal (co-eternal) with God himself.²⁴" Based on this statement from the Prophet Joseph Smith, we may conclude that much of the diversity we find in the world could be derived from our Heavenly Father's infinite mind. Being an all-powerful, perfect, exalted being, he is able to see all things, understand all things, and harmonize all the ideas that to us, imperfect mortals, appear to be divergent. Again, the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "... we are looked upon by God as though we were in eternity. God dwells in eternity, and does not view things as we do."²⁵

²² TPJS, p.137. March 25, 1839. In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) the Lord implied that the "latecomers" would receive the same rewards as those who started working early.

²³ Faith Precedes the Miracle, p.303-304. This was an excerpt from chapter 28, entitled "Tolerance," a highly recommendable reading.

²⁴ TPJS, p.353. April 7, 1844. Parenthesis added based on a comment placed on the footnote of the same page.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.356

The Lord will use the weak things of the world (not the learned nor the famous) in his work²⁶; thus there is no need to discriminate against anyone. We need all--no matter their income level, educational background, or race. Because of our pre-mortal divine filiation and the atonement all souls are precious unto God²⁷; and to despise one another is to despise the image of God²⁸. The Apostle James wrote the following:

"My brethren, ye cannot have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and yet have respect to persons. Now if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect for him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then in yourselves partial judges, and become evil in your thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? ... But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.²⁹"

Another Insight on Diversity: The Analogy of the Building

We are engaged in a glorious task: the building up of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. This is an enterprise without similar in the whole history of this earth. Perhaps not even the building of Enoch's city of Zion could be compared to this latter-day work, because of the worldwide scope of the work at this time. While Enoch and his people built one city, we are involved in building a new world.

The Apostle Paul compared the members of the Church with a building, or a temple: "In [Christ] all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In [Christ] ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.³⁰" We may say that the design of this building is so elaborated, so intricate, so beautiful, so perfect, so temporarily incomprehensible to us, imperfect mortals with finite capabilities, that in order to accomplish this work we will need to use a combination of all knowledge, all skills, all gifts, all powers and all authorities bestowed either in ancient or in modern times. Like the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, a "... welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories ..."³¹

Where are we going to find this knowledge, these skills, powers and authorities? The powers and authorities are being restored through living prophets since the days of the prophet Joseph Smith. However, the knowledge and skills have not been completely restored yet. We have the fulness of the gospel³², but not the fulness of gospel knowledge. We have the key to unlock the meaning of mysteries, which interpretations will progressively increase our understanding.

²⁶ D&C 1:19-21

²⁷ D&C 18:10-11

²⁸ Psalms 8:4-6; 82:6

²⁹ JST James 2:1-5,9

³⁰ Ephesians 2:21-22; brackets added.

³¹ D&C 128:18

³² D&C 42:12

The Lord also revealed that He would have his word written all over the world³³. That suggests that additional knowledge and skills are scattered all over the world. I suppose no single nation in the world today has the complete combination of knowledge and skills necessary to build the millennial kingdom of Christ. If that is true, it would be another reason why we have been commanded to organize stakes³⁴ of Zion all over the world, instead of gathering the Saints in only half a dozen places.

Human wisdom alone cannot erect this building, or the millennial kingdom of Christ. But the combination of the wisdom given to all peoples and cultures--after they are purged, refined, and sanctified by the Spirit of Lord under the direction of his living prophets--will do it.

Alma, the younger, taught that the Lord has "... [granted] unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have ..." ³⁵ By this we may assume that all nations had at some point in time at least some parts of the gospel, if not its fulness in a number of still unknown cases. That being true, we could then assume that when the universal apostasy came, those elements of the gospel were misinterpreted and mixed with other traditions not based on the gospel--perhaps in an effort to make those principles more appealing to the people--and that the true principles continued to exist imbedded in several forms of cultural expressions like myths, legends, fables, stories, etc.

The process of purging means that the false elements present in these cultural expressions will have to be set aside. Refinement implies that some fine-tuning of that wisdom with the basic principles of the gospel will have to take place, just like in the process of distillation, where unseen impurities are separated from the main element. In the final stage, sanctification, the Spirit of the Lord will give life to that purified wisdom, and that will become part of the will of the Lord, thus enabling us to be blessed by obedience to it.

³³ 2 Nephi 29:8,12,14

³⁴ D&C 115:6; 101:20-21. In the last chapter of this study I will propose some insights about the establishment of Zion.

³⁵ Alma 29:8; brackets added.

Flattery

The word "flattery" is always mentioned in the scriptures in a negative sense. In whatever social group we may find ourselves in, there will always be instances when we (or others) will congratulate someone or praise those involved in a job well done. These expressions of appreciation are sometimes called "flattery". However, there is a difference between the flattery denounced by the prophets and sincere praise, which is an appropriate expression of appreciation. The dictionary defines flattery as: insincere compliment; gratification by falsification; cajoling; beguiling. To flatter is "to play upon the vanity or susceptibilities of" someone. Here is Elder Bruce R. McConkie's definition of "flattery":

"Flattery is the act of ingratiating oneself into another's confidence by excessive praise, or by insincere speech and acts. It includes the raising of false and unfounded hopes; there is always an element of dishonesty attending it."¹

In other words, flattery is an expression of appreciation based on selfish desires of retribution, usually requiring some wicked action or behavior on the part of the flattered party. Sincere appreciation does not demand anything in return, and is based on a desire to encourage or motivate others to reach higher levels of accomplishment for the glory of God.

At this point some may think: "What is the big deal about that? I never compliment anyone desiring something in return ..." Most of us don't. However, the fact that we don't seek retribution does not guarantee that other persons will not seek some form of retribution from us, especially while we serve in leadership capacities.

This is a very serious matter. Over the years I have faced--or observed--instances where a few individuals, clearly unfamiliar with the standard procedures of the Church of Christ, addressed me or others with some of the most wonderful and eloquent words of praise. And why? Because they wanted something in return: letters of recommendation, positions of leadership, ordinances, etc. In all cases, those individuals wanted something that at least some of them knew they were not prepared--or sometimes not even worthy--to receive. Other cases involved individuals who wanted something inconvenient, inopportune, unadvisable, or in some way questionable or unethical. And they thought that by flattering me and others they might gain whatever they wanted.

How Flattery Can Be Used

Experience has shown that there is a pattern followed by those who engage in the use of flattery. Again, instead of dealing with modern examples that could wound the sensibility of other persons, I will use some of the examples found in the scriptures. In the Book of Mormon we find two cases of individuals who used flattery to try to gain positions of preeminence among the people: Sherem and Amalickiah. Notice their tactics:

"Sherem ... labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts; ... And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.²"

"Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were ... desirous that he should be their king ... were seeking for power. And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people. ... Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.³"

Flattering words generally address inner desires or aspirations that we, imperfect individuals, may have. This is probably the reason why flattery works so well in so many cases. In the two cases we just read, both Sherem and Amalickiah offered what the people wanted: an excuse or a rationale for committing sins, or for obtaining power and authority by illicit means; in other cases, flattering words may be directed towards our desire of recognition. But no matter what is being appealed to, the Apostle James explained that we are allured by something from within us: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."⁴

Another common characteristic in the use of flattery is the manner used to address the person or persons being flattered. Sherem tried to allure Jacob by calling him "Brother Jacob"; Amalickiah acknowledged the hunger for power of the enemies of freedom of his day as appropriate. Over a century later, on the old world, when the Pharisees tried to entrap the Savior, they sometimes started by complimenting him using words like: "... Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men."⁵ After such kind words, ho would not feel an urge to respond in the same level of kindness?

While serving in leadership positions we may at times be approached by individuals who will compliment us in a rather exaggerated manner: "Brother or sister ____ you are the best teacher in the entire

² Jacob 7:1,3-4

³ Alma 46:4-5,10

⁴ James 1:13-14

⁵ Matthew 22:16

church⁶. You should be the one presiding here. I wonder why you were not chosen ..." Then, after such splendid words, unlawful requests may come that would be similar to these: "... we would see a sign from thee⁷", or "... What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?⁸"

An unwise and perhaps naive individual could easily be led into the belief that those tempting him or her are "friends," and might fall into the trap of agreeing with them by showing a sign or falling into a "doctrinal trap" just to avoid arguing with an apparent "friend." Christ, however, always maintained an eternal perspective in his responses. When asked to show a sign he refused⁹--even knowing that that might be the last time those men would call him "Master," and that he probably would not make any converts among them. When asked to mix religion with partisan politics or public policy, he avoided the temptation of engaging in a long and pointless quarrel.

The Search for Earthly Honors

Another serious mistake is to use our positions in the Church acquire the honors of men. Once again, the Lord himself set the example:

"... when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, [they] said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.¹⁰"

Even being the lawful heir to the throne of David, Jesus Christ did not accept that earthly honor¹¹. Speaking to the multitudes and to his disciples, he warned against feelings of self-aggrandizement:

"Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, ... and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi ... and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts¹²".

Again, we see the keyword "desire". Christ was not condemning the receipt of earthly honors; he warned, though, against those who would make those honors the motive behind their service in the kingdom. One tragic case we can find in the scriptures was that of the Prophet Balaam. He received messengers from Balak, king of Moab, who wanted him to curse the Israelites. In Balaam's day many wise men would desire the honor of one day being called directly by a king to perform some special task. Thus,

⁶ I would be very cautious in using superlatives like "the best," "the greatest," "the most powerful," in relation to church units, organizations, programs, general authorities or other individuals. First of all because we don't know whether that is true--and in most cases it probably isn't. And secondly because we have no need to make comparisons among ourselves. We should say, or better, think: "Let God be the judge and reward each one of us according to his perfect wisdom."

⁷ Matthew 12:38

⁸ Matthew 22:17

⁹ Matthew 12:39; those individuals probably wanted to witness a great miracle, but the Lord promised them an even greater one--his own resurrection. However, just like it had happened with the Prophet Jonas (Jonah 1:15,17), this greater miracle, the resurrection, would not be performed in front of an audience (Luke 24:1-3).

¹⁰ John 6:14-15; brackets added.

¹¹ John 18:36

¹² Matthew 23:6; Luke 20:46

Balaam was probably having the chance of his life before him. After consulting the Lord—who told him he could not curse his covenant people—Balaam refused to go with Balak's messengers.

However, the words spoken by the messengers were probably echoing in Balaam's mind; after all, Balak acknowledged Balaam's power, "... I [know] that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."¹³ Besides, he had been visited by the elders of both the Moabites and the Midianites. What a great honor ...

But, surprise! Another group of messengers, in greater number and of higher status in the kingdom, come to him delivering this message: "... Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."¹⁴

Poor Balaam ... I can imagine the tremendous pressure in his mind: 'Balak, the king, praying, begging me to come ... Promising me perhaps a position as one of his chief counselors ... Oh, the honor, the reputation, the fame, the admiration and reverence from all the people ...

Insisting with the Lord, Balaam got this answer: "If the men come to call thee, rise up, if thou will go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, shalt thou speak. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab."¹⁵

The Lord's answer requires some attention. It is that same type of speech he used to say "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it ..."¹⁶ Yes, we have our free agency and we may choose for ourselves, even though we may later regret making a wrong choice. In Balaam's case, he had already heard the word of the Lord not to curse the people; since all Balak wanted was to have the Israelites cursed, why should he go with Balak's messengers anyway¹⁷?

Perhaps Balaam rationalized thinking that if he would talk personally to Balak he might make the king change his mind about cursing the Israelites; after all, Balak had promised that he would do whatever Balaam would tell him—perhaps even accept the discussions, be baptized, and also issue a proclamation to have his people do the same. And who knows? The king might still reward him for speaking the word of the Lord, although, as a humble prophet he would not accept any earthly honors ... maybe just a good job with a fat salary ... but still, just to keep the Lord's commandment of eating bread with the sweat of one's face ... with air-conditioning.

If that was Balaam's plan, it was doomed to failure, because in these last days the Lord revealed the following:

¹³ Numbers 22:6; brackets added for clarification (based on a footnote for this verse in the LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible).

¹⁴ Numbers 22:16-17

¹⁵ JST Numbers 22:20-21. Note the difference from the King James Version in the clause: "... if thou will go with them ..."; once more, 'desire' is the keyword.

¹⁶ Moses 3:17

¹⁷ It is interesting to notice how this situation relates to the one lived by the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding the loss of 116 pages of manuscript translated from the plates. See History of the Church 1:20; also D&C sections 3 and 10.

"... although a man may have many revelations, and have the power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him.¹⁸"

Balaam followed the inspiration of the Almighty, and blessed Israel three times, incurring in Balak's anger: "... now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour.¹⁹"

Wow! What terrible words! Imagine, to have the mighty king say--perhaps in front of all the princes, court counselors, and reporters: "Balaam, you are fired! Get out of here! I don't care what your religion says! All I wanted was to have you get those people off my back, and you didn't do it!"

But, wait a minute! The Lord did not say to Balaam that he should not reveal to Balak under what conditions Israel would receive those blessings he prophesied, nor under what conditions they might lose them ... Therefore, Balaam "... taught [Balak] to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.²⁰"

Whether Balaam received the honors promised by Balak, is still unknown; the fact is that the judgment of God fell upon him²¹ because he used his priesthood for personal gain.

In review, these are two lessons we learn from the tragic case of Balaam: (1) we must never exercise the priesthood for personal gain (money, honor, prestige, status--first seats in the synagogues, or whatever else it may please us); and (2) we must not go against the will of the Lord because the fear of men²², or because the lusts of the flesh²³, neither to "please the crowd²⁴" and gain popularity.

