

# A BLESSING HITHER TO UNKNOWN,

## BOOK II, FINDING THE MARK

### How to grow the tree of life in your heart

By Max B. Skousen

## PREFACE

This book is the second in a four part series in which I am sharing a journey of discovery in my own attempt to fulfill the challenge made by President Ezra Taft Benson in 1986 during his first conference as President of the Church. In his landmark address, he reminded the Saints of an important revelation received by Lorenzo Snow on tithing. The dramatic results of President Snow's revelation brought the Church out of financial bondage and transformed its temporal structure. Then, next, President Benson said:

**NOW, IN OUR DAY, the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the *Book of Mormon*, to get the Church and ALL THE CHILDREN OF ZION out from under condemnation, the scourge and the judgment. This message *must* also be carried to the members of the Church throughout the world...**

**Now, in the *authority of the sacred priesthood in me vested*, I invoke my blessing upon the Latter-day Saints and upon good people everywhere...I bless you with *increased understanding of the Book of Mormon*.**

***I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, that God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN – and we will plead to the Lord that He will begin to lift the condemnation – the scourge and judgment. Of this I bear solemn witness.***(Ensign, May 1986, p.78)

As I write this in the 1996, it has been ten years since President Benson announced that thrilling challenge and promise conveyed by the Lord through him to the Church. President Benson continued that theme at each of the five conferences which followed, making six in all, covering the first three years of his presidency.

Then in his next conference, his seventh, he stopped calling the Church out from under its condemnation. To me, it was as if the Spirit had restrained him from saying more, perhaps for the same reason that Nephi said he was stopped. "And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; *the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance*, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, *when it is given unto them in plainness*, even as plain as word can be."<sup>2</sup> (Nephi 32:7)

As we read those harsh words, let's remember that Nephi was not talking about Laman and

Lemuel, nor their followers. He was speaking directly to his own loved ones and faithful followers who were too fearful to join him in entering into a perfect brightness of hope in Christ.

So after six conferences, President Benson spoke no more to the Church about his revelation. Instead, at his seventh conference, he gave some warm encouragement to our senior saints. In his eighth conference, he sent his love and encouragement to the children of the world. As it turned out, that was his farewell public blessing. His deteriorating health ended his extensive speaking career, but not his great love for the Savior, His Church and the Book of Mormon.

### MY TESTIMONY OF RECEIVING A BLESSING HITHERTO UNKNOWN

So what about President Benson's challenge? As for myself, and I am sure many thousands of others, his promise has been fulfilled in our lives beyond our fondest hopes and expectations. My personal testimony is shared in this series of four volumes, titled *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown*.

**Book I, *Looking Beyond the Mark***, is about my discovering that for much of my life I had been living by faith in Christ in *the preparatory way*, i.e. by "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," rather than in the ultimate, *victorious way*, i.e. by the tree of life. Most of *Book I* deals with what I learned from a deeper understanding of the scriptures when I made the shift from one way of experiencing Christ to the other. It is my hope that the reader will have read *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark* before reading this second book because I will be building on the basic principles discussed in that volume.

In contrast, this work, **Book II, *Finding the Mark*** is about the scriptural lessons which show us how to experience greater faith by, as Alma says, looking forward to the promised fruit which grows on Christ's precious tree of life – which tree we are to let the Savior grow in our very own hearts. These lessons have to do with obtaining a clearer understanding of the miraculous nature of the *mark*, which I believe to be Christ's *gift of His pure and perfect love* which the Father *sheds* into the hearts of ALL WHO ARE TRUE FOLLOWERS OF HIS SON. (Moroni 7:48)

That love is symbolized by the beautiful tree of life which Lehi, Nephi and Joseph Smith, Sr. saw in their visions. (1 Nephi 11:21-23, & Lucy Mack Smith's History of Joseph Smith, p) *Book II* is designed to clearly identify the true mark (target) to which sanctifying faith in Christ must be aimed. I found that as I became clearer about exactly what I was to believe Christ can and will shed into my heart, the more empowered my faith in the Redeemer became.

Since the Lord declared that the reason for our condemnation is our *vanity* and *unbelief*, both Books I and II deal with the process of discovering the depth of our own vanity and unbelief, especially as they relate to Christ. Through this deeper understanding of the scriptures, particularly the *Book of Mormon*, there can grow a greater meekness in our relationship with Christ and a more powerful belief in the incredible blessings He promises to give us, even in this life, just as President Benson promised.

*Book III* will deal with the scriptural lessons which describe how we can experience Christ more completely as *our way, our truth and our life*. Mormon called this stage, literally, *entering into the rest of the Lord from this time henceforth until we rest with Him in heaven*. Thus the title, **Book III, *Entering Into the Rest of the Lord***.

The last, **Book IV, *Perfection in Christ***, will deal with what the Lord has revealed about how the Church and the children of Zion might experience the powerful, final preparations for the Second Coming of Christ.

### MY PURPOSE IN SHARING

The contents of these books are not offered for doctrine, nor do I claim that they represent an

official position of the Church. These concepts are my own views, based upon my experiences and understanding which have come from those blessings. And as I have tried to make clear, my views have continued to deepen and broaden as time goes on.

I have been interested in what people have experienced in their hearts as they have read *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*. Some have become angry, some say they were merely confused. Others seem to have found themselves moving to deeper levels of love and joy than they have ever known. For this, I truly thank the Lord. That is my constant prayer in sharing these very personal views and experiences.

There is the old saying, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears." God is the teacher. He is also the One that opens the eyes of the blind, if they would be healed. I am so grateful for the degree that He has opened my eyes. Because of this, my love and testimony has increasingly deepened for His Church, for those who carry the heavy responsibilities of presiding over it, for His sacred scriptures and for the teachings and decisions of the Brethren. My testimony is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's greatest work on the face of the earth. This is to me an all consuming state of knowing. It is no longer a matter of belief, it is a matter of comprehending just how our Church, which has been under such limiting condemnation for so many years, is to eventually do ALL that it has been assigned to do. The way the Lord led me out of my burdens of disbelief to a greater understanding of His Church is the part of the story which will have to wait for Book IV, but it is the most thrilling part of what I want to share.

May the Lord bless you with absolutely ALL that you are ready to receive and no more than that for now. I am sure that whatever that is, it can fill your heart to overflowing again and again.

With His love,

Max B. Skousen

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## Chapter I

# LOOKING AGAIN AT PRESIDENT BENSON'S CHALLENGE

So what has happened in more than ten years since President Benson promised that, if we would sup daily from the *Book of Mormon* and *abide by its precepts*, there would be poured out upon *each child of Zion* and the Church *a blessing hitherto unknown*?

I know from my own personal sources that President Benson was pleased by the multitude of Latter-day Saints who took the Lord's challenge seriously. Many reported to him that as they pondered the messages of those sacred pages more intently, they had begun to hunger as never before for the greater spiritual blessings so forcefully testified to by the Nephite prophets—to be, literally, spiritually born of God, receiving His image in their countenances, experiencing a mighty change in their hearts, being truly baptized by fire and the Holy Ghost and fully sanctified by the pure love of Christ.

## PRESIDENT BENSON'S DEEP CONCERN

While President Benson was still functioning in his office, *he was also grieved* that there was such a minority among the saints, even those in high office, who recognized the wonderful opportunity the Lord was now giving the Church as a body. How few were *true seekers of the spiritual fullness*. Yet, he was even more concerned that many of those who experienced a quickening of the Spirit began coming to him burdened with heavy hearts. They told him of their dismay as they continued attending Church to find that little was changing. It was still business as usual. Overall, the members were still being fed gospel milk instead of the gospel meat which they had been inspired to hunger for in their deeper study of the *Book of Mormon*.

In his second conference, for all the Church to hear, President Benson quoted from the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 84, which described what would be required of us in order to come out from under the judgment of the Lord:

**Which vanity and unbelief  
has brought the *whole Church* under condemnation.  
And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.  
And they *shall remain* under this condemnation *until* they repent  
and remember the NEW COVENANT,  
even the *Book of Mormon* and the *former commandments*  
which I have given them,  
not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written.**

(D&C 84:55-57)

## ELDER DALLIN OAKS RENEWS THE CHALLENGE

A year and half before President Benson's death, Elder Dallin Oaks of the Quorum of Twelve in a BYU address rebroadcast by satellite throughout the Church in June, 1993, and published in the March, 1994 issue of the Ensign, gave a major address regarding President Benson's special message for the Church. Elder Oaks revealed that President Benson, in his second year as our prophet, met with all the General Authorities in a temple meeting. In that meeting, he pled for them to take seriously this revelation he had received from the Lord. Here is a key part of Elder Oaks' address:

**Along with other General Authorities, I have a clear recollection of the General Authority Temple Meeting on March 5, 1987. For a year, President Benson had been stressing the reading of the Book of Mormon. Repeatedly he had quoted these verses from the Doctrine and Covenants [D&C 84:53-57], including the Lord's statement that the Saints' conduct had "brought the whole church under condemnation."**

**In that temple meeting, President Benson reread those statements and declared, "This condemnation has not been lifted, nor will it be until we repent." He also repeated his declaration of a year earlier that "in our day the Lord has inspired His servant to reemphasize the Book of Mormon to get the Church out from under condemnation."**

**Along with others, I felt the impact of this declaration of condemnation. As I studied the subject, I was relieved to find that the serious consequences of this condemnation need not be permanent. The use of this term elsewhere in modern revelation suggests that it refers to a punishment or a penalty, not to a permanent banishment. In fact, the words President Benson quoted invite the Saints to repent of their deficiencies so the condemnation can be removed. . .**

**Thus, the "new covenant," the "new and everlasting covenant" the early saints had received and treated lightly by the time the quoted revelation was given, included all of the commandments and ordinances of the gospel, which are explained most clearly, but not exclu-**

sively, in the Book of Mormon. As President Benson has said, "when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines." (Ensign, March, 1994, pp. 60 & 64)

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATELY DEFINING THE NEW COVENANT

As Elder Oaks emphasized, remembering the *new covenant* is to *DO as well as to SAY*, to walk our talk, to bring to pass the literal fulfillment of God's great covenant that *He has bestowed upon our heads*. Let us read again the way Elder Oaks defined what he believes is meant by the new covenant — the "*new covenant*," the "*new and everlasting covenant*"... **included all of the commandments and ordinances of the gospel.**

I used to agree totally with Elder Oaks' definition, believing that if God says we must keep all of the commandments and be worthy of all the ordinances of the gospel, then certainly it must be possible to do so. It sounds right and we hear it often. However, it would seem that if the new covenant *includes ALL of the commandments and ordinances*, we are without hope! Since we have not been able to do so during the last hundred and seventy five years, how are we to do better now, in this day of even greater pride and approval of the world?

It is easy, as Elder Oaks does, to define the new covenant all inclusively as *everything* God has commanded us to obey in the gospel, but what about being able to DO everything God has commanded. In fact, "doing" was the Lord's major emphasis, that whatever the new covenant is, we are not just to SAY, but we are "*to DO according to that which I have written!*"

So General Conference after General Conference, Sacrament Meeting after Sacrament Meeting, priesthood lesson after priesthood lesson, Relief Society lesson after Relief Society lesson, we keep reminding ourselves to do all of the things required "of true followers of Christ." Sound familiar? I certainly tried it for many years. But the longer I had struggled and watched many others struggle, the more I realized that none of us will ever completely do so. Yet, I could see why it is the duty of the Brethren to hold our feet to the preparatory gospel fire. But when is anyone of us, let alone the majority of the Church, going to remember and DO THIS *new covenant*, if that means keeping *ALL of the commandments*.

Our only hope, I finally began to see, is to discover that such a challenging but hopeless definition comes from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (the preparatory gospel), and not from the tree of life (the fullness of the gospel). It was only then that I began to understand a very different meaning to *the new covenant*.

### SUMMARY

*Remembering the new covenant* is being willing to recognize and forsake our *barriers to fulfilling it*. The Lord said that we do have barriers, and those barriers are our *vanity and unbelief*. Elder Dallin Oaks renewed that challenge for the whole Church, and the Church is truly on the move to greater spirituality. Yet the real task is to understand that the new covenant is not just more of the same preparatory gospel, but is the fullness of the gospel which comes from moving from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life.

## Chapter II

# MORONI'S DEFINITION OF THE NEW COVENANT

It is my experience that the greatest, clearest definition of the *new covenant* was written by Moroni as he finished his father's sacred plates. He declared that the new covenant, which he called "*the covenant of the Father*," is our Heavenly Father's contractual guarantee that those who truly and wholeheartedly come unto Christ shall experience the purity, holiness, love, peace and joy of BEING PERFECT IN HIM—**NOW! Present tense!** Moroni testified to such a blessing categorically, specifically and assuredly.

I took special note that Moroni put this powerful declaration as the very last words on the gold plates. His statement bares witness as a COVENANT-SEAL, like documents were sealed in ancient times with a large drop of melted sealing wax and then imprinted by a signet ring of the one in authority. So, in a way, Moroni put his final seal on the covenant of the *Book of Mormon* in these two closing verses, followed only by two short sentences of farewell. (Moroni 10:32-34) In doing so, he was witnessing to those of us who would live in these latter days that God can and will make those who TRULY COME UNTO CHRIST *perfect, pure and holy, without spot, not by struggle, but by the miracle of His grace.*

These two verses of Moroni's covenant-seal were quoted in my first book of this series and will be quoted again in Book III and IV because I believe that they describe a magnitude of blessings which have been "hitherto unknown" by most of us for these many generations of Latter-day Saints. Here is what Moroni declared:

**Yea, come unto Christ,  
and be perfected in him,  
and deny yourselves of all ungodliness;  
and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness,  
and love God with all your might, mind and strength,  
then is his GRACE sufficient for you,  
that by his GRACE ye may be perfect in Christ;  
and if by the GRACE of God ye are perfect in Christ,  
ye can in nowise deny the power of God.**

**And again,  
if ye by the GRACE of God are perfect in Christ,  
and deny not his power,  
then are ye sanctified in Christ by the GRACE of God,  
through the shedding of the blood of Christ,  
which is in THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER  
unto the remission of your sins,  
that ye become holy, without spot.**

(Moroni 10:32-33)

## MY OLD SELF-IMPOSED BARRIERS TO COMING UNTO CHRIST

I had memorized these words over fifty years ago on my mission because they impressed me so deeply even then. How incredibly profound they are. What incomprehensible blessings of

heavenly magnitude they absolutely guarantee that the Father will provide in and through His ever new, yet eternal *covenant*. By simply *coming unto Christ*, we would experience being *perfected in Him by the grace of God*.

But Moroni's words also weighed heavily on my heart. On the surface, his words seem to totally correspond to what Elder Oaks defined as the new covenant. Sure, I thought, I could be perfect in Christ, but first Moroni said that I must *deny myself*, not just some, but *ALL OF MY UNGODLINESS*—*"If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness!"* Isn't that what we covenant when we promise to keep *ALL OF THE COMMANDMENTS*? And is not that what Elder Oaks was saying as well? Yet, is anyone, including Elder Oaks, doing them all?

Over the years, try as I would, I found many clearly stated requirements of godliness seemingly beyond my ability. Certainly, I had not rid myself of ALL my

*pride*, (Alma 5:29)

*impatience*, (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

*envy*, (Galations 5:21)

*procrastination*, (Alma 13:27)

*selfishness*, (D&C 56:8)

*materialism*, (Jacob 2:17)

*judging*, (Matthew 7:1)

*intolerance*, (Matthew 7:2)

*unholy thoughts*, (Matthew 5:28)

—just to name a few of the elements which are not godly.

Nor was I a possessor of those things which are godly, such as being

*thankful for ALL things*, (D&C 59:7) nor did I have

*an eye single to the glory of God*, (D&C 88:67) nor was I

*filled with the light as Christ is in the light*,

(1 John 1:6-7)

*truly confessing His hand in all things*, (D&C 59:21)

*loving God with all my heart, might, mind and soul* (Matthew 22:37)

*fully loving others even as myself*, (Matthew 22:39)

*and being perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect*. (Matthew 5:48)

Yet, again, wasn't that what Moroni said I would have to do? Deny myself of ALL UNGODLINESS, so that I could *be perfect in Christ*, having such a total remission of my sins that I would be holy, without spot. Isn't that the *new covenant* which the Lord says I must not only remember, believe and say, but DO?

### SEEING THAT I WAS ONLY A PRETENDER

We all like to believe that because of our testimonies, we *really have faith in Christ*. I was a firm believer in what Nephi told his father when given the seemingly impossible assignment of returning to Jerusalem to get the priceless brass plates from the shrewd, powerful and wicked Laban. Nephi boldly declared, *"I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."* (1 Nephi 3:7)

Well, since I had not fully accomplished the Lord's commandment to deny myself of ALL ungodliness, I began to convince myself that God really did not expect me to do it completely in this life, but *just sincerely try*. In fact, I had heard such merciful and reasonable thoughts taught from our pulpits as words of authority. Yes, at the time, such a reasonable compromise certainly made sense to a slow learner like me. That is, to my natural mind, *it did make sense* that surely

the Lord does not ask what is evidently impossible. Yet all through the scriptures we are told that we keep our covenants only as we keep *ALL* the commandments. As we recall again what James declared, "**For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one point*, he is guilty of all.**" (James 2:10)

So, without realizing it, I had developed the attitude that if God is going to *pretend that I can, I will pretend that I do*. So on partaking the sacrament, being interviewed for a temple recommend, or renewing my covenants in the temple, I had become what Paul called, a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. In other words, I was a fake, trying to look like shining gold when I was really, at best, shining brass. I was treating lightly the things I had received. I was a real contributor to the vanity and unbelief that was continuing the Lord's condemnation upon the children of Zion, **EVEN ALL**.

### **JACOB'S WARNING ABOUT LOOKING BEYOND THE MARK**

So, ten years ago, in 1986, responding to our new president's challenge, I began asking myself what was there about this *new covenant of the Father* that I did not understand? It was then that Jacob's profound statement (Jacob 4:14) about the Jews *looking beyond the mark* began to take on a greater meaning. I could see that the whole nation of ancient Israel was *also* put under condemnation because of their *vanity and unbelief*, just like us. They were *stiff-necked*. They *despised the words of plainness* and *desired many things which they could not understand*. So, as Jacob declared, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, God, Himself, through His prophets, *gave them many things which they could not understand and fully do, so that they would stumble*. (Jacob 4:14)

*As I explained in Book I, I began to finally realize that I had been looking beyond what the mark stood for*. I decided that the mark must stand for the one thing we cannot do without, which is the totally unearned GIFT of Christ's pure and holy love. As king Benjamin was taught by an angel, that without that priceless gift of the Spirit, I *could not* put off the natural man. But, with that gift, I would *no longer be the natural man*. (Mosiah 3:19)

I began to realize that what Moroni was actually saying in his covenant seal is that—

to *come unto Christ and be perfected in Him* is not a self-improvement program, nor is it about no longer having weaknesses.

Instead it is for me to surrender totally to Christ so that—

He can bestow upon me His perfect love, and then all the rest of the promises of the covenant follow *automatically*.

As I gained greater understanding of what the mark stood for—

I experienced more faith and hope that His gift could and would multiply itself in my life.

I could see Moroni was really saying that—

I cannot be given the pure love *without it producing the fruit* which would enable me to deny myself of all ungodliness—*not all weaknesses but all ungodliness*.

In the same way—

I could not have that pure love without being given the ability to love God with all the energy of my heart, mind, and soul.

I could not have that pure love and not experience the reality and infinite scope of the power of God.

I could not have that pure love and, through it, not be continually purified and cleansed from *all sin that shall still continue in my life*.



## THE PURIFYING POWER OF CHRIST'S LOVE

Many prophets have assured us of the same things.

John testified that one cannot have that perfect love and, at the *same time*, *have fear*. (1 John 4:17-18)

John also declared that one cannot be in the *light as Christ is in the light* and, at the *same time*, *walk in darkness*. (1 John 1:6-7)

As James, who called this gift God's "*wisdom which comes from heaven*" said, "**The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.**" (James 3:17)

Peter, who called this love "*the divine nature*," said, "**According as His divine power hath given unto us ALL things that pertain unto life and godliness...that ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**" (2 Peter 1:3-4)

The Spirit began witnessing to me that SUCH is the *law irrevocably decreed about His pure and perfect love*. As difficult, yes, even as impossible as it all sounds, it is the hidden mystery of all mysteries, even *the mystery of godliness*.

Over the many years before, I had appreciated all these words, but, in my vanity, I had felt that I was, at least to some major degree, to earn those gifts in my own right, and in that *unbelief*, I *believed* that until I did, Christ would not, *even could not*, give me what I was to develop for myself, which was a new heart.

So as I now began to discover my foolishness, I found that, just like Israel of old, I had been *looking beyond* that free gift, the MARK. And instead, I had been looking to what God had revealed to us in our vanity and unbelief as the preparatory gospel, the gospel of repentance through self-improvement, which I began to realize is symbolized in the garden of Eden account as the *tree of knowledge of good and evil* which God had both created and forbidden, the partaking of which produces the fall in each of our mortal lives. It is called the preparatory gospel because it is to get us ready, but *it cannot take us all the way*. It is designed to give us experience in learning our duty, but, all by itself, is not designed to give us total victory while in this life. In contrast, the *new covenant* has to do with going ALL THE WAY to perfect love by *the Father making us perfect in His love, which is another way of saying, being COMPLETE in Christ*.

My story of being converted to that principle was the subject of *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, which I trust you have read before taking on this second book in the series. The reason I feel that you should have first read the preceding book is that until we see how subtle and devious are the many ways we can *look beyond the mark*, there is little chance that we are in a position to see and comprehend the simplicity, magnitude and miracle of finding the true mark of Christ, thus able to make it our one and only target. As Paul testified in his letter to the Philippians, he kept the mark constantly in his sights:

**This *one thing* I do,  
forgetting those things which are behind,  
and reaching forth unto those *things which are before*,  
I press toward the MARK for the prize  
of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

## SUMMARY

Moroni specified precisely how we will find the answer, which is to truly *come unto Christ* and believe His words of promise that in Him and by Him, we will be made perfect in His love,

which is pure and holy without spot. I acknowledge that I pretended to believe and perform, instead of finding the many ways I was still looking “around” and “beyond” the pure love of Christ, which the Father promises will produce the very results He declared in His *new and everlasting covenant*.

# Section I

## The Paradoxes of the Four Levels of the Gospel

### Chapter III

#### LOSING ONE’S LIFE TO FIND IT

Welcome to a further step in preparing to receive *a blessing hitherto unknown*. In the first book we dealt at length with what it means to look beyond the mark. Now, we will explore the process of *understanding what we give up in order to continue to move toward the mark*. The most difficult part of this process is that victory will depend upon—

*unlearning* more than learning,  
*helplessness* more than persistence,  
*surrender* more than struggle, and  
*not knowing more than knowing*.

In other words, finding the mark has to do with becoming more like *a little child*, and that is rather difficult for grown-ups like us to do comfortably. It usually takes a continual dying to the old self, i.e., to the old ways of experiencing who and what we are, even who and what we worship. As Christ told His disciples, “*He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*” (Matthew 10:39)

## CHANGING DIRECTION—FROM COLLECTING TO RELEASING

Most of our lives we have valued, yes, even worshipped knowledge. We have believed in knowledge as the source of eternal progression. And in the practical, materialistic world of science, skills, art, and many other disciplines, this is true. It is also true in the spiritual area of providing a reasonable, practical system of understanding how we will relate to the Creator. But eventually, the mind and its great accumulations of conclusions about right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil must give way to a higher state of awareness that goes beyond knowledge. It is a state of knowing, a state of comprehending. In this state, we still have all of the technical knowledge that has proven valuable, but we relate to it in a much less dogmatic, unilateral way. We begin to see that every view is merely a different way of seeing a relationship and, thus, we remain truly open to other possibilities. We are still free to take a definite position, but there is less rigidity and more spontaneity.

As the Lord warned our Church in the condemnation, our limitations result from two characteristics—pride and unbelief. Our *pride* comes from our belief that we, and in a sense, we alone, have the only real truth about God and how we are to please Him. Our *unbelief* comes from the fact that we tend to disbelieve anything that we don't think we already know.

It is difficult to change direction when the way we have been going all of our lives seems to have been working reasonably well, even though not as perfectly as we might have liked. We have been able to achieve a great deal of faith and hope in the gospel by listening to the voice of the Spirit within as we have studied the scriptures, attended our meetings, fulfilled our assignments, listened to His living prophets, praying regularly and rearing our families. It works. And at the same time, it only works up to a point. With most of us there is still that nagging feeling deep within us that we are not yet doing enough, that there is still something very basic that is missing.

### FINITE KNOWLEDGE VS INFINITE LOVE

After reading *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, you may have concluded that you are still missing the most important thing in your life, which is possessing the gift of the pure, infinite and eternal love that Christ possesses, i.e., you are still missing the mark. That was the bad news. But the good news is that the solution is much more simple than you may have ever imagined. Receiving that gift does not require more struggling, efforting and studying, even fasting and praying. Not that those activities are without value, but they are usually induced by a motive which is too self serving. Fortunately, there is a simpler way to surrender to a spiritual completion, described in the scriptures as **“being perfected in Christ.”**

The challenge in finding the mark is not in more achieving, valuable as that may be. Instead, it is in your ability to truly trust enough to *“let go and let God.”* It is called *“yielding,”* but we find that genuine yielding is very difficult because we still believe that God's love is something we need to earn, or, that our right to possess the pure love of Christ must be achieved. That sense of needing to be worthy and the need to succeed is so deeply ingrained in us by the preparatory gospel that we keep measuring ourselves on the scale of what we believe pleases and displeases God.

So how about taking this first step of recognizing that you have *no idea what God really wants!* Yet, hasn't everything you have been learning up until now has been the result of trying to find the answer to that question? But, bottom line, how in the world could you ever come to a conclusion that you do *know* what God wants? “Well,” you might answer, “God has told us what pleases and displeases Him.”