Escaping the Lure of Flattering Words

As it happens with all virtues to be acquired and all weaknesses to be avoided, the key is in our own minds. There is no magic; the power is within us all the time. The effects of flattering words can be prevented by first, not judging people by their appearance or their eloquence alone:

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.²⁵"

18 D&C 3:4

19 Numbers 24:11

20 Revelation 2:14; brackets added. See also Numbers 31:16.

21 Numbers 31:8

22 D&C 3:7-8

23 D&C 88:121

24 Exodus 23:2

25 1 Samuel 16:7

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going."²⁶

Secondly, whenever we are faced with a request that we can't see anything wrong with, but that we still don't feel like doing it anyway, let us take the time to ask for the counsel of the Lord. This is very important: whenever we don't feel like doing something we have been asked by someone, or whenever for some unknown reason we don't feel comfortable doing it, or whenever we are afraid of doing it, *then we shouldn't do it!* We shouldn't be afraid of losing the initial approval of the people. People, in general, like to see their leaders making quick decisions; however, they will be the first ones to turn against their leaders if the decisions are later found to be wrong or questionable.

Except in emergencies, when the decisions have to be made hastily, it might always be wise to take some time to ponder about major decisions, and never submit ourselves to the will of a flatterer. Exactly for not doing this, Joshua and the leaders of his day made a treaty of peace with the deceiving Gibeonites²⁷, in disagreement with a previous commandment of the Lord.

We must practice integrity at all costs, like Micaiah²⁸, Abinadi²⁹, and many other martyrs who would not yield to fear, nor pervert the word of the Lord either to become popular before the people or to even to save their lives. We may find it easier to resist flattery if always keep in mind that we live in a temporary environment³⁰, where all offices, distinctions, ranks, classes, titles, and honors are as the "flower of the field."³¹

²⁶ Proverbs 14:15

²⁷ Joshua 9:14-16,18

²⁸ 2 Chronicles 18:6-7, 26-27

²⁹ Mosiah 17:9-20

³⁰ See chapter 3 for some insights on the temporary nature of our mortal environment.

³¹ Isaiah 40:6-8; James 1:10; 1 John 2:15-17; D&C 124:7

***The Knowledge
of the Truth***

Our knowledge of the restored gospel and its doctrines gradually increases over the years-- assuming that we study the scriptures and the words of the prophets regularly. But as we gather more and more information, it may become difficult for some of us to associate individual pieces of information in a meaningful way.

Thus, "... many, having a zeal not according to knowledge, and not understanding the pure principles of the doctrine of the Church, have, no doubt, in the heat of enthusiasm, taught and said many things which are derogatory to the genuine character and principles of the Church; and for these things we are heartily sorry, and would apologize, if apology would do any good."¹

Having started the process of developing or acquiring godly virtues, and of avoiding the evolution of undesirable weaknesses, church leaders must then ensure that they understand the true doctrine of Christ.

In this section we will discuss some of the benefits brought by our knowledge of the true doctrine--and the harm that may be caused by the lack of it. We will discuss what the knowledge of God and the doctrine of Christ are, and share some ideas on the process of learning eternal truths.

We will also discuss how those who have been called to serve as counselors in presidencies have an important role in helping us learn truth.

¹

TPJS, p.80. Published in May 1, 1835.

***Eternal Truths:
Spiritual Nutrition***

One of the requirements any individual has to fill before being called to serve in a leadership capacity is that he or she must know at least a little about the basic doctrines of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Why is it so important? Because of our nature as eternal beings, and also because of the potential damage we may cause in the lives of those we were called to serve.

Feeding Spirits With Knowledge

At this stage of our mortal experience we know very little about our eternal nature, or the anatomy and physiology of our spiritual bodies. We know a great deal about our mortal bodies, understanding the complex chemical processes involved in digestion and dialysis; the electrical, mechanical, and chemical processes employed by our hearts and lungs. And we are beginning to understand the extraordinary and once mysterious electrochemical processes involved in our brain.

However, as children of Heavenly Parents, each one of us is actually an eternal spirit temporarily housed in an imperfect mortal frame. Because of the temporarily fallen nature of our mortal bodies and of the world where we have been placed, under normal conditions we cannot see or feel our spirits.

We don't remember anything about our eternal selves: how our spirit bodies look like, or what they are composed of, or how they work. But from the revelations given through latter-day prophets we learned two important concepts: First, that our spirit bodies affect our mortal bodies. And second, that the capacity our spirit bodies have to learn and move is far greater than our mortal bodies' present capacities¹. President Brigham Young taught that just like our mortal bodies, our spiritual bodies need constant care and nourishment:

"... the spirit is influenced by the body, and the body by the spirit. ... The Lord has planted within us a divinity; and that divine immortal spirit requires to be fed. Will earthly food answer for that purpose? No; ... That divinity within us needs food from the Fountain from which it emanated. It is not of the earth, earthy, but is from heaven. Principles of eternal life, of God and godliness, will alone feed the immortal capacity of man and give true satisfaction."²

¹ See Discourses of Brigham Young, pp.248 (March 4, 1860), 380 (September 16, 1871). President Young taught that in the spirit world our spirits would "... learn with greater facility ..." and "... move like lightning ..." and that after the resurrection we would "... learn a thousand times more in a thousand times less time ..."

² *ibid.*, pp.70 (April 6, 1855), 165 (December 18, 1859)

By developing good study habits we can exercise our mental faculties so that we can narrow the distance between our mortal mind and our spiritual mind. This narrowing may be called "spirituality". President Spencer W. Kimball said: "... if I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns."³ Spirituality also implies communion with the Lord; it means to be immersed in the Holy Spirit, that eternal substance that connects us with the source of all truth. Then, in whatever interests we have, whether we are studying gospel doctrine, engineering, art, management, chemistry, or anthropology, we will be able to find knowledge through the Holy Spirit, and the scriptures can help us enter into this spiritual communion.

Nephi counseled us to "... feast upon the words of Christ; for ... the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do ..."⁴ Unfortunately, most of the time we don't fully realize how much an effect the scriptures can have in our lives. In the words of the Brother of Jared, the Lord is "... able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men."⁵ Nephi said that the scriptures will tell us all things. Do we believe in Nephi's words, or do we think that maybe he was exaggerating a little? We might also think that Nephi knew little about mathematics, chemistry, or physics, and that only out of his lack of that type of scientific knowledge he could make such a statement⁶. But if we consider that what we call physical, chemical, mathematical or biological principles and laws are mortal manifestations of the same principles and laws governed by the Lord through His priesthood, then we will have to recognize that he is the source of this knowledge, and certainly he is willing to teach us about these matters. President Joseph F. Smith taught:

"I believe that the Lord has revealed to the children of men all that they know. I do not believe that any man has discovered any principle of science, or art, in mechanism, or mathematics, or anything else, that God did not know before man did. Man is indebted to the source of all intelligence and truth, for the knowledge that he possesses; and all who will yield obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, which lead to virtue, to honor, to the love of God and man, and to the love of truth and that which is ennobling and enlarging to the soul, will get a cleaner, a more expansive, and a more direct and conclusive knowledge of God's truths than anyone else can obtain. I tell you this, because I know it is true."⁷

By guiding our mental process the Lord will give us the power to get as many answers by ourselves as possible. The words in the scriptures are not magic; but since they invite, or put us in tune with the Spirit of the Lord, these words have the power to stimulate the faculties of our spiritual minds, to the extent that our mortal minds also become stimulated. This way we can achieve greater levels of understanding and consequent performance.

³ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.135. July 11, 1966.

⁴ 2 Nephi 32:3

⁵ Ether 3:5

⁶ I find it hard to believe that Nephi didn't have some knowledge of those sciences. He wrote that he had been educated in the "learning of the Jews and language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). Lehi was so wealthy that Laban, considered a powerful man, coveted his wealth (1 Nephi 3:24-25,31). Therefore, we could assume that Nephi and his brothers might have received the best education available at that time, perhaps including a period of studies in Egypt, where he could have seen wonders in architecture, engineering, and chemistry. Whether that was so is not clear at this time, but we do know that he built a ship (1 Nephi 18:1-4) fit for a transoceanic voyage that could have lasted about a year (Ether 6:11), and later a temple (2 Nephi 5:15-16). Those types of enterprise require a lot of math and physics ...

⁷ Gospel Doctrine, p.5. April, 1902.

As result of experiences that I had while translating the Book of Mormon, today I have the impression that there is much more in the sacred texts—especially the Book of Mormon—than what has been printed on those pages. The Lord suggested that His word is spirit⁸; thus, beyond those printed words are those that no mortal language can transmit⁹. The printed words, then, are "tools" to guide us in the process of putting our minds in tune with that spiritual sphere in which the knowledge of God is dominant. One day this earth will also be filled with that knowledge¹⁰, but while that does not fully happen, we need those "immersions" in spiritual element, by which we will receive the pure intelligence that will make us, according to the prophet Joseph Smith, learn more about heaven—and about God—than we would by reading all books ever written about it¹¹.

Finding a New Dimension in Earthly Life

Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated: "... people who study the scriptures get a dimension to their lives ... that can't be gained in any [other] way ... There is an increase in faith and a ... feeling of inspiration and understanding ..."¹²

It is still difficult for mortal minds to see things under an eternal perspective. Let's consider this word, "perspective" (or "dimension") for a moment. In spatial geometry we learn that a geometric shape on a sheet of paper can be seen as the representation, like a shadow, of an object floating in space. I had a geometry teacher in my junior high school who would say to the students: "Get your minds out of the paper and imagine these things floating in space."

This concept is quite interesting. A gray square on a piece of paper could be understood as that shade of a pyramid floating in the air and projecting a perfectly vertical shadow. Without an additional perspective (or dimension) we might have thought that the square was the shadow of a cube, and not of a pyramid.

The same happens with our understanding of this life. We also have to "get our minds out of the ground" and observe this life with an eternal perspective to understand how the Lord deals with his children. The Lord's own words explain this concept, and he also promises that with patience we will eventually get to the point of fully understanding eternal matters:

"Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall come after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory ... Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you; And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along."¹³

⁸ D&C 84:45

⁹ 3 Nephi 19:31-34; 28:13-15

¹⁰ Isaiah 11:9

¹¹ TPJS, p. 324. October 9, 1843

¹² Church News, 24 Jan 1976, p.4

¹³ D&C 58:3-4; 78:17-18

The Risks of Personal Opinions and Beliefs

Our personal opinions and beliefs are important, but we must be very careful to not present them as the mind and the will of the Lord. When we teach a true doctrine, any person can inquire the Lord about what we taught and receive a testimony of the truthfulness of that doctrine. If we teach something that is not in accordance with the word of the Lord no testimony will be received, but instead, a stupor of thought¹⁴ (or confusion of mind) will take place.

One simple test: whenever in a class there is a heated debate, we can be certain that it is because a false principle--or a wrong interpretation of an aspect of a correct principle--was taught. In these cases, the best attitude is to acknowledge our lack of knowledge about that principle. We should not be ashamed of doing so; after all, none of us knows everything. We may then ask those present in the class to study and pray about the matter during the week. Then, in the next class, that point will certainly be clarified.

The Spirit of the Lord will never give us a testimony of a false doctrine, even though some of these may make us "feel good" about them because of their either logical or emotional appeal. We must remember that human logic does not always agree with the mind of the Lord: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."¹⁵

The teaching of personal beliefs as if they were an approved doctrine is something that brings me a few sad memories. I remember that during my youth I was taught a few false doctrines about people of black ancestry. At that time one of those "personal doctrines" stated that blacks probably had not been valiant in the pre-mortal existence, and that they would never receive exaltation. This doctrine was apparently well accepted and it seems to me that very few individuals ever took the time to search the scriptures to verify that idea.

The paternalistic attitudes towards "those poor black souls" were sometimes almost unbearable. I still remember vividly that when I was about seventeen years old (a couple of years before President Kimball's revelation that extended the priesthood to all worthy men) one good brother told me that because I could not hold the priesthood I would never be admitted into the celestial kingdom. He then suggested that I should not marry the young lady I was dating (who was not black and eventually became my wife), because, in his opinion, marrying her would jeopardize her future exaltation.

I confess that I just could not accept those ideas, although I never publicly disagreed with my leaders. Having been raised in an excellent family who had taught me to have faith in God above all things, even during the years in which we did not know about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, I had such a great love for God that I just could not accept the idea that I might have been less valiant or less worthy in the pre-existence. That just sounded against my nature.

I understand that even today there are individuals who believe (and unfortunately some of them still teach) that people from certain races will never reach exaltation and eternal life. However, I don't feel any intention of contending with them to prove my view. Because of my testimony that Jesus Christ lives and that He is at the head of His Church, I feel that all I have to do is to wait on the Lord and be merciful with those who underrate me for any reason.

¹⁴ D&C 9:9

¹⁵ Isaiah 55:8-9

But as a High Priest I understand that part of my duty requires me to be concerned with the eternal welfare of my fellow-beings¹⁶. That is why I feel the obligation to warn that a line of reasoning that denies any righteous person an opportunity to be exalted may be, in a way, denying the power of Christ's atonement. If we say that Christ cannot exalt an individual who receives His ordinances and keeps His commandments, we are in a way saying that Christ's atonement was not infinite and eternal, as the scriptures teach¹⁷.

Again, I do not see any reason to confront or to contend against those who think that I have little chance to be saved. It is not the Lord who is saying that I am not going to the celestial kingdom; he allows me to make that decision by myself. And for those who insist in denying me the right to eternal blessings, I would quote the words of Jacob: "... there is none other way save it be by the gate ... and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there ..."¹⁸

I have enough faith to wait on the Lord; to wait for that day when all speculation will vanish, and truth will be plainly manifest; that day when "... the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."¹⁹ Just like Father Lehi, "... I know in whom I have trusted."²⁰ And I have trusted in him who "... doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him." Nephi added the following: "... Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. ... and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile."²¹

The reason why we are going over this example is to emphasize how important it is to learn the true doctrine of Jesus Christ; how important it is to avoid teaching our own opinions as if they were official doctrines. We are dealing with the lives of individuals, all of whom are precious in the sight of the Lord; so precious that the Great Jehovah chose to come down from the courts of infinite glory to suffer infinite agony and pain so that all these individuals--all of them--could have a chance of coming back to the presence of the Lord on conditions of repentance²².

Our lack of true knowledge may damage lives instead of saving them, and if that happens, one day we will certainly find ourselves in deep trouble, because the Lord said: "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! ..."²³

The Lord is merciful, and he is aware that we will not have all knowledge in this mortal stage. After all, he was the one who determined that we would not have a full knowledge at this stage of the plan of salvation, so we could develop faith. But it is one thing to make a mistake (e.g. teaching a false doctrine, or making a wrong judgment) after we searched for knowledge with all diligence; it is another very different

¹⁶ Alma 13:6,12

¹⁷ Alma 34:10; D&C 132:27

¹⁸ 2 Nephi 9:41. I altered the sequence of the clauses.

¹⁹ Isaiah 11:9

²⁰ 2 Nephi 4:19

²¹ 2 Nephi 26:24,33

²² D&C 18:10-11; 19:15-16,18

²³ Jeremiah 23:1

thing when the mistake is the result of our negligence in searching for the truth. We must have enough strength of character to say "I don't know", and then look for the answer through study, prayer and patience.

Serving or Disserving Others

Church leaders must strive to learn the true doctrine and the covenants of the Lord, otherwise they may disserv (i.e., harm or injure) those under their responsibilities. I remember an insight I gained in the past while reading the experience Aaron had when he was guarding the people while Moses was communing with the Lord on the mount.

Moses gave the people some initial instructions about the law and then went to the mount and "disappeared" for 40 days²⁴. The people saw when Moses went up the mount into the cloud of God's glory. After waiting his return for over a month, they probably imagined that something had gone wrong and wanted some action taken; maybe they thought Moses had died--after all, who would survive almost a month and a half in the midst of all that fire and lightning without appropriate food and shelter²⁵?

It is possible that Aaron, fearing that the people might give up waiting and decide to go away, decided to do something that might make them wait a little longer, like a religious ceremony, for example²⁶. He remembered Moses' recent instructions and the sacrifices of oxen that had already been offered²⁷, and perhaps Aaron, by not understanding those instructions well, decided to build a calf (a young ox) maybe with the intention of creating a visible token of the covenants the people had made almost a month and a half before²⁸. If that was really Aaron's intent we don't know at this time. However, if that was his intention, it backfired, because the people engaged in open idolatry, causing the judgments of God to fall upon them.

As church leaders in these latter days we are also conducting the people to a promised land: in our case, we call this promised land the celestial kingdom. As the prophets and apostles commune with the Lord and receive instructions, we at times may also hear the people asking how long it will take us to get there. I have heard people asking why we don't go faster; or why the Lord doesn't give any new revelations. Occasionally we may even find individuals who, if they could, would rather release the prophets when they would get too old, probably expecting that a younger person might get things done faster--which idea hides the false assumption that the prophets direct the Church instead of the Lord.

Sometimes it seems that we want to see the Church of Christ remodeled or re-restored every two or three years. We must understand and teach that the Lord said that he would give "... line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little ..."²⁹

Once again, we can damage the lives of others if we assume that all our thoughts and ideas are the result of inspiration from the Lord³⁰. For example, in the Book of Mormon we find the account of a man called Zeniff, a good Christian. So good that he reached the point of loving his enemies, the Lamanites. In

²⁴ Exodus 24:14-15,18

²⁵ Exodus 20:18; 24:17; 32:1

²⁶ Exodus 32:5

²⁷ Exodus 20:24; Exodus 24:3-8

²⁸ Exodus 32:2-6

²⁹ D&C 98:12

³⁰ See chapter 8 for another insight on this topic.

his own words, "... when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed."³¹

Zeniff, having a burning desire to return to the that part of the land where Nephi had lived after he had left his brethren³², gathered a group of followers and went back to inhabit the land³³. His problem was that he wanted a particular blessing (a beautiful one--to live in the land of his ancestors) and perhaps he thought that the Lord would have to give it to him just because of his desire³⁴. Had he been more attentive to his scriptures, he would have seen that the Nephites had left that part of the land under the Lord's instructions³⁵, and apparently only the Lord could command them to go back. That mistake cost his people years in wars and eventually, bondage³⁶.

We must constantly check to see whether our opinions coincide with the scriptures and with the latest words of the living prophets. The handbooks, conference reports, official church magazines, and those appointed to instruct us are the appropriate sources of the latest words. We should never assume that we already know how to solve a certain problem based on past experiences alone, because the circumstances may very well be partially or totally different. We must also consider that the Church is dynamic, not static: although the fundamental doctrines do not change, the programs and certain procedures will at times be altered to face different circumstances.

In conclusion, let us consider what the Lord said about his revealed instructions: "... I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation."³⁷

³¹ Mosiah 9:1

³² 2 Nephi 5:4-5,7-8

³³ Mosiah 9:3,5-9

³⁴ A still common misunderstanding of a covenant instituted by the Lord: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say ..." (D&C 82:10).

³⁵ Omni 1:12-13

³⁶ Mosiah 9:10-13; 19:26,28; 21:13

³⁷ D&C 82:9

The True Doctrine

So far we have discussed the benefits of having some knowledge of the basic doctrines of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the potential harm that can be caused by the lack of this knowledge. Now, we'll focus on what specific knowledge we must possess, and how we can obtain it.

In his first vision the prophet Joseph Smith was commanded not to join any of the churches of his day, and the Savior himself told him the reason: "I was answered that ... they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight ... that: 'they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.'"

We can gain many insights from these words. At this time we'll concentrate on two of them: first, that the Lord was particularly displeased with the fact that the hearts of the people were not centered on him, and secondly, that the people denied his power. What do these things mean, and why are they so important?

The hearts of the people were not centered on the Lord because they didn't know him; in fact, most of Christianity still believes that God is a spirit that has no body, parts or passions. If God has no passions, how could anyone be loved by him? How could anyone develop a personal relationship with a mere "spiritual essence" that has no body or parts? Would anyone sacrifice him or herself to keep commandments ordered by a spiritual "essence" or "entity" that has no feelings?

If God were only a spiritual essence, with no passions or feelings, our love for him would never be as deep as the love children have for their fathers; it would be just like loving the wind: we can feel the wind blowing, and we may even say that we "love" it, but there is no personal, affectionate relationship between us and the wind, because the wind has no body, no parts, no passions, and therefore, no cognition. If God had no passions, and no cognition, how could he ever have any mental activity? The whole universe would then become the product of simple chance, and our life a cosmic coincidence.

In addition, to believe that the universe, the planets, and everything in them would be simply the product of "natural laws", means to also accept the false idea that God would have no direct power over our lives, because the natural principles of physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, geology, and all other sciences would have been responsible for the creation and maintenance of the universe by themselves, without the assistance of an almighty being.

That is why the First Vision is so important for the world: at that occasion and in subsequent visions Joseph Smith saw that there is a God, a perfect, glorified, almighty man, with a body of flesh and bones—tangible², not just a symbolic image of a body—and with passions: a God who can hear and speak³, who can weep⁴, who can feel joy⁵.

The Knowledge of God

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ⁶. But the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that in order to have faith one needs to know who and how he is: "It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did ...⁷"

In the scriptures and in the words of the latter-day prophets we find information about the existence of God, about his character, perfections, and attributes, his way of dealing with his children, and the order of his eternal kingdom. But that is not all:

"How do men obtain a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections and attributes? ... Let us here observe, that after any portion of the human family are made acquainted with the important fact that there is a God [through the scriptures and through the testimonies of other individuals] ... the extent of their knowledge respecting his character and glory will depend upon their diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him ... By devoting themselves to his service, through prayer and supplication incessantly strengthening their faith in him ... until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face.⁸"

But how can one acquire the third requirement, "the knowledge that the course of life which [one is] pursuing is according to [the Lord's] will"? The prophet Joseph addressed that saying:

"Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation ... because ... it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God.⁹"

So we see that we must learn about God, serve him, pray to him, and offer sacrifices of time, talents, means, and other possessions until we finally have strong enough a faith to behold his face. And this knowledge is not obtained simply by reading, but by practicing those things one has learned. This is the main

² D&C 130:22

³ D&C 6:22-23; 25:12; 88:2; 112:1

⁴ Moses 7:28

⁵ D&C 18:13

⁶ Fourth Article of Faith

⁷ TPJS, p. 345. April 7, 1844.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.32,23; brackets added.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.57

reason why we have classes in our organizations and quorums; so that we can share with others¹⁰ the knowledge that we have obtained through our personal study and experience. This is also the reason for assignments and activities in the Church—to practice these knowledge through small acts of service rendered to each other, which in turn are acts of service unto the Lord¹¹.

As church leaders we participate in this process of acquiring the knowledge of God both individually and in our assignments, by planning and helping administer classes and programs, ensuring the fulfillment of this objective--of knowing God¹². This objective is a lifelong pursuit, and we must never cease to seek it, so one day we may say like our father Abraham: "Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee¹³".

Notice that the words of the prophet Joseph Smith imply that the ultimate knowledge of God will come as a result of our personal encounter with Him. Such experience can only happen if we are pure and clean enough to deserve the application of His mercy, which will allow us, just like it happened with Moriancumer, Moses, and Enoch, to be "... redeemed from the fall ... [and] brought back into [His] presence¹⁴ ... [having] the glory of God ... upon [us] ... [so that we may] endure his presence¹⁵ ... [and being] clothed upon with glory ... [see] the Lord ... face to face¹⁶ ... and [have] faith no longer, [but know,] nothing doubting ... having this perfect knowledge of God¹⁷ ..."

The Doctrine of Christ

So far in our discussion we have dealt with the first knowledge members of Church of Christ must obtain: the knowledge of God, which will enable us to develop the faith we will use to perform the work of the Lord--i.e., "to bring to pass immortality and eternal life¹⁸" to ourselves and others.

Having done that, the next step is to learn the doctrine of Christ, and the Savior himself explained what that doctrine is:

"And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me ... and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost

¹⁰ D&C 88:118

¹¹ Mosiah 2:17; 5:13

¹² John 17:3; D&C 132:24

¹³ Abraham 2:12

¹⁴ Ether 3:13; brackets added

¹⁵ Moses 1:2; brackets added

¹⁶ Moses 7:3-4; brackets added

¹⁷ Ether 3:19-20; brackets added

¹⁸ Moses 1:39

... And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.¹⁹"

One of the problems we may sometimes face in the Church is that the first principles of the Gospel, or the doctrine of Christ—faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost—are set aside and replaced by other subordinate doctrines. We sometimes go about our lives believing that the central aspects of the gospel is temple attendance or home or visiting teaching, or meetings, or whatever else. We should consider that none of these things would exist, nor would they benefit us in any way in eternity, without the atonement. This idea, together with the remembrance of the doctrine of Christ, or the first principles of the gospel, must remain constant in our minds.

Faith and repentance are not topics reserved only for investigators and less active members. Those who may consider themselves "strong and firm," who have served full-time missions and received the temple ordinances also need to develop faith and exercise repentance. Some of us at times view ourselves in some sort of "higher level" of membership, where these "elementary" doctrines would no longer be pertinent. That is a mistake. I have seen or heard of a few brothers and sisters, who once rendered service in positions of great responsibility, becoming less active members. I can only wonder how many of them got to that point of inactivity--and in some cases unbelief--as a result of not paying attention to those "elementary" doctrines.

The first principles of the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ, are for all of us, no matter our age (provided that we are more than eight years old) or our many years of membership. Even those among us who were born in LDS families and have been active members all their lives will still have reasons to repent. All need to have faith in the Lord and in the power of his atonement, to partake of the sacrament, and to receive the visitation of the Holy Ghost.

Without obedience to these basic principles, one may temporarily lose the blessings connected with the ordinances of the gospel until he or she repents²⁰. All blessings are predicated upon our individual righteousness, and righteousness presupposes continuous repentance. Without continuous repentance and the weekly renewal of baptismal covenants through the sacrament there is no visitation of the Holy Ghost; without the visitation of the Holy Ghost there will be no personal revelations. And how will we be able to receive power from on high and find our way back to the presence of the Lord without the knowledge of the meaning of our patriarchal blessings and the symbolic instructions of the endowment?

The efficacy of our ordinances, or their acceptance by the Lord, depends on our practice of the first principles of the gospel--mainly faith, repentance, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, with the weekly renewal of the baptismal covenants. When we visit others as visiting teachers or as home teachers we need to have purified ourselves (through the process of repentance), so that we may be in tune with the Spirit of the Lord. Only then the Lord will speak through us for the benefit of the person being visited; otherwise these visits will become mere worldly social gatherings and another cold number in our reports.

¹⁹ 3 Nephi 11:32-35,37-40

²⁰ D&C 130:20-21; 132:5

Likewise, without genuine repentance and without faith in God and in the power of his atonement, a sacrament meeting is just one more meeting that we attend, without any effects: no renewal of our covenants, no strengthening of our spirits, nothing--just one more meeting.

So we see that in our service as church leaders we must encourage those under our responsibility to perform all things required from them without losing sight of the relationship between these important activities and the doctrine of Christ. The words of the Prophet Joseph Smith are a summary of this concept:

"The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it. But in connection with these, we believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost, the power of faith, the enjoyment of the spiritual gifts according to the will of God, the restoration of the house of Israel, and the final triumph of truth.²¹"

The Things Pertaining to the Kingdom

Now that we have understood the true doctrine of Christ, and how it subordinates all other principles, laws, and doctrines, what else should we learn? The Lord himself answered that, and I will dare to provide a few possible meanings:

"Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand²²"

At this point of this passage, a good question to be asked is what would be these things that pertain to the kingdom of God?

"... things both in heaven [astronomy] and in the earth [geography, zoology], and under the earth [geology]; things which have been [history], things which are [social sciences], things which must shortly come to pass [prophecies]; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations [political science, economics, international relations], and the judgments which are on the land [current events]; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms [geography, anthropology]--That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.²³"

There is an immense amount of knowledge to be learned. There is an eternity of knowledge before us, plenty of subjects to be discovered or rediscovered. And yet, once in a while we find individuals who say that they already know enough, or others that say that they can no longer learn; and yet others who don't want to learn, and who try to justify themselves by saying that since in the spirit world they will be able to learn what they need they don't have to worry about it now. For these, we may suggest the following responses:

²¹ TPJS, p.121. May 8, 1838.