## GOD IS NOT ABOVE CHANGING HIS MIND ON GOOD AND EVIL

Well, friend, it may well be that God says different things at different times, and one thing to one group and another to another group. Do you doubt this? Probably so. Well, let's be honest for a bit. Look what He said through His great prophet Moses to the children of Israel about what food was clean and unclean. Do yourself a favor and make a note to read the whole Chapter 11 of Leviticus. It is absolutely incredible. Then read Acts, Chapter 10, when the Lord rebuked Peter three times for refusing to kill and eat all those unclean foods which God had absolutely forbidden in His divine law.

**And [Peter] saw [the] heavens opened, and a certain vessel descended unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth. Wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.**

**But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice, and the vessel was received up again unto heaven.** (Acts 10:11-16)

What Peter was being shown was not only that it seems the Lord had changed His mind on what was clean and unclean, but that Peter was to change His mind on teaching the gospel to the untouchable Gentiles. In other words, Peter had to start unlearning what he had assumed were absolute, eternal truths. You may say that was only because God had already fulfilled the Law of Moses, but shouldn't we assume that what foods were clean and unclean was not just an arbitrary whim but based upon some type of scientific principles which would not change?

What if God told us in our day that we should start smoking cigarettes and cigars? He could, you know! A horrible thought, of course!

What about polygamy? Did you know that up until 1876, 23 years after the Church officially declared it was practicing polygamy, we still had a whole section in the *Doctrine and Covenants* declaring that monogamy was the only law to be lived by the Saints and that to have more than one wife or husband at a time was an excommunicatable sin.

Remember that all of our knowledge of good and evil comes directly from the tree of knowledge which God has told us not to partake, yet we feast upon the fruit of that tree. Even the temple makes it clear, we cannot partake of the tree of knowledge and *at the same time*, partake of the tree of life. When we go to the one, *we lose access to the other*.

## EVERY NATION IS GIVEN ITS OWN TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

If you feel this principle that God purposely creates *confusion* CONFUSING, remember that the Lord told Nephi that He speaks to every nation and commands their prophets to write His words to them so the people can be judged by their own law. We considered this possibility at length in Chapter XX and XXI in Book I. Since every nation is looking beyond the mark, then each nation would be given what they felt they needed, which is a knowledge of good and evil particularly suited to them. Then by their unique law, they, too, come under the fall. In addition, it would appear that each nation is told that they are the custodians of the one and only truth so they will struggle *valiantly* but *vainly* to be *perfect before God*.

You may not like this idea and I certainly can't blame you. But once you realize that God gives us our knowledge of good and evil, not only to discipline us, but also to bring us under the fall—everything shifts in the way you see what God is really doing.

Ultimately, recovery from the fall is not in more knowledge of good and evil, but in the sanctifying power of the pure love of Christ. Much of what we will consider in this book further defines the fact that when it comes to a knowledge of good and evil, we should not ignore the Lord, but *neither can we "trust" Him when it comes to His giving to us more "truth" for our tree*

*of knowledge*

Remember, Israel was given all kinds of such knowledge for two reasons: (1) because they desired it and (2) so they would stumble. (Jacob 4:14) Simply, God loves us so much that He will give us enough “rope” (knowledge) to hang ourselves on that *forbidden tree of knowledge*. We must lose our life of living by that tree in order to find *our life in Him at the tree of life*.

So to start laying a foundation for this study of finding the mark, we might as well deal with one of the most fundamental and difficult principles the reader will have to face. It is the principle of the paradox. The gospel is filled with paradoxes.

### WHAT IS A PARADOX?

The dictionary defines a paradox as “*two seemingly contradictory statements, both may nonetheless be true.*” I have tried to think of many different ways to break this idea of how the Lord teaches in paradoxes. I was trying to break the news to you gradually so that this reality will not come as much of a shock to you as it did to me. But we might as well go for broke and start wrestling with the fact that God deals in paradoxes, i.e., contradictions. That is not what we have been taught to expect from God so it can come as a mind shattering surprise. But you might as well get used to this idea because this book is about paradoxes which are foolishness to the wise. Who are the wise? They are those who are heavily laden with all of the wealth of *fixed religious conclusions* which give them only *one way* of seeing eternal reality. The religiously orthodox despise paradoxes.

What do I mean by God revealing contradictions? Well, let’s take the wonderful belief we have that “*as man is, God once was, and as God is, man may become.*” That means God has certainly changed just as we will change, does it not? We are also assured many times that God “*is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*” (2 Nephi 27:23, 29:9; & Moroni 10:19) Oops! So which is the ultimate truth—has God changed in the past or has He always been the same? We will deal with this later, but these two contradictory statements are what we can call a paradox. When both are understood clearly, even though they seem to contradict each other, we will see how both are literally true.

I would now like to introduce you to one of the most helpful principles I have found. This principle helps explain why it appears that God is often contradicting Himself. It is to see that God reveals His truths on progressive steps or levels, each of which appears to be in opposition or contradiction to each other. Remember, there must be opposition in all things or there is no existence. (2 Nephi 2:11) So please read on.

### SUMMARY

In our pride and vanity, we believed there is only one way to come to Christ, and that is through His restored kingdom of God. But truly coming to Christ is, ultimately, that which happens on the inside, in the heart, rather than how we show up on the outside. It is not only with our lips, which are the beliefs of the mind, but especially in our hearts that we must give up our life to Christ. So the gospel plan is filled with contradictions, called paradoxes, in which the mind, if it is honest, will allow the heart to yield to the purifying power of Christ.

## Chapter IV

# THE FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL

We may easily assume that when we choose to come to the Savior as our shepherd, that we only give up the old way of life once—only dying once to Christ. In the full plan of salvation, however, it is helpful to realize that there are four very different stages or levels to the gospel. Each level builds upon the other, yet is separate and seems to contradict what we were taught on the prior level. Because of this, the next level is actually designed to be rejected and unwanted until the purpose of the prior level is completed. For example, we needed to partake of the tree of knowledge to experience the fall, yet we will need to leave that tree and reach the tree of life to overcome the fall. We will find that there are two steps or levels to the tree of knowledge and two steps to the tree of life, making four in all. Each level is necessary yet contradictory to the next. How is that for a few paradoxes?

### SEEING THE FOUR LEVELS IN LEHI'S VISION

In Lehi's vision, which we will discuss in greater detail later, we can see the four levels or steps graphically symbolized.

**Level 1. The great and spacious building**

**Level 2. The strait and narrow path**

**Level 3. The rod of iron**

**Level 4. The fruit on the tree of life**

### ◆ THE FIRST LEVEL—THE TEMPORAL LAW

#### ***THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING***

Lehi saw that the building represented the pride of the world. Yet he also saw that there were many multitudes who sought to attain the supposed safety of the great and precious building but *failed to make it and were lost*.

**And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building. And it came to pass that *many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads. And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building.* (1 Nephi 8:31-33)**

So we can see that those who finally entered the incredible structure, which didn't touch the ground, had made a considerable achievement and justifiably felt great comfort and security. Lehi saw that his fellow Israelites were residing in that building and were mocking those who were at the tree of life. Why would the chosen people do that? Would it not be because of their pride and joy, as God's chosen people, already having exclusive possession of God's perfect law, with His holy priesthood, the sacred temple and the other blessings of being God's covenant people?

**The temporal law of good and evil represents the major portion of the tree of knowledge, with all of its dos and don'ts. So we show it as the lower portion of the forbidden tree of knowledge.**

Of course those chosen people in the building would be suspicious of an alternative way. Lehi reported that he saw—

a great and spacious building, and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth. And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine, and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit...Behold the world and the wisdom thereof, yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together. (1 Nephi 8:26-27 & 11:35)

Since these people had God's law, the preparatory gospel, we could say that they represented those who are in the *first level*, and in their self content (vanity), they were condemning those who were trying to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which we could assume is the *fourth level*. In their self righteous judgmentalness based upon their loyalty to the divinely revealed law of God, they were sure that the only way anyone could be righteous was to be where they were and doing what they were doing in the established and orthodox Church of God.

## ♠ THE SECOND LEVEL—THE SPIRITUAL LAW

### *THE STRAIT AND NARROW PATH*

In the vision, those who sought for the tree of life first had to leave behind their vanity and unbelief, and second, get on the other side of the river where they could seek, reach and partake of the fruit laden tree of life. It turns out that this was not an automatic achievement. Those who chose to seek the tree were undoubtedly encouraged when they saw a strait and narrow path which would safely lead them directly to the tree of life. This strait and narrow path is the *second level*.

As we will consider in Chapter VII, Lehi described two levels to the God's law. The *first level* is the temporal law and the *second level* is the spiritual law, the strait and narrow path. This path was very clearly defined, suggesting that it symbolizes a very precise, structured approach to God, but more in the spiritual level of the law rather than the temporal level. So it is still on the tree of knowledge, but on a higher level.

**Those who are blessed by the Spirit gain the strait and narrow path and believe they are at the very door of the tree of life. But since they are still into struggle and resistance, they have only moved to a higher level of the tree of knowledge.**

To reach the path, they had to give up their place in the glorious, "heavenly" building which was no longer satisfying their hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Their new found joy and confidence must have been great because it looked like the *strait and narrow path* was the *final answer*. All they had to do, it appeared, was carefully stay on the path and eventually reach the tree. They could rest assured that having found the path, gaining the tree would be just a matter of effort and time. But not so. Lehi reports:

**They did come forth, and commence in the [strait and narrow] path which led to the tree. And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, they wandered off and were lost.** (1 Nephi 8:22-23)

Even though the path looked like it was all that was needed, yet it ultimately failed when the mists of darkness blinded their sight and they would lose their way. So the second level works and then it doesn't work.

## ♣ THE THIRD LEVEL—THE CHASTISEMENT

### *THE ROD OF IRON OR FLAMING SWORD*

When the strait and narrow path became obscured by the mists of darkness and did not work any more, some on the path were willing to grab hold of the seemingly unimportant and

redundant iron rod, which symbolizes the third level.

**And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood... They [a few of those who were blinded by the mist] came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron, and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.** (1 Nephi 8:19-20, 24)

**The iron rod, the chastening of the Lord, is symbolized in the garden of Eden story as the flaming sword, which guards the way of the tree of life, to cleanse by fire the repentant who have given up the tree of knowledge.**

Nephi was told that the MISTS OF DARKNESS were the *temptations of the devil* and the *iron rod* is the *word of God*. We will find that the temptations of the devil on the strait and narrow path are very different than his temptations given to those in the building. We will also find that what is meant by the word of God is not the law of God, for that again is represented by those in the great and spacious building. Since Christ is the Word, we will find a much more spiritual meaning.

In this stage of sanctification, Christ testifies that he chastens and rebukes those He loves. He does not spare the rod, if you can see the interesting metaphor. So the iron rod might symbolize the same level as *the flaming sword* which was placed to protect the tree of life from being reached prematurely.

#### ♥ THE FOURTH LEVEL—PURE LOVE OF CHRIST *THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE*

Obviously those who finally reach the tree of life and partake of the fruit would represent the *fourth level*. It would appear that this level is finally the truly safe and secure harbor. Don't count on it! This stage is also wrought with dangers. Pride and conceit can still overwhelm the achiever of this priceless blessing.

Notice what Lehi saw happening to the first group that reached the tree and partook of the fruit.

**And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed. And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building... and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit. And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.** (1 Nephi 8:25-28)

So they had left the building, found the strait and narrow path, followed the iron rod through the mist, reached the tree and had feasted on its fruit, yet partaking of that fruit did not protect them from being devastated by ridicule and condemnation. That scoffing was probably coming from their own families and friends across the river, otherwise it probably would not have hurt so much. So what did they do? They did not want to go back, so they found other ways of filling their needs, ways that were forbidden and so they were lost, at least for a time.

**The tree of life, the beauty exceeding of all beauty, representing the pure love of God which is shed into the hearts of the children of men, thus is the most desirable above all, and the most joyous to the soul.**

#### EACH LEVEL REQUIRES A DYING TO THE OLD



Notice that those seen in the vision who started on the strait and narrow path had to have already stopped trusting in the support and false security of the great and spacious building. Obviously, most of those in the building did not give it up but just stood in contempt of those who did. Yet, most of those on the path, when they were blinded by the mist, refused to give up trusting in the path. Only a few were willing to grope around and find something very different, grasping the very end of the iron rod. Finally, when they reached the base of the tree, they had to let go of the security of the iron rod in order to free their hands so that they could reach up high enough to obtain some of the fruit and eat. But even on this glorious level, they could fail.

What did they fail to do at this point? I think we will see that they did not make the conversion from *having* the fruit to *becoming* the fruit. After all, that is the purpose of eating and drinking. We become what we eat and drink. That is the ultimate result of having God's perfect love shed into our hearts. We no longer look to the outside for our inner love, joy and peace, but to that which we have become within. From then on, drinking deeply of the fountain of living waters and partaking of the fruit of the tree that is grown in the heart must come from within. One would no longer need to hang onto the tree or sit beside the fountain. Instead, one has become the tree, the fountain. There is no more spiritual separateness.

Some will not want to give up hanging onto such a rich, ultimate possession as the tree and the fountain, but eventually they will discover that what they hold onto will also be lost. Experiencing the completeness in Christ does not come from without, but from within.

*Finding the mark involves finding and giving up each of these levels, INCLUDING THE LAST.* That is the greatest paradox of all.

#### THE FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL

LEVEL	SYMBOL	MEANING
FIRST	Great and Spacious "Temporal" Building	Living by the temporal law of ordinances and performances
SECOND	Strait and Narrow "Spiritual" Path	Living the spiritual law by the gifts of the Spirit
THIRD	Rod of Iron Flaming Sword	Being purged by Christ of all our self righteousness
FOURTH	Fruit of the Tree of Life	Receiving the gift of the pure love of Christ, the fountain of living waters

#### RELAX! YOU ARE RIGHT ON SCHEDULE

God is really God. He knows exactly what He is doing with you as a part of His own infinite and eternal life. In doing so, each of us is invited to move from one level to another level. When we do so, we will usually undergo the gauntlet of ridicule, pleading and condemnation by those we leave behind. In each case, those who stay behind serve those who move ahead by making the movement a definitive shift, whereby losing their "old life" each time to find a fuller life in Christ, grace by grace. I don't think Christ was kidding when He said, **"Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets."** (Luke 6:26) To put it another way, look out when all those you love and admire think you are where you need to be.

So why bother? That is the ultimate question. The answer is, why not! What we lose, step by step, are only our chains and what we gain is the ever increasing liberty in Christ. Victory is

not required, it is offered. What we gain is greater love, joy and peace than we could have ever imagined—in fact, totally different than we could imagine. Yet, to add one more paradox—*if we need it, we can't have it.*

### SUMMARY

The reason that God deals in paradoxes is that the gospel comes on levels. To be taken seriously enough to make each level work, it is essential that those at that particular level believe that they have finally found the *whole truth of God*. Only then, at best, will they give their heart and soul to try to make it work to perfection. So each level is stated in absolute terms. When it works but, at the same time, does not work, then and only then, will the true seeker hunger and thirst after more enlightenment. That is when the door to the next level will open. There are two levels on the tree of knowledge, (1) the temporal law and (2) the spiritual law. There are two levels on the tree of life, (1) the chastening to be stripped of pride, called the iron rod or flaming sword and (2) the gift of His love, which is the fruit growing on the tree itself.

## Chapter V

### THE DIVINE USE OF SYMBOLISM AND THE TEMPLE ENDOWMENT

When we read about the dream-vision of Lehi and the wide-awake experience of Nephi, we are reminded that everything they saw was a likeness, i.e., allegorical and symbolical, to reveal various principles of the gospel. Nephi had desired to receive the same vision as his father so he could be given specific meanings for those things his father had seen. Their *experiences were real*, but the things and people they saw were not permanent realities, i.e., there is no actual great and spacious building filled with hosts of Israelites or a physical tree of life sitting out there some place. These were divine manifestations of appearances, like we produce in our own dreams, to teach some of the great lessons of life in a more graphical way than words alone could tell.

The same principle can be applied to many of the parables Jesus taught. As was the custom in those days, stories were usually not expected to be actual historical accounts. Such stories are called allegories. The dictionary defines an allegory as a literary, dramatic, or pictorial device in which a person, object or event illustrates an idea, such as a moral or religious principle.

For example, when Christ told the story of the ten virgins going to a wedding, we need not assume that such an event had ever taken place. He told the story as if it had taken place to make the story more meaningful. Nor do we need wonder, for example, if the story of the prodigal son was historical or allegorical. Another example would be that of the man who found the pearl of great price and sold all of his other pearls to buy the one.

#### USING PARABLES TO TEACH MANY LEVELS AT THE SAME TIME

The Lord frequently used such parables to teach us. Usually the parables have an obvious, moral meaning, but at the same time, there are often deeper gems of truth carefully hidden in the story to keep certain information from the unprepared. For example, after Christ taught the people some parables, he would sit down with his disciples and give them some of the deeper meanings. Mark explained:

**And with many such parables spake he the word unto them [the multitudes], as**

**they were able to hear it. But without a parable spoke he not unto them. And when they were alone, he expounded ALL things to his disciples.** (Mark 4:33-34)

As we can well imagine, this two-level way of teaching confused his disciples, so they asked Him why he didn't teach everyone what he was confiding in them.

**And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?**

**He answered and said unto them, Because it is given *unto you* to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven, but *to them it is not given*...Therefore speak I to them in parables, because *they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*...**

**For this people's *heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed*; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and *should be converted, and I should heal them*. But blessed are your eyes, for they see and your ears, for they hear. For verily, I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.** (Matthew 13:10-17)

### UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF SYMBOLS IN TEACHING

In understanding these different levels of the gospel, it is well to realize that when we try to teach anything, we can only do so symbolically. In communicating information one to another, all we have are *symbols of what is*, not *actually what is*, for even words are symbols. The word "water" is not water, of course, but it is a device by which we can provide information about water, such as, "I need water" or "I have water."

That is also true when describing these four levels of the gospel. For example, we can talk about love, and there are all kinds of different ideas we describe by using the word "love," but none of these words are love. The word "peach" is not a peach. As we know, all the descriptions we can use to describe what a peach tastes like cannot convey to another the experience.

So what does the Lord do to teach us about Himself, our relationship to Him and about eternal life? He uses symbols, i.e., words, parables, pictures and allegories. When the Lord uses stories, they may or may not have been historical events. For the purposes of the story, we might remember that it does not matter whether it is history or not. In fact, the Lord says that he uses EVERYTHING that He has created as teaching symbols, revealing who and what He is. This is what Adam was told:

**ALL things have their likeness,  
and ALL things are *created and made*  
to BEAR RECORD OF ME,  
both things which are *temporal*,  
and things which are *spiritual*.**

(Moses 6:63)

We Latter-day Saints tend to be great literalists when it comes to the accounts in the scriptures. We want to convert most of the stories into exact, historical facts. This is especially true with the creation and Garden of Eden story. We want to believe it literally occurred in exactly the way it is described and at a very specific time, totally changing the earth and everything which dwells upon it about 6,000 years ago. "Well," you might ask, "didn't it?"

If I answer, “Possibly, but not necessarily,” you might be as shocked as I was when the possibility occurred to me. More on this later. Just hang in there, because being ambivalent in this way may help you understand parts of the temple Endowment much better. Remember, we are assured that the Endowment is primarily symbolic.

### **THE TEMPLE ENDOWMENT, A MASTERPIECE OF SYMBOLISM**

The Holy Temple, with its four floors, where one progresses from the baptismal work in the basement to the upper floor, the Solemn Assembly Room, symbolizes the four levels of the gospel. In addition, we have strict rules as to who can enter the temple. In the same way, we should guard carefully what we allow to enter our personal temple of our own physical, mental and spiritual being. In the same way, since the gospel includes both the milk and the meat, the temple teaches about both the lesser and higher priesthoods. As there are two tokens assigned to the Aaronic Priesthood, there are two tokens assigned to the Melchizedek Priesthood, making four tokens in all, literally symbolizing the four levels of the gospel. The sequence of each token represents a growing union and oneness with God, starting with partial and ending in a fullness.

It is no secret that in our larger temples, we have a Creation Room and a Garden of Eden Room where the scriptural account of these events are presented. Since these two accounts are already well known by those entering the temple, many have wondered why they are included and given such prominence. Is it to remind us again about how our first parents disobeyed, or is it God’s greatest teaching story for each of our own lives, for we might well be reminded to think of ourselves as Adam and Eve?

### **MY FIRST EXPERIENCE IN THE TEMPLE**

Let me carefully share what I can about my own first experience in the temple for it may help others who have had difficulty appreciating the ceremony. Having been raised in an active LDS family, I had looked forward for many years to that day when I could go to the temple and be taught what could only be revealed in such a holy place. When I had read in the scriptures about *the mysteries of godliness*, I assumed that such teachings would be the things reserved for the temple Endowment. Like many members who are unprepared for their first experience, I came away quite mystified. The complexity of the ritual confused me as to what it all really meant. Little did I realize that, like many of Christ’s parables, it was designed to do just that!

In sharing a little of my own first temple experience, I trust that I am being general enough not to go beyond the counsel of privacy, even though all of the Endowment Ceremony is already found in the public record, including on the Internet. It is also no secret that in addition to the Creation and Garden of Eden Rooms, there are the Telestial, Terrestrial and Celestial Rooms.

After going through the first two rooms, since I was already familiar with the creation and garden of Eden stories, I was anxiously waiting to see what I would be taught in the other three rooms. The instruction given in the Telestial and Terrestrial Rooms could be generally described as reviewing obedience to the first principles necessary for us to enter the Celestial Kingdom. Oh, I thought, the final room is the Celestial room and that is where we will surely be given the mysteries of godliness. But when I entered that room, the most beautiful room in the temple, there were no further instructions. The Endowment was over.

### **TO UNDERSTAND THE GREAT TRUTHS YOU ARE ONLY TAUGHT IN SYMBOL THIS DAY**

Back in those days, in the early Forties, when a group was going through for their own Endowments, extra instructions were given in words somewhat as follows: “Brothers and Sisters, *pray and meditate* that God may reveal to you the *great truths* which were *only taught to you in*

*symbol* this day.” I failed to follow that advice and wanted to have everything laid out in firm, clear concrete. Instead, I have found that the temple, from top to bottom, is designed to represent, to symbolize, to demonstrate a deeper understanding of light and truth, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Counsel of the Twelve, in his book on the temple, wrote:

**The reason the teaching of the gospel often times is so difficult is that ideals in the gospel are such intangible things as faith, repentance, love, humility, reverence, obedience, modesty, and so forth. The dimensions of size and shape and color and texture just do not serve us there.**

**In teaching the gospel we do not re-create the material world around us; we deal with the *intangible world within us*. It is far easier to re-create the visible, tangible world around us in alphabetical symbols than to re-create *spiritual ideals and have them understood*. And yet it can be done, and it can be done most effectively by using symbols.** (Boyd K. Packer, *You may claim the blessings of The Holy Temple*, Bookcraft, 1980, p. 40)

Elder Packer then quotes the teachings of our great scientist-Apostle, Elder John A. Widsoe, from his book, *Temple Worship*, who stated:

**We live in a world of symbols. We know nothing, except by symbols. We make a few marks on a sheet of paper, and we say that they form a word, which stands for love, or hate, or charity, or God or eternity. The marks may not be very beautiful to the eye. No one finds fault with the symbols on the pages of a book because they are not as mighty in their own beauty as the things which they represent. We do not quarrel with the symbol G-O-D because it is not very beautiful, yet represents the majesty of God. We are glad to have symbols, if only the meaning of the symbols is brought home to us...**

**There are men who object to Santa Claus, because he does not exist! Such men need spectacles to see that Santa Claus is a symbol; a symbol of the love and joy of Christmas and the Christmas spirit. In the land of my birth there was no Santa Claus, but a little goat was shoved into the room, carrying with it a basket of Christmas toys and gifts. The goat itself counted for nothing; but the Christmas spirit, which it symbolized, counted for a tremendous lot.**

**We live in a world of symbols. No man or woman can come out of the temple endowed as he should be, *unless he has seen, beyond the symbol, the mighty realities for which the symbols stand*.** (Elder John A. Widsoe, *Temple Worship*, p. 62)

## THE TEMPLE ENDOWMENT, KEY TO THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

After I first lost my testimony and left the Church in 1970, I still realized the incredible reservoir of truths which are unique to Mormonism. In fact, there were so many things about the temple which, symbolically, reveal so many of the deeper truths of the gospel, that I decided to leave a parting gift. So I wrote a 180 page book on the symbolism of the endowment. I only distributed 300 copies, but with the advantages of copy machines, there have been many thousands who have obtained copies. When I rejoined the Church and came back under my covenants of secrecy, I totally disassociated myself from the book, but now that those covenants have again been removed, I am now republishing what I believe to be a very inspiring book.

The temple is filled with symbolism in order to help us understand the paradoxes in the gospel. The most critical fact is that when we partake of the forbidden tree of knowledge, we *lose access* to the tree of life. Another example is the Star of David with the interlacing of two opposing triangles, one pointing down and the other pointing up. The way we use the sign of the

compass with the point down is opposite to what the Masons do, who also trace their ceremonies back to the Temple of Solomon, having their sign of the compass with the point up. Being dressed with the left and then with the right is also very symbolical. Each of the four tokens and signs correspond to the four levels of the gospel. The sign of the square has one measuring line going horizontal and the other going vertical, with the horizontal representing the law and the vertical representing love. One without the other just does not work.

### SUMMARY

We so easily forget that parables and symbols are used by the Lord to conceal as much as to reveal. There are many different levels of meanings in stories, even in words. Seen this way, the Temple Endowment is a masterpiece of symbolic communication by the Lord and is easily misunderstood by those who are unaware of the possible deeper meanings. As we gain better understanding of the different levels of the gospel, everything in the universe begins to teach us of the wonderful mysteries of God.