²² D&C 88:78

²³ D&C 88:79-81; brackets added.

"Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.²⁴"

"I shall not cease learning while I live, nor when I arrive in the spirit world; but shall there learn with greater facility; and when I again receive my body, I shall learn a thousand times more in a thousand times less time; and then I do not mean to cease learning, but shall still continue my researches.²⁵"

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written ...²⁶"

The Learning Process

The next question is: how do we learn the doctrine of Christ? Instead of trying to suggest a magic formula to help in our learning (we all have at least one), I just want to focus on what attitude we must have to learn. The appropriate attitude is described by two keywords:

"... treasure up in your minds continually the words of life ...²⁷"

"... feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.²⁸"

I like these two keywords: treasure and feast. In the first analogy, based on our knowledge in the fields of Finance, Accounting and Economics, we are reminded of the operations involved in maintaining a treasure: that it must be guarded and accounted for continually; that it must also be wisely invested, so that it won't lose its value in the face of inflation²⁹. Likewise, our knowledge of the doctrine, the law and the principles of the kingdom of God, must be continually assessed; and if we do not use them, we may lose them³⁰.

In the second analogy, we learn that the words of Christ must be taken in great portions, just like the food in a feast (or banquet). President Spencer W. Kimball warned us against the risk of having only small doses of scriptural knowledge:

"We overestimate our scriptural knowledge. I ask us all to honestly evaluate our performance in scripture study. It is a common thing to have a few passages of scripture at our disposal, floating in our minds, as it were, and thus to have the illusion that we know a great deal about the gospel. In this sense, having a little knowledge can be a problem indeed. I am convinced that

²⁴ D&C 130:18-19

²⁵ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.248. March 4, 1860.

²⁶ John 21:25

²⁷ D&C 84:85

²⁸ 2 Nephi 32:3

²⁹ Those who have ever lived in a highly inflationed economy know that the rule is "use it, or lose it."

³⁰ Alma 12:9-11

each of us, at some time in our lives, must discover the scriptures for ourselves--and not just discover them once, but rediscover them again and again.³¹"

As we grow in knowledge and gain further insight, we will find additional meanings to even well-known passages of scripture. Through the guidance of the Holy Ghost³² we may discern which of those additional meanings are correct, for our personal benefit. I believe this can also happen if we try to study the scriptures in depth in a foreign language.

Above all, we should keep in mind these words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject."³³

³¹ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.134. September 1976.

³² Moroni 10:4-5; D&C 9:8-9

³³ TPJS, p. 324. October 9, 1843.

The Blessings of Good Counseling

In the previous chapters I made a couple of references specific to those called to serve in presidencies. And in those instances I used the term "members of presidencies", instead of "presidents." The reason was to avoid the erroneous belief that counselors have a secondary or subordinate role.

Let us understand the honor of serving as a counselor by reminding that "Counselor" is one of the titles attributed to Christ¹. Perhaps this is so because he is our advocate before the Father, and he constantly pleads our cause before the Father. I like to think that as counselors we act another of the Savior's roles.

In the Book of Mormon we find the allegory of the olive trees. In that superb parable the servant of the Lord of the vineyard acts as a counselor: he never makes the final decisions but throughout the parable he offers suggestions of alternative courses of action available to the Lord of the vineyard. And those suggestions saved the vineyard from immediate destruction. If we recognize the servant's actions as those of an advocate, we would understand the servant in the allegory to be a representation of Christ².

Such line of reasoning shows how counselors can represent Christ with their service. But let me stress that counseling also includes those who are not members of presidencies: other church leaders and members are an important source of insights. In fact, whenever I think of good counseling, I remember many great men and women who I observed having active roles in their callings--not all of them as members of presidencies. These individuals' opinions blessed the lives of many whom they served.

How did that happen? Knowingly or not, they followed the admonition of the Lord given to Frederick G. Williams, one of the counselors to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

"Therefore, ... I ... will bless ... thee, inasmuch as thou art faithful in counsel, in the office which I have appointed unto you, in prayer always, vocally and in thy heart, in public and in private, also in thy ministry in proclaiming the gospel in the land of the living, and among thy brethren.

¹ Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6

² See Jacob 5:26-28,33-34,47-51. I wrote "we would understand the servant ... to be a representation of Christ" because since parables have multiple layers of meaning, it would be unwise to make absolute statements about the possible meanings of each particular symbol. For example, in this allegory the servant could also mean a composite personage representing prophets, bishops, parents, etc.

And in doing these things thou wilt do the greatest good unto thy fellow beings, and wilt promote the glory of him who is your Lord.³"

The Role of a Counselor

Counselors are not called to have a subordinate role, but to be actively engaged with their respective presidents in performing miracles. President Harold B. Lee identified the greatest miracle we should promote:

"Today it might well be said that the greatest miracles we see are not the healings of sick bodies, but the miraculous changes that come into the lives of those who become members of the Church ...⁴"

The Lord also instructed President Frederick G. Williams that part of his calling involved the charge to "... succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."⁵

A good symbolic example of the role of counselors in the performance of miracles is found in the Old Testament:

"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun."⁶

In the previous chapters of this book we discussed a number of principles equally important. Anyone would find it difficult to remember all those principles, especially at those crucial hours when they would be more needed--those moments when we find ourselves under tension, and still having to make important decisions dealing that will impact the lives of others. Such are the moments when a wise counsel can be a comfort, and it can help presidents avoid mistakes that could damage the lives of the people.

This presupposes that even though presidents have the responsibility of making the final decisions, counselors should be prepared to make them in as good a manner as the presidents, by gathering pertinent facts--perhaps with a different viewpoint than that of the president, not with the intention of challenging the president, but ensuring that all aspects of the issues are discussed and treated fairly, with no biases or prejudices. In fact, in the minutes of the organization of the first high council, it was established that "... every man is to speak according to equity and justice ... But should the ... councilors ... after hearing the evidences and pleadings impartially, discover an error in the decision of the president, they can manifest

³ D&C 81:3-4

⁴ Stand Ye in Holy Places, p.288

⁵ D&C 81:5

⁶ Exodus 17:8,11-12. Our current scriptural records give few details on how Ancient Israel was organized ecclesiastically. Thus, even though it is so far unclear whether Aaron and Hur were acting as Moses' counselors, still, their performance in the incident described in this passage is an excellent symbolic representation of the role of the counselors.

it, and the case shall have a re-hearing.⁷" It becomes then necessary that counselors speak their minds freely, according to the feelings the Lord puts in their hearts⁸.

How to Receive Counsel

Presidents must look upon being assisted by counselors as a privilege and a blessing⁹. Organizations (or classes, quorums, wards or stakes) will only reap the full benefits of the service rendered by their counselors if their presidents receive counsels and opinions with open ears, minds, and hearts. Open minds are free of strict adherence to pre-conceived ideas (right or wrong ones). Open hearts are free of jealousy and pride, that do not admit either the idea of being counseled or the suggestion that one's ideas might be misguided or wrong.

"Let no man think he is ruler; but let God rule that judgeth, according to the counsel of his own will, or, in other words, him that counseleth or sitteth upon the judgment seat. ... Wherefore, ... seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works.¹⁰"

A president must carefully take into consideration all counsels--especially those he or she might dislike--because the Lord will frequently speak to the president through his or her counselors. Jacob's advice "... seek ... to take counsel from his hand ..." can include those through whom the Lord will speak. So, a wise president will not inhibit his or her counselors' ideas and inspiration by trying to impose his or her (the president's) own ideas. All members of a presidency should ask the Lord to bless them so his word can be manifested through each one of them.

"Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good ...counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel.¹¹"

The Prophet Joseph Smith also pointed to the importance of receiving counsel from more experienced persons: "The way to get along in any important matter is to gather unto yourselves wise men, experienced and aged men, to assist in council in all times of trouble.¹²"

Being assisted in the process of receiving revelations by considering revelations given to others is not a new concept. The Lord rebuked his disciples because at first they didn't believe in the accounts of his resurrection--after all, they were the ones who had received the keys of the Holy Apostleship, and perhaps at that time they thought that no one else could receive revelations: "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven

⁷ D&C 102:16,20

⁸ Helaman 13:3; D&C 8:2-3; 100:5-8

⁹ D&C 102:10. Although this verse refers to the President of the Church, the same may be said to counselors serving in organizations, wards, and stakes, because they represent the presidency of the church in their respective spheres of action.

¹⁰ D&C 58:20; Jacob 4:10

¹¹ Alma 37:37; 39:10

¹² TPJS, p.299. May 14, 1843.

as they sat at meat, and upbraided [i.e. reproached severely; censured] them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.¹³"

Later, Peter was instructed to start the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles in part by a vision he received and in part by an angel's ministering to Cornelius, who was not even a member of the Church at the time¹⁴. Some might say: "but that doesn't mean that this could happen today; perhaps this Cornelius was already a special chosen man." To that I would respond by asking how many chosen people--men, women and children--could be wandering around at this very moment in neighborhoods and cities looking for the true Church of Jesus Christ?¹⁵ And for those who might say: "but this still does not mean that it could happen today; after all, Peter was an Apostle and I am just a" I would respond saying that the difference between us and both ancient and modern prophets is in the breadth of their callings compared to ours.

Let's be clear that presidencies do not receive revelations from the people, as the Prophet Joseph Smith explained:

"... it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church, or any one, to receive instruction for those in authority, higher than themselves; therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them; but if any person have a vision or a visitation from a heavenly messenger, it must be for his own benefit and instruction ...¹⁶"

My intention is to demonstrate that presidencies must listen to the voice of the people for two reasons: first, to become aware of the works the Lord is operating through his other servants; secondly, presidencies also need to receive insights on what they themselves should ask the Lord. In the early days of our dispensation the Prophet Joseph Smith received revelations on issues that had been brought before him by other individuals in the form of questions, concerns, and righteous desires. Answers to direct questions are found, for example, in sections 12, 14, and 77 of the Doctrine and Covenants; an apparently domestic matter originated the Word of Wisdom, in section 89. Even before the Prophet Joseph inquired of the Lord concerning the matter, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris had already been "... moved upon by an inspired desire to be the three special witnesses¹⁷" of the Book of Mormon.

We must remember President Brigham Young's statement that while in mortality we are unable to receive a revelation from God with all its perfections.¹⁸ Therefore, we need the insights provided by those who are associated with us, especially our counselors and fellow servants in our Church assignments, and our spouses in our homes. All can be instruments in leading us to learn something new. Then, through

¹³ Mark 16:14; brackets added with dictionary definition.

¹⁴ Acts 10:9-20,28-35. Notice that the two manifestations complemented each other, like a message divided in two parts in such a way that it only makes sense when the two parts are put together. Notice also that Cornelius' message did not have any direct instruction to Peter (TPJS, p.21 - see next quotation.)

¹⁵ D&C 123:12

¹⁶ TPJS, p.21. April 13, 1833.

¹⁷ D&C 17. Check the headings of all the sections I have listed.

¹⁸ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.40. July 8, 1855. See this quotation in chapter 9, as part of a discussion on the benefits of cultural diversity.

prayer, members of the presidency will obtain the confirmation from the Lord¹⁹ about the truthfulness and appropriateness²⁰ of what they have learned from the people's experiences.

A scriptural account about counseling a presiding officer can be found in the experience Moses had when he followed a suggestion given by his father-in-law, Jethro. I have seen presidencies who didn't allow dialogues of any kind, using the argument that since they had been called by revelation and "were inspired" nobody should ever question their decisions. I wonder what would have happened if Moses had used the same argument when his father-in-law taught him the principle of delegation of authority.

Moses was a Prophet of the Lord and judged the people all day long, apparently wearing himself out in the process. One day Jethro came to visit him. Probably having more years of experience in the priesthood than Moses, Jethro counseled him to delegate some of his tasks and take care only of the more serious cases²¹. Had Moses been an unwise man, he might have said something like this:

'I really appreciate your input, most honorable Jethro. Delegating some tasks is certainly an excellent idea. But since the Lord called me--not you--as his prophet, any new doctrines or new procedures must come through the appropriate channel of revelation. So, as you see, I am forced to disregard your opinion on this subject.

One more thing: Please, I am not trying to sound disrespectful towards you, but I am afraid that this type of attitude--trying to advise a prophet of the Lord--might be harmful to your soul. So please, next time, try not to criticize the work of the Lord's anointed. And by the way, most honorable Jethro, don't forget that I love you.'

What a blessing for Israel of old--and for us--that Moses was "... very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."²² Because of his meekness, he heard the counsel of his father-in-law, pondered on those words, and surely he later consulted the Lord, who then consented on an administrative change that benefitted not only Moses but also all the people.

In the New Testament we can see how the Lord Jesus Christ acted in relation to the opinions of the people: "... Jesus ... asked his disciples, ... Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?²³" I believe that Jesus knew very well what the people thought about him; however, by his questioning the disciples he could also be teaching the necessity of getting to know the people's opinions. But that is not all. Next, he asked the disciples: "... whom say ye that I am?²⁴" Using the same reasoning, we may say that presidencies should also be open to receive feedback from fellow servants.

Two other examples are once more found in the Old Testament. Note that I am quoting two passages of scripture that, at first glance, may make us overlook the important lesson on leadership.

¹⁹ D&C 9:8-9

²⁰ A principle may be true and yet its practice may be inappropriate at a certain point in time. For example, the Law of Consecration.

²¹ Exodus 18:13-24

²² Numbers 12:3

²³ Matthew 16:13

²⁴ Matthew 16:15

In the first passage, Saul, the son of Kish, was looking for his father's lost animals²⁵. At that same time, the Prophet Samuel was looking for the man that the Lord had chosen to be the first king of Israel. The Lord told Samuel that in the next day at a certain hour his chosen man would come before Samuel²⁶. However, instead of inspiring Saul to meet Samuel, the Lord inspired Saul's servant²⁷, maybe because Saul's mind was too occupied with the search for the animals. By listening to his servant, Saul received a blessing greater than finding his father's lost property; he was commanded to care for his Father in Heaven's children²⁸.

The second passage shows what happened before Daniel revealed and interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream. He asked the king for some time and then went home and discussed the matter with his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah²⁹, asking them to "desire mercies of the God of Heaven concerning this secret." Later, Daniel saw the dream in a vision and learned its interpretation³⁰.

Valuing the People's Opinions

President Brigham Young taught that although priesthood ordinations and callings come from the Lord, the authority in the callings comes through the sustaining vote of the people:

"... Joseph presided over the Church, by the voice of the Church. Perhaps it may make some of you stumble, were I to ask you a question—Does a man's being a Prophet in this Church prove that he shall be the President of it? I answer, no! A man may be a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and it may have nothing to do with his being the President of the Church. Suffice it to say, that Joseph was the President of the Church, as long as he lived: the people chose to have it so. He always filled that responsible station, by the voice of the people. Can you find any revelation appointing him the President of the Church? The keys of the Priesthood were committed to Joseph, to build up the Kingdom of God on the earth, and were not to be taken from him in time or in eternity; but when he was called to preside over the Church, it was by the voice of the people; though he held the keys of the Priesthood, independent of their voice.³¹"

This statement shows one of the main differences between leadership in the world and leadership in the kingdom of God. In the world, the leader is at the center, and exercises control over the people. In the kingdom of God a leader is a servant of others³²; he or she is chosen by God and accepted by the people to be a teacher and a motivator, not a taskmaster.

²⁵ 1 Samuel 9:3

²⁶ 1 Samuel 9:15-16

²⁷ 1 Samuel 9:5-10

²⁸ 1 Samuel 9:27; 10:1

²⁹ Doesn't this sound like a priesthood executive committee meeting?

³⁰ Daniel 2:17-18. Notice that it is not recorded how long Daniel and his companions had to wait for an answer from the Lord. They could have waited for hours, days, or even weeks until their request was finally granted. Also notice in verses 27-30 how Daniel bore his testimony before the king, publicly acknowledging the hand of the Lord in that miracle.

³¹ JD, Vol. 1, p.133-134, April 6, 1853. Part of this quotation is also found in Discourses of Brigham Young, p.137.

³² D&C 50:26

Member of presidencies must keep in mind that they are also members of a congregation of saints. Each of us is one among many, and many others could be in our place. Each of us have limitations to overcome and weaknesses to defeat, some of which may even be still unknown to us. We are not better than anyone else in a general sense. One person may not have any problems living the word of wisdom, but another member who struggles to live the word of wisdom may be more effective in forgiving and forgetting than that person, or perhaps he or she spends more time on charitable service. Can we then say that we are better than others based only in the fact that we were called to serve in a presidency? Certainly not.

Presidencies Must Exemplify Unity

Members of a presidency should strive to be one. The Lord commanded: "... be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine."³³ This can be accomplished only through a close relationship of true friendship. The Lord implied that friendship is a higher status of relationship between him and his servants. If we are to follow the Lord's example, we also should become friends:

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."³⁴

This statement also implies that friends will always have an open channel of communication with the Lord. We can also consider the words of President Wilford Woodruff:

"It is my duty to have fellowship with God, as weak an instrument as I am in the hands of God. It is my duty to have power with God. And when I have this, then my counselors should stand by me and with me. We should be of one heart and mind in all matters, temporal and spiritual, that come before us in the labor of the Church and kingdom of God ... with every organization in this Church ... There should be union. There should be no discord, no disunion. If there is, the Lord is not pleased with it, and we are hindered in our work."³⁵

Working together as friends must be one of the goals of any presidency. As we approach that status, we will be more confident to delegate, because we will know each other and have sufficient trust. Sometimes presidents are afraid of delegating tasks to their counselors because of that old concern with perfection, with having things done "our way". President Ezra Taft Benson identified some of the reasons why we may fail in our efforts to delegate:

"... failing to delegate enough, delegating by formula, failing to keep communication lines open, failing to define the assignment, failing to make the assignment stick, failing to delegate enough authority to do the job, being too narrow in your delegation, and failing to allow for mistakes. Theodore Roosevelt said, 'The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.'³⁶

President Spencer W. Kimball's exhortation towards unity is also clear:

³³ D&C 38:27

³⁴ John 15:14-15

³⁵ Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, p.89. 1890.

³⁶ Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.379

"Use counselors. Mission presidents and stake presidents and ward bishops, do not ever say 'I: I will do this; I'm going to do this; I've decided this.' The Lord gave you all two counselors, and it is always 'We made this decision; we decided to do this.' Recognize your counselors, give them opportunities also to develop, and if you ignore them, you are hardly worthy to be the executive.³⁷"

After All This, Are We Free From Error?

Truth is broader, more detailed, more intricate than we can imagine. Our mortal comprehension is far from fully understanding the Lord's paths. We have already mentioned what the Lord said through Isaiah, "... my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ...³⁸", and we remember once again President Brigham Young's teaching about our inability to receive perfect revelations from God³⁹. Now, regarding this same subject the Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"... the things of God are of deep import; and [only] time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can ... find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity--thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.⁴⁰"

These words indicate that we cannot understand all the implications or visualize the full extent of the consequences of every decision we make as members of presidencies. The analogy of the prism⁴¹ suggests that because of our diverse backgrounds--different upbringing, different national or regional cultures, and different life experiences--each one of us will tend to see only a few aspects of a particular subject, but not all aspects. When making decisions as a presidency, the insights provided by good counselors can increase our understanding of the potential consequences of our actions.

But can we say that this is enough? Can we say that a presidency will always have enough information to make wise decisions? The answer is "No." We should therefore be open to more opinions, to more points of view; we should have an open channel to listen to what the members are saying and feeling, although at the same time not delaying our decisions to the point of paralyzing the work.

Many times I have seen instances where presidencies made mistakes because they were not sensitive to the feelings of the people. Our decisions in this mortal stage will always be somewhat imperfect because of our fallen condition. But if we honestly do our best the Lord will justify our actions and use his power to avert any potentially negative consequences, for the kingdom's sake. Doing our best involves listening and understanding the feelings and the contrary opinion of others. We were called as members of presidencies to represent the Lord, not to be the Lord. So, if a member of our stake, ward, organization or quorum didn't understand the basis of a certain decision, it is appropriate to sit down and talk about it using the scriptures. The time spent in this conversation can become a time of learning and edification for both persons.

³⁷ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.488. March 9, 1975.

³⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9

³⁹ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.40

⁴⁰ TPJS, p.137. March 25, 1839. Brackets added.

⁴¹ Mentioned in chapter 9 as part of a discussion on the benefit of diverse cultural backgrounds.

In other instances I saw individuals even sitting down to talk, but the presiding officer wouldn't use the scriptures. If one uses only earthly learning--without the Spirit of the Lord--to explain a decision, then he or she would better re-evaluate the decisions being made. Where the Spirit of the Lord is present there is edification, understanding and rejoicing⁴². Where the Spirit is not present discord, argument, backbiting, loss of spirituality, and inactivity usually follow.

We should always remember the responsibility placed on us when sitting in council, by pondering on these words of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

"... no man is capable of judging a matter, in council, unless his own heart is pure; and ... we frequently are so filled with prejudice, or have a beam in our own eye, that we are not capable of passing right decisions. ... Our acts are recorded, and at a future day they will be laid before us, and if we should fail to judge right and injure our fellow-beings, they may there, perhaps, condemn us; there they are of great consequence, and to me the consequence appears to be of force, beyond anything which I am able to express. Ask yourselves, brethren, how much you have exercised yourselves in prayer since you heard of this council; and if you are now prepared to sit in council upon the soul of your brother."⁴³

⁴² D&C 50:22-23

⁴³ TPJS, p.69. February 12, 1834.

Section 5

Spiritual Administration

In this section we will address two questions often asked: the first is to where to draw the line between spiritual and temporal matters in our service. The second deals with the role of organizations, quorums, and classes in fulfilling the mission of the Church, and we will address that question by discussing the principle of correlation.

Speaking about the organization of the church, President Joseph F. Smith taught the following:

"No house would be a house of order if it were not properly organized, as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is organized. Take away the organization of the Church and its power would cease. Every part of its organization is necessary and essential to its perfect existence. Disregard, ignore, or omit any part, and you start imperfection in the Church ...

[Bear] in mind that the temporal and the spiritual are blended. They are not separate. One cannot be carried on without the other, so long as we are here in mortality. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the earth is a physical organization as well as a spiritual organization. We need practical faith--that is, we need to practice the principles of our faith. Without the practice of the principles of the gospel, we can never realize our hopes and expectations concerning the results of this great latter-day work.¹"

¹

Gospel Doctrine, p.149 (April 1915), 208 (October 1900) Brackets added

Administration and Ministration

Our service in the Church of Christ involves two dimensions: a temporal or material and a spiritual dimension. And so we have a number of leadership activities and procedures that will involve administration and ministration. Some still debate the question of which of those two activities--ministration or administration--would take precedence. Instead of selecting a winning side, I propose that we are dealing with the two sides of the same coin: we should minister while administering, and administer in order to minister effectively.

As a former bishop and member of several priesthood executive committees at ward and stake levels I am well aware of the many statistical data we have to keep track of monthly, quarterly, and annually. I am also aware of the many planning and evaluation meetings, the many interviews to be conducted, and the many programs and activities to be managed. However, without the knowledge gained in the scriptures and by personal revelation we may run the risk of engaging in those necessary activities without a vision of how our reports, meetings and interviews fit in the plan of salvation. In the book of Proverbs we find the following: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."¹

Administrative Functions As Spiritual Activities

While conducting our meetings, preparing our reports, or performing other administrative functions in the Church of Christ, we are expected to put in practice the principles of the gospel. We do so by exercising the prayer of faith in the performance of our responsibilities², by repenting of our mistakes, and by seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost through the weekly partaking of the sacrament, continuous prayer and study of the scriptures. Without a vision of how the basic principles of the gospel relate to our "temporal" duties in the church, our administrative tasks will have no apparent connection with the "spiritual life" of the gospel, and we may tend not to feel the sacredness of these tasks, thus eliminating part of our joy in the performance of our duties--an essential part of our experience as servants.

In the Church of Christ all administrative functions must be conducted under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord. In all these activities we are helping build His eternal kingdom. The Lord said: "... all

¹ Proverbs 29:18. Some translations may use other words instead of "vision." For example, in the Portuguese translation of the Bible this passage reads: "Where there is no *prophecy*, the people perish ..." Keil and Delitzsch, in their "Commentary on the Old Testament" (6:25) translated this verse from Hebrew into German, and here is the English version of the first part of the verse: "Without *revelation* a people becomes ungovernable ...".

² See chapter 2 for a discussion on the prayer of faith.

things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal ... for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal ...³"

Now, let's reexamine one of our administrative functions, secretarial work⁴, under a spiritual perspective. This is considered by many as an essentially bureaucratic assignment. I heard individuals say that there is nothing spiritual in serving as a ward clerk or as a secretary in Primary. However, it is in part because of assignments like these that our meetings, ordinances (including baptisms, confirmations, the temple endowments and sealings) are validated or sealed in heaven. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following about the mechanics of the sealing power:

"... whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven, and whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven; ... It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of--a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven. Nevertheless, in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation, ... this power has always been given. Hence, whatsoever those men did in authority, in the name of the Lord, and did it truly and faithfully, and kept a proper and faithful record of the same, it became a law on earth and in heaven, and could not be annulled, according to the decrees of the great Jehovah ...⁵"

Without records members of the Church cannot enjoy the full privileges of membership, like service assignments or temple attendance. In fact, in the early history (19th century) of the restored Church we find that a number of Saints crossed the plains without any records. Fleeing murderous mobs some left behind valuable objects and documents, including membership and ordination certificates. Because of that many had to be rebaptized and also reordained to the priesthood, so that they could once again have in their possession records that would prove their membership and priesthood offices.

But far more important than proving membership and office is the fact that with these records our ordinances are validated or sealed in heaven. So we see how spiritually influential the work of a secretary or a clerk is in the plan of salvation.

Now, let's consider another important aspect of this issue--organizational "memory." There is an enormous amount of information and wisdom accumulated in the history of our stakes, wards, organizations, classes, and quorums. Information about problems that had to be faced and how they were solved using the faith and prayers of those who occupied positions of leadership over the years. I believe that any stake with two or more years of existence has enough information to help a brand new stake presidency solve dozens of initial problems.

Yet, quite often in newly organized (or reorganized) stakes, wards and organizations, the new presidencies have to learn how to carry out their duties mostly by themselves. While it is true that the Lord helps us, it is also true that whatever help he has given to a former presidency would help a new presidency become effective much faster. And not only that: by learning through accounts of previous experiences, the new presidencies can be even more effective than the ones before them, thus helping the Lord bless that organization, quorum, ward, or stake with additional light and knowledge--instead of blessing them over and over again with the same level of knowledge.

³ D&C 29:34-35

⁴ In the last section of this chapter I will make an analysis of our administrative meetings under a spiritual perspective.

⁵ D&C 128:8-9. See also Matthew 16:19; Revelation 20:12,15; D&C 132:7

Church Leaders Are Ministers

As presidencies and leaders in general we are servants, and part of the time we are ministering servants. Our responsibility is to help others find--or maintain themselves in--the path that leads to the presence of the Lord. During this mortal journey most of the members of the human family have little or no idea of the steps necessary be on the path that leads to the celestial kingdom. There are people throughout the world--our neighborhoods included--who live their whole lives without ever getting that information. Once we accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ we receive the first four key pieces of information: who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going--or should go. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits."

So, we know: (1) that we are spiritual sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents⁶; (2) that we lived with them as spirits at a previous and glorious stage of existence, before coming to this earth⁷; (3) that we are here as part of a perfect plan to prepare ourselves for yet another, far more glorified stage of existence⁸; and (4) that we have the possibility of living with our Heavenly Parents again in a stage of indescribable glory⁹. And we know that it is through Jesus Christ and the blessings of the atonement that we can achieve that future exalted stage, and that His doctrine¹⁰ outlines the steps we need to take to get there.