## Chapter IX

# THE FLAMING SWORD—SYMBOLIZING THE CRITICAL THIRD LEVEL OF THE GOSPEL

This chapter will deal with the third level of the gospel, which is this advanced phase of preparation. One of the most graphic symbols which relates to the tree of life is the flaming sword spoken of in the Garden of Eden story. The sword was placed there to keep Adam and Even from reaching the tree. We usually do not consider the flaming sword any further and fail to realize the other aspects it symbolized.

For example, it is specifically mentioned that it was placed at the eastern entrance to the garden. Our temples have their main door facing east. It is in the east that the rising sun of each new day first appears. So it is that the eastern gate of the garden seems to indicate blocking the way of further enlightenment. In addition, we might ask what is meant by the sword turning every way? That question leads us to recognize that the sword is truly an all inclusive barrier.

### WISDOM OF PROVIDING A PROBATIONARY PERIOD

In the Garden of Eden account, we are told that the Lord placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree. I used to think the flaming sword was a permanent barrier, and a barrier it is, but it is not an impassable barrier. As Alma explained to his wayward son, Corianton:

**Now, we see that the man had become as God, *knowing good and evil*; and lest he should put forth his hand, and [immediately] take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit [of the tree of life while they are in their disruptive knowledge of good and evil]—**

**And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, *a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God*... And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both *temporally and spiritually* from the presence of the Lord... And there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and *A REPENTANCE GRANTED*, which *repentance mercy claimeth*...**

**Therefore, O my son, WHOSOEVER WILL COME MAY COME [BACK] AND PARTAKE OF THE WATERS OF LIFE [i.e., fruit of the tree of life] FREELY; and whoso-**

ever will *not* come the same is *not compelled* to come. (Alma 42:2-7, 22, 27)

### WATERS OF LIFE ALSO REPRESENT THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST

Notice I showed in parentheses that the waters of life are equivalent to the tree of life because they both symbolize the pure love of God. The symbolism of the fountain of living waters and tree of life are synonymous.

**The rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life, which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.** (1 Nephi 11:25)

The flaming sword was to function as a restraint to prevent Adam and Eve from getting back to the tree of life before they had repented. Notice that the sword was on fire and *fire purifies*. God is a flaming fire. We are to be *baptized by fire* and the Holy Ghost. Those who desire to partake of the fruit of the tree will want to have enough faith in the mercy of God and have repented enough so that they can walk through the flaming barricade of that twisting, churning blazing sword which cuts every way.

### GOING THROUGH THE FLAMING SWORD

The flaming sword suggests a trial by fire which Peter seems to refer to when he wrote, ***“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory.”*** (1 Peter 1:7) What we will find is that going through the flaming sword perfectly describes the cleansing process one must experience before being capable of eating the fruit of total non-judgmentalness.

Moroni also defined the two specific levels to the *fullness of the gospel*. Once the law has become dead and one no longer looks to the law to produce eternal life, one is free to experience the gospel in its fullness. The first step is (1) *to come unto Christ* and the second step is (2) *to be perfected in Him*.

Coming unto Christ is a process of dying to the old self, which is the natural man steeped in his knowledge of good and evil. Being perfected in Him is receiving the gift of His perfect love, which produces the giving up of all the judgmentalness picked up in the preparatory gospel, which taught us to compare everything *that is* with what *it ought to be*. Let's face it, we are not about to give up that proud judging habit painlessly. It takes some real humbling to be stripped of the pride of looking down our noses at *what ought not to be*.

### THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD

Paul counseled his fellow Hebrew saints to be patient during this humbling, chastening phase. He wrote:

**Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth... Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS unto them which are exercised thereby.”** (Hebrews 12:5 & 11)

As we have seen, John witnessed that we can then be anointed with His perfect love, which casts out all fear, thus enabling us to have ***“boldness in the Day of Judgment”*** and be ***“in the light as Christ is in the light.”***

### ONLY THOSE ON THE SECOND LEVEL ARE READY FOR THE THIRD LEVEL

To those who have only known the first level, the outward, temporal law of the gospel, as proud inhabitants of the great and spacious building, it may seem impossible, or at least improb-

able, that such a permanent perfection in Christ's love could ever be attained in this frail mortal life. However, as Lehi saw, those who have experienced being on the strait and narrow path by the blessings of Spirit and have been *wrought upon by the Holy Ghost*, can begin to understand with a brighter faith and hope, even though the path, itself, cannot take them there.

By the blessings of the Spirit in the spiritual law, they will have tasted enough of the power of His love to have a real hope, a genuine faith, coming from their own experience that, with Christ, such a spiritual state might really be possible. Yet, because they are still living by fixed ideals, they will have also found that even after such blessings, they are still falling short of their ideal of what perfection in Christ is supposed to be. It is only through this "misery," as Nephi described it, that we may finally give up our prideful knowledge of "*what out to be*" and *YIELD*. Remember, we yield ONLY when we give up the struggle. Yielding is not struggling. We yield when we stop trying to go ahead and, instead, step aside to wait.

### THE COMFORT OF STAYING WITH THE PACK

As I wrote earlier, most faithful members of the Church have lived fruitful, fulfilling lives only on the first temporal law level of the preparatory gospel. Out of a thousand on this level, it would seem evident that not many have moved to even the second level in this life during these hundred and seventy years that we, as a Church, have been under condemnation. That is why the Lord has warned us that many are called but few are chosen.

Of course it is not ours to judge individuals, but for simplicity, let's say that perhaps a hundred out of a thousand have been blessed to move to at least the spiritual level of the law. Those in this minority group probably had to learn to keep quiet about the marvelous blessings they were experiencing because the majority of those around them would find it hard to believe that such blessings could be received by anyone who is not *a recognized prophet* and certainly not by people *who are no better than themselves—or even as good*.

### THE NECESSITY OF A BROKEN HEART

Christ has stressed that such chastening is one of His most important tasks. Notice the following statement which we have quoted a number of times in Book I, which shows how the Lord described His work of purging us of the sin of being called and ordained *but not chosen*:

**Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and *whom I love I also* CHASTEN that their sins may be forgiven, *for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in ALL things* out of temptation, and I have loved you—Wherefore, ye must needs be chastened and *stand rebuked before my face*...**

**But behold, verily I say unto you, that there are *many* who have been ordained among you, whom I have called, but *few* of them are chosen. They who are not chosen have sinned a *very grievous sin*, in that they are *walking in darkness at noon-day*. (D&C 95:1-6)**

Let's remember, this painful processing is not out of His lack of love, but through His love. "**Whom I love I also chasten.**" This chastening is done to "**prepare a way for their deliverance.**" It is to deliver us from the FALL by returning us to the TREE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

### TO PREPARE MY PEOPLE FOR THE GLORY

In our Church history, after the great suffering in Ohio, Missouri and Nauvoo, the camps of Israel were hanging on for dear life at Winter Quarters. At that critical time of almost unbelievable trials, the Lord gave clear and powerful words to Brigham Young:

**My people must be TRIED in ALL things, that they may be *prepared* to receive the GLORY that I have for them, even *the glory of Zion*; and he that will not *bear chastisement* is not worthy of my kingdom...**



**For my Spirit is sent forth into the world to ENLIGHTEN THE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE, and to the condemnation of the ungodly.** (D&C 136:31 & 33)

Thirteen years earlier, in the bitter winter of 1833 when the Saints were first driven from the central gathering place of Zion in Jackson County, the Lord revealed that His hand was in their suffering and humiliation.

**Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. For all those who will *not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.*** (D&C 101:4-5)

### **DENYING THE LORD WITHOUT KNOWING IT**

We may try to take comfort in the fact that although we may smart a little when things go against us in life, at least we do not “deny” the Lord. That may be true on the level of the law, but may not be true at all on the third level of the Lord’s chastisement, for we can often fail to see and confess His hand when bad things happen to us. When we do *not* acknowledge our difficulties, even severe difficulties, as *special gifts* from Christ for our unfoldment, then in reality *we are denying Him* as the infinite source of those difficulties. Notice the strong warning the Lord gave to those saints who wanted to qualify as worthy inhabitants of Zion, the pure in heart:

**And in NOTHING doth man offend God, or against NONE is his wrath kindled, SAVE THOSE WHO CONFESS NOT HIS HAND IN ALL THINGS.** (D&C 59:21)

Well, is His hand in ALL things or isn’t it? And does that include all natural disasters? Does that include man-made disasters? Does that include slipping on the ice or a car accident? Does God actually do all things, or merely allow all things that happen to happen, and out of His infinite wisdom, sees that things on this earth must be as they are without His interference most of the time? This is an important subject because it is a critical element in possessing the pure love of Christ and will be what we will see from many points of view in this book.

### **SUMMARY**

As fallen man finally realizes that he cannot fulfill all of the demands of the forbidden tree of knowledge, he is ready to be led away from his worship of knowledge to face the flaming sword. The purpose of the trial by fire, the flaming sword, is to break him free from all of his beliefs about *what ought to be*, which makes him carnal, sensual and devilish. As he is stripped of the pride of always needing to be right, he is able to see more and more of the *illusions of his conclusions*. Only in this way does he gradually become willing to be thankful for all things, just the way they are, “**willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.**” (Mosiah 3:19)

## **Chapter X**

### **THE IRON ROD—ALSO SYMBOLIZING THE THIRD LEVEL OF THE GOSPEL**

Now that we have seen how the flaming sword symbolizes both the barrier to the tree of life and also the chastening process by which one becomes capable of enjoying the fruit which is precious above all, we are ready to return to Lehi’s vision to see that the symbolism of the iron rod represents the same purifying function.

As we stated earlier, most people have assumed that the rod, since it represents the word of God, means the law of God. So the subject of this chapter is to see that, instead, it represents, like the flaming sword, the chastening hand of Christ on those who would come unto Him.

Since this is such a paradigm shift for most members, be patient as we try to better understand the significance of this new way of seeing Lehi's vision.

### “IRON ROD” SAINTS AND “LIAHONA” SAINTS

A number of years ago, Dr. Paul Wells, a renowned professor of religion at BYU, came up with interesting titles for two categories of active, diligent Saints. *Iron Rod Saints* is the name he gave those who live by the rigid and fixed letter of the law, and *Liahona Saints* for those who live more spiritually, by the spirit of the law. We know that the symbol of the *iron rod* as seen in Lehi's vision has a great deal to do with the tree of life, but, in contrast, what do we know about the *Liahona*?

### THE MIRACULOUS LIAHONA

As we read the history, shortly after Lehi and his caravan were on their journey to the new land, the Liahona was given to them as a compass to guide them on their way in the wilderness and to also serve as a director for spiritual instruction. Nephi explains:

**My father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go.** (1 Nephi 16:10)

Not long after they had received this wonderful gift, Nephi broke his steel bow and could no longer provide food for the camp. As they suffered from hunger day after day, everyone but Nephi became discouraged and complained bitterly. Then the Lord rebuked the group, especially Lehi, who at this time was still living on the level of the spiritual law of good and evil. Due to these difficult circumstances, even he had been complaining about the hardness of the way.

### THE LIAHONA WORKED ONLY BY FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we read this account, notice how much chastising it takes to break us out of our arrogance of knowing “what ought to be” based upon the spiritual level of the law.

**And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow.**

**And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly...The pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.**

**And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord [more knowledge of good and evil]; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things.** (1 Nephi 16:25-29)

Personally, I had long assumed that the Liahona was another representation of the love of God like the tree of life, but that could not be the case. The Liahona worked only when they were living righteously by faith. When they were not, the Liahona would FAIL because their faith and righteousness failed. In contrast, the pure love of Christ is something that “*never faileth.*”

For many years I found these two definitions, the Iron Rod Saints and the Liahona Saints, useful descriptions and helped to clarify the two main types of active, diligent members—(1)

those who were religious by being satisfied to be studying and outwardly obeying the law of the gospel, and (2) those who were not only active, but also were experiencing deeper, inner blessings of the Spirit. For the most part, the Liahona Saints were trying to live by faithful *obedience to the spirit of the law* which they still looked to as *the source* by which they were *earning* their eternal exaltation. Calling them Liahona Saints seemed to be appropriate.

I also thought that the title of Iron Rod Saints was a good name for the letter-of-the-law members. Much later, however, I changed my mind. The reason is that the allegory of the iron rod began to have a very different meaning, one which had little to do with rigid obedience to the law.

### IS THE “WORD” THE “LAW?”

As we have mentioned earlier, when Nephi saw his father’s vision, he asked the angel to tell him the meaning of the iron rod. He was told:

**The rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God, and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.** (1 Nephi 11:25)

Yes, like most members, I had been assuming that the *word* of God is “*the law of God*,” i.e., the commandments, just as I had understood that the living waters represented the law of the gospel. We sing the beautiful hymn, “Hold to the Rod,” because we have understood that holding to the rod is to earnestly try to keep the commandments and, thereby, reach the tree of life. So the title, Iron Rod Saints, was used to define those who concentrated on the literal meaning of the law of the gospel and the importance of learning what strict obedience is required, defending that understanding and trying to conduct their lives in strict obedience to it.

### ARE WE NOT TO LIVE BY *EVERY* “WORD?”

In the 84th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, shortly before the condemnation is pronounced upon the Church, the Saints are commanded, “**For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.**” (D&C 84:44) Like the way we interpret the iron rod, we believe this literally means that we must and can live by every commandment that God announces. Such an understanding, and most members see it that way, puts a heavy, even impossible burden upon us. Later, we will see an entirely different way to understand what it really means to live by *EVERY WORD*—a very different way which does lead all the way to the tree of life.

But for now, let’s remember, by the law we are all *cut off*. So what if the “word” of God DOES NOT represent the “law” of God, the knowledge of good and evil? In such a case, we might want to call the “letter of the Law” Saints by another name.

### APPRECIATING THOSE IN THE BUILDING

We have usually identified those in the great and spacious building as the vain and foolish people of the world. However, the scoffers in the building, to a significant degree, would have been so critical because they were diligent and loyal fellow Israelites. Yes, they were proud, but didn’t they have good reason? After all, they were the Lord’s chosen people who had been blessed by the gift of God’s one and only law.

Let’s read again the description of that beautiful, levitating building, almost like a temple, which gave its inhabitants such great pride, self assurance and, yes, at the same time, *self justified judgmentalness*.

**And I beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building, and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth. And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were**

in the *attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers* towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit. (1 Nephi 8:26-27)

And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building...And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the *wisdom* thereof; yea, behold the HOUSE OF ISRAEL hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the *pride of the world*, and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. (1 Nephi 11:35-36)

I think it is safe to assume that a good share of the mockers were zealous Israelites with their holy law, their priesthood ordinances and their God created, prophet-led organization. Their hostile judgment against those at the tree of life must have come from their desire to promote and defend their way of life, actually their holy law of righteousness. They clearly demonstrate that Lehi was correct in declaring that the knowledge of good and evil, even on the spiritual level, cuts everyone off from totally experiencing the perfect oneness with Christ.

### THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING SAINTS

Like those beautiful, well dressed inhabitants of the building, many Latter-day Saints tend to see themselves as faithful protectors of the law and the prophets, judging and condemning those who dare believe that there must be something more than just living by the principle and ordinances of the gospel. Their hostile mocking and finger pointing at their more spiritually seeking members would be the result of their so-called justifiable pride, just as it was the case with the proud children of Israel who inhabited the great and spacious building.

Since our latter-day Church is still under condemnation because of *our vanity*, the description might fit us as well as them. In contrast to the Liahona Saints, we might title the faithful, letter of the law members as *Great and Spacious Building Saints*.

Since Nephi was told that the iron rod is the word of God, we may have incorrectly assumed that *the iron rod was therefore the "law of God."* On the basis that those in the great and spacious building were the real followers of the law, then the iron rod is not the law. Then what does the iron rod represent?

### THE IRON ROD IS THE ONLY WAY TO REACH THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE

First, let's again read the account in Lehi's vision where he describes the iron rod which led to the fruit laden tree of life.

**I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood...**

**And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered on and were lost.**

**And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they had partaken of the fruit of the tree.** (1 Nephi 8:19-24)

So Lehi watched, fascinated, as only some of those blinded on the path felt around until they took hold of the end of the rod. Only these relatively few followed the rod, hand over hand, making their way through the bewildering mist of darkness to finally reach the gloriously white tree, *"the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow."*

## **CHRIST, HIMSELF, IS THE “WORD OF GOD”**

When I understood better what Lehi taught Jacob about both the *temporal and spiritual law* being a knowledge of good and evil, it seemed evident that neither the letter of the law nor the spirit of the law represented the very important “rod of iron” in the vision.

Since the tree of life and the fountains of living water are representations of “the love of God which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men,” the rod of iron which leads directly to the fruit of that tree would have to be something other than the law which cuts us off from the full experience of that love. So, I began asking, could the iron rod represent a purifying and humbling function of Christ, as was also symbolized by the flaming sword?

After all, is it not true that *Christ is called the Word*? John bore witness to “*the Word*” being the name of Christ in the Trinity of the Godhead.

**For there are three that bare record in heaven,  
the FATHER, *THE WORD*, and the HOLY GHOST.**

(1 John 5:7)

John, the Beloved, began his gospel with a testimony of the Word being none other than Christ.

**In the beginning was the WORD  
and the WORD was with God,  
and the WORD was God...  
All things were made by Him...  
In Him was life,  
and the life was the light of men.**

(John 1-5)

In the next chapter we will consider the way that Christ chastens those He loves to open their hearts to the most precious of all gifts, His pure and perfect love.

## **SUMMARY**

The third level of the gospel is designed to take the journey from the tree of knowledge into a purifying process. Only in this way are we ready to accept the gift of the pure love of Christ. Liahona Saints are those members who have moved to the wonderful but vulnerable, strait and narrow path. They are on the higher level of the spiritual law, being guided by the Holy Ghost, as Lehi was with the sacred Liahona. But Liahona Saints can still be blinded and disoriented by becoming proud of their inspired knowledge. This vanity, which is Lucifer’s most subtle temptation, is an appropriate way to understand the mists of darkness, blinding those on the path. Only when we give up trying to guide ourselves by our own conclusions, will we take hold of the iron rod. Christ, the chastening iron rod, will gradually destroy our arrogance of knowing only one way to see the multiple and diverse ways *God’s hand is in ALL things*.

## Chapter XI

# YIELDING TO CHASTENING OF CHRIST

This chapter will deal with the transition from being a Liahona Saint, one who is enjoying the spiritual gifts of grace on the strait and narrow path, to becoming a true Iron Rod Saint, one who is willingly and cheerfully (most of the time) going through the flaming sword by submitting to the chastening of Christ.

### GETTING LOST BY THE TEMPTATIONS THAT COME WITH SPIRITUAL REVELATIONS

Those on the Second Level of the spiritual law are vulnerable to the “temptations of the devil” in a very subtle way. Strange as it may seem, their vulnerability looks like anything but vulnerability. Their rich spiritual life looks more like real security in the trusting arms of the Holy Spirit. The reason is that when people are being blessed on the level of the spiritual law, they receive more and more guidance by the Spirit. To them, these are thrilling times. At last, it appears, the promise of being led by the Spirit is really working in their lives. With grateful hearts, they acknowledge their trust in the graciousness of the Lord.

So if we look at the possibility that the path represents spiritual guidance, then how could the temptations of the devil blind them to the right way? Understanding the answer to that question is critical. The fact is that when they are truly open to inspired guidance of the Lord, they are also more open to spiritual temptations.

### MY OWN TEN YEAR JOURNEY IN THE MIST OF DARKNESS

I speak from personal experience on this issue so perhaps I can save you from having to go through the same type of detour. My detour took me about ten years, between 1967 to 1977, before the Lord put my hand on the iron rod, enabling me to head back in the direction of the tree of life.

Now don't get me wrong. As strange and amazing as those ten years were, I clearly see the hand of the Lord in all of it, including the hand of the devil. A group of us enjoyed wonderful visions, prophecies, visitations and direction, along with what we thought was a great deal of humility and love. Also during that time, my knowledge became so great that I left the Church. Yet, I was continually seeking to serve the Lord with everything I had.

### HOW THE LORD FINALLY TOOK MY HAND

Then in 1977, the Lord decided I had wandered long enough and shocked me with a two hour experience which showed me that I didn't know much at all, if anything, about what ought to be. That is when He revealed to me how His hand is in all things, including all the foolish things upon the earth that confound the wise, meaning spiritually led people like me. He showed me the actual *perfection* of his work in *my own imperfection*. Even more thrilling, the Lord showed me the actual *perfection* of the Church in all of its *imperfection*.

That is when I pled to be allowed back in the Church and the Lord assured me that

such would be arranged, and it eventually was. So for the last twenty years, I have had a testimony of the Church that has never been so strong. It was my joy and privilege to choose to function totally and joyously under priesthood authority.

Now, as of a few months ago, I freely gave up my membership so that I could again distribute these books I am writing. That sounds inconsistent, I know. But I have not taken this step because the Lord told me to. I did it because I chose to do what I am doing. I am not teaching any new revelations, but only emphasizing what God has already revealed. So why is it that the Brethren, whom I totally believe are prophets of the Lord, do not want these things taught in the Church and why have I chosen to break ranks?

### **MY BOOKS ARE PRIMARILY FOR THOSE ALREADY ON THE STRAIT AND NARROW PATH**

It is for a simple reason, my friend. More and more people in the Church are moving ahead of the pack, leaving the great and spacious building of the First Level and finding their way onto the strait and narrow path of the Second Level. Many of them are getting into the same situation as I did when they are subtly tempted to become “humbly” wise.

The purpose of these four books is to reach these wonderful, faithful, spiritual souls so that they learn how to go to the “not knowing” mind of the Third Level, seeing the illusions of their conclusions. It seems evident that this is not a function the Lord is ready for the whole Church to undertake at this time. The Church is, as I believe that it should be, heavily involved in the structure, discipline and burden of the temporal law.

### **WHY THE LORD IS HOLDING THE CHURCH ON THE FIRST LEVEL**

To maintain the integrity of the First Level, the Brethren cannot give general support to the Second Level. Remember, this is the way the levels work. So they can only give disdain to those who have ventured ahead to walk the strait and narrow path of the spiritual law. The fact that so many of these are wandering off onto strange roads is strong evidence to the Brethren that none should be so foolish as to seek deeper levels.

The Brethren, because of the way the First Level works, are absolutely right. At this point in time it is quite precarious for Saints to try their spiritual wings because the Lord has not yet moved the support program of the Church to that level.

Personally, remembering the clarion call of President Benson, I suspect that such a time will come in the not too distant future. But the spiritual shift has already begun. Many are taking spiritual flight and joyfully walking down the spiritual path. So I decided to let my Stake President know that, since I knew the territory, I was going to be a friend to those people. Possibly, I might help them understand how to recognize the mist of darkness and move to the Third Level, which is the iron rod. Of course, he could not understand but I trust that you might understand. If you don't, you are still going to do fine doing it your way.

### **THE KEY TO NOT GETTING LOST IN THE MIST OF DARKNESS**

Here is *the key* that those on the spiritual path would do well to understand. The principle underlying this key is that whenever we receive a revelation from the Lord, in and of itself, it is both a *temptation* as well as a *blessing*, depending upon what we do with it.

Lucifer's temptation is to have us turn a revelation into a conclusion, and joyfully, possibly proudly (in our great humility, of course), decorate our tree of knowledge with it.

Remember who it is who got us to partake of the tree of knowledge in the first place. It is Satan's particular pleasure to have us continually embracing the tree of knowledge by making fixed conclusions out of our heavenly inspiration—*that we thus know for sure what is right, what is wrong, what we are to do and what will happen*. That is exactly what the devil has in mind to get us off the path that is supposed to lead us to perfect, unconditional love. More on this critical subject later.

This becoming vain and proud in concluding about God's ultimate truth is what Paul said the Corinthians were doing. They were receiving many blessings of the Spirit, for he acknowledged **"that in everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge...so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."** (1 Corinthians 1:5-7) But what were they doing with their revealed knowledge? They were contending one with another. **"For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?"** (1 Corinthians 3:3)

### THE DANGER OF MAKING CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions, especially when based upon the inspiration of the Spirit, tend to be very divisive, wherein we are easily **"tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."** (Ephesians 4:14) These "winds of doctrine" do not have to be "false doctrine." It is the old vanity of "I know more than you, so listen to me" syndrome. So the temptations of the devil are to have us take our revelations from God and use them to become even wiser by concluding that now we know the one and only truth about the situation. Thus we feel divided from and possibly superior to those who think otherwise.

In this way, every revelation, whether it be from the Lord, from our own feelings, or from other sources, can be used by Satan to have us make fixed conclusions, thus enhancing our "glorious" tree of knowledge. Therefore, we tend to become unteachable to other points of view. Once we understand this clever trick of the devil, we can refuse to be tempted in this way. So instead of running over to decorate our glorious tree of knowledge by making conclusions out of our insight, inspiration or revelations, including visitations, how about taking them over to decorate our *tree of life*? We do that by seeing these wonderful revelations only as interesting POSSIBILITIES. Thus we can still be open to seeing *other possibilities*. There is no other way to remain as a little child.

### HOW CHRIST CHASTENS THOSE HE LOVES

If we think of the iron rod as representing *a function of Christ*, what function would He perform to guide and humble those who have left the great and spacious building and are seeking the tree of life? We remember that in order to experience the *at-one-ment of His perfect love*, we must have a broken heart and contrite spirit.

We have all heard the saying about sparing the rod and spoiling the child. The Psalmist adds, speaking of the wicked, **"Thou shalt beat them WITH A ROD OF IRON; thou shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."** (Psalm 2:9) So we might ask, is that what is required to change the spiritually proud and wise into the humble and contrite? Yes, indeed!

Remember, there must be a dying to this Second Level before we can go to the Third Level. Those who will not give up their trust and reliance upon daily spiritual direction of *what ought to be*, will often refuse to try *this other way* to relate to Christ. This other way, which is symbolized as the *end* of the iron rod, is to acknowledge that they have *no idea of what ought to be*. It is called having a *not-knowing mind*.



## SUMMARY

Since we have all lived much of our lives on the tree of knowledge by which we drew a feeling of comfort, security and “humble” superiority by being “right,” the purpose of the chastening of the Lord is to open up our hearts to be more like a little child, fully teachable. To do that, we can refuse to convert our revelations—whether they are a sense of knowing, a burning in the bosom, a flash of inspiration, a dream-vision, or even an open vision or visitation—into a conclusion about the one and only “TRUTH.” Instead, we treasure such information as AN INTERESTING POSSIBILITY and stay open, teachable, resilient and spontaneous, i.e., as Christ told Nicodemus, like the wind.

## Chapter XII

### THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST

#### The Fourth Level of the Gospel

The first three levels of the gospel are preparatory for this final state of being, the gift of eternal life by possessing the pure love of Christ. This is the “rest” Christ offered those who would come unto Him. This is the second comforter, the peaceable things of immortal glory, the truth of all things. This is the calling and election made sure, the promise of eternal life. This is walking in the light as Christ is in the light, having no darkness, where fear is no longer. Thus by the grace of God, one is made perfect in Him, becoming holy, without spot.

### THE MAGNIFICENT, SYMBOLIC TREE OF LIFE

The true meaning of the tree of life is the key to the mystery of godliness, just as the true meaning of the tree of knowledge is the key to the fall, both playing such important parts in the Garden of Eden event. **“And I the Lord God, planted the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”** (Moses 3:9)

When this symbol of the love of God was created, it was made to defy all comparison in beauty and glory. Lehi spoke of its indescribable beauty:

**And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted.**

**Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy.** (1 Nephi 8:10-12)

**That tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is THE GREATEST OF ALL THE GIFTS OF GOD.** (1 Nephi 15:36)

### WHITER THAN DRIVEN SNOW

When Nephi was shown the tree, his awe was exceeded only by his curiosity. He wanted to understand what the tree represented. But first he exclaimed:

**I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did**

*exceed the whiteness of the driven snow...*

**I said unto the Spirit; I behold thou has shown unto me the tree which is PRECIOUS ABOVE ALL. And he said unto me; What desirest thou?**

**And I said unto him; To know the interpretation thereof... And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal father! [Now] Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?**

**And I answered him, saying: Yea, IT IS THE LOVE OF GOD, WHICH SHEDDETH ITSELF ABROAD IN THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN; *wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.***

**And he spake unto me, saying; Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.** (1 Nephi 11:8-11, 21-23)

We should take note that Nephi did not discover that the tree represents a virtue, a holiness, and spirituality that man is to develop on his own through learning the knowledge of good and evil, even with God's help.

Nephi understood the meaning of the tree when he was shown a vision of the Christ child in the arms of His mother. The babe revealed to him that the glorious tree represented God's gift to the world of His only begotten son, who would bring fallen mankind back into oneness, called the *at-one-ment*. That oneness is what the infinite and eternal Christ is all about, and the comprehension of the oneness is called THE LOVE OF GOD.

We are told that not only was the tree of life protected at the east gate of the Garden of Eden by the flaming sword, but also by Cherubims.

### WHY WERE CHERUBIMS PLACED AT THE GATE?

Cherubims is plural for cherub. Our LDS dictionary defines them as "figures representing heavenly creatures, the exact form being unknown." The Lord had Israel create statues of them to be placed in the Holy of Holies and on the Mercy Seat of the Ark. Ezekiel saw them in a vision. (LDS Dictionary, p. 632)

In Hebrew, a cherub is a child, with an innocent or chubby face. Historically, they are pictured in art as little child angels. If that is accurate, they would carry a great message. Christ told His disciples—

**Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.**" (Mark 10:15)

**Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.** (Matthew 18:3-4)

So what was the function of the Cherubim? Were they fierce warriors to destroy those who might try to circumvent the flaming sword or were they child angels, waiting there to welcome and escort those, and only those, who were humble and meek to the center of the garden where they could feast upon the fruit that was precious, pure and sweet above all? What an interesting thought.

### THE GREATEST OF ALL THE GIFTS OF GOD

As we have discussed, one of the ways we keep from clearly seeing the mark is because of our belief that the pure love of Christ is a process of self-development rather than a gift. There is nothing wrong with striving to be better in every way, of course, and the Spirit will assist us in that process. But, as we are told, the pure love of Christ is something God sheds into our hearts. It is not something finite human beings can create by themselves, even though it is up to us to make room for that gift and nurture it as it grows.

So what is this love that enters the heart that man cannot create? We can answer that question in part by asking another question. In what way does the pure love of Christ relate to the gift

of eternal life? Christ said that **"life eternal is to *know thee*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."** (John 17:3) What does it mean to really KNOW God and His Son? Since God **"comprehendeth ALL things...and all things are BY Him, and OF him,"** would comprehending God have anything to do with the pure love of Christ as well as eternal life? We shall see that comprehending God and experiencing eternal life is what the pure love of Christ is all about.

### YE SHALL COMPREHEND EVEN GOD

Is it possible for man to comprehend God? The Lord has proclaimed that eventually the Saints in the latter days are to experience an incredible and miraculous blessing by which they will more fully comprehend God. It is to comprehend the infinite and eternal light that shines in our darkness. That divine light is not only the substance of our being and the light of our minds, but out of which ALL things are made and live.

Just as ancient Israel was promised that their scourge and judgment would come to an end by their finally being given the gift of loving God with all their hearts, souls and might, we too have been given a similar promise. The wording, however, is a little different. Instead of describing the miracle as that of opening the heart to perfect love, the Lord describes the ultimate miracle as "comprehending even God." In Section 88, the Lord said:

**The light shineth in darkness,  
and the darkness comprehendeth it not;  
nevertheless, *the day shall come*  
when you shall *comprehend even God,*  
*being quickened in Him and by Him.***

(D&C 88:49)

What a glorious promise! But do we fathom the depth of the promise? I know I had thought I comprehended God because I understood that He was an exalted, glorified and perfected man. As John said, however, **"God is LIGHT."** It is His infinite beingness, His eternal Presence, the light of truth, by which we are to perceive how we are IN Him and BY Him. It is to comprehend the ONE God, infinite and eternal, to which the *Book of Mormon* bears such powerful witness.

### THEY "IS" ONE GOD

In my earlier scriptural study, I had concentrated so much on the individual separateness of each member of the Godhead that I did not realize that they are one in much more than purpose and power. We are assured, however, that in some infinite way they join together as ONE GOD. In their individuality, they are each a God-Being. But in their infinite presence through the living light which shines forth, THEY **"IS"** ONE GOD. The verb "is" is singular. They IS one God.

Nephi wrote,

**This is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, WHICH IS ONE GOD, WITHOUT END.** (2 Nephi 31:21)

Alma taught,

**Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which IS ONE ETERNAL GOD.** (Alma 11:44)

Mormon testified,

**Unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, *which is one God*** (Mormon 7:7)  
Original translation 1830)

Even the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, in their testimony, declared,

**And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, WHICH IS ONE**

**GOD.** (The Testimony of Three Witnesses)

Sometimes the declaration uses the plural verb, "are." Christ said, during His visitation to the Nephites,

**Behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost *are one*; and I am *in the Father*, and the *Father in me*, and the *Father and I are one*.** (3 Nephi 11:27)

In other words, the Father and I are one God. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read,

**Which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are *one God, infinite and eternal, without end*.** (D&C 20:28)

**"I AM THE TRUE LIGHT THAT IS IN YOU AND YOU ARE IN ME."**

Yes, the Lord promised us that the day would come when we are to comprehend even God, being quickened *in Him and by Him*. Then, immediately, the Lord gave these additional thrilling words of promise:

**Then shall ye *know* that ye have *seen me*,  
that I am,  
and that *I am the true light that is in you*,  
and that *you are in me*;  
otherwise ye could not abound...  
And if your eye be *single to my glory*,  
your whole bodies shall *be filled with light*...  
and that body which is *filled with light*  
*comprehendeth all things*.**

(D&C 88:50 & 67)

**THE MYSTERY OF COMPREHENDING GOD**

Ancient Israel heard the words of Moses just as we have read these words in the Doctrine and Covenants. But as Israel still looked beyond the mark and were put under condemnation, so were we. So let us review what the prophets have taught about the hidden mystery of comprehending God. First, they warn us that God is not what we think He is, but much, much more. Down through the ages, religious people have thought they knew all about God and when the prophets have tried to share their more infinite and glorious understanding, it has usually been considered to be incomprehensible, illogical and foolish.

What about us? As we have seen, the Lord says we are under condemnation because of our own *vanity and unbelief*. In what way are we so vain? Well, do some of us proudly boast that because of the restored gospel, we already understand and comprehend God? Do we seem to be saying something like this?

"For us it is so simple! He is our Heavenly Father. He is an exalted, resurrected being with a body of flesh and bone in whose image we were created. Through His Son and His great councils, He is in touch with the universe and organizes all things for the good of those who believe these truths. He and His Son are one, yes, but only in that they are one in purpose. So where is the mystery about God?"

Besides our vanity, the Lord speaks of our unbelief. Wherein do we, with all of our study and faith, have such serious "unbelief?" Well, as we have read the above reference, that "unbelief" seems to include our not comprehending the light that He is, because He says we are not yet

qualified for that wonderful blessing. Could our unbelief be something as basic as our lack of understanding, even denying, the One Infinite and Eternal God?

### IT IS SO HARD TO SEE THAT WE DO NOT SEE

I must confess that such was the case with me. My finite and proud mind thought it knew much more about God than it really did. For many years I was convinced that there was no great mystery about God. Since we Latter-day Saints understand the great truth about the Father being a resurrected Being, and the world does not, I had a tendency to be a little smug because of my corner on truth about the Godhead and its key to eternal life. I wanted to stay in my comfort zone of making God much more finite than He is. But as the Lord allowed me to discover one expanding concept after another, each clue had to hit me over the head like a two by four.

What alarmed me is that some of these new truths would seem to contradict many of my preconceptions about what God and Christ are, which in turn limited my ability to comprehend what the pure love of Christ is all about. I now realize that the primary reason for my difficulty in finding the mark was because I stubbornly held onto some of these limiting concepts of God. As mentioned earlier, God is revealed to us as a paradox, i.e., conflicting concepts in that God is both finite and infinite, changing and unchanging.

### HAS GOD CHANGED OR NEVER CHANGED, THAT IS THE QUESTION?

As I stepped back just a little and examined more closely some of my beliefs about God, I began to find that my thinking was shallower than I had thought. For example, one of my firm beliefs was – and still is – that "as man is, God once was and as God is man may become." What a wonderful concept that is! Such a progressive, dynamic and personal plan of exaltation. It was plain and simple enough so that anyone could understand it who cared to do so. But one day I began to realize that our own scriptures testify that God has always been the same, from all eternity to all eternity. Eternity has no beginning and no end.

Mormon testified,

**For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but He is *unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity*...For do we not read that *God is the same yesterday, today, and forever* and in Him there is no variableness *neither shadow of changing*?** (Mormon 9:9 & Moroni 8:18)

Nephi declared,

**For He is the *same yesterday, today and forever*.** (1 Nephi 10:18)

In our modern revelations, we read,

**Therefore showing that He is the *same God, yesterday, today, and forever*.** (D&C 20:12)

Well, has God progressed from man or has He forever been the same? At first I didn't want to think about the obvious contradiction. I wondered if this is one of the mysteries we are told to leave alone? If I let myself think about it, the more confused I became. How was I to reconcile two apparently diametrically opposing concepts about God? As unbelievable as it may seem, when I more fully comprehended the infinite and eternal God, I began to understand how these two concepts, without compromising the complete accuracy of each, do not contradict each other. In the next chapter we will go into this further to discover how both really are true.

### WHAT ONE COMPREHENDS ARE THE PARADOXES OF GOD

As mentioned before, we call these puzzles *paradoxes*. A paradox is *a declaration of two seemingly contradictory statements, both of which may nonetheless be true*. It is a word we will

be using more frequently because what one may discover is that comprehending God is seeing that everything in creation turns out to be a paradox. Is God both "finite" and "infinite?" What if there was "a beginning" and, yet, it is "without beginning?" What if "then" is not really then, it is "now?" What if there is no "there," it is "here?" Knowing the answers is not important. After all, these concepts can only add to our technical knowledge, and in and of themselves, have little value. In fact, it doesn't really matter if we believe or disbelieve any of these paradoxes, but they are thrilling by-products of comprehending the infinite and eternal. It is a new and very humbling way of seeing Christ's world when we do.

Does this all seem confusing when you thought "God" was so simple? But all we have just done is take a little peek at possibly why the natural mind cannot comprehend God. In the next chapter we will deal with the fact that God not only has a glorified, resurrected body of flesh and bones, but is the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God also revealed to us in the scriptures.

### TO PRUNE MY VINEYARD FOR THE LAST TIME

But one might ask, **"When are the saints to receive this great blessing of comprehending the true light that is in them? Are we to wait until the millennium?"** No! The Lord explains that the blessing is to enable us to assist Him in preparing the earth for His coming. The Lord has said that not only have we been *called*, but we grievously sin if we are not *chosen* worthy of walking in the fullness of the noonday light. For what purpose? **"To prepare *mine apostles* [LDS Bible Dictionary says that all special witnesses are apostles] to prune my vineyard for the last time, that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh."** (D&C 95:4-6)

### SUMMARY

What a thrilling promise the Lord has given to us, that He will enable us to comprehend that which is infinite and eternal. There is no way we could do that and not have His love springing from our hearts. That love may engender incredible feelings of joy and awe from time to time, but it is the comprehending God that establishes the perfect trust which casts out all fear. But first we must come face to face with the fact that we really do not comprehend the light which is the source and life of all things. When we do comprehend that light, we enter into a world which is totally transformed in glory and dominion. It is not the world we have thought it is. God is not only what we think He is. Christ is not only what we think He is. All of them are much, much more than we had ever dared imagine. *And so are we!*

## Chapter XIV

# ONE GOD, INFINITE AND ETERNAL

Now that we have seen there are four distinct levels of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it might be helpful to see that even an understanding of God comes on levels.

### GOD APPEARS DIFFERENT ON EACH LEVEL

On the FIRST LEVEL of doing the *works* of righteousness, God is a judge who promises great rewards if we obey ALL of His commandments. On this level, God's love for us is conditional depending upon whether we are passing the test. God is revealed as both a God of wrath and a God of benevolence.

On the SECOND LEVEL of *grace*, wherein we receive *tastes* of the oneness of the tree of life, the presence of God is experienced more as a spiritual power which dwells within our hearts. Although, on this level, God's approval is still conditional, His mercy is ever abiding. He ceases to be a God of wrath, yet He is still a separate entity from that which we are.

On the THIRD LEVEL of the *chastening*, wherein we gradually let loose of our *need* to merit God's love, we begin to experience the absence of separateness from God. In this way, the third level is often called *The Integrative Level* because we are moving from separateness to union, seeing that we, as spirit beings, are individualized and personalized manifestations of the One Infinite God.

On the FOURTH LEVEL of *oneness*, called the pure love of Christ, the Godhead is experienced both in their finite sense, as perfected God-Beings, and in their infinite sense, as being the One God, infinite and eternal, manifest in ALL things, in which there is nothing but God. In the same way, there is nothing but Christ, since the universe is not only made BY HIM, it is made OF HIM.

### MORMONISM REALLY INCLUDES ALL FOUR CONCEPTS OF GOD

In the religions of the world, there are two opposing concepts of God, dualism and monism. Dualism, the concept held by most religions in the West, claims that God, the Creator, is totally *separate from His creation*. Monism, the concept held by most religions of the East, is that the Creator and the creation are *one and the same*. What our Four Standard Works teach, very uniquely, is that both are true. The Trinity is made up of separate God-Beings who are finite, inside of time. Also, as Joseph Smith stated, with God, the past, present and future are one infinite and eternal "NOW," which is outside of time. By this view, as the *Book of Mormon* declares, **all God Beings, i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, IS ONE GOD, INFINITE AND ETERNAL.** We will consider these concepts in the first chapter of Section III.

B. H. Roberts, as a member of the First Council of Seventy, tried valiantly for many years to help the membership of the Church see the dual reality of God, being both infinite and finite. God is not just an infinite Spirit and He is not just a glorified, resurrected man. HE IS BOTH AND BOTH ARE ONE AND THE SAME.

Elder Roberts was assigned to write the study manual for the Seventies throughout the Church over the five year period from 1908 to 1913. The final year, 1913, was devoted to what he titled, *Divine Immanence and The Holy Ghost*.

Twenty years later, just before his death in 1933, he gave a very powerful talk at General Conference on the subject. Evidently it was not yet time for the Church to open up to a wider, more omniscient understanding of God, for it was generally ignored. But neither have his teachings ever been condemned nor contradicted.

### B. H. ROBERTS' DESCRIPTION OF THE ONE INFINITE GOD

This is what B. H. Roberts, one of our greatest and most widely respected scriptorian scholars, said in General Conference to the Church:

**This Light then, the Light of Truth and named for us men "the Light of Christ" – is also God, even the Spirit of God, or of the Gods, for it proceeds forth or vibrates, or radiates from all the Gods – from all who have partaken of the One Divine Nature – hence "The God of all other Gods" – mentioned by our Prophet of the New Dispensation, "The God of Gods," "The Lord of Lords," proceeding forth from them, to extend the one God into all space that *He might be in and through all things*; bearing all the powers and attributes of God, creating power in earth and sun and stars; world-sustaining power and guiding force.**

**He bearing all the mind and spiritual attributes of God into the immensity of space, becoming God everywhere present – OMNIPRESENT; and everywhere present with power –**

OMNIPOTENT; extending everywhere the power of God; also *All-Knowing, All-Seeing, All-Hearing* – OMNISCIENT! Bearing forth in fact all the attributes of Deity; Knowledge, Wisdom, Judgment, Truth, Holiness, Mercy – every characteristic or quality of all Divine Intelligences – *since they are ONE*; and this Divine Essence or Spirit becoming "the Light which is in all things, that giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the POWER OF GOD, who sitteth upon His throne, who is the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things."

United in this Divine Essence or Spirit is the mind of all Gods; and *all the Gods being INCARNATIONS of this Spirit*, become *God in unity*; and by the *incarnation of this Spirit in Divine personages*, they become the Divine Brotherhood of the Universe, the ONE GOD, though made of MANY. (The Last Seven Discourses of B. H. Roberts, pp. 99-100)

### NOW WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE PARADOX OF A CHANGING GOD WHO NEVER CHANGES

By this marvelous explanation of the one infinite God, we can gain a better idea of how our Father in Heaven was once, as an individual, a man like we are. But now, in His perfection, glory and conscious union with the Infinite Life which is in all things, our Father is that very Eternal God that is the same yesterday, today and forever. That is why the paradox, seemingly a contradiction, is true.

This is how the paradox of the Godhead being made up of three God-Beings, "**Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit...is one eternal God,**" is also true. This is the light that "**shines in darkness and the darkness [which is our natural minds] comprehends it not.**" This is the God that we will comprehend, experiencing the reality of being "**quickened in Him and by Him.**"

And as the Lord emphatically testified, "**Then shall ye know that ye have seen me, that I am, and that I am the true light that is in you, and that you are in me; otherwise ye could not abound.**" (D&C 88:50)

### THE LOVE OF GOD PASSETH KNOWLEDGE

I found that B. H. Roberts' great teachings helped me appreciate why the tree of life in Nephi's vision represents the love of God. The beautiful tree, white above all that is white, pure above all that is pure, is about INFINITE LIFE. It is the tree of ETERNAL LIFE. Life is ONE. Ordinary knowledge, even about God, is divided between belief and disbelief. In contrast, the love of God is this universal, cosmic union of light and power being expressed by all God-Beings, and as manifest to us, the Infinite Christ. It is this infinite reality of Himself which He sheds into the hearts of the children of men, and through that influx of divine intelligence, the recipient really does comprehend the Infinite and Eternal God.

That is why I believe Paul described the meat of the gospel as the "*wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom.*" (1 Corinthians 2:7) Notice, again, how Paul defined the mystery of Christ as a process of comprehending the incomprehensible in these words to the Ephesians:

**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;  
that ye, being rooted and grounded in [His] love,  
may be able to COMPREHEND with ALL saints  
what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;  
and TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST,  
WHICH PASSETH [natural] KNOWLEDGE,  
THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED  
WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD.**

(Ephesians 3:17-19)

I had always been thrilled by those words, even though I wondered what magnitude of un-



derstanding Paul was really talking about when he described comprehending "**the breadth, and length, and depth and height.**" Perhaps this is what President Benson meant when he promised us that each child of Zion and the Church would receive a blessing hitherto unknown. Would this not be what the Lord promises that we are to experience exactly what Paul described as the blessing "**FOR ALL SAINTS?**" As the Lord has promised, when our eye becomes single to His glory, it is then that we are to "*COMPREHEND ALL THINGS.*"

### SUMMARY OF SECTION I THE FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL

As I promised you, this book has much to do with paradoxes. It also has much to say about giving up our life that we might find it. The surprise is that we will find ourselves dying to each step as we experience a broken heart at the level we are on and open ourselves to be taught on the next level. We are even to die to dependence upon the outer gift symbolized by the tree of life, the love of God, because as we experience who we are, that we are already individualizations of the one, infinite God, then we know that everyone else is also, as well as what the universe is and what God is. For God is Infinite and Eternal Life, and at that stage of perfection or completion in Christ, we will have experienced "gazing into heaven" and know for ourselves that we too are Infinite and Eternal Life.

## Section II

# Remembering And Doing The New Covenant

## Chapter XV

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECTLY DEFINING THE NEW COVENANT

Section II will deal with some surprising possibilities as to what the new covenant IS and what it IS NOT. A covenant with the Lord is always a two way contract. God promises what He will do — if we, in turn, will fully do what we promise.

### TO REMEMBER THE NEW COVENANT

To review, the Lord declared that the key requirement for our coming out from under condemnation had to do with two factors — *repentance and remembering the new covenant*, to not only "say but to do" what the Lord has written. Let us read the words again.

**And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the *Book of Mormon* and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written.** (D&C 84:57)

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REMEMBER THE NEW COVENANT?

We have already quoted at length in Chapter I from Elder Dallin H. Oaks' landmark talk and 1994 Ensign article on reminding the saints of President Benson's call for us to come out from the Lord's condemnation by remembering and doing the new covenant. Following are some of Elder Oaks' additional comments on the subject. He said:

**This revelation [D&C 84:56-57] states that the condemnation can be removed by repenting and remembering "the new covenant." What is this "new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them?"**

The new covenant is obviously inseparable from the *Book of Mormon*, as has frequently been said, but it also includes "the former commandments" which the Lord had given His people. I believe this "new covenant" mentioned in verse 57 is the same as "the covenant" described in verse 48, which the Father teaches and "has renewed and confirmed upon" those who come unto Him, all "for the sake of the whole world."

Under this interpretation, the new covenant, whose neglect the Lord condemned, was the covenant contained in the *Book of Mormon* and in the "former commandments" the Lord had now renewed and confirmed upon the early Saints. These former commandments must have been the Lord's prior revelations, as contained in the *Bible—the Old and New Testaments—and in those modern revelations already given to the Saints.* (Ensign, March 1994, p. 63)

In this way, Elder Oaks stressed that properly defining the new covenant is, obviously, an essential step in remembering it. We can study and understand the covenant on those four different levels of the gospel, the MILK, which includes the first two levels and the MEAT, which includes the last two. Let us take the two milk levels first because we will find that Elder Oaks is teaching, appropriately, on that level in his talk to the Saints.

### UNDERSTANDING THE COVENANT ON THE PREPARATORY GOSPEL LEVEL

Since Elder Oaks' talk was to nourish the Saints where they are, and where they are is under condemnation, let us see again how his words apply on the preparatory gospel level. This is how he defined the new covenant:

**Thus, the "new covenant," the "new and everlasting covenant" the early Saints had received and treated lightly by the time the quoted revelation was given, INCLUDED ALL OF THE COMMANDMENTS AND ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL.** (Ensign, March 1994, p. 64)

As I have mentioned, for most of my life I would have also defined the new covenant in this way—that we are not to just *say*, but we are to *do* ALL that God has commanded. By this definition, however, we are all put on notice that we will not and can not be removed from the condemnation, scourge and judgment until we are keeping ALL the commandments that God has given us.

### **COULDN'T WE DO IT IF WE JUST TRIED HARDER?**

"Well," I had asked myself many times in my younger years, "surely there must be a way if we just tried harder!" But harder, even harder yet, still never makes our obedience complete. As I had gone deeper and deeper into my belief that most anyone *can* keep all the commandments *if they would just try hard enough*, the answer I found is that no one *can* and no one *has*. Believe it or not, this includes Christ himself. No one can keep ALL the law because, for one of many reasons, the law contradicts the law in places! Christ was perfect, not by the law, but by His love.

When we covenant that we will keep all the law which God asks us to do, we automatically become covenant breakers if we fail to do so. This is another one of those divine paradoxes. That painful realization was the beginning of my own spiritual death on the second level, preparatory to my spiritual rebirth, giving up on the spiritual law on the tree of knowledge, and going through the flaming sword toward the tree of life.

What a contrast between those two trees! On the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there are hundreds of commandments, counting both temporal and spiritual. On the tree of life, there are only two fundamental commandments (1) to love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, strength and soul, and (2) to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Christ said, upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Why is that? Because without this gift of love, not only for God, but also ourselves and our neighbors, the law becomes tinkling brass and sounding symbols.

### **THE NATURAL MAN CANNOT FULFILL THE COMMAND TO HAVE PERFECT LOVE**

We recall that the angel told king Benjamin that the natural man is an enemy to God and will be forever and ever unless he *yields*. Simply stated, under the fall, the natural man feels cut off, separated, vulnerable and needy. Perfect love is about perfect union, which cannot exist until the results of the fall are neutralized by the fruit from the tree of life.

Yet the tree of knowledge also includes *these two commands to love God totally and our neighbor as ourselves*. In fact, when Moses gave the law, this commandment to love God with all their heart was actually given greater emphasis than any other part of the law. They were to write this particular commandment on parchment and seal it in *amulets*, called phylacteries, to be worn on the *forehead* or *arm* and also placed *on their door posts*. As we know, Christ also made both of those commandments primary in the law of the gospel as well.