However, not all the details are given at first, and we may desire answers to additional questions like: Why have we come at this specific time and place? What specific role do we have in the Lord's plan? We will receive additional answers through the regular study of the scriptures and the words of the living prophets, and also through our patriarchal blessings¹¹ and the symbolic representations introduced in the temple endowment.

All these pieces of information combined will form a "map" to guide us to the presence of the Lord. However, at first this map will not be completely open in front of us, but it will be unfolded slowly and continuously as we live our lives. Since each one of us is unique, there are no two identical maps; while the scriptures and the temple endowment are the same for all of us, our patriarchal blessings are not

⁶ Hebrews 12:9; Moses 3:5; 6:51

⁷ Jeremiah 1:4-5; Abraham 3:22-23

⁸ Alma 34:32; Abraham 3:24-26. TPJS, p.354. April 7, 1844.

⁹ D&C 76:50,58-62,69-70,89-95; 132:20

¹⁰ See chapter 12 for a discussion on the doctrine of Christ.

¹¹ The patriarchal blessing is a prophetic declaration that manifests the word of the Lord for a particular individual. It *may* include counsels, warnings, promises, and information regarding the past, the present, and the future of the individual. We might call it a customized book of revelation.

identical¹². Our individual roles or missions in this life may look very similar; for example, we may learn that the Lord wants us to preach the gospel and give comfort to others. But since we have been blessed with different gifts, skills, and circumstances, our individual missions will show countless unique details that will not be applied to everybody else's maps.

As ministering servants we can encourage others to receive their patriarchal blessings and their own endowments, and we can also persuade them to continue attending the temple as regularly as they can, and to ponder and pray about their "maps." This exercise is too sacred to be discussed in public, and no efforts should ever be made to change that.

One complicating factor is that at times we may receive parts of our maps that have nothing in it; or even non-contiguous parts that will be close to each other but with a blank space between them. In these situations, we have to exercise our individual faith to deduct what the missing part of our map would look like and connect it to the other two parts. The way to do it is to observe the patterns that the Lord has already shown us in the past. These are chances that the Lord gives us to make our own decisions and act as if we were Him. President Brigham Young taught the following: "At Nauvoo, Joseph dedicated another temple ... He knew what was wanted ... He needed no revelation then, of a thing he had long experienced ... It is only where experience fails, that revelation is needed."¹³

Sometimes we have the knowledge necessary to connect two parts of our maps but we may not be aware that we possess it. These are often strenuous times, and one may spend days, weeks, even months struggling with a particular problem. As ministering servants, especially as home or visiting teachers, we must detect those who are passing through these difficult times—and all of us will certainly pass through this type of experience many times during our mortal lives. We must be ready to provide support, encouragement, and prayers of faith in behalf of those who are passing through these phases. This support and encouragement should not be expressed only through a few handshakes and pats on the back. We have to get involved as far as it is convenient to the individuals being assisted, thus helping those persons find in their own memories the pieces of their maps that are apparently missing.

We can use the prayer of faith¹⁴ to ask for the Lord's direct intervention when dealing with matters beyond our capacity to resolve. Therefore, in such occasions we may help others by searching the scriptures with them so that they can find the connections between the information found in their patriarchal blessings and in their own experiences. Again, I stress that we should only assist them, allowing them to ponder and decipher the logical connections by themselves, and so avoid dependency and promote self-reliance. President Ezra Taft Benson wrote:

"... the time a leader spends in personal contact with members is more productive than time spent in meetings and administrative duties. Personal contact is the key to converting ..."¹⁵

¹² Pondering about the meanings of the symbols presented in the endowment is a sacred and private activity; it should never be discussed in public. However, this knowledge alone won't take us anywhere if we don't stop regularly to consider the "big picture." Some of the questions we must regularly ask ourselves are: what direction are my current decisions and actions pointing me to? Does this direction match the picture my individual map is suggesting so far?

¹³ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.416. April 6, 1853.

¹⁴ See chapter 2 for a discussion on the prayer of faith.

¹⁵ Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.147. April 3, 1981.

Yet, after all our lifelong efforts there will still be missing parts in our maps. It is possible that we will not have our maps completely unfolded in this life, because our temporary imperfect nature will not allow us to have perfect knowledge of all things. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that there are things about our exaltation that will only be learned in the spirit world:

"When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel--you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.¹⁶"

There are still other parts of our eternal lives about which we have little knowledge. Clearly those areas impact our lives, but complete revelations about them are not going to be given us in this mortal stage. They might refer to our pre-mortal activities or our prospective celestial projects, but I will not speculate about this. President Brigham Young said the following: "You may ask me whether the leaders of this Church have received all their endowment blessings. I think that we have got all that you can get in your probation, if you live to be the age of Methuselah."¹⁷

We may also consider these words from President Heber C. Kimball: "Have we got through with our endowments? No, we have not; we have only just commenced, merely received the initiative ordinances, and we are only children in these things yet, but if we are faithful, we shall receive all that our hearts can desire, for the Almighty will withhold no good things from them that love him and keep his commandments."¹⁸

When trying to interpret symbolic representations of eternal realities, we should ask ourselves if we are just trying to satisfy our curiosity without the commitment to refine our obedience. If that is the case we will not receive additional knowledge from the Lord. He said: "... I, the Lord, am not pleased with those among you who have sought after signs and wonders for faith, and not for the good of man unto my glory. ... I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. ... And to them will I reveal all mysteries ..."¹⁹

Administrative Meetings as Spiritual Activities

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how an administrative function like secretarial work should be seen as a spiritual activity. Now we will focus on our meetings—but not our Sunday services, because one can clearly recognize those meetings as spiritual exercises through which we worship the Lord and are spiritually renewed. Instead, let's discuss the spiritual component of our administrative meetings: ward or stake correlation and welfare councils, priesthood executive committees, and all presidency meetings²⁰.

¹⁶ TPJS, p.348. April 7, 1844.

¹⁷ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.396. October 6, 1863. For those who may not remember, the Bible states that Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

¹⁸ JD, Vol.10, p.75, October 6, 1862

¹⁹ D&C 63:12; 76:5,7-8

²⁰ I will propose some further insights about our correlation meetings in chapter 15.

All our activities in the Church of Christ must be done in order²¹ and should have a purpose related to the mission of the Church. Our administrative meetings are opportunities to discuss and plan how the different elements of our Sunday services, lessons, talks, firesides, and occasional social activities can be used to help us all draw nearer to the Lord through spiritual and social experiences. In other words, how to use lessons, hymns, prayers, special talks, lessons, visual aids, films, etc. to help our congregations feel the power of the Holy Ghost and be strengthened by that experience.

So, even our administrative meetings deal with an essentially spiritual matter: how to invite the Spirit of the Lord into our meetings and, by extension, into the homes of both members and non-members of the Church. Whatever apparently temporal matters we discuss in our meetings must be addressed with this spiritual goal in mind²².

²¹ D&C 88:119; 132:8

²² Needless to say that all the members of the presidency must counsel with the Lord through the prayer of faith. Before the meetings we should ask for guidance and wisdom; after the meetings we should ask for the Lord's approval of our decisions and plans of action.

Effective Correlation

A correlation council: a bishopric (or stake presidency) and the presidents of the organizations and quorums meet together and combine their resources to fulfill the mission of the church. We can also borrow the "concept" of a correlation council and extend it to any gathering of the leaders of an organization, quorum, or class.

Somehow some of us still struggle with the idea of correlation. We spend most of our meetings dealing with calendars, paperwork, and fail to address the needs of the people. All that change as the presidencies of the organizations and quorums gain a vision of the Church as a kingdom with many interrelated departments and functions, and understand the spiritual nature¹ of the work they are performing.

The Purpose of Correlation

In the revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord suggested that the service performed in his house could not be improvised:

"Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer ... fasting ... faith ... learning ... glory ... order, a house of God² ... Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.³ ... Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon. But verily, thus saith the Lord, let not your flight be in haste, but let all things be prepared before you ...⁴"

The idea then is to use our administrative meetings to plan how to use our resources to accomplish the mission of the church. So in these meetings we can define how to use our material resources (talks, hymns, prayers, lessons, visual aids, plays, special activities etc.) to invite the Spirit of the Lord to our worship services and into the lives of those we have been assigned to serve.

¹ See chapter 13 for a discussion on the spiritual nature of our seemingly bureaucratic functions.

² D&C 88:119

³ D&C 132:8

⁴ D&C 133:14-15

The next step is to determine who among our human resources (stake and full-time missionaries, visiting teachers, home teachers, or other regularly or specially assigned individuals,) will "give life" to those material resources we have chosen to use, and who will be responsible to invite both members and non-members to attend the activities we are planning. Since we may--and that's especially true in areas where the Church is still new--have a limited number of individuals available to perform these services, in our planning meetings we must also carefully consider how to delegate and assign these duties wisely.

Councils in the Church of Christ are fully productive only when their members are united in faith. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught the order that existed in the councils of the ancient days:

"I had never set before any council in all the order in which it ought to be conducted, which, perhaps, has deprived the councils of some or many blessings. ... in ancient days councils were conducted with such strict propriety, that no one was allowed to whisper, be weary, leave the room, or get uneasy in the least, until the voice of the Lord, by revelation, or the voice of the council by the Spirit, was obtained, which has not been observed in this Church to the present time. It was understood in ancient days, that if one man could stay in council, another could; and if the president could spend his time, the members could also; but in our councils, generally, one will be uneasy, another asleep; one praying, another not; one's mind on the business of the council, and another thinking on something else."⁵

"... could we all come together with one heart and one mind in perfect faith the veil might as well be rent today as next week, or any other time ..."⁶

We can see that the degree of unity among the members of a council will determine the continuity and the strength of their spiritual experiences. Those experiences will in turn impact the quality of the decisions they will make. Therefore, it is important that all members of a council strive to let the spirit of revelation flow by having their thoughts and prayers focused on the matters to be discussed.

A Correlation Agenda

A good idea to help us all focus our thoughts and guide our prayers is to give each member of the council an agenda of the topics to be discussed in an upcoming meeting. Each member of the council should have a copy of the agenda. At the end of this chapter I included an old agenda I used years ago when I served as a bishop. Its purpose was to serve as a "schoolmaster," helping all members of the ward council focus their thoughts on the several aspects of the mission of the Church.

Revelation comes after pondering⁷. An agenda continually reminds us the topics that must occupy our minds as leaders. Should the Primary be involved in preaching the gospel? Most certainly--after all, children also have non-member friends. Should the Relief Society be involved in family history? You answer this one.

We must remember that the Ward Mission Leader and the High Priests Group Leader are just coordinators of, respectively, the missionary and the temple work in the ward. The concern and the initiative for missionary and for genealogical activities may come from every organization and quorum. Every organization and quorum is partly responsible for carrying out the mission of the Church--preaching the gospel, perfecting the saints, and redeeming the dead. When a bishopric coordinates all organizations and

⁵ TPJS, p.69. February 12, 1834.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.8. October 25, 1831.

⁷ 1 Nephi 11:1; Moroni 10:3-5

quorums to work as a team in all aspects of the mission of the Church their activities become interrelated. That is what correlation is all about.

This term, "interrelated" (or "interdependent") also implies that all organizations and quorums are equally important. All need each other; and all are equally necessary to the building up of the kingdom of God, so far as the current status of things is concerned. For example, the father in a less-active family will be the focus for the Elders Quorum or the High Priests Group⁸; the mother will be the focus for the Relief Society; the youth, the for Young Men or Young Women; the children, for the Primary. The organizations will work in partnership for the benefit and salvation of the family.

At first the use of a correlation agenda may be close to disastrous: we sometimes get so used to talking about the shortage of chalk, or about the noise of the children, or about the number of flowers to be bought to the next ward social, that the change of subjects from purely temporal to temporal with a spiritual focus may leave some of us speechless. Don't be surprised if in the first meetings nobody has any subject to correlate. Be patient, allow some time for the council to ponder on those topics, and then wait for the results. How can we be sure that positive results will come? Simple. This is the Lord's work.

Members of presidencies can help other leaders find the issues to be correlated during regular interviews. We may also use formal committees (especially in the Relief Society and in the Quorums) appointed to gather information on each specific area of the agenda. For example, in one meeting the presidency may decide to assign certain individuals to find information about unlisted job openings or low-cost educational opportunities available in the community. This information will later be shared with the other council members, who will in turn use it to help ward members in their efforts to become self-reliant.

At first, the idea of these committees can be a little confusing to some people, especially those who like to do everything "their way," but when we realize how independent we can be to organize these committees and also when we envision the potential benefits in the lives of the members, we start to get enthusiastic, and soon our meetings will become more effective, and the Spirit will also be poured more abundantly on the lives of the people.

The Role of the Auxiliary Organizations

Some of the church's organizations are called "auxiliaries" because they help the priesthood carry out the mission of the church. We should be careful with the term "auxiliary", since in some languages and cultures it carries the connotation of "secondary." They are of no lesser importance in the Church of Christ, and their objective is the same as the priesthood's: "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man⁹." The words of President Spencer W. Kimball, referring to the Relief Society, help us catch the correct vision:

"Relief Society complements priesthood training. The Relief Society is the Lord's organization for women. It complements the priesthood training given to the brethren. There is a power in this organization that has not yet been fully exercised to strengthen the homes of Zion and build the kingdom of God--nor will it until both the sisters and the priesthood catch the vision of Relief Society.¹⁰"

Therefore, a discussion of which organization would be the most important, or would have priority over the others is useless. All organizations and programs are equally important, and if we deal with

⁸ Yes, High Priests can also become less-active if not properly cared for.