Well, regardless of what I thought and how I struggled, as a "natural man," I realized that I did not love God consistently with ALL my heart and soul, let alone, love my neighbor as myself. Sure I could try and greatly improve, but though there were times when I felt filled with the pure love of Christ, I became discouraged when I failed to retain those feelings on a permanent basis. I call this the yo-yo effect. Painfully, I remembered what James had said, **"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."** (James 2:10)

## THE COVENANT HAS TO DO WITH GRACE

In fact, Elder Oaks, in his BYU address, makes this point extremely clear. He stressed that even if we were to keep, as we might mistakenly think we can, ALL of the commandments, it would still not be enough. Here is more from his landmark talk:

**In short, in order to *escape condemnation*, not only "to say" but also to do according to that which the Lord has written, we must give diligent heed to the words of eternal life and *live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God*...**

**Men and women unquestionably have impressive powers and can bring to pass great things. But after *all our obedience and good works*, we cannot be saved from death or the effects of our individual sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ.**

**The *Book of Mormon* makes this clear. It teaches that "salvation doth not come by the law alone." In other words, salvation does not come simply by keeping the commandments. "By the law no flesh is justified." Even those who try to obey and serve God with all their heart, might, mind and strength are "unprofitable servants." Man cannot earn his own salvation. He cannot be cleansed by personal suffering for his own sins." (Ensign, March, 1994, pp. 60-67)**

## IS DOING THE BEST WE CAN ENOUGH?

These are strong, clear, but conflicting words. *"Salvation doth not come by the law alone,"* and *"we MUST...live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God."* Without saying so openly, his words are designed to conceal the Catch 22 trap which is inherent in the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

## UNDERSTANDING THE COVENANT ON THE MEAT LEVEL

Since Christ promised that the way was so simple that we must be like little children to get it, I felt deeply in my heart that there had to be a much simpler, reachable way to understand the new covenant. I found there was. This new way was not about struggle, burden, efforting or even trying. It was so simple that I had totally missed it.

In the chapters ahead, you may agree with me that there is *only one thing* that we, as a natural man, can do which is not contaminated with impure intent. But first, let's ask, *what is impure intent?* My intent is *impure* if any portion of my motive contains—*what's in it for me*. We have *impure intent* when our eye is not *single to His glory*. As long as I am looking out for my glory, even to the *"least degree,"* whatever I am doing is contaminated, which means impure or, as Mormon says, *evil*. (Moroni 7:5-11)

## COME UNTO THE FATHER AND HE WILL TEACH YOU THE COVENANT

Earlier in this chapter, in quoting Elder Oaks describing the verses in Section 84 which said we must be remembering the new covenant, he referred to an earlier verse, Verse 48 in this same Section 84. Let's read his statement again:

**I believe this "new covenant" mentioned in verse 57 is the same as "the covenant" described in verse 48, which the Father teaches and "has renewed and confirmed upon" those who come unto Him. (Ensign, March, 1994)**

There are many pearls of great value in Verse 48 of Section 84 and the surrounding verses which we will refer to in later chapters, but at this point we will concentrate on what the Lord has to say about this *covenant* that the *Father teaches ALL who hear the voice of the Spirit and come unto Him*.

**46. And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.**

**47. And everyone that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Fa-**

ther.

**\*\*\* 48. And the FATHER teacheth him of the COVENANT which He has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world.**

**49. And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under the darkness and under the bondage of sin.** (D&C 84:46-49)

## **THE COVENANT IS SOMETHING ONLY THE FATHER CAN TEACH DIRECTLY**

When I carefully studied these verses which preceded the pronouncement of our condemnation, I finally realized that, ultimately, it is God the Father who will do the teaching, not man or his works. The reason I had not realized it before is because I believed the new covenant was keeping the commandments, and certainly my fellow-man could teach me enough of those through sermons, lessons, scripture and good books. So if *only* the Father can teach us the covenant, it must be something quite different than commandments. Then what must the covenant be? I began to see that this might be the principle Joseph Smith was referring to in the conference shortly after the death of Patriarch James Adams. Let's read part of that talk again.

**Reading the experiences of others, or the revelation given to them, can *never* give us a comprehensive view of our condition and *true relation to God...***

**[But] could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading [and comprehending] *ALL that ever was written on the subject.*** (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 324)

## **BY GAZING INTO HEAVEN FIVE MINUTES, YOU WOULD KNOW MORE**

When I first read the prophet's talk, I was startled at the idea that one could learn so much in such a short time. Perhaps you were too. Five minutes! Wow! So I wondered, could the Father teach me whatever the new covenant is in five minutes? The possibility came as a shock. So whether it would be in 5 seconds, 5 minutes or 40 days or even longer, it must be directly experienced as a gift from the Father. The fact is that God has made mankind this promise that He will teach the true meaning of His covenant to everyone who truly comes to Him. Let us read it again:

**And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you.** (D&C 84:47-48)

In really digesting these wonderful words, I could see more clearly what it was I had been doing incorrectly. Since I believed our part of the new covenant was keeping all the commandments, I had been trusting in the scriptures and our prophets to teach me how I could do just that.

## **THE NEW COVENANT IS TO KNOW GOD**

Remember Christ said that *life eternal was to know God*. Trying to know God by knowing *about* God would be like a blind man asking someone to teach him what *seeing is*. Seeing could be described to a blind man, but not taught. Experiencing "seeing" is *what seeing is*. That is when I began to understand the description Jacob gave regarding Israel being blind, "**which blindness came from looking beyond the mark.**" They mistakenly believed that what they needed was to know all the specific rules and laws of true righteousness. As Paul testified, God gave Israel what they wanted so it could be *a stumbling stone to them*. But one might ask, "Why would God do that?" Well, my friend, is there any other way to give us the broken heart which is

the essential requirement to come under the atonement?"

### WHERE IS THE NEW COVENANT DESCRIBED?

If the new covenant cannot be taught by man, can it at least be described? I searched to find if it was described, and if so, where is it written? I noticed that the Lord said, "the new covenant, "even the *Book of Mormon* and *the former commandments*," which would include, as Elder Oaks said, BOTH the Nephite record and the Bible. So, first of all, I went to the Bible. Low and behold, I found three very amazing descriptions of the new covenant which thrilled me greatly. But though they helped me better understand, yet I still could not really comprehend the magnitude of the covenant until I had the experience of being taught by the Father. That greater understanding has grown as I have been taught on deeper and deeper levels by experiencing what the Lord has so freely promised to ALL who come to Him.

### AN UNEARNED GIFT

I do not say this to boast, though to many it may sound like I am doing just that. The reason I freely testify to such a blessing is that I found that it is totally *an unearned gift* of a loving Father. It is *not an attainment* like I used to think it would have to be. It was yielding, and yielding, as I will remind you time and time again, is not struggle, self-improvement nor efforting. Not that struggle is bad, for it can be very worthwhile and I have tried to do my share. But struggling is not what the Father will reveal to us as His new covenant. Then what is it? As Lehi told Laman and Lemuel, it is *waking up from a deep sleep*. (2 Nephi 1:13) Waking up need not be a struggle if we really want to wake up.

So in the next chapters, we will look at what descriptions of the new covenant I found, first in the *Bible*, then in the *Book of Mormon*, then in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and finally in the *Pearl of Great Price*.

### SUMMARY

To correctly understand the new covenant requires giving up our long held beliefs taught to us in the preparatory gospel. When we look at the possibility that the new covenant has to do with the promise of receiving the pure love of Christ, then we can better understand why it is that only the Father, through His son Jesus Christ, can shed the miracle of His love into our hearts. That love is to see beyond separateness, beyond fear, beyond doubt. This state of knowing the Father is the result of being permitted to gaze into heaven even for a short time, thus knowing more than we would by reading and comprehending all the books that have ever been written. This seems to be the way that those who come to the Father, begin *to do*, rather than *merely to say*, what is written.

## Chapter XVI

# THE NEW COVENANT IS MORE THAN THE PREPARATORY GOSPEL

One subject we have not addressed has to do with the "new" in the NEW covenant. Since the covenant we are to remember is the new one, it would be well to understand what the "OLD"

covenant was. Comparing the two will be helpful.

### JEREMIAH WAS TO REMIND ISRAEL OF THE OLD COVENANT

The Lord explained the difference to Jeremiah, a prophet during the critical days before the destruction of Jerusalem. This was also the same time Lehi was called of the Lord to preach repentance and had to flee for his life.

Jeremiah was told to warn his nation about their continuing to break the original covenant God had made with Israel in the days of Moses:

**And say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel; *Cursed* be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt... that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day.** (Jeremiah 11:2-5)

Jeremiah was brutally persecuted for telling the people about their pending destruction because they were under a curse, eventually to be scattered into all nations on earth.

### THE LORD WILL MAKE THE NEW COVENANT WITH ISRAEL IN THE LAST DAYS

The Lord told Jeremiah: **“I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine *anger*, and in my *fury*, and in great *wrath*.”** (Jeremiah 32:37) The Lord also gave him the exciting news of what will happen in that day:

**Behold, *the days come*, saith the Lord, that I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah—Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; *which my covenant they brake*, although I was an husband unto them, said the Lord.**

**But *this shall be the* [new] *covenant* that I will make with the house of Israel....** (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Well, what do you know about that! Jeremiah is about to be told exactly what this *new covenant* is that God is going to make with Israel. What is it God will do in that day of gathering and restoration? Will He give us more commandments, more knowledge of good and evil? No, evidently not, for he had already told Jeremiah to rebuke the leaders who were always reminding the people, hypocritically, of carrying **“the *burden of the Lord*.”**

Interestingly, that is what we are still doing when we tell the saints that they must DO ALL THE COMMANDMENTS. We all know how that burden feels, don't we? So Jeremiah was instructed to tell the priests and the prophets to cut it out! **“And the *burden of the Lord* shall ye mention NO MORE; for every man's word shall be his burden.”** (Jeremiah 23:33-38)

### A DIVINE MIRACLE OF THE HEART

The Lord's new covenant is that He is going to produce a miracle far greater than the dividing of the waters of the red sea, or gushing water from a rock struck by Aaron's rod. For what Jeremiah was about to be told can best be understood by something Jesus said to His fellow Israelites in their great temple. Christ is going to do a glorious miracle of putting His *fountain of living waters* in the hearts of His people. As John reported Christ boldly testifying:

**In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, *out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*.** (John 7:37-38)

What the Lord next told Jeremiah certainly describes such a miracle of rivers of living water flowing forth from the hearts of the children of men. The new covenant is proclaimed:

**But *this shall be the covenant*  
that I will make with the house of Israel;  
After those days, saith the Lord,  
I WILL PUT MY LAW  
IN THEIR *INWARD PARTS*,  
AND WRITE IT IN *THEIR HEARTS*;  
AND WILL BE THEIR GOD,  
AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

(Jeremiah 31:33)

Would not the offer Christ gave to his fellow Jews in the temple at Jerusalem describe what Jeremiah was told would happen? **“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”** Living waters represent the perfect love of God **“which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men.”** (1 Nephi 11:22-25)

Those words of Christ and what the Lord revealed to Jeremiah tells us a great deal about this **"blessing hitherto unknown"** promised by President Benson, which blessing is to be poured out on *each child of Zion and the Church*.

WOW! Now are you beginning to really get the picture? Truly, doesn't it almost take your breath away?

### **THE PRIESTHOOD CAN START WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF NOONDAY**

As we relate this marvelous promise spoken by the Savior and given to Jeremiah to the Latter-day instructions *to remember and do the new covenant*, we can see that it is the restored Church which is called to be custodians of this covenant for *the whole world*. What a great challenge that is! Let's reread a part of that passage about the roll our priesthood is to serve with the Father teaching the covenant to those who come unto Him.

**And everyone that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which He has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world.** (D&C 84:47-48)

Does this not mean that we are to make a major shift from the old covenant? Instead of only emphasizing the *burden of the Lord* in all the dos and don'ts, we can start preparing people for this true spiritual rebirth. We “do” the new covenant when we enable the saints "to hearkeneth to the voice of the spirit," which will bring them to the Father who will put His law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.

### **THE NEW COVENANT IS GOD'S PROMISE TO TAKE US TO THE TREE OF LIFE**

I believe there is only one way people can receive the law in their inward parts and have it written in their hearts, and that is to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and be filled with the pure love of Christ. If so, that *must be what the new covenant is really all about!* We are to cease looking beyond the mark!

That is exactly what the Lord told Jeremiah. After Jeremiah is told about the new covenant God will write in our hearts, the Lord said:



**And they shall teach *no more*  
every man his neighbor,  
and every man his brother, saying,  
*Know the Lord, for they shall ALL know me,  
from the least of them unto the greatest of them,*  
saith the Lord;  
for I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY,  
AND I WILL REMEMBER  
THEIR SIN NO MORE.**

(Jeremiah 31:34)

### **THIS SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT IS TO PRECEDE THE MILLENNIUM**

Is this great miracle something God will do after Christ returns? It is easy to assume incorrectly that this blessing is something which will not take place until the Millennium, but this immersion of the Spirit is what must precede the Second Coming, not follow it. As the Lord told Enoch regarding the last days,

**And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but *before that day*, the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth...**

**And *righteousness* and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be *looking forth for the time of my coming*...**

(Moses 7:61-62)

### **THIS IS OUR LATTER-DAY ASSIGNMENT**

Let's read again the Lord's description of His "strange act" of pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh as a part of pruning His vineyard for THE LAST TIME prior to his coming.

**For the preparation wherewith I design to prepare mine apostles to prune my vineyard *for the last time*, that I may bring to pass *my strange act*, that I MAY POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH.** (D&C 95:4)

We will want to remember, as Elder Oaks pointed out, that we were put under condemnation because we had failed to take the bestowal of this new covenant seriously enough. In fact, we had treated it lightly. Since we are still under the same condemnation, we must be doing the same thing still. As I have quoted before, the Lord combined the message of the above words about His strange act with another strong rebuke to the latter-day priesthood:

**Wherefore, ye must needs be chastened and stand rebuked before my face...that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh—But behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many who have been ordained among you, whom I have called but *few of them are chosen*. They who are not chosen have sinned *a very grievous sin*, in that they are *walking in darkness at noon-day*.** (D&C 95:2-6)

### **PAUL ALSO STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW COVENANT**

In his Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul stressed that the work of the Church was to bring people, especially Israel, *in remembrance of this new covenant* so that they would not only *say*, but *do* what is written. As he forcefully wrote to remind the Jewish Saints in his day, he quoted Jeremiah almost totally verbatim, along with his own commentary. Although it is a long quotation, it would be well to read what Paul reminded the Jewish Saints regarding the *new covenant*. Isn't it amazing that we never hear this taught in General Conference? Yet, surely this too will change in the Lord's good time. This is what Paul wrote:

For the [outward, preparatory] law made *nothing perfect*, but the bringing in of a *better hope did*, by which we draw nigh unto God [the Father]...For if that *first covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the *second*. For finding fault with them, He saith [quoting the Lord speaking to Jeremiah]:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make *a new covenant with the house of Israel* and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

For *this is the covenant* that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will *put my laws into their mind*, and *write them in their hearts*, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.

And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, *from the least to the greatest*. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. [End of Paul's quotation of Jeremiah]

In that He saith, *a new covenant*, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is ready to vanish away*... How much more shall *the blood* [perfect love, the living water] *of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offereth Himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works* to serve the living God? (Hebrews 7:19; 8:7-13; 9:14)

### MOSES TOLD ISRAEL THEY WERE BEING DENIED THIS BLESSING BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF

After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, Moses was preparing to leave his people. He rehearsed the entire law, showing them the incredible blessings they would receive if they were to live by every letter and the great curses if they did not. Sadly, he let them know why they would fail to be worthy of the blessings. They would fail because God had not given them the ability to see their own blindness which came, as Jacob said, by looking beyond the mark. Let us read again how Moses gave them the bad news first by testifying to their blindness in these words:

And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt...the signs and those great miracles. **YET THE LORD HATH NOT GIVEN YOU AN HEART TO PERCEIVE, AND EYES TO SEE, AND EARS TO HEAR, UNTO THIS DAY.** (Deuteronomy 29:2-4)

### MOSES PROMISED THEM A MIRACLE OF THE HEART IN THE LAST DAYS

Then, finally, Moses gave them the good news which would not come then, but in the last days. Here is part of what he said to the hosts of Israel:

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessings and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shall call them to mind among *all the nations*, whither the Lord thy *God hath driven thee*, and shalt *return unto the Lord thy God*, and shall *obey His voice*...

And the Lord thy God *will circumcise thine heart*, and the heart of thy seed, *to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live* [to be one with Him]. (Deuteronomy 30:1-2 & 6)

That was God's latter-day promise, a NEW COVENANT, even though Moses did not call these blessings by that name. Instead of being under the curse because of their vanity and unbelief, their eventual repentance would enable God *to circumcise their hearts*. In the last days, when Israel would finally begin to truly return to the Lord, not just with their lips, but also with

their hearts, they would be spiritually born of the Spirit.

### ISAIAH ALSO PROPHESED ABOUT THIS MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER

Isaiah also spoke of this day in words which most of us know by heart:

**Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have *removed their heart far from me*, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men** [those priesthood leaders in Israel].

**Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise men** [in the law] **shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.** (Isaiah 29:13-14)

Notice that this marvelous work and a wonder will cause the wisdom of their wise men, which would be speaking of those in His Church, and covering up of the understanding of their prudent, the cautious and conservative members.

### THESE BLESSINGS WERE NEVER FAR FROM ISRAEL

After Moses told the vast multitudes of Israel that eventually they would be *circumcised in their heart*, it would be then that they would finally discover that this *blessing had never been far from them after all*. They would see what they could not see before its time, that they could have had these blessings *at any time*. Knowledge of how to receive these blessings was not something that someone had to go to heaven or to a far off country to get and bring back. For all this time it would be as close as their own mouths and their own hearts! Moses testified:

**For this commandment** [of the circumscribed heart] **which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it?**

**Neither is it beyond the sea... But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it... That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him. FOR HE IS THY LIFE AND THE LENGTH OF THY DAYS.** (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

Does this blindness on the part of such a zealous people make you a little sad like it used to do to me? These three thousand years of waiting looked like a tragic waste to me. Then when I saw that we in modern Israel have been doing the same, I was saddened even more. The only difference is that in our case, it would appear that in many ways we have been even worse because we have been given much more.

Yet, such sadness totally disappeared, and hopefully it will for you, when I discovered some of the truths which will be covered in the next chapter.

### SUMMARY

In this important chapter, you have been led through a number of lengthy but vital references which explain what the new covenant is really all about, which is God's promise to transform the heart of not only His chosen people, but people throughout the world. The *Book of Mormon* helps us understand that this circumcision of the heart is symbolical of leaving the forbidden tree of knowledge, going through the flaming sword, and partaking of the fruit of the tree of life and the fountain of living waters. Through modern revelation, we find that the Restored Church was given the priesthood to coordinate that strange act as the Lord pours out His Spirit on the world, in preparation for the Second Coming.

## Chapter XVII

### THE “GAZING INTO HEAVEN” EXPERIENCE

If a person were to gaze into heaven five minutes, what could he or she learn about “*who we are*” and “*our relationship to God?*” As we have read, Joseph Smith said that we could learn far more in those few minutes than we could by reading and comprehending all the books that have been written since the days of Adam on that subject.

#### WHAT DOES GAZING INTO HEAVEN MEAN?

One dark night, as a teenager, I was out at our barn to milk the family cow. I happened to look up into the crystal black sky, studded with those millions of sparkling stars. I had always thought of the heavens up there like a diamond studded canopy, a flat ceiling. But for some reason, I suddenly realized that each of those stars, though they might look very close to those near to it, would be billions of miles in front or behind the others. In other words, I was comprehending the incredible and awesome magnitude of the universe above me in three dimensions, instead of the usual two dimensions. Awe and wonder swept through my body. I realized how absolutely small and insignificant I was in relation to even this one galaxy with its hundred billion blazing suns, let alone comparing myself to the billions of other galaxies in the endless heavens above.

So I was gazing into THE heavens, the boundless firmament, and felt so insignificant. What would it be like to gaze into the eternal heaven, itself? Would the experience be similar, emphasizing our smallness even further? No, in fact it is just the opposite.

#### COMPREHENDING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Section 88 is a treasure-house of insight into what heaven is all about, for all creation, both physical and spiritual, is heaven. The creation is truth, truth so infinite that it is the essence of light, called the light of Christ.

**Which TRUTH SHINETH. This is the LIGHT of Christ.**

**As He is in the sun... As also the LIGHT of the stars,  
and the power thereof by which they were made...**

**The LIGHT which shineth, which giveth you LIGHT,  
is through Him who enlighteneth your eyes,  
which is the same LIGHT that quickeneth your understanding.  
Which LIGHT proceedeth forth from the presence of God  
to fill the immensity of space—  
the LIGHT WHICH IS IN ALL THINGS,  
WHICH GIVETH LIFE TO ALL THINGS.**

(D&C 88:7-13)

In that same revelation, as we have already considered, we are told what the difference will mean when the darkness that we are is able to comprehend that light. Let’s read it again:

**The light shineth in darkness,  
and the darkness comprehendeth it not; nevertheless,  
the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God,  
BEING QUICKENED *IN HIM AND BY HIM*.**

**[So] then shall ye know that ye have seen me, that I am,  
and that I AM THE TRUE LIGHT THAT IS IN YOU,  
AND THAT *YOU ARE IN ME*;  
OTHERWISE YE COULD NOT ABOUND [EXIST].**

(D&C 88:49-50)

What we are being told so clearly is that we are really *one in and of God*. There really is no separateness. So if we found someone who had been blessed with such an experience, we would want that person to help us comprehend what they gained from that experience, right?

### **OTHERS CAN EXPLAIN AND DESCRIBE BUT CAN NEVER GIVE US THAT COMPREHENSION**

Obviously, if another person could share with us the experience, itself, then Joseph Smith's statement would not be true. As he emphasized, we cannot get such a state of KNOWING second hand, it must be personally experienced. Thus it really is a mystery, and that is the sum and substance of what the Lord calls *the mystery of godliness*.

For example, if 99% of the people on the earth were sightless, what could the 1% explain to them about what seeing was really like? Yes, as we have already mentioned, they could describe it, define it, even demonstrate what they could understand by seeing, but they could not give the experience of seeing to the sightless. To comprehend seeing is to see. It is that simple and that complex, all at the same time.

### **GAZING INTO HEAVEN IS THE FOURTH LEVEL**

In the three closing chapters of Section I, we reviewed many of the aspects to the fourth level of the gospel, i.e., what it means to partake of the fruit of the tree of life. Let's recap what we have found so far in the scriptures:

It is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (1 Nephi 15:36)

It is comprehending even God, being quickened in Him and by Him. (D&C 88:49)

It is entering into His rest, the fullness of His glory. (D&C 84:24)

It is the mystery of godliness. (D&C 19:9-10)

It is the fellowship of the mystery of Christ. (Ephesians 3:4-9)

It is to know the pure love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. (Ephesians 3:19)

It is being sanctified in Christ by the grace of God. (Moroni 10:32)

It is the new covenant of the Father. (Moroni 10:33)

It is the second comforter. (D&C 88:3-5)

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "GAZING INTO HEAVEN" AND BEING "SHOWN ABOUT HEAVEN"**

I want to make it clear that we are not talking about ordinary revelations, even visions or visitations, wonderful as they may be. Such revelations are much more limited than directly experiencing that which is infinite and eternal when truly gazing into heaven.

When Joseph Smith, for example, had his first glorious vision of the Father and the Son, he was taught much about God's Heaven, and it certainly changed his life. It raised him from the temporal law to the spiritual law. Yet he still had much to learn on the level of the preparatory gospel.

When Nephi had the marvelous experience of seeing the vision of the tree of life, he was being shown about Heaven, but he was not “gazing into heaven.” Yes, for a time, he was filled with the fire of the pure love of God, even unto the consuming of his flesh. Yet, even at middle age, as we have seen, he was not in the rest but in the agony of the spiritual law. It was only later that he found the rest that his younger brother Jacob had received in his youth.

Although Alma was converted and saved from hell by Christ after three days of torment, he too had much to learn before he grew the tree of life in his heart.

### THE VISION OF THE THREE DEGREES OF GLORY

Let’s consider the incredible vision that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received regarding the Three Degrees of Glory. They were shown many marvelous things about how Heaven works. Let’s read again what they wrote at the conclusion of their vision:

**This is the end of the vision which we saw, which we were commanded to write while we were yet in the Spirit. But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of His kingdom which He showed unto us, which *surpass all understanding in glory*, and in might, and in dominion...**

**Neither is man *capable to make them known*, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love Him, and purify themselves before Him; to whom He grants *this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves*. That through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear His presence in the world of glory.** (D&C 76:113-118)

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “TREE OF KNOWLEDGE” VISIONS AND “TREE OF LIFE” EXPERIENCES

Remember, I mentioned that on the spiritual level of the gospel, we seek and may receive wonderful revelations. As such, we would be on the strait and narrow path which leads to the tree of life, but we are not yet there. The temptation is to convert these revelations into conclusions, thus decorating our tree of knowledge with fixed ideas about the kingdom of God. Let’s remember, a very subtle form of pride is the feeling that we know something that others do not know. That feeling of superiority could very easily be what was meant in Lehi’s vision as the *mists of darkness*, wherein the possession of great knowledge can separate us from our fellow-man.

Is that what Joseph and Sidney did after receiving the glorious vision? Possibly, right along with the rest of the Church. Even to this day, we still treasure our conclusions about the Three Degrees of Glory. Deep gospel discussions can go on endlessly as to exactly what it all means. Notice we take great comfort and, yes, pride in knowing such sublime truths. That, my friend, is vanity. How do we know that?

Well, let’s look at what the Lord did to the Church shortly after the vision. Seven months later, the whole Church was put under condemnation for *vanity and unbelief*, **“and this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, EVEN ALL.** (D&C 84:56) “Even all” would also include Joseph and Sidney, would it not?

### HOW REVELATIONS CAN TAKE AWAY THE SIMPLICITY AND PLAINNESS OF THE WAY

Why would the Lord give us such a glorious vision if it was going to add to our vanity? Remember, as we covered in *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, what Jacob taught us about Israel, who—

**despised the words of plainness...and sought for things they could not understand... For God**

**hath taken away His plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it... And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.** (Jacob 4:14)

Now before you throw this book in the fireplace, let's think for just a minute. Am I saying that the vision of the Three Degrees of Glory was not the truth? No, of course not! Am I saying that the vision was not a great blessing from God? No, again! Remember, God gives us what we think we need to round out our precious tree of knowledge so that we can learn for ourselves that such knowledge will never perfect us.

Did that vision give us ALL the truth there is regarding the three Heavens? Of course not. It could not possibly be ALL THE TRUTH. Why? Because we are talking about that which is infinite and eternal. All "knowledge" is finite because, by its very nature, it is a conclusion. Any conclusion regarding the infinite and eternal is also an exclusion, thus must be only a part, i.e., this is so but that is not so. Our natural minds, even with great revelations, cannot comprehend the whole. That is why the infinite light shines in the finite darkness and the darkness comprehends it not.

### SUMMARY

Again, we reviewed that God will give us great revelations to understand all about Heaven, and these are part of the tree of knowledge, which we use to support our vanity of being wise in the ways of Heaven. We in the Church have done just what Israel did of old and desired many such blessings, and consequently, we receive many such things. In contrast, the experience of gazing into heaven is not to find out just how it works, but to find out that heaven is truly what we are as spiritual beings, infinite and eternal manifestations of the one infinite and eternal God.

## Chapter XVIII

### THE TREE OF LIFE, THE MARK, IS THE EXPERIENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Let's remember, God teaches in symbols and parables, and they always have *many levels of meaning*. As for myself, I had to learn this the hard way, not just once, but many times. When it comes to trusting and seeking God to enhance our tree of knowledge, He will often oblige. But we should be very cautious, very tentative. When we attach such revelations to our falsely worshipped tree of knowledge, like Lucifer tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, we think it makes us wise. In contrast, when we attach such revelations to the *tree of life*, then we see these wonderful, revealed truths *ONLY as interesting possibilities*, not as *fixed, finite, absolutely the one and only truth*.

#### REVEALING THE MYSTERY OF "ETERNAL" DAMNATION

You see, these are the real *mysteries of godliness*, to understand how God sets us up to have the tree of knowledge motivate us, even while it cuts us off from truly knowing who we are. Do you doubt this? Well, in Book I, we considered an example in which the Lord clearly revealed how He does that very thing. In the D. & C., Section 19, the Lord unveiled one of His carefully guarded secrets—how He will mislead us in order to increase our need to be good and fear of being evil.

You may recall, this mystery has to do with the doctrine of *eternal and everlasting damna-*

tion for those who die unrepentant. The Lord explained why He has had His prophets reveal to us what appears to be a very clear, absolute, and horrifying doctrine, which is totally and purposefully misleading, *all by God's loving design!* Let's read again what the Lord unveiled.

**It is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written *endless torment*. It is written *eternal damnation*; wherefore it is MORE EXPRESS THAN OTHER SCRIPTURES, THAT IT MIGHT WORK UPON THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN, ALTOGETHER FOR MY NAME'S GLORY.**

**Wherefore, I will explain unto you this MYSTERY...I speak unto you that are chosen in this thing, even as one, that YOU MAY ENTER INTO MY <sup>REST</sup>. For, behold, *the MYSTERY OF GODLINESS, how great is it!* For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hands is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore, eternal punishment is God's punishment. (D&C 19:6-11)**

The Lord is not only calling this one of His mysteries, He is saying that if we could just comprehend this *one mystery*, we would *enter into the REST*. Why is that? It is because the key to "the mysteries of godliness" is that *godliness* is not about a fixed knowledge of how things have got to be. Instead, it is about a *love which comprehends all things*. All things include *every possible point of view*. Otherwise, how would *perfect love enable one to BELIEVE ALL THINGS?*

### **WHY DID GOD TELL US, AND US ALONE, ABOUT THE THREE DEGREES OF GLORY?**

Let's contemplate for a moment about the glorious vision Joseph and Sidney received regarding the Three Degrees of Glory. Notice that we have held that vision close to our bosoms as a wonderful conclusion. Why did we need to know all about The Three Degrees? Was it to work on our hearts so that we would strive, struggle and effort more? Of course. Did it work? You know it worked. Thus, are we not all anxiously trying to qualify for the top level of the top kingdom and get all of our loved ones there? Of course! But who for? For whose glory? Primarily, for our own joy and glory, of course. Then, is that pure intent? No! Yet it works as a great motivator for both the faithful "Great and Spacious Building Saints" who are motivated by the letter of the law and it works for the spiritual "Liahona Saints" who are motivated by the spirit of the law.

### **TO GAZE INTO HEAVEN—IS TO KNOW YOURSELF**

But again, what is this gift of *the pure love of God* that is shed abroad into the hearts of the children of men? How is it different from such things as glorious visions and the ministering of angels, all of which are still a part of the preparatory gospel? It is simply that to be shown ABOUT Heaven supports our separateness from Heaven, but "gazing into heaven" is to *experience BEING heaven*. That is the difference!

In such an awakening, we directly experience who we really are as infinite spiritual individualizations (children) of an infinite and eternal God. It is to have the veil of the fall removed. This is, simply, the fullness of the gospel. As President Hunter reminded the Church and as we discussed in Chapter XXII in Book I, **"The gospel...is not the peculiar property of ANY ONE PEOPLE or any one age... It embraces all truth. It circumscribes all wisdom."** (Ensign, November 1991, p. 19)

Such experiences of enlightenment have been given many names. One that I particularly like is the term, *cosmic consciousness*, because it is both very descriptive and cuts across all cultures.

### **COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS**

We Latter-day Saints may not like the word "cosmic" because it sounds less spiritual and more scientific, at best, and New Age, at the worst. But the word cosmic merely means "pertain-



ing to the universe, as distinct from the earth.” But in the sense of relating to *consciousness*, the dictionary says that it means “*infinitely or inconceivably extended.*” How do you like that for an appropriate definition for truly “gazing into heaven?” In such a cosmic conscious experience, you would not be in the process of *trying to understand* Heaven, you would literally *become aware that you are heaven*.

Remember, that is the purpose of eating the fruit from the tree of life and drinking the water from the fountain of living waters. We are to become what we eat and what we drink. That is why the pure love of Christ *passeth knowledge*. *When one has discovered the pure love of Christ, one has discovered the fullness of God.* (Ephesians 3:19)

## A COSMIC CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE

Following is an account written by Richard Bucke, a Canadian psychiatrist who was President of the Psychological Section of the British Medical Association and later, President of the American Medico-Psychological Association.

**I was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment, not actually thinking, but letting ideas, images, and emotions flow of themselves, as it were, through my mind. All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by in that great city. The next, I knew that the fire was *within myself*.**

**Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, of *immense joyousness* accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination *impossible to describe*. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, *a living Presence*; I became conscious *in myself of eternal life*. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I *possessed* eternal life then.**

**I saw that without any peradventure, *all things work together for the good of each and all*; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call *love*, and that the *happiness* of each and all is in the *long run absolutely certain*.**

**The vision lasted a few seconds and was gone; but the memory of it and the *sense of the reality* of what it *taught* has remained during the quarter of a century which has since elapsed. *I knew* that what the vision showed was true. I had attained *to a point of view* from which I saw that *it must be true*. That view, that conviction, I may say that *consciousness*, has *never*, even during periods of the deepest depression, *been lost*.** (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New American Library, 1958, pp. 306-307)

## THAT MOMENT TRANSFORMED THE WAY HE EXPERIENCED WHO HE IS

Other than his own account, I do not know much about the late Dr. Bucke. Was he religious? Was he a Christian? I don't know. I suppose he could have been both or neither one. But obviously, being a medical doctor and a psychiatrist, he was a student of life and seemed to have had a healthy respect for living things.

In his case, the cosmic experience lasted but a few moments, yet it became a totally new and supportive framework which stayed with him the rest of his life. Yet, he acknowledged that it did not keep him from becoming discouraged or depressed at times when circumstances turned difficult. He still had to face life full-on. As he said, “**That view, that conviction, I may say that *consciousness*, has *never*, even during periods of the deepest depression, *been lost*.**”

Notice that he expressed *helplessness* in trying to describe what he experienced. It was an “**illumination impossible to describe.**” But what he could describe is that he went beyond belief to *a state of knowing*, a state beyond our language to describe. “**Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I SAW that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the**

contrary, *a living Presence.*”

## EXPERIENCING BEYOND SEPARATENESS

After reading about many people’s experiences, including Dr. Bucke’s, and after having had my own, I can assure you that when he experienced that the universe was alive, *a living Presence*, he knew he was not separate from that Presence, but that, in his spiritual being, he was a manifestation, an individualization, of that Presence. And notice, he capitalized the word, for what he was experiencing was Infinite God.

Also notice what he said immediately thereafter. “**I became conscious *IN MYSELF* of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then.**”

What he described next has a profound implication as to what it means to discover who we are. Once he saw that he, himself, was eternal life, that in essence, he was an expression of a real spiritual reality, the universe, i.e., all things—then he had that unspeakable peace come over him that he was a manifestation of that which was ALL GOOD.

**“I saw that without any peradventure, *all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain.*”**

## THE FOUNDATION PRINCIPLE IS UNION

Notice that the only word Dr. Bucke could use to describe that infinite union, that perfect wholeness in oneness, is the word “love.” He almost apologized for using the word, when he says, **“the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we *call love.*”** Notice he saw that the entire creation, that **“all things work together for the good of each and all.”** That, again, my friend, is what the pure love of Christ is all about.

In such an enlightenment, there is no further need to condemn and complain. As Paul declared, when that which is perfect is come, that which in part is done away, for we:

**BEARETH ALL THINGS,**  
*the way they appear in our life;*  
**BELIEVETH ALL THINGS,**  
*the way they are perceived by all,*  
**HOPETH ALL THINGS,**  
*just the way they will work for the good of all,*  
**ENDURETH ALL THINGS,**  
*as loving gifts from Christ for our good.*  
 (I Corinthians 13:7)

## FOR EACH PERSON AND FOR EACH TIME, THE EXPERIENCE IS DIFFERENT AND UNIQUE

Long before I had my own experiences, I was fascinated by these thrilling reports of what appeared to be an incredible shift from being *IN* the *FINITE universe*, to being *OF* the *INFINITE universe*, that which is beyond space and time.

For some, like Dr. Bucke, the experience lasted a few seconds. With some other individuals, the experience has lasted a few minutes, a few hours, a few days or even a few weeks. It may be only a one time experience, or similar experiences may be repeated a few or many times. If so, it appears that for most, a repeated experience is similar only in its infinite consciousness. Each is unique and usually quite different than previous experiences. As far as I have observed, we never experience exactly the same view twice. After all, with infinite varieties of ways to

glimpse into the infinite and eternal, there is no need to repeat. It never becomes boring, you can be assured.

### SUMMARY

As we understand the symbolism of the forbidden tree, we see that each of us has come under the essential fall by partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yet, such knowledge of good and evil which created the fall *cannot* take us *out from under the fall*. As long as we want the fruit from the tree of knowledge, *the Lord will oblige*, both in the temporal law and the spiritual law. That is until, and unless, we are privileged to awaken and gaze into heaven for even a moment. Such a cosmic conscious experience allows us to go beyond the *finite* mind *to the infinite being that we are*. Thus, we are permitted to remember what we came from, and *how this world of darkness* is more *perfect* than we could have ever imagined. The earth experiences allow us to experience the *opposite* to who and what we eternally are so that we can, sooner or later, joyfully comprehend who and what we have always been.

## Chapter XIX

### WHY THE NEW COVENANT HAS BEEN HIDDEN BY A SPIRITUAL VEIL

After the last chapter, you may be feeling somewhat frustrated if such an experience has not already happened to you. On the other hand, if such a blessing has happened, you may be anxious to have it repeated to regain those feelings of awe and, as Dr. Burke said, “*exultation and immense joyfulness*.”

#### THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST IS NOT A FEELING, IT IS A HIDDEN POINT OF VIEW

Since most of us just naturally believe that *love is a feeling*, we assume that the *pure love of Christ would be* the ultimate feeling. We are encouraged with this idea because of the feelings we have during great spiritual experiences. We therefore tend to feel less spiritual when those feelings are absent. You might ask, “Well, shouldn’t we?”

No. I don’t think so. Such a belief is the surest way to stay out of the rest. The truth is that God’s infinite and eternal love is not a feeling, it is *a point of view—His point of view!*

Cosmic consciousness may be *accompanied* with incredible feelings of joy, but we know that feelings, no matter how sublime, *can come and they can go*. Like Dr. Bucke testified, that point of view never failed him, even in times of deep depression, though *his exultation of immense joyousness* was relatively fleeting.

#### FEELINGS COME AND GO, BUT LOVE, WHICH IS COMPREHENDING, IS FOREVER

Yes, feelings are transitory. *Comprehending this oneness is forever*, whether the feelings are there or not. That is why charity, the pure love of Christ, which Paul calls the *fellowship of the mystery of Christ*—having THE MIND OF CHRIST—never fails. Let’s read again Paul’s powerful testimony:

**Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge [a *knowing*, not a *feeling*] in**

*the mystery of Christ... And to make all men see [to understand] what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been HID IN GOD [by infinite design], who created ALL THINGS by Jesus Christ.* (Ephesians 3:4 & 9)

But we speak the *wisdom of God in a mystery*, even the hidden wisdom [an understanding, not a feeling], which God ordained before the world *unto our glory...*

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have *entered into the heart of man* [which would be a feeling], the things [comprehensions] which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD... For who hath *known the mind of the Lord*, that He may instruct him? BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST. (1 Corinthians 2:7, 9-10, 16)

### WHY THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS HAS BEEN SO CAREFULLY HIDDEN

Notice that Paul acknowledged that “the fellowship of this mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been *hid in God*.” Why would God hide the truth about the tree of life and keep the true nature of godliness such a mystery?

As we explained in Book I, the real purpose of earth life was to enable us to experience the opposite to heaven so that we could then comprehend heaven. This earth is about the fall of mankind. Experiencing the fall is about darkness and sin, the opposite to light and righteousness.

Without darkness covering the earth, the school of darkness would fail. So here is the key to understanding about God’s secrecy—IF YOU KNEW THE END BEFORE THE END, THE BEGINNING WOULD NOT WORK! *It is that simple. You are coming near the end when you leave the tree of knowledge and start through the flaming sword.*

We have all had the experience of telling others about a great movie. We are tempted to share the amazing ending, but we know that if we did, we would take away the greatest value of the movie for them. That is the way with life. It is designed so that the light shines in darkness, but the darkness must not comprehend the light until the darkness has done its work.

### HOW GOD’S PERFECT PLAN INCLUDES WITHHOLDING KNOWLEDGE

God assures us that He knows the whole story. But, by necessity, He is very careful about revealing how life is all going to work out for the good of all! As Nephi was told, “The Lord knoweth ALL THINGS FROM THE BEGINNING, wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all His works among the children of men” (1 Nephi 9:6)

Once we see the purpose of darkness, even logically, we can see that if God let everyone discover the light prematurely, the school of darkness would be over. That is why the tree of life is protected by the flaming sword and iron rod. That is why those who do wake up have been put under restraint. Let’s review again how Alma explained this principle.

It is given unto *many to know the mysteries of God*; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of His word which He doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto Him.

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the *same receiveth the lesser portion of the word*; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given *the greater portion of the word*, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until *he know them in full*.

And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word *until they know nothing concerning His mysteries*. (Alma 12:9-11)

Notice that the Lord takes care of the shielding. For example, take the scriptures. Most

members of the Church can read all these scriptures and never see what you are seeing. They can read this book and just not get it. I am not revealing anything in this series that God has not already revealed, yet only those readers who have been given eyes to see will see the mystery. And what is the mother of all mysteries? That it really is noonday! There really is no darkness. Everything is working out perfectly for the good of all! But in order for it *to work*, it is *not supposed to look like it is working!*

### PAUL DESCRIBED A VEIL HELD OVER THE EYES OF ISRAEL

When Paul wrote his second epistle to the repentant Church at Corinth, he was able to speak of more spiritual things, including an understanding of how the Lord uses a VEIL to limit premature understanding, and what it means to come out from under that VEIL.

Paul reminded them that when Moses was presenting the old covenant to Israel, he came down from the mountain with the tablets of stone, literally *radiating* with the light of God.

**And [Moses] was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights... When Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.**

**And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him... And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.** (Exodus 34:28-35)

### PAUL CONTRASTS THE OLD COVENANT OF DEATH WITH THE NEW COVENANT OF LIFE

Paul wrote these insightful words contrasting the two covenants:

**And such *trust* have we through *Christ to God-ward*, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but *our sufficiency is of God*, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [new covenant]; not of the letter, but of the Spirit, *for the letter* [of the law] *killeth*, but the Spirit [Christ's love] *giveth life*.**

**But if the *ministration of death* [by the law of good and evil], written and engraven in *stones* [the tablets containing the Ten Commandments], *was glorious*, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, *which glory was to be done away* [fulfilled in Christ], *how shall not the ministration of the Spirit* [under the new covenant] *be rather* [more] **GLORIOUS**. For [if] the ministration of **CONDEMNATION** *be glory, much more doth the ministration of RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEED IN GLORY...***

**Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech, and not as Moses, which put a VEIL over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to *the end of that which is abolished*.** (2 Corinthians 3:4-13)

### THE NECESSITY AND WISDOM OF THE VEIL

So Paul compared that marvelous glory of *the covenant unto death* to the much greater glory of the pure love of Christ, *the new covenant unto eternal LIFE*.

Without the curse of the law, and remember, every nation has been given their own unique law of good and evil, there would be no fallen state. We came down here to experience the curse of the law. Once we have really done that and finally recognized that we have failed, in our vain attempt to sanctify ourselves, we may finally be willing to experience the gift of a broken heart that only the recognition of utter failure can bring. Only through that contrite spirit are we ready to yield to the voice of the Spirit. It is then that we can humbly come to the *Father so that He can teach us the new covenant by direct experience*.

So let's see what Paul wrote next to the repentant Corinthians about the VEIL held over the eyes of their fellow Jews:

**But their minds were blinded, for until this day remaineth the same VEIL untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament, WHICH VEIL IS DONE AWAY IN CHRIST. Nevertheless when [Israel] shall turn to the Lord, THE VEIL SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY.** (2 Corinthians 3:14-16)

### **PAUL DESCRIBED WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY**

After Paul acknowledged the value people can experience on the preparatory level, he gave us a remarkable description of the greater glory which unfolds when the VEIL of the Lord is taken away. By the spiritual breakthrough, we can really walk in the light as Christ is in the light. As Paul said in his great chapter on charity, **"we see through a glass darkly, but then FACE TO FACE. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."** (1 Corinthians 13:12)

When the VEIL is lifted, we can no longer deny His Presence in our own life: Paul continues:

**Now the Lord is that Spirit,  
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,  
there is liberty [in Christ].  
But WE ALL,  
WITH OPEN FACE BEHOLDING  
[SEEING OUR OWN FACE],  
AS IN A [LOOKING] GLASS,  
[WE SEE, IN OURSELVES]  
THE GLORY OF THE LORD,  
[AND THUS WE] ARE CHANGED  
INTO THE SAME IMAGE  
FROM GLORY TO GLORY,  
EVEN AS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.**  
(2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

The above translation is taken from the King James Version, and as you can see, takes some clarification. In other translations, the meaning is more clearly stated. Here is the way it appears in the very popular New Revised Standard Version:

**Now the Lord is the Spirit,  
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,  
there is *freedom*.  
And all of us, with [our] unveiled faces,  
*seeing the glory of the Lord* [in ourselves]  
*as though reflected in a mirror,*  
*are being transformed*  
*into the same image*  
**from one degree of glory to another;  
for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.****

If that is not describing the experience of gazing into heaven, I don't know what would be. Paul is saying that when the VEIL is removed, we will and do experience in the miracle of our own transformation the glorious workmanship of His hand. We can look into a mirror and see our own face as His face, our own body a His temple.

What we begin to see each time we look at our reflection in a mirror is the face of God, for we are His tabernacles. (D&C 93:35) In other words, we see who we are! We see face to face, thus we know that we are infinitely one, one with the glory of the Lord, continually being transformed from one level of glory to another level of glory.

In case some of these thoughts leave you a little confused, just remember, these are the kinds of things one would comprehend almost instantly by gazing into the fullness of His glory even for a few minutes. So don't worry about them now. Remember, the pure love of Christ is the “mind of Christ,” which is something the natural mind cannot fathom, even if it thinks it already understands and believes.

So now we see even more clearly what the new covenant is about. It is about a whole new way of seeing life, a whole new way of seeing God, a whole new way of seeing Christ and His atonement, and a whole new way of seeing ourselves.

### SUMMARY

If we make an ideal out of “entering into the rest” on our own time table, we will be denied. *If we “need” it we can’t have it.* Instead, accept that the Lord is removing the veil from before our eyes one phase at a time. It is not in the goal, it is in the journey. Our primary purpose of this mortal existence under the fall is not to create or achieve eternal life. It is to experience the opposite to eternal life, i.e., what it is like *to not know we are eternal life*. So God has carefully designed the world to produce that result. When we yield to His will, which is being willing to submit to all things the Father sees fit to “inflict” upon us, then we offer less and less resistance to “losing” our life for His sake. We may then find that our life is what He is.

## Chapter XX

### THE NEW COVENANT AS DEFINED IN MODERN REVELATION

As we approach the end of Section II, *Remembering and Doing The New Covenant*, we will conclude by reviewing some of the descriptions given to us in our modern revelations.

In the *Book of Mormon*, as we have previously noted, Moroni’s last three verses contain one of the clearest definitions of the Father’s covenant of purifying and sanctifying those who come unto Christ and are perfected in Him.

#### THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS EMPHASIZES THE NEW COVENANT

When we realize how clearly Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John and Paul explained what God would eventually give to Israel in the last days, some will wonder what the Lord has revealed on the subject in our day. We have referred frequently to Section 95, in which the Lord speaks of preparing His priesthood, **“that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.”** (D&C 95:4)

In our primary reference source, Section 84, we read:

**And everyone that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has received and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the WHOLE WORLD.** (D&C 84:47-48)

## UNTO WHAT WERE YE ORDAINED?

One of the most powerful declarations, even though it may sound platitudinal in its majesty, is Section 50.

In this revelation, the Lord described in detail the results of His strange act and the role the priesthood will be called upon to function in it. First the Lord inquires of us, **“Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—UNTO WHAT WERE YE ORDAINED?”** The Lord answers by declaring what the priesthood is really all about. *“It is to preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.”* Then the Lord makes a challenging warning. *“He that is ordained of me...doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God.”*

## YOU MAY CHASE DARKNESS FROM AMONG YOU

In the next 11 verses, the Lord defines the incredible work He is calling the priesthood to perform, and the power to be associated with their calling. It has to do, first of all, with *shedding infinite and eternal light into the world*.

**And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.**

**That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.**

**And again, verily I say unto you and I say it that you may know the truth, that YOU MAY CHASE DARKNESS FROM AMONG YOU. He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the GREATEST [in the likeness of Christ], notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all.**

**Wherefore, he [who is ordained to the priesthood] 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 [by covenant] through Jesus Christ, His Son.**

## SANCTIFICATION ESSENTIAL FOR PRIESTHOOD POWER

**BUT NO MAN IS POSSESSOR OF ALL THINGS EXCEPT HE BE PURIFIED AND CLEANSED FROM ALL SIN. And IF YOU ARE purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done.** (D&C 50:23-29)

So this is what it means to be *called and ordained, and then CHOSEN*. Notice the Lord’s warning, **“There are many who have been ordained among you, whom I have called, but few of them are chosen.”** (D&C 95:5)

Yes, we can carelessly rest upon our callings and assume that, for most of us, such blessings of being *purified and cleansed from all sin* are only for the next world, but the Lord makes it clear by saying, **“AND IF YOU ARE.”** This declaration is definitely in the *present tense*, that we are to chase darkness from us here and now!

So is the Lord describing the new covenant here? Well, if we read this profound declaration on the priesthood calling in conjunction with Moroni’s covenant seal of the Book of Mormon, we can see that it is nothing less.

**And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not His power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, WHICH IS THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.** (Moroni 10:33)

So if we truly come unto the Christ, which is the personal, resurrected Christ who is both finite and infinite God, and deny not His power so that we become holy without spot, then the majestic priesthood covenant found in Section 50 becomes a reality. **“And IF YOU ARE purified and cleansed from all**



*sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done.”*

It is when we allow the many testimonies of the prophets to come together like we have done in this Section II that we begin to realize the magnitude of the blessing President Benson must have been referring to when he said, *“God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown!”*

### NEW COVENANT DEFINED IN THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

In the Book of Moses, we find that long after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, even after they had raised a large family, they were finally taught the good news of the fullness of the gospel. This fullness was to replace the preparatory gospel they had diligently followed for probably 75 to 100 years. Here is what they were finally revealed by the Lord:

And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they *taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good...*

Even so ye must be *born again into the kingdom of heaven...* For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood [perfect love] ye are sanctified.

After these words, the Lord defined for Adam and Eve what they were to teach their children as the fullness of the gospel.

**Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:**

**That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be SANCTIFIED FROM ALL SIN, and enjoy the *words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.*** (Moses 6:58-59)

### IT WILL BE GIVEN TO ABIDE IN YOU

Immediately following those instructions, Adam was given a profound summary of what God has covenanted to ABIDE IN HIM AND EACH OF US. As we go through this list of eight components, contemplate what it means to have such “incomprehensible blessings” abiding in us. Where else can we find such an all encompassing declaration of the new covenant by which WE COMPREHEND ALL THINGS?