⁹ Moses 1:39

¹⁰ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.498. March 1976.

them without assigning ranks we will begin to visualize in an infinitesimal scale how the Lord works in eternity:

"He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever."¹¹

A Sample Ward Council Meeting Agenda

- ◆ Invocation
- ◆ Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting
- ◆ General Business: Calendar and Budget Review

Missionary Work (Counsel)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Status Report <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Names and Status of Investigators 1.2 Council Members' Visits to Investigators with the Missionaries 2. Missionary Support <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Referrals 2.2 Fellowshiping New Members and Investigators 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Missionary Activities and Programs <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Special Meetings or Firesides 3.2 Expositions 3.3 Distribution of Scriptures, etc. 4. Community Service & Public Relations 5. Prospective Missionaries 6. Information About Ward Members on Missions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Council Letters to Missionaries
----------------------------------	--	---

Temporal Welfare (Assists)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temporal Welfare <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Current Welfare Needs 1.2 Health Concerns 1.3 Educational Opportunities 1.4 Employment Opportunities 1.5 Home Storage 2. Spiritual Welfare <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Special Needs 2.2 Ordinances and Ordinations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Members' Activity <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Attendance in Meetings 3.2 Report on Retention of New Converts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.2.1 New Convert Checklist 3.3 New Callings and Assignments 3.4 Service Projects to Solve Members' Temporal Needs 3.5 Future Social Activities (cultural and sports)
-----------------------------------	---	--

Family History & Temple Work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family History <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Report on Family History Activities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1.1 Journals or Oral Histories & Books of Remembrance 1.1.2 Status of Extraction of Names 1.1.3 Submission of Names for Temple Work 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Temple Work <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Temple Attendance 2.2 Upcoming Temple Excursions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2.1 Financial Assistance for Temple Patrons 2.3 Progress of Temple Preparation Seminar
---	--	---

- ◆ Review Assignments to Council Members and Organizations
- ◆ Benediction

Section 6

The Exercise of Leadership

In the previous sections we dealt with personal qualities to be developed or acquired, weaknesses to be avoided, and knowledge--or vision--to be obtained about the true doctrine and about the roles of the several administrative functions in the Church of Christ. In this last section of this study we will examine the execution of leadership actions.

How do we exercise leadership? Based on the teachings contained in the scriptures and in the writings of latter-day prophets we conclude that leading includes several actions. From a long list of leadership actions, we will discuss the following: emulating the Lord; purifying our desires; constant attention to our environment; honest evaluation of our performance; and careful preparation for release.

This last section is a synthesis of the principles discussed in the previous ones. Here we will also address the idea that while engaged in leading others towards the Lord sometimes things may not work the way we expect them to, even when following the right procedures.

*Serving the Lord
in the Latter Days*

A glorious prophecy about the last days conceals an important insight on the responsibility of all those serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.¹"

The idea in these verses is simple, but one question remains: When, in all the history of humankind, did the Lord himself come down to earth to teach the people of many nations? Before you answer, "during Christ's mortal ministry, in the meridian of times", let me remind you that at that time he came to teach only the Israelites², leaving the remaining nations to be taught by his disciples³. From the scriptures now available to us we see that the pattern of his actions was to come and introduce a new dispensation himself, and then appoint those who would represent him in carrying the work forward⁴. We can safely conclude that the same is going to happen when those scriptures recorded by Isaiah and Micah are fulfilled.

Church leaders are some of the Lord's legitimate representatives because of the authority they received when set apart to serve. These latter-day Elders and Sisters are the persons whom the nations of the world will seek to learn the Lord's ways--by learning His true doctrine--and to walk in the Lord's paths--by obeying His commandments and receiving His ordinances. These representatives are the ones who will

¹ Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4

² Matthew 15:24

³ 3 Nephi 15:22-23

⁴ Exodus 3:8,10; Isaiah 6:8; D&C 138:28-30

"judge among many people," perhaps by helping them resolve their sometimes centuries-old feuds. And they may "rebuke strong nations" by proclaiming repentance from their sins and from any improper practices.

To fulfill our duties as the Lord's representatives we have to become an educated people, not only in spiritual and eternal matters, but also in temporal matters⁵. Above all, we have to emulate the Lord at all times and in all circumstances--in and out of the Church. To do so we must strive to know the Lord--to really understand his personality, his character, and his attributes⁶. Is that difficult? Yes, but not impossible; and if we can feel this difficulty we probably understand what the Lord meant when he said: "... behold how great is your calling ..."⁷

Representing the Lord

If we are to represent the Lord before the people we must start by trying to do what the Lord would do if he were among us. When the Lord gave the Prophet Joseph Smith instructions regarding the operation of the School of the Prophets, he listed a number of actions that presidents and teachers should perform:

"And this shall be the order of the house of the presidency of the school: He that is appointed to be president, or teacher, shall be found standing in his place ... he shall be first in the house of God, in a place that the congregation in the house may hear his words carefully and distinctly, not with loud speech. And when he cometh into the house of God, for he should be first in the house--behold, this is beautiful, that he may be an example--Let him offer himself in prayer upon his knees before God ... And when any shall come in after him, let the teacher arise, and ... salute his brother or brethren ..."⁸

Although some of the actions prescribed in this passage are not applicable outside the School of the Prophets, we can still properly follow part of this standard in our stakes, wards, organizations and quorums. As church leaders we can arrive early in our meetinghouses and offer a prayer perhaps asking the Lord for the blessings of forgiveness, wisdom, spirituality, and asking for some specific blessings⁹ to be bestowed that day--those miracles that would bless the lives of others and help them draw closer to the Lord. We can take the time to greet our brothers and sisters and spend some time with them--instead of locking ourselves in a room. We can use these moments to learn some important things by listening to the experiences of others. And since the world in the latter days is full of confusion, we can also use these conversations in the foyers to convey faith in the Lord, hope, confidence, and the recognition of the blessings received. "Therefore, strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings"¹⁰

The requirements for service in the kingdom of God are many, and we sometimes may feel overwhelmed by them. However, we should never get discouraged. The opportunity to serve the Lord, especially in a leadership capacity, is an opportunity to be molded by the Lord.

⁵ See chapter 12 for a discussion on the kinds of knowledge to be acquired.

⁶ See chapter 12 for a discussion on the knowledge of God.

⁷ D&C 112:33

⁸ D&C 88:128-132

⁹ See chapter 2 for a discussion on the use of the prayer of faith in the performance of assignments.

¹⁰ D&C 108:7

To render service is to sacrifice time, talents and other temporal means. An analysis of how sacrifices were offered in ancient days may give us an idea on how we should sacrifice (or serve) today¹¹. Although these specific sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law have been discontinued¹², we are still commanded to live the law of sacrifice by offering as sacrifice broken hearts and contrite spirits¹³.

In the instructions given to Moses¹⁴, animals without blemish were to be offered as sacrifice. With the end of those types of sacrifices we are required to offer our souls to God¹⁵. And the manner we ought to make this offer should follow those same ancient symbolic requirements. So, we offer our feelings, our devotion, and our service. Just like in ancient times these must also be without blemish, or in other words, they must be sound, whole, with no defects; we must offer a firm resolution to love and serve the Lord, the best service we can render, using all the capacity and talents we have been blessed with¹⁶.

Righteous Desires and Attentive Service

If our desires are not righteous our offering of the best of our capacity will not be accepted by the Lord¹⁷. Those who received powers and spiritual gifts in the past received those blessings because their desire was to do the will of the Lord, not to satisfy any selfish desire. Such was the case with Nephi¹⁸, three of the Nephite-Lamanite disciples¹⁹, and John, the Beloved Disciple²⁰. We may remember the example of Ammon and his brethren, who preached the gospel but neither to gain a reward nor to simply keep a commandment. They did so because "... they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble."²¹

¹¹ A full analysis of the symbols involved in the ancient law of sacrifice is beyond the scope of this study. Many scholars have discussed this subject in detail, and the study guides of the Old Testament published by the Church Educational System have excellent quotes from many of these authors. The Bible Dictionary in the appendix of the LDS edition of the Bible is also a very good source.

¹² 3 Nephi 15:4-5,8-10; 9:18-20

¹³ 3 Nephi 9:20; D&C 64:22,34

¹⁴ Leviticus 1:2-3,10; 2:1,4,11,13

¹⁵ Omni 1:26

¹⁶ Extending this analogy a little further, we would perform this service accompanied with bread made with fine flour (the bread being a symbol of Christ, his law and truth, and the fine flour suggesting to us purity, refinement, and superior quality); a service blended with oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit or of spiritual strength), salt (a symbol of a covenant of friendship between the Lord and us, and of the preservation of our eternal life through that covenant), frankincense (a symbol of prayer), without leaven (a symbolism for worldly contamination). See Matthew 16:6,12; Matthew 25:1-4,8-9; John 6:35,48-50; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4; D&C 45:56-57.

¹⁷ D&C 4:2; 137:9

¹⁸ Helaman 10:4-12

¹⁹ 3 Nephi 28:6-10. We don't know whether these brethren were Nephites or Lamanites. Mormon and Moroni call them "three disciples."

²⁰ John 21:20-23; D&C 7

²¹ Mosiah 28:3

The formula to obtain this pure desire resides in having our eyes "single to the glory of God"²² or in other words, in not seek our own glory (praise, promotion, or potential temporal or spiritual rewards), but seek our Heavenly Father's glory²³. We must be particularly careful with those who approach us with flattery²⁴. Those engaged in obeying the will of the Lord don't need to flatter others.

After obtaining this desire we should be extremely attentive. Many times we will be near those who will be screaming for help in a way that we may tend to misunderstand. One of my favorite passages in the New Testament tells how blind Bartimaeus was healed by the Savior. This passage may help us understand the concept of being attentive:

"... as [Jesus] went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus ... sat by the highway side begging. ... And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. ... And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. ... And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still ... and commanded him to be brought unto him: ... And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. ... and when he was come near ... Jesus ... asked him ... What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, ... Receive thy sight: ... thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way ... glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.²⁵"

Some individuals in need of a "friendly shoulder" sometimes don't look for those who have been assigned as their servant-leaders because they think these leaders are already "too busy." Others may be rejected by unwise servant-leaders because at first glance their conduct (or their appearance or their clothing) seems inappropriate²⁶. Bartimaeus could have lost the opportunity to receive his sight because some individuals seemed to be telling him: "You can't call him 'Jesus'; you must call him 'Lord' or 'Rabbi'." Or perhaps they were saying "What an irreverent man, screaming like a drunkard! The Lord will never answer the call of someone with such a despicable behavior."

These are the times when we must be alert and sensitive. These are the times when we must look beyond the behavior per se and perceive a precious child of God who might be in extreme pain and anguish. Those are the times to use the gifts that belong to the mantle we have received and bring comfort to such individuals. In some cases, a person will need "... the pleasing word of God ... the word which healeth the wounded soul."²⁷ In other cases, a blessing of counsel and comfort, or simply attentive and patient ears.

Many of us we may face tough circumstances that may leave us either a little depressed, or bitter towards others, or perhaps a little doubtful of whether the Lord really answers our prayers. This is the time

²² D&C 4:5; 82:19; 88:67

²³ Moses 1:39

²⁴ See chapter 10 for a short discussion on how to avoid being influenced by flattery.

²⁵ Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43; brackets added.

²⁶ Matthew 9:10-13; Alma 32:2-5

²⁷ Jacob 2:8

when an alert and sensitive church leader will make all the difference in the world. President Joseph F. Smith, speaking about the responsibilities of the Bishops, taught a lesson that can be extended to all leaders:

"It is expected of a bishop to know all the people in his ward, not only those who are faithful members of the Church, diligent in the performance of their duties and prominent by their good acts, but to know those who are cold and indifferent, those who are lukewarm, those who are inclined to err and to make mistakes; and not only these, but it is expected that the bishops, through their aides in their wards, will become acquainted, not only with their members, male and female, but that they will know also the stranger that is within their gates and be prepared to minister solace, comfort, good counsel, wisdom and every other aid possible to be rendered to those who are in need, whether they are of the household of faith or are strangers to the truth."²⁸

Evaluation and Release

One way to evaluate our service as church leaders—although not a perfect way, since only the Lord is able to evaluate perfectly—is to observe the lives of those individuals we serve, and see the strengthening their faith and testimony. Of course, we cannot judge the success of one's service by this standard alone. For example, Noah's ministry can be considered successful even though as far as we know only seven of his investigators were saved from the great flood.

Some individuals may respond negatively to our service. But that is apparently inevitable, since even the Savior had this experience during his mortal ministry¹. Perhaps some of the saddest experiences we will have in our service will involve those individuals who will not want to come unto Christ to receive the joy that comes through the Spirit of the Lord. Our minds should always be concerned with them and we must always remember them in our prayers, because, as the Lord himself indicated, "... ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them."²

Evaluating Ourselves

The first evaluation we must perform deals with ourselves, both as individuals and as the Lord's representatives. We must evaluate our behavior while serving the people to make sure that we are not becoming stumbling blocks³ to others. As we consider whether our actions as leaders are correct, let us remember this passage of scripture:

"Then Jesus was taken up into the holy city, and the Spirit setteth him on the pinnacle of the temple. Then the devil came unto him and said, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."⁴

¹ John 6:60-61,66-67

² 3 Nephi 18:32; see also verses 28 thru 34.

³ Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Alma 4:10; 39:11-12

⁴ JST Matthew 4:5-7

We must analyze our attitudes and ask ourselves whether we are willingly making mistakes under the assumption that the Lord will fix whatever we do wrong. To do so is to tempt God and to abuse of the principle of justification⁵. Because of our mortal imperfection we will at times make unintentional mistakes. Our misunderstandings, misjudgments, oversights and miscalculations can "... dash (someone else's) foot against a stone."⁶ Therefore, as leaders we have the responsibility of being critical of ourselves before being critical of others. We must study the scriptures, the words of the living prophets and always look for better ways of thinking and judging situations, and above all, we must be open to change.

President Heber J. Grant once had a great experience in connection with change. As a new--and young--Apostle he was faced with a decision of consenting on the rebaptism of a former prominent member. Initially he refused to consent, and when asked why, he told President John Taylor: "... I can tell the Lord that he [the former member] had disgraced this Church enough, and that I did not propose to let any such man come back into the Church ... when a man can lie to the apostles, and when he can be guilty while proclaiming repentance of sin, I think this Church has been disgraced enough without ever letting him come back into the Church."⁷ And he added: "While I live I never expect to consent it if it is left to my judgment." President Taylor replied: "Well, my boy, don't you vote for him as long as you live, while you hold those ideas; stay right with them."

At lunch time he read a passage in the Doctrine and Covenants that said: "Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord. ... I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men."⁸ In his own words he described what happened, and that shows how far we ourselves should be willing to change: "... I closed the book and said: 'If the devil applies for baptism and claims that he has repented, I will baptize him.'⁹"

I also remember the words of the Apostle Paul: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."¹⁰

I am often impressed by the idea of walking in "newness of life". After our baptisms our lives were "new" for a while; but after some time, these "new" lives became old, and we had to change them. That change came because we learned new truths, or new ways of achieving higher or more perfect levels of

⁵ D&C 20:30

⁶ Matthew 4:6; parentheses added.

⁷ Gospel Standards, p.260-261; brackets added.

⁸ D&C 64:9-10

⁹ Gospel Standards, p.261. Narrated in October, 1920. On his return to his office, he told President John Taylor of his change of heart. President Taylor then responded that he wanted Elder Grant "... and some of the younger members of the apostles [to] learn the lesson that forgiveness is in advance of justice where there is repentance; and that to have in your heart the spirit of forgiveness and to eliminate from your hearts the spirit of hatred and bitterness, brings peace and joy; that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings joy, peace and happiness to every soul that lives it and follows its teachings." Brackets added.

¹⁰ Romans 6:1-4

performance in keeping the commandments. This type of change must occur in our lives from time to time, so that we can continue walking in "newness of life".

Again, our leadership calling ask for this type of self-analysis. We need to take a good look at ourselves, and be open to others' comments about us. In my particular case, my wife has always a lot to say about my performance whenever I ask her. I am particularly interested in her words when she answers that I am "ok". She uses this "ok" as a way of saying that although I have been doing my best, I still have to mend a few things. "Already doing my best" is not enough for those who believe in eternal progression and in the possibility of becoming like our Heavenly Father. There is always something better beyond our mortal and imperfect perceptions of what the "best" is.

Evaluating our Service

While evaluating the our service, as well as the service performed by our fellow servants, we must avoid the thought that if something is wrong then we or someone else must be immediately released. Except for situations involving an infirmity, a family problem, or gross wickedness, releases should not be used as a quick-fix.

Our feelings that things are going wrong may sometimes be a consequence of our lack of understanding of the ways of the Lord. We can trace an interesting parallel between our position nowadays and Moses' position during his mortal ministry. Just like him we have also been called to gather the Lord's covenant people out of a spiritual Egypt or Babylon¹¹, and commanded to organize them and lead them into a promised land that we by convention call "celestial kingdom." However, by continuing within this analogy, we also have to acknowledge that not everything will run smoothly: there will be problems caused by our actions, and the miracles sometimes will come only after some tribulation.

When the Lord called Moses, he explained that his mission would not be easy; he told that Pharaoh would let the people of Israel go free only after a show of force¹². By the account in the book of Exodus it is unclear whether Moses told this part of the plan to the Israelites, and he himself was amazed when Pharaoh increased the burdens over the people. We don't know how long the show of force lasted, but it seems that it probably took a rather long time.

Sometimes we get used to seeing films like Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments," in which the plagues over Egypt last (in projection time) just a few minutes. The problem here is that what we see in a motion picture is shown in a compressed-time mode, where the events of an entire month can be shown in 720 frames (or 30 seconds). We don't know exactly how long it took to deliver the Israelites from bondage, but some scholars believe that the plagues over Egypt could have come over a period of six or seven months¹³. During that time, the Israelites were under an increased burden, and they were complaining that Moses had promised one thing and accomplished another. In fact, at first they got so angry that they just didn't accept Moses as a true Prophet¹⁴.

It takes time to deliver a people from bondage; it takes time to help them organize themselves; and it takes time to help lead them into a promised land. There are some inevitable problems: being

¹¹ D&C 1:16; 133:14

¹² Exodus 3:19-20

¹³ Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, pp.1:481,493

¹⁴ Exodus 6:9,12

imperfect, some will leave because of sin; others will misunderstand us, be offended and leave. In other occasions our actions will apparently backfire¹⁵.

We also have to understand that there are two phases in this liberation: first, there is a physical liberation and later, a spiritual liberation. Israel of old was physically liberated when they left the land of Goshen. However, their spiritual liberation took much longer to happen. Some of those folks didn't have enough faith to be liberated while in the flesh, and had to be taken to the spirit world to have the process completed.

Centuries after Moses, in another age of restoration, Nehemiah lived what seemed to be an administrative nightmare: full-time priests leaving their duties in the temple to find jobs, merchants offering their products and the covenant people purchasing them on the Sabbath, among other serious problems¹⁶.

As leaders we must realize that today the process is still, at least in principle, very similar. We are physically liberated when we join the Church of Christ and change our habits, our physical appearance, our activities, our language, etc. The spiritual liberation will come when, like it happened with the brother of Jared, we are "... redeemed from the fall ... and brought back into [the Lord's] presence ..."¹⁷

Preparing to be Released

Inevitably, the day will come when we will be released from our leadership callings, and there are a few acts we should perform in preparation to that event. The word of the Lord to Moses provide a pattern to be followed: "... charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him ..."¹⁸

In most occasions we won't know long beforehand that we are going to be released. Therefore, in these cases the best strategy might be to prepare several of our fellowservants to perform their duties without our presence--by charging, encouraging, and strengthening all of them. This way, when the time to be released comes, there will be no interruption in the work. In those occasions when we will be informed beforehand the date of the release, and also who will replace us, we may not only do what Moses did with Joshua, but we may also try, if convenient, to do what Elijah did to Elisha. Elijah allowed Elisha, his appointed successor¹⁹, to walk with him²⁰ and even to observe him while he worked a great miracle²¹. Right before he was translated, Elijah offered Elisha the opportunity to ask for a blessing:

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And

¹⁵ Exodus 5:22-23

¹⁶ Nehemiah chapter 13.

¹⁷ Ether 3:13; brackets added. See also D&C 67:10-14; 88:63,68; 93:1

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 3:28

¹⁹ 1 Kings 19:16,19

²⁰ 2 Kings 2:1-2,4,6

²¹ 2 Kings 2:8

Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more ...²²"

The result of this strategy was splendid. As soon as Elijah had been translated, Elisha was ready to serve, to the point of performing miracles similar to those performed by Elijah:

"He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."²³"

After the Release

Our attitude after being released from a leadership responsibility is perhaps one of the most meaningful lessons we may teach in the Church of Christ. If we resume our duties as members of the Church humbly--by supporting our successor, and by encouraging others to do so--we will help them feel comfortable and confident in their callings sooner, and we will help those they have been called to serve to trust them faster, thus avoiding undesirable interruptions in the work of the Lord.

Later, we must also avoid the temptation of judging the performance and the quality of the decisions of our successors. We must remember that although the challenges may be the same, surely there will be new aspects, new elements that we may not be aware of; and the Lord will certainly inspire his servants differently than he did with us. As we have discussed before, by no longer possessing the "mantle" of member of a presidency, we will hardly be able to make a righteous judgment.

Our position, then, must be one of unconditional support, so that by our prayers and faith the new leadership may teach us those principles that will enable us to further advance in the knowledge of God and in the doctrine of Christ.

²² 2 Kings 2:9-12

²³ 2 Kings 2:13-15

A Few Final Words

I am sure that while reading or skimming through the chapters of this study you remembered someone who was an example (good or bad) of the principles discussed. Many of us share the trait of looking to others whenever we think about something right or wrong.

If while reading you felt that some of these words were the right ones to someone else, you may mention that you read an interesting manuscript, but don't compel that person to follow these principles. The change that brings salvation can only come when we are truly committed, and if we have no desire to change heated debates will hardly affect us. I did not write this manuscript with the intention of criticizing anyone, but with the intention of sharing some ideas that may lead us, as a people, closer to our Father in Heaven.

I have a testimony that God lives and that Jesus Christ is our Savior and that because of his atoning sacrifice we have this life and a possibility of an eternal life. I know that Joseph Smith Jr. was and still is a Prophet of God and that men are called nowadays as true Apostles and Prophets of the Almighty. I know that the priesthood of God is a real power, having been restored through heavenly ministers. I spent my first six years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without this priesthood, and I could feel a sensible difference in my life after I received the privilege, honor and blessing of being ordained an Elder. I also know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, as well as the Bible. And I am grateful for the blessing given me to be sent to the earth in this great day of miracles.

The Establishment of Zion

We are living in the most glorious period in all the history of humankind. Soon, the millennial kingdom of Christ will be established, and the whole planet will be transformed. What a glorious opportunity we have to serve at this time, when powerful miracles are being performed in preparation to the great events of the near future. I can feel the truth of the Prophet Joseph Smith's words:

"The building up of Zion is ... it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; but they died without the sight; we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory; it is left for us to see, participate in and help to roll forward the Latter-day glory ...²⁴"

This is the time in which Zion will be found throughout the world. In Frankfurt, Recife, Nagoya, Kiev, Porto, Ilorin, Liverpool, Chicago, Pusan, Lyon, Nairobi, Adelaide, Jakarta, Pretoria, Quezon City,

Hong Kong, and in _____²⁵. The establishment of Zion starts with the entrance of the Mormon missionaries in countries around the world. LDS converts throughout the world may be considered the pioneers of the 20th century, since similarly to the American and European pioneers of the 19th century, they are (using familiar American Mormon language and types) crossing the barren plains of apostasy, facing the snowstorms of prejudice, fighting the wolves of temptation, and the militia of anti-mormon sentiment.

Soon, the so-called "Mormonism" will be found literally all over the world; but it will not wipe out local cultures; rather, it will refine, purify, and perfect whatever is good, noble, and virtuous in all cultures. The Lord stated that Zion would "flourish"²⁶, or in other words, blossom or bloom. I don't know in exact details how this is going to happen; on the other hand, the verb "flourish" brings to my mind the sense that Zion will not be established being imposed from the outside, but that it will grow from the inside, like a flower.

In nature we see each kind of flower display variations in color, fragrance, and size--due to different types of soil, quality of nutrients, and other factors--and still maintain their enchantment despite all these variations. Similarly, Zion will be the wonder of the world, but it will not look the same everywhere. The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is sent to the world²⁷ but the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is "built"²⁸, not necessarily "implanted," in every nation. The bureaucratic organization of the church by itself is not the source of salvation, but a tool to help us organize the work in a manner that is efficient and beneficial to the people.

Some prophets have taught that the Latter-day Saints are the leaven of their respective cultures and nations²⁹. If we are to be good leaven, we should keep in mind that leaven makes the dough--not itself--look bigger. Let's consider this prophecy made by the prophet Joseph Smith Jr. about us in these last days:

"The heavenly Priesthood will unite with the earthly, to bring about those great purposes; and whilst we are thus united in one common cause, to roll forth the kingdom of God, the heavenly Priesthood are not idle spectators, the Spirit of God will be showered down from above, and it will dwell in our midst.

The blessings of the Most High will rest upon our tabernacles, and our name will be handed down to future ages; our children will rise up and call us blessed; and generations yet unborn will dwell with peculiar delight upon the scenes that we have passed through, the privations that we have endured; the untiring zeal that we have manifested; the all but insurmountable difficulties that we have overcome in laying the foundation of a work that brought about the glory and blessing which they will realize;

²⁵ Add your own list of places. Remember that it does not matter how many members of the church are currently living in those places. Even if now there are few or no members of the church in those places, the Lord will open the doors to the preaching of the gospel in his own due time.

²⁶ D&C 35:24; 39:13; 49:25; 64:41

²⁷ D&C 1:23

²⁸ D&C 107:33-34

²⁹ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.440. April 13, 1974. See also Gospel Doctrine, p. 74; Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.16

[A] work that God and angels have contemplated with delight for generations past; that fired the souls of the ancient patriarchs and prophets; a work that is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family.³⁰

Bibliography

Church News. Salt Lake City:Deseret News Press.

Journal of Discourses. 26 vols. London:Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86.
Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language - The Unabridged Edition. Edited by
Jess Stein and Laurence Urdang. New York:Random House, Inc., 1973.

The Standard Works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Holy Bible, The
Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Including excerpts
of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Benson, Ezra T.

The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1988. Orem, Utah:Infobases, Inc.,
1992.

Grant, Heber J.

Gospel Standards. Compiled by G. Homer Durham. Salt Lake City:The Improvement Era, 1943.
Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Jenson, Andrew

Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia. 4 vols. 1901-36. Salt Lake City:Western Epics,
1971. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1993.

Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch

Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids:William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,
1983.

Kimball, Spencer W.

The Miracle of Forgiveness. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1969. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Faith Precedes the Miracle. Salt Lake City:Deseret Book Co., 1972.
Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball. Edited by Edward L. Kimball.
Salt Lake City:Bookcraft,1982. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Lee, Harold B.

Stand Ye in Holy Places. Salt Lake City:Deseret Book Co., 1975. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

McConkie, Bruce R.

Mormon Doctrine. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1966. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992

Smith, Joseph F.

Gospel Doctrine. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Smith, Joseph Fielding

Doctrines of Salvation. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. 3 vols. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1954-56. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Smith, Joseph, Jr.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City:Deseret Book Co., 1976. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Lectures on Faith. Salt Lake City:The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,1938. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Snow, Lorenzo

The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow. Compiled by Clyde J. Williams. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1988. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Woodruff, Wilford

Discourses of Wilford Woodruff. Selected by G. Homer Durham. Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1988. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

Young, Brigham

Discourses of Brigham Young. Selected and Arranged by John A. Widtsoe. Salt Lake City:Deseret Book Co., 1941. Orem:Infobases, Inc., 1992.

About the Author



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20th century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master’s degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor’s in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, and now teaches religion at Ricks College.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.