**Therefore it is given to *ABIDE IN YOU*;**

- 1. the *record of heaven*;**
- 2. the *comforter*;**
- 3. the *peaceable things of immortal glory*;**
- 4. the *truth of ALL things*;**
- 5. that which *quickeneth ALL things*,**
- 6. which maketh alive ALL things;**
- 7. that which *knoweth ALL things*,**
- 8. and hath *ALL power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice and judgment.*** (Moses 6:55-61)

Then, on that very day, after Adam's many years of patiently waiting upon the Lord, the blessing came.

**And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father, that Adam cried**

unto the Lord, and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water...

And thus he was baptized and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was *born of the Spirit*, and became QUICKENED IN THE INNER MAN. And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying: *Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. This is the record [the covenant] of the Father, and the Son, from henceforth and forever...Behold, thou art ONE IN ME, A SON OF GOD, AND THUS THEY ALL BECOME MY SONS. Amen.* (Moses 6:64-68)

### ***RECEIVE GRACE FOR GRACE***

Now, after reviewing God's covenant to Adam, let's remember some of the other key points about the *new covenant*:

The Spirit is given to *every man* that cometh into the world.  
 Everyone who *hearkeneth* to the Spirit comes unto the Father.  
 The Father teaches us the new covenant by direct experience.  
 In this way, God bestows His perfect love, the mind of Christ, in our hearts.  
 This is the true meaning of *coming unto Christ* and being *perfected in His love*.  
 So no more will we teach our neighbor, for all shall know the Lord.  
 This is what culminates in the total forgiveness of our iniquity.  
 Thus we become holy, without spot, even though not without weaknesses.  
 This is the covenant God has renewed and confirmed upon modern Israel.  
 The priesthood is given this responsibility for the sake of the whole world.  
 Yet, as of now, the whole world still lies in sin and groaneth under darkness.  
 We must come out of darkness first before we can serve the world.  
 A VEIL must be removed from the eyes of modern Israel to see beyond the darkness.  
 Then we will feast upon the *fruit of the tree of life* and drink of the *fountain of living waters*.  
 Then the Brethren will lead the priesthood to coordinate the new covenant for *the world*.

## **SECTION III**

# **Growing the Tree of Life in Your Heart**

## Chapter XXI

### WHY THE PURE LOVE OF CHRIST “PASSETH KNOWLEDGE”

In this section we will study Alma’s process of growing the tree of life in our heart. Alma teaches us through a fascinating metaphor, i.e., planting, caring and harvesting fruit of a spiritual tree. As we have considered, there are usually many levels of meaning to allegories and metaphors. At this point in a book about finding the mark, we will want to understand Alma’s metaphor on its deeper levels.

Alma’s sermon is so profound and all inclusive that I originally planned to write this book, *Finding The Mark*, using his structured approach as a basic outline. However, I found that when I brought in the many supplemental subjects connected with these deeper levels, his presentation stopped being simple. So I decided to save the discussion of Alma’s tree of life experiment for this separate section at the end of the book.

#### ANOTHER ELEMENT TO THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

As we begin Section III, there is one more major insight which will be especially helpful in putting Alma’s experiment to work. It deals with an answer to a question. Paul testified, “**to know the love of Christ, WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE; that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.**” (Ephesians 3:19) Why is it so? In other words, why does the love of Christ “*passeth knowledge*,” or as we might say, *go beyond ordinary understanding*? Understanding this principle is the most basic, yet least understood, ingredient comprising *unconditional love*. To emphasize this principle, I will give you two very powerful references which can establish it more clearly in your mind.

So what is this insight that can make such a difference in your nurturing the tree of life as it grows within you? *It is to see the perfection of everything that is going on at this moment —because it is all according to God’s plan.*

#### ARE ALL THINGS GOING EXACTLY AS GOD PLANNED?

Some will argue that this kind of talk is “*false doctrine*,” at best, and “*insanity*,” at worst. They will sputter and say, “What about all the evil, the cruelty, the wickedness? Certainly evil is not God’s plan!”

Don’t count on it! God really is God, and as Jacob wrote,

**For behold, by the power of His word man came upon the face of the earth... O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of His hands upon the face of it, ACCORDING TO HIS WILL AND PLEASURE?** (Jacob 4:9)

We have already referred to the Section 88, Verse 41, of the Doctrine and Covenants which testifies that *all things are by Him, and of Him, even God, forever and ever*. That divine declaration, when read with our eyes covered by a spiritual veil of blindness, means little, but when even partially understood, it transforms everything one sees in life, including life itself. “*All things*” actually does mean ALL THINGS. *Of Him* and *by Him* really means OF HIM AND BY HIM. On top of that, since God is infinite and eternal, which means beyond time, then the past, present and future are all ONE WITH GOD as well.

## GOD CONTEMPLATED THE WHOLE OF EVENTS

Do we have any clear references to support such an idea that God has planned it all, meaning EVERY BIT OF IT? Yes! Prophet Joseph Smith has given us one of the most revealing statements I have ever read on the total creative involvement that God has with *everything* that is going on in the earth. It is part of an editorial published by him in Nauvoo in the Times and Seasons two years before his death. Here is an excerpt from that editorial:

**The great Jehovah *contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever “the morning stars sang” together for joy. THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE WERE AND ARE WITH HIM, ONE ETERNAL “NOW.”*** [The “now” was in parentheses in the original.]

**He knew of the fall of Adam, the iniquities of the antediluvians, of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family, their weakness and strength, their power and glory, apostasies, their crimes, their righteousness and iniquity. He comprehended the fall of man and his redemption. He knew the plan of salvation and pointed it out. He was acquainted with the situation of ALL nations and with their destiny.**

***HE ORDERED ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNCIL OF HIS OWN WILL.***

(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 220)

This incredible declaration, along with many other interesting concepts given in the same editorial, will be discussed in greater detail in *Book III, Entering the Rest*. But for now, you might do well to read it over a few times to understand the significance of the idea that God has planned everything that is going on, and then “**ordered ALL THINGS according to the council of His own will.**”

## WHY DID GOD CONTEMPLATE EVIL?

Once we understand that the purpose of mortality under the fall was to experience the opposite to Heaven, then the need for darkness, evil and sin upon the earth makes a great deal more sense. Notice what Isaiah was told:

**I am the Lord... *I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do ALL THESE THINGS...*** Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. *Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makes thou?* (Isaiah 45:5-9)

**Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have *created the waster to destroy*** [In Hebrew, “waster” means “God controls all”]. (Isaiah 54:16)

## I GIVE UNTO MEN WEAKNESSES

Another great reference is in the *Book of Mormon*. We can recall that Moroni testified he was visited by the Savior who told him that our weaknesses are given to us by Him:

**And if men come unto me *I will show unto them their weakness.* I GIVE UNTO MEN WEAKNESS THAT THEY MAY BE HUMBLE; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and *have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*** (Ether 12:27)

What an incredible statement! Yet how easily some might want to take advantage of it and shirk responsibility for human frailties. Instead of saying, “The devil made me do it,” they could say, “God made me do it!” You see, when we wake up to our being a co-eternal manifestation of infinite God, life ceases to be a matter of either excuses or blame, but a *matter of free, truly responsible choices as a joint heir.*

Some have wanted to qualify the declaration by assuring us that God would never be the

One to give us a bad temper or make us an alcoholic. But when we wake up, knowing “the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,” a powerful union, a divine partnership, is joined toward the love, joy and peace promised by His indwelling Presence. After all, such human frailties are the weaknesses which become revealed and exposed in the bright spiritual light of day as we begin to draw closer to Christ. And those are also the weaknesses *which become stronger* in the *oneness with His love*.

### ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL ADDS MORE DETAILS

Elder Maxwell, of the Quorum of Twelve, has written extensively on what he calls *The Doctrine of Foreordination* in which God “sees, rather than foresees, the future—because all things are, at once, present, before him!” Here are some excerpts from an article in the Ensign by this brilliant scholar:

**The combined doctrine of God’s foreordination [fore-knowing] is one of the doctrinal roads “least traveled by.” Yet it clearly underlines how very long and how perfectly God has loved us and known us with our individual needs and capacities. Isolated from other doctrines, or mishandled, these truths can stroke the fires of fatalism, impact adversely upon agency, cause us to focus on status rather than service, and carry us over into predestination...**

**Yet, though foreordination [fore-knowing] is a difficult doctrine, it has been given to us by the living God, through living prophets for a purpose...In some way, our second estate, in relationship to our first estate, is like agreeing in advance to surgery. Then the anesthetic of forgetfulness settles in upon us. Just as doctors do not de-anesthetize a patient in the midst of authorized surgery to ask him again if the surgery should be continued, so after divine tutoring, we agreed to come here and to submit ourselves to certain experiences; it was an irrevocable decision. Of course, when we mortals *try to comprehend*, rather than *accept* foreordination, the result is one in which finite minds futilely try to comprehend omniscience...**

**It takes no violence even to our frail human logic to observe that there cannot be a grand plan of salvation for all mankind, unless there is also a plan for each individual. The salvation sum will reflect all its parts.**

**Once the believer acknowledges that THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ARE BEFORE GOD SIMULTANEOUSLY—EVEN THOUGH WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND HOW—THEN THE DOCTRINE OF FOREORDINATION MAY BE SEEN SOMEWHAT MORE CLEARLY...**

**The omniscience of God made it possible, therefore, for Him to determine the boundaries and times of nations. See Acts 17:26 and Deuteronomy 32:8... In the revelation given to Moses in which the Lord says, “And all things are present with me, for I know them all.” (Moses 1:16) God does not live in the dimension of time as do we...**

**But the doctrine of foreordination properly understood and humbly pursued can help us immensely in coping with the vicissitudes of life. Otherwise, time can play so many tricks upon us. We should always understand THAT WHILE GOD IS NOT SURPRISED, WE OFTEN ARE...**

**What a vastly different view of life the doctrine of foreordination gives to us! Shorn of this perspective, others are puzzled or bitter about life... The disciple will be puzzled at times, too. But he persists. Later he rejoices and exclaims over how wonderfully things fit together, realizing only then, THAT WITH GOD—THINGS NEVER WERE APART!**

**...The doctrine of foreordination is, therefore, not a doctrine of repose, it is a doctrine for the second-milers, it can draw out of us the last full measure of devotion...It is a doctrine for the deep believer and WILL ONLY BRING SCORN FROM THE SKEPTIC. (Neal A. Maxwell, Ensign, February 1979)**

### DOES THIS MEAN THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS?

If everything is contemplated, then would there be any accidents? The answer is no, even

when they look like there are. As Elder Maxwell said,

**[This] can help us immensely in coping with the vicissitudes of life. Otherwise, time can play so many tricks upon us. We should always understand THAT WHILE GOD IS NOT SURPRISED, WE OFTEN ARE.**

Paul said that we are to have the *“mind of Christ.”* What do you suppose that means and what would it be like to have the mind of Christ?

Well, if we put the quotations from Joseph Smith and Elder Maxwell together, we have a better idea of how Christ might possibly see the world. The great Jehovah, having *contemplated it all from the beginning to the end* and ordering everything into existence, *would see the earth unfolding, inside of finite time, exactly as He had contemplated.* He would be seeing the *big picture*, that in the long run, everything is *working for the good of it all.* I am confident that He is, in essence, reporting to His Father as he watches the plan’s unfoldment, *“YES, DEAR FATHER, IT’S WORKING!”*

### INFINITE GOD COMPREHENDS INFINITELY

God is outside of time FOR US, and inside of time WITH US. Remember, we are the tabernacles of His infinite Spirit. (D&C 93:35) He is NOT, as the song says, watching from a distance. He knows and feels everything we know and feel. Yet He is also above and separate from it all. Let’s read again from the Olive Leaf, Section 88. Hopefully, you will want to put this beautiful statement to memory:

**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.** (D&C 88:41)

As Elder Maxwell acknowledged, this is incomprehensible to the natural, finite mind:

**When we mortals try to comprehend, rather than accept foreordination, the result is one in which finite minds futilely try to comprehend omniscience.**

Let’s read again the testimony of Paul to the people in Athens, which Elder Maxwell gave as a reference:

**God...hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.**

**That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.** (Acts 17:26-27)

As Elder Maxwell acknowledged, this is not a generally understood aspect of the gospel:

**The combined doctrine of God’s foreordination is one of the doctrinal roads “least traveled by.” Yet it clearly underlines how very long and how perfectly God has loved us and known us with our individual needs and capacities.**

### WHY THE TREE OF LIFE WAS GUARDED

At the same time, Elder Maxwell underlines that this doctrine has its dangers for it can distort the way we carry responsibility for our choices. I believe this is why Paul was not willing to teach the Corinthians the mystery of Christ, for it could have taken away their fear. The natural man needs fear to control unwholesome appetites. Those Corinthian Saints were still into their fear-based power of needing to be right and making others wrong. As Paul said, *“Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”*

As Elder Maxwell warned,

**Isolated from other doctrines, or mishandled, these truths can stoke the fires of fatalism, impact adversely upon agency, cause us to focus on status rather than service, and carry us**

**over into predestination.**

“Well,” one might say, “it sounds like predestination to me!” Yes, it does, except for one major factor. All of this contemplating, including the past, present and future, is all being done in the “NOW.” Not then! And if it is all being done in the *infinite now*, it is still totally fluid, totally spontaneous. Now figure that one out, if you can! What all of this means to me is that *everything really is in God’s hands because it is all by and of Him*. Everything is designed to work out for the good of all. Infinite love could and would do nothing less.

Well, reader, there it is. You will find that as we go through the various stages shown in Alma’s allegory, this understanding will be helpful to you. To perceive and believe that all things will and do work right on schedule will reduce and finally eliminate condemnation of anything, thus be preparing you to experience the fullness of that love, joy and peace, called the pure love of Christ. Then, as we recall again what Paul said happens when that which is perfect has come—*we bare all things, we hope all things, we believe all things and we endure all things*, just the way they are. Is there any other way?

### SUMMARY

Understanding that God creates totally according to His will and pleasure in His infinite oneness with all things, that all things were contemplated and ordered into existence, prepares us to commit to completing the experiment suggested by Alma. Since evil and good are only in the eye of the beholder, we may choose to see that with God everything does work for the good of all. In fact, this is the Father’s work and glory, to complete His master plan, which includes the fall and all it represents upon the earth.

## Chapter XXII

### SEEING THE ZORAMITES AS PART OF GOD’S PERFECT PLAN

Our next step is to understand the setting for Alma’s lesson on growing the tree of life in our hearts. If you are not fairly familiar with Alma’s sermon, do yourself a favor, lay this book down and read both Chapters 31 and 32 from the Book of Alma. Even if you are familiar with these writings, a review will help you see how straight forward his approach is—

#### READING BREAK: ALMA CHAPTERS 31 & 32

Alma, besides two of his sons, took five great missionaries with him, including the prophet Amulek. Also invited was Zeezron, the miraculously converted lawyer whom Alma had converted during his disastrous mission to Ammonihah.

#### WROUGHT UPON BY THE HOLY GHOST

As head of the Church, Alma had given his missionaries a special blessing which resulted in the Holy Ghost falling upon them in abundance.

**Behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were *filled with the Holy Spirit*. And**

they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

And the Lord provided 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, **SAVE IT WERE SWALLOWED UP IN THE JOY OF CHRIST.** (Alma 31:36-38)

Yes, swallowed up in *the joy of Christ!* So we see that they too had grown the tree of life in their hearts and were feasting upon its fruit, never to hunger or thirst again, regardless of unfavorable circumstances and disappointments.

Before Alma was approached by the miserable poor, his group had spent many frustrating days, possibly weeks, preaching to the Zoramites. These apostate Nephites would listen but continued to refuse to give up any of their fixed beliefs. That part of the story is told in chapter 31 and the first part of 32.

### **ZORAMITES—PUFFED UP, EVEN TO GREATNESS**

If we think of the Zoramites as zealous but vain Israelites, which they were, then it is easy to recognize that they also qualify as proud inhabitants of the great and spacious building. We have all heard the quip, *it is hard to be humble when you are so great!* Chapter 31 of Alma has some interesting observations about these people who had made considerable sacrifices for their faith in order to form large communities where *pride was seen as faithfulness* and *unbelief was seen as a firm testimony*.

### **ALMA FINDS THE POOR PREPARED BY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

Only the despised poor responded to the missionaries' power-filled witnessing. While Alma was speaking to a group of citizens on the hill Onidah, **"there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world."** Their spokesman asked, **"Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty."**

The record states, **"now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld WITH GREAT JOY; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word."** (Alma 32:4-6)

Alma sensed a great opportunity at last, but what was he to say to them? These people wanted relief from their humiliation, not a change of their beliefs. They were into self pity, not anxious to find that their problems were all within rather than without. So Alma was led by the Spirit to give them an experiment in which they could gain faith in the word of God.

In the record that we have of this sermon, he never mentioned Christ, the Son of God, even once. Nor did he explain that the tree of life represented the love of God which is shed into the hearts of the children of men. He did not mention the atonement. It was *after* the tree of life sermon that *he testified of these other things*, which you will find in the next chapter, Chapter 33. His talk was followed by a great sermon by Amulek, which is Chapter 34.

### **WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THEIR MISSION?**

In the 35th chapter of Alma, we find the account of what happened when the missionaries departed. The Zoramite rulers, priests and teachers had appeared relatively friendly and open to intellectually arguing the points of doctrine about Christ. Yet inwardly, they were greatly distressed that any of their people, even their despised poor, would listen to such "spiritual quackery." For if Alma was right, these spiritual leaders were in serious jeopardy, which they felt couldn't possibly be true since they were held in such high esteem by the membership of their church. So the Zoramite elite used a clever strategy to discover and punish any of Alma's converts.



After the more *popular* part of the Zoramites had consulted together concerning the words which had been preached unto them, they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft [their status quo]... Therefore they would not hearken unto the words.

And they sent and gathered together throughout all the land all the people, and consulted with them concerning the words which had been spoken.

Now their *rulers* and their *priests* and their *teachers* did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out *privily the minds of all the people*...

After they had found out the minds of all the people, those who were in favor of the words which had been spoken by Alma and his brethren were *cast out of the land* [a physical form of excommunication]; and *they were many*. (Alma 35:3-6)

### LET'S NOT BE TOO HASTY TO JUDGE

It is easy for us to sit in judgment of those “*wicked Zoramites*,” but let’s remember, they were not wicked in their own eyes, but were sincerely holding to and protecting their truth as they understood it. So, let’s step back for just a bit. When we take into account that the hand of the Lord is in ALL THINGS, we recognize that there is always a divine purpose being served. Sometimes His purposes are not apparent to us, of course, but recognizing that His hand is in everything, literally, changes the way we experience all circumstances, including all those with our fellowman, warts and all.

So we ask, in what way were the Zoramites a part of a greater plan? In actuality, as it turns out, by their vicious persecution of the converts, they served a very important service for those who accepted the challenge to grow the tree of life in their hearts. Remember what Christ said, “**Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.**” Why is approval by one’s peers a “woe” rather than a blessing? Is it because that in the *comfort of approval*, there is little chance of a person truly *waking up*? Christ also added, “**Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.**”

### OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS MUST COME FROM SOME PLACE

Well, if there is need for persecution, there would have to be persecutors. In this case, notice that all parties are serving the Lord. It is so easy to forget that which is of greatest value thrives best under opposition—the greater the value, the greater the opposition. Ultimately, who provides the opposition? Is it God? Some will say, “No, it is the devil!” Well, who cast the devil and his hosts upon this earth? Obviously, God did. And, just as obvious, knowing God’s perfect love, it would have to be for a very wise purpose.

Does this give you the key to how everything changes when we begin to move away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? We see how *everything* is working to provide the widest variety of experiences here on earth, mostly in darkness and occasionally in light. Understanding this, we will be able to better appreciate Alma’s introductory remarks to the humbled poor.

### THE FIRST PHASE IS “*SEEING THE ILLUSIONS*”

As we study the introductory portion of his message, we see the first phase is to start clearing out that great mass of almost automatic judgmentalness which consciously and subconsciously fills our lives. This first phase starts by seeing how easily and frequently we judge, especially those things we see as not right, good, fair, nice or justified.

Christ commanded, “**Judge not least ye be judged!**” Judging is the manifestation of vanity. So we can start to make room for Alma’s experiment by seeing the nature of our pride, which is the first step to greater humility. What is humility, anyway? Obviously, it is very subtle. Prob-

bly one of the proudest things a person can do is to “try” *to be humble*.

Real humility is very simple. It is simply being thankful for ALL THINGS, *including our judgmentalness!* Now, what does that really mean? It means that we have *an eye single to the glory of God* by realizing that every part of the universe, *including the “Zoramite” that is in each of us*, is His doing.

We are told, Christ is the light of every mind. But some will say, “Well, Christ is only the *potential* light of every mind. When the mind is in darkness, then Christ would not be active, would He?”

Remember, we are told that the light shines in darkness and the darkness comprehends it not. This light is the life of everyone, whether they comprehend it or not. “Then,” one might wonder, “why don’t we all see things the same?”

If every mind was inspired to see reality the same, there would be no darkness, no confusion upon the earth. If there were no differences of opinion, there would be no way we could discover the restrictions we place upon our love. If every one agreed with us on everything, we would falsely believe our love was pure and undefiled when it was not. So the Lord manifests Himself as termites and He manifests Himself as Zoramites, all for the good of all, including the termites and the Zoramites.

### SUMMARY

So our first lesson is to notice how quickly we judge the Zoramites as being opposite to God’s will, and what a shift we make when we see the hand of God in all things, including seeing how the opposition provided by the Zoramites served those who would give up their lives for His sake, that they might truly find it. The Zoramites, in turn, through the eventual consequences of their evil ways, harvested precious lessons in their earthly life, allowing them to eventually comprehend that they too are infinite children of God, experiencing the darkness and sin that was designed to cover the earth. Adam fell that man could be the way man is, and man is that he might eventually have joy. What a different picture we see from the tree of life instead of from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

## Chapter XXIII

### AN OVERALL VIEW OF ALMA’S SERMON

Now that we have taken a more cosmic view of the Zoramites, and the role they played in the presence of evil in the world, let us take an overall view of the sermon, itself. You may have noticed that most of the instructions in our scriptures tell us what is required to make the transition from the natural man to the spiritual man, but Alma has some of the clearest information on HOW to do so.

#### ALMA 32 CAN BE THE KEYSTONE TO COMING HOME IN THIS LIFE

In Book I, we referred briefly to Alma’s sermon on just how we are to plant and nurture the tree of life within our hearts. If any one chapter in the Book of Mormon can qualify as “*the keystone of our lives*,” then this chapter explains, from Alma’s own personal experience, how the Lord has prepared a way for us, also, to—

**pluck the fruit of the tree of life....  
which is sweet above all that is sweet, and  
which is white above all that is white,  
yea, and pure above all that is pure, and  
ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled,  
that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.**

(Alma 32:40-42)

### **ONE OF OUR MOST QUOTED SCRIPTURES**

While I was a full time missionary, this chapter was one of my favorites. It appeared to me that Alma was simply telling us how to solve what I thought was one of life's most difficult questions—how does one develop greater and more powerful faith? I found that I could use his step by step approach to grow a stronger spiritual testimony of the gospel. However, having gained faith in the gospel and the truth of the restoration, I felt I had fulfilled the lesson and, therefore, could set it aside, using it only as the basis for talks to our investigators in their need to build stronger faith. How wrong I was.

Little did I realize that Alma's lesson is written in such a way that it can nourish a seeking soul on all four levels of spiritual growth. Faith is something we possess in many degrees or levels. Actually, even though I had an abiding testimony, I was like one of the foolish virgins who were in the right place, at the right time, waiting for the right person, but had failed to bring enough oil for my lamp. I had not sufficiently allowed the Holy Ghost to be my guide, and, indeed, I was found wanting. (D&C 45:56-57)

What was my problem? Simply that I had applied Alma's lesson only on the beginner's level, the "milk" level. Milk is for infants in the gospel. What might be fine for a beginner is less appropriate for the more mature. I had stopped growing in the power of my faith and failed to understand that Alma's counsel could be used, as Paul pleaded, to feast upon the "meat."

### **WAITING FOR THE NEXT LIFE TO PLUCK THE FRUIT**

As for myself, like so many babes in Christ, I did not know that I was "unskillful in the words of righteousness." Neither did I know that I was using Alma to *look beyond the mark*.

The reason, as I found later, is that I was playing a little trick on myself. Actually, not a *little* trick, but a *giant one*. I had simply moved Alma's glowing promises of plucking the fruit of the tree of life to the hereafter. Only after death did I believe God would be willing to grant me the true rewards of my confident faith and continual repentance.

So, in reality, I had thought that all Alma was talking about is how to grow faith in the gospel of imperfect but struggling obedience instead of the gospel of perfect holiness and sanctification, never again to hunger or thirst. Alma not only knew better, he very clearly testified to his own experience of just such a blessing.

### **UNDERSTANDING ON A DEEPER LEVEL**

I gradually discovered that I had just assumed to know what Alma was talking about. Only after I had found the deeper answers to a number of questions was I finally able to truly "*arouse my faculties*" in earnest. Then I realized how a sincere but vain and foolish person like myself could really repent and actually let the Lord grow that tree within my heart.

As the process continued, it became easier and easier. I marveled more and more how clear and crucial were Alma's instructions, once I had eyes to see. Yes, he really was talking about heavenly blessings for the here and now in mortal life.

Even though it took me many decades to wake up and try his challenging experiment in the correct way, I have since seen others do it in a few short years, some in a few months. But whether we grow the tree rapidly or slowly, if we are going to “*press toward the mark for the prize*” of eternal life in the here and now, we can better understand how to do it, as he explained, in a way that he guaranteed really works.

### ASKING MYSELF MORE QUESTIONS

In *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, I discussed Jacob’s *single headline verse*, Chapter 4, Verse 14, of *The Book of Jacob*, about looking beyond the mark, which finally prompted me to ask myself twelve questions.

In contrast, Alma’s instructions for finding the mark are not covered in only a single verse. They take up 35 verses, 8 to 43, in Chapter 32 of *The Book of Alma*. So it is not surprising that I came up with at least twice as many questions. But these questions are very different because once a person understands, at least intellectually, what the mark is, these twenty-four questions are all answered by different aspects of one basic principle.

### IT IS ALL ABOUT THE AT-ONE-MENT, WHICH IS EXPERIENCING BEING ONE IN THE INFINITE CHRIST

The fulfillment of that one principle of integration is often referred to in the scriptures as—

**charity,  
the pure love of Christ,  
made perfect in Christ,  
born of the Spirit,  
the mystery of godliness,  
sanctification,  
the fullness of joy,  
peace everlasting,  
the rest of the Lord,  
the pearl of great price,  
the mark,  
calling and election made sure, and  
the second comforter.**

However, although each of these names is describing various aspects of spiritual integration, they tend to be held by so many of us as angelic, heavenly *ideals* rather than the freely accessible process of Christ’s grace.

So I have chosen to give a title to this aspect or basic principle of the process. This is the way we move from darkness to light, from fear to perfect love. This title describes the process in a tangible, understandable and workable way. This principle which changes the hard barren soil of our heart into a fruitful field enables us to grow the tree of life. Here it is!

**THE CELESTIAL ATTITUDE  
OF SPIRITUAL GRATITUDE!**

The commandment by the Lord for us to have continual joy and thankfulness for everything in His creation is constantly reinforced in the scriptures. Such statements as—

**having an eye single to His glory,  
being filled with light, having no darkness,  
the sons of God sang for joy,  
with joy shall ye draw water  
out of the wells of salvation,  
that your joy might be full,  
that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves,  
the kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Ghost,  
the fruit of the spirit is love, joy and peace,  
thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things,  
and make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.**

### **THE STEPS FOR GROWING THE TREE OF LIFE**

The process is greatly simplified by understanding that every question about *spiritual re-generation* starts and ends with the *celestial attitude of spiritual gratitude*. Actually, in Alma's allegory, he described six phases to growing and possessing the tree of life in our hearts.

#### **SIX PHASES FOR FINDING THE MARK**

1. *Clearing* the ground of pride-created conclusions.
2. Preparing the soil by *learning* about the gift of Christ.
3. Experimenting with a little *faith* to sprout the seed.
4. Caring for the seedling with gratitude for the process.
5. *Nurturing* the tree with total trust in Christ's gift of handling your life.
6. *Harvesting* the fruit that appears on the tree.

I asked myself a number of specific questions about each of these six phases, and found I had twenty-four questions in all. Together, they helped me to better understand the process of *being thankful for all things* and how they fit the *Four Levels of the Gospel*. Only then could I better appreciate the process of planting, nourishing and partaking of the bounteous blessings of the tree of life.

### **SUMMARY**

Although Alma's instructions for running his experiment of planting the seed of faith is one of the most loved and quoted scriptures in the *Book of Mormon*, it is probably one of the least understood. Very few have ever noticed that the seed that we are to plant in the heart becomes the *precious fruit-laden tree of life*. That is the tree we are to nurture as it begins to grow and not to cast it out by our neglect, impatience and indifference. The key to that process is joyful gratitude for everything that is going on in our lives, including our weaknesses and uncomfortable circumstances. *The Celestial Attitude of Spiritual Gratitude*, platitudinous and over-simplistic as it sounds, is the key to nurturing the tree of eternal life within the heart.

## Chapter XXIV

### UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIMENT

Before we consider each of these six phases in detail, let's look at how Alma systematically moves from the first phase to the final phase, using an experiment at the center of his instructions. He covers the first two phases by teaching them true principles, (1) the role of *humility in being teachable*, and (2) the importance of *faith* in testing his words.

Then (3) he challenges them to test out his promises by conducting an *experiment by using just a little faith*. Then if the experiment works, and they do feel a change taking place in their heart, he coaches them how to multiply the fruits of their experiment.

He (4) congratulates them on the perfect knowledge to be gained by the success of their experiment and how to use that success to find enough *hope* that the rest of his message will also work. He explains the necessity of not losing that hope.

(5) The fifth phase explains how they are to use *patience, trust, belief, and anticipation to produce ultimate success*.

(6) At this point Alma tells them about the ultimate blessing. He described what the final results will be, that they will have a permanent feasting upon something that is most sweet, most white, most pure, and most precious above all things.

#### LISTING THE TWENTY FOUR QUESTIONS

As I have mentioned, the longer I studied these six phases, the more questions I found myself asking. So we will answer each of these questions one at a time.

#### QUESTIONS ON GROWING THE TREE OF LIFE

##### Seeing the Illusions Phase - Clearing the ground

1. What does it mean to be lowly in heart?
2. What does it mean to be compelled to be humble?
3. What does it mean to seek repentance?
4. What does it mean to be humble because of the word?

##### Decision Phase - Preparing the Soil

5. What does it mean to desire to believe?
6. How do we give place for a portion of His words?
7. What does it mean to exercise a particle of faith?

##### Experimental Phase - Planting the Seed

8. What does it mean to awake and arouse our faculties?
9. What is the seed of faith we are to plant in our hearts?
10. How can we cast out the sprouting seed by our unbelief?
11. In what way is our unbelief resisting the Spirit of the Lord?

##### Change of Focus Phase - Caring for the Seedling

12. What are these swelling motions within our breast?
13. How do we enlighten our understanding?
14. How do we gain perfect knowledge by tasting this light?

### Nurturing Phase - Growing the Tree

15. How do we nourish the tree with great care?
16. How do we neglect the tree?
17. How do we cast it out because our ground is barren?
18. How do we nourish the word by our faith and patience?
19. How do we look forward in long-suffering?

### Final Phase - Harvesting the Fruit

20. Why is the fruit sweet, white and pure above all others?
21. Why does the fruit make our burdens light?
22. Why do we never again hunger or thirst?
23. Why do we experience everlasting life?
24. Why is this fruit found only on the tree of life?

By classifying the six phases as they fit into the four levels of the gospel, we can see how the gospel is designed to move the spiritual seeker progressively toward the fullness of Christ.

**The First Level of The Gospel**, The Great and Spacious Building, is Seeing the Illusion of our misconceptions.

**The Second Level of The Gospel**, The Strait and Narrow Path, includes both the Decision Phase and the Experiment Phase of accepting the possibilities.

**The Third Level of The Gospel**, The Iron Rod/The Flaming Sword, includes both the Changing Focus Phase and the Nurturing Phase of growing the tree.

**The Fourth Level of The Gospel**, The Tree of Life, is the Final Phase, Partaking of The Fruit.

In the chart below, start at the bottom and work your way up through the four levels.

### FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL AND GROWING THE TREE OF LIFE

LEVEL	SYMBOL	PHASE	ACTIVITY
<b>Fourth</b>	Fruit of the the Tree of Life	VI. Final	Harvesting the Fruit
<b>Third</b>	Iron Rod/ Flaming Sword	V. Nurturing IV Change of Focus	Growing the Tree Care of seedling
<b>Second</b>	Strait and Narrow Path	III. Experiment II. Decision	Planting the Seed Preparing Soil
<b>First</b>	Great and Spacious Building	I. Seeing Illusion	Clearing Ground

## ARE THERE MODERN PARALLELS WITH US?

Alma's mission to the Zoramites fits well into the idea of a teaching parable as well as a historical event. As a people, we might be more like the Zoramites than we would like to believe.

First of all, they were a zealous people who had courageously followed their prophet leader into the uninhabited parts of the land to build cities of their own. They built beautiful synagogues where they came to worship one day a week to bear their testimonies to each other and marvel at how blessed of the Lord they were. They believed they were a chosen people, elected of God, separated from the false doctrines of other believers. They had rejected the spurious doctrines of older, apostate generations of the past. They had rich and poor among them. They had faith that they alone would be exalted. They believed they were tolerant and teachable, treating Alma and his missionaries with enough respect to allow them to speak in their halls, homes and streets. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Now, in what way were they different from us? Well, they believed there would be no Christ. In fact, they felt that a belief in Christ would lead people away from being close to their Holy God. They believed that God was a Spirit—a Spirit which is the same yesterday, today and forever.

## FACING OUR OWN "UNBELIEF" ABOUT CHRIST

Would it surprise you to find that those of our Christian neighbors who have been *touched by grace*, feeling Christ's *glowing Presence* within them, tend to feel that we Mormons do not really accept Christ in the sense that He can literally dwell in our hearts? They think we keep him separate, honored mostly for the great event of redeeming us from the fall, which He performed two thousand years ago. Yes, they know we pray in His name, speak in His name, claim He presides over our Church, and even include His name in the title of the Church, but they feel that we only accept the atonement as a legal satisfaction, balancing mercy with the scales of justice. They suspect that we have hardened our hearts to the indwelling miracle of His purification and sanctification.

Well, maybe they have a point. Is this what the Lord called our vanity and unbelief? Probably so. In fact, until recently, the Lord had us taught in our most sacred services that it is *incomprehensible* to believe that God is so vast that He fills the universe and yet so small He can dwell in our hearts. Let's remember, it was Adam who we heard say, "*I cannot comprehend such a God*," when he had just partaken of the forbidden fruit which divides everything up. No wonder he could no longer comprehend such an Infinite God.

## YES, STEP BY STEP, WE ARE CHANGING

You notice that the Lord has arranged for us to no longer hear that interesting dialogue any more. Well, it is a good thing, because He can and does dwell in our hearts. As it is written, **"God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."** (Galatians 4:6) **"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love."** (Ephesians 3:17)

Yes, it may be true that the *finite* Christ, the actual resurrected Christ, does not dwell in our hearts, but the *Infinite Christ*, that of which all things are made, certainly does! But we tend to be mesmerized by the glory of the three God-Beings who make up the Godhead and so ignorant of them being in union, *the one Infinite and Eternal God*. In that sense, do we really believe fully in Christ, the creator of all things in heaven and earth? Do we believe in the Christ who is both the Father and the Son, the one infinite and eternal God, as we are taught so clearly in the Book of Mormon? (Alma 11:26-40)

Those are questions we don't have to answer for others in the Church, only for ourselves.



And as we do, as you probably well know, the healing of our unbelief by direct experience, grace upon grace, is a marvelous work and a wonder indeed.

Let's remember the prophecy we so frequently quote about the glory of God's work in the last days. That promise of a work and a wonder is preceded by a warning that we are drawing *close to the Lord with our minds but not so close in our hearts*. These words of condemnation are so significant for our day that Nephi included them in his warnings about those in the last day who would say, "**All is well in Zion.**" (2 Nephi 24-24) Let's read again the words of Isaiah which Nephi copied on his plates.

**Wherefore the Lord said, For as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.**

*Therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid...*

*The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*

**For the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, AND ALL THAT WATCH FOR INIQUITY ARE CUT OFF, THAT MAKE A MAN AN OFFENDER FOR A WORD, AND LAY A SNARE FOR HIM THAT REPROVETH IN THE GATE, AND TURN ASIDE THE JUST FOR A THING OF NAUGHT.** (Isaiah 29:13-21 & 2 Nephi 27:25-32)

## SUMMARY

As we look at my twenty four questions prompted by Alma's six phases of coming unto Christ, we can understand why words alone can never substitute for the direct revelation of Himself as our indwelling Lord and Savior. As we take a more careful look at the followers of the prophet Zoram, we can see enough parallels to leave little doubt as to why the Lord's condemnation has remained over us even unto this day. However, with the bad news is the good news. As wonderful as the Church has served us in our lives up until now, the Lord is letting us know, "*My special chosen children, you have seen nothing yet. I have a much greater work and a wonder to do among this people!*"

## Chapter XXV

### CLEARING THE GROUND

#### Phase I—Seeing the Illusions

The first stage of planting a crop in uncultivated fields requires making room to plant. In farming, this phase is equivalent to clearing the land of any obstacles. In our highly civilized society, our first project would be to remove enough of the trash, brush and bushes that clutter the field to make some room.

In the spiritual quality of the heart, those barriers to new growth are our conclusions of what "ought to be" and what "ought not to be." These are the hindrances to love, joy and peace. And just like any plot of fertile ground, weeding is an ongoing process, along with nurturing the desired growth.

Since most of us are quite comfortable with the status quo, some over-powering change has to come along to help *strip us of pride*. There is no other way of clearing the ground to plant Christ's tree, for His essence is meekness and lowliness. Alma recognized that not only were his

eager listeners at the bottom of the financial and social ladder, they had lost all love and respect for themselves. **“Therefore they were poor as to things of the world, and also they were poor in heart.”**

### **Question No. 1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE POOR IN HEART?**

So now we come to our first question in the process of growing the tree of life in our hearts. What does “being poor in heart” really mean? Well, it doesn’t mean comfort. It doesn’t mean a bed of roses.

It usually means being discouraged, for one thing. Depressed people are *poor in heart*. Discouraged people are *poor in heart*. Those people who feel victimized, misunderstood, exploited, betrayed or humiliated tend to be *poor in heart*. It does not seem like it is a very nice condition to have, and it is not. But it may be an extremely valuable state to be in, for out of such frustration and misery can grow an openness, a desperate hungering and searching. You might remember to think of this the next time you feel like the bottom has dropped out of your comfort zone.

### **THE NECESSITY OF BEING MEEK AND LOWLY**

If we are to plant the tree of life in the soil of our heart, the heart cannot be hard but must be soft and pliable, which is called being meek and lowly. So often we are told this in the scriptures. **“He giveth grace unto the lowly.”** (Proverbs 3:34) Christ said that we were to learn of him, **“for I am meek and lowly in heart.”** (Matthew 11:29) In the Sermon on the Mount, he said, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit...they that mourn...the meek.”** (Matthew 5:3-5) Paul declared, **“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love.”** (Ephesians 4:1-2) In the Doctrine and Covenants, we are told, **“Declare my gospel and learn of me, and be meek and lowly of heart.”** (D&C 32:1)

Even though Alma was overjoyed to see that the Zoramite poor were lowly in heart, they despised their condition and were anything but grateful. They were depressed, discouraged, fearful, humiliated, desperate and anxious. We all know the feeling for it has come to all of us at times, from the highest to the lowest.

### **THE BROKEN HEART COMES FROM HELPLESSNESS**

Alma was delighted because he knew full well that before the goblet can be filled with the pure love and meekness of Christ, it must be drained of the proud and judgmental life of the natural man. But being drained is devastating to the ego. It truly breaks the heart. But the heart that is broken is the vain and foolish heart of self importance, arrogance and vanity. However, we have nicer names for vanity. We call it a positive self image, self confidence, assertiveness and ambition. We love the good feelings and hate the bad feelings. In our modern day, with our great—

**luxuries**, which we call *necessities*,  
**knowledge**, which we call *education*,  
**distractions**, which we call entertainment and  
**abundance**, which we call security,

we often find it hard to be humble when we are so great!

So what did Alma find in these desperate seekers? In their helplessness, there was a definite sense of not knowing, not understanding, a state of confusion. Actually, believe it or not, being *poor in heart* can be a very advantageous state of consciousness if one’s heart, out of frustration, starts letting go of many of those beliefs and conclusions which held one’s world of vanity together.

## Question No. 2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE COMPELLED TO BE HUMBLE?

Alma actually congratulated them on their despised condition:

**I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is *necessary that ye should learn wisdom*; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are *necessarily brought to be humble*.**

**And now, because ye are *compelled to be humble*, blessed are ye, for a man sometimes [but not always], if he is *compelled to be humble*, *seeketh repentance*; and now surely whosoever *repenteth shall find mercy*. (Alma 32:12-13)**

Unfavorable circumstances are usually seen as anything but what a loving God would provide, yet that is exactly what we can begin to realize. By understanding God's word, we might see the illusion of one of our most basic conclusions, which is that bad things generally happen to bad people and good things generally happen to good people. The truth is that good and bad things, as the world defines them, happen to everyone. So because of this illusion, we tend to be grateful for the good things and despise the bad things.

### AFFLICTION IS THE NATURAL PROCESS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Affliction, whether it be humiliations, persecutions, betrayals, failures, financial disaster, disabling illness, loss of loved ones, neglect, disapproval, or being just totally misunderstood and falsely accused, are among our greater opportunities to find the unbounded riches of spiritual inheritance. It is time to thank and praise God. Otherwise, afflictions can embitter the soul. They can turn out the light of hope and trust.

The first step to dying to the old way is to begin recognizing the good in every aspect of our situations. It is seeing everything, and *I mean everything*, as *gifts* of specifically designed circumstances by *a wise and loving Father in Heaven*. This includes our own weaknesses and failings.

Why are most of us unwilling and afraid to be thankful for our failings? Is it because we think that repentance means hating what we perceive as bad, especially those weakness in ourselves? We hate what appears as inadequacies, inferiority, humiliations, stupidity, wrongs, foolishness or whatever. It is difficult to accept such conditions as being created by God for any constructive reason. Well, my friend, how else do we discover we are "nothing," which is the first step to repentance from our vanity.

## Question No. 3. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK REPENTANCE?

Alma mentioned that those who are compelled to be humble, hopefully, "seeketh repentance." Repentance is often misunderstood as being based on guilt and shame. Guilt and shame are ego trips. Guilt is to deny the atonement of Christ, who has already taken the punishment for our sins. When we beat ourselves up for being less than our ideal, we are trying to climb up on the cross and take His place to personally suffer enough pain to pay for our mistakes. The results are some degree of self hate, and that is not love. It isn't even repentance, in the spiritual meaning of the term.

### TRUE REPENTANCE IS WISING UP

We have heard that *necessity* is the mother of *invention*. True repentance is a form of invention. It is looking for something that will work when what we have been doing does not seem to be doing the job. In contrast, when the path we are using is completely satisfactory, we usually do not look for a better way. Of course, since comfort is what feels good, we pray to the

Lord to help us escape all misfortune and pain. If you were the Lord and you loved us as much as He loves us, what would you give us in answer to our prayers? *Would you spare us the misfortune of good fortune?*

### REPENTANCE OF PRIDE TAKES HUMILIATION

Alma had encouraging words to the miserable, helpless people he turned to teach. As far as they were concerned, they had no place to go but up. That is a very blessed state of mind to be in, for even a little glimmer of hope enables one to truly seek another way. Sure, the proud can seek repentance, but they usually only want to repent of those things which still deprive them of self-confidence, respect and success. Usually, the last thing they want to repent of is their *pride and vanity*. Those who have no pride left can be ready, willing listeners if they can shake off the need to blame and complain.

So the first thing Alma did was to assure them that their being cast out of their churches was the best thing that could have happened to them. My, how Alma's enthusiastic attitude must have shocked them. But he told them why. It was so that they could gain the greater virtue, which is humility and wisdom. So that being the case, they really had nothing to complain about and no one to blame.

In contrast, their successful and proud Zoramite leaders wanted these poor citizens to repent of those things which contributed to their poverty, such as not having a positive self-image, conformity, neatness, cleanliness and ambition. Actually, all these qualities are well and good in order to prosper more effectively in the temporal world. But those things have nothing to do with the spiritual world. For many years I thought there was no difference between self improvement and spiritual repentance. But gradually I began to realize that Alma was talking about a form of repentance that is *totally spiritual*.

### ALMA TAUGHT THE JOY OF SPIRITUAL REPENTANCE

What is spiritual repentance? It is simply to shift our inner focus from the darkness of the temporal world to the light of the spiritual world. Darkness is fear, worry, blame, guilt, anger and shame. The poor among the Zoramites were in darkness and, evidently, they had been trying to repent on the temporal level so that they would not be outcasts. As a body, they went to Alma for help out of their deplorable condition.

What they received from Alma was not pity nor condolences. They received the shocking news that could destroy their blaming and self-pity. He assured them that they had great reason to rejoice. Therefore they could repent of being in darkness and join him by turning to the light of thankfulness and praise. That is what spiritual repentance is based upon! Nothing less!

### AWAKENING FROM DARKNESS TO THE NOONDAY

So now, after showing them the way out of the darkness of blame and shame into the light of thankfulness and praise, Alma was ready to teach them how to solve the problem of their lack of faith. He knew that they could not repent of their blaming others, including God, for their misfortunes and turn to the Lord in love, joy and peace unless they could gain more faith in what Christ had to offer them.

Repentance means to turn around, to go back, and start over. It is to *correct our point of view*. It is to see that what we did, at the moment we did it, we had *incorrectly justified as being right*. Now, from hindsight, we may finally see that this was not really in our best interest, for whatever reason—be it materially, socially, spiritually, emotionally or psychologically.

*Repentance is reversing our point of view.* That process comes in stages, of course, as a function of grace, grace upon grace. Grace is the heavenly wisdom which comes from above.

#### Question No. 4 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMBLE BECAUSE OF THE WORD?

There are two ways to reach the “not knowing” state, (1) by devastating circumstances, as the Zoramite poor, or (2) by waking up to one’s hardness of heart by seeing the *depths of vanity and unbelief in the light of the promises of God*. Although Alma was grateful for the humbled poor because they were teachable, he let them know that there was a better way to be *poor in heart*:

**And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are *more blessed* who truly humble themselves *because of the word*?...**

**Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized, *without being brought to know the word* [by experience], or even *compelled to know*, before they will believe.** (Alma 32:14 & 16)

I remembered doing a lot of thinking about those words, “**humble themselves because of the word?**” But how does that work? I knew I should study the scriptures, listen to the Brethren and hear the voice of the Spirit within me, but how could God’s word, all by itself, take me to the depths of a broken heart and a contrite spirit like severe afflictions had sometimes done in my life?

The question is vital. Why? Because when we are humbled only by painful conditions, the *humility seems to pass when conditions improve*. Have you noticed? If we are humbled by the word, which should be before us continually, then would we not have a greater chance to remain free from pride and vanity? Would we then be in a position to plant the seed of the tree of life in our hearts?

#### SOME CAN BE HUMBLLED BY THE MIRACLE OF LIFE ITSELF

As Alma taught the desperate poor, he realized that he only had one door to their inner souls, and that was the anger of betrayal they felt about those they had trusted in their religious society. However, he acknowledged that there were probably some among them who were beginning to see that *all was not well in their Zion*, and that they needed to take a good look at those conclusions they had made about God and His ways. In other words, they had already opened themselves to his words by having a “not knowing mind.” Alma acknowledged this in these words:

**And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye *shall do* because ye are *afflicted and cast out*—now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I *mean to judge you* only according to that which is true [obvious] —**

**For I do not mean that...*all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves*; for I *verily believe* that there are some among you who would humble themselves, *let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might*.** (Alma 32:24-25)

#### TWO DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WORD

So in what way are we to be humbled by the word? On the tree of knowledge, the word of God is His law. At the First Level of the Gospel, in the great and spacious building, the burden of the law creates fear and guilt, which is the only humility many have known.

If one is still in and of the self-righteous building of pride, the ultimate process of waking up, i.e., becoming poor in heart, is to discover the mind-blowing, life-altering truth—that *all judging, all anger, all guilt, all superiority, all inferiority, all blaming come from FEAR!* In our blindness, we had been convinced *that such judging is love*. We may have called it “tough love,”

and there is a place for that, but pure love never comes out of fear. Love and fear do not really coexist together, but we have been conditioned to believe they do.

Remember, for Alma, the “word” of God is not the law that is found in the knowledge of good and evil. The Word of God is Christ, and Christ said that He did not come into the world to judge the world.

**For God *sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved... And *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**** (John 3:17-19)

### **LUCIFER, NOT CHRIST, IS THE ACCUSER**

Lucifer is in the world as the great complainer, the accuser of his brethren. In contrast, as Christ does not condemn the world, neither have we been sent into the world to condemn. But we have found it so easy to condemn, and since God’s hand is in EVERYTHING, we are arrogantly condemning the handiwork of God. When we see that all things, and I believe He really does mean ALL THINGS, are made by Him and of Him, then if we *have an eye single to His glory*, we would CONDEMN HIM NOT. For when we condemn any of His creation, we, unknowingly, condemn the Source of that creation.

When we realize that all creation is the result of “every word that proceedeth out of His mouth,” and that we are to live peacefully and thankfully for all that He is, does and manifests, then we would be truly humble. Then we would see that when we have condemned anything, including ourselves, we have been condemning God.

### **SUMMARY**

The first phase of growing the tree of life is to clear a place in our hearts to plant the seed. There are many different ways we can discover that we have been a proud dweller of the great and spacious building. We might be very tolerant in some areas, intolerant in others. So this phase allows us to see through the temptation of the devil on the level of pride and prejudice. When we discover the pain of seeing that our way is not working, we can then see the hand of the Lord in our circumstances, including the way we feel about them. Then we are free to be humbled because of His word—the message which promises the abiding of His indwelling Presence.

## **Chapter XXVI**

### **PREPARING THE SOIL**

#### **Phase II—Making a Decision To Hope**

It is one thing to clear a piece of our inner field for planting, but totally another type of project to prepare the soil so that it will provide nourishment for that which we plant. This is Alma’s second phase, and it has to do with preparing the soil of our heart with spiritual nutrients for growing the delicate and sensitive tree of perfect love.

### **RECOGNIZING OUR HEART IS ALREADY OVER-CROWDED**

It isn’t that our inner soil has not already been quite productive, for we have been watering and fertilizing that great, over-grown, ever-spreading *tree of knowledge* so that, basically, it fills

our heart with the many ways we *need to be right*. But that judgmental tree, producing the seeds of fear, over-runs the soil. The tender shoots of unconditional love can be quickly smothered. So Alma will deal with this critical possibility all the way through the process.

Phase I was not designed to clear *all* the field, for that is not possible in this early stage of repentance. We *judge*, consciously and unconsciously, in more ways than we can count. In fact, our tree of knowledge can be more like a *banyan tree*, whose branches shoot aerial runners down to the ground to take root and become another trunk of the same tree. Or we might think of our tree of knowledge as a *quaking aspen*, in which the roots send up shoots which also become trees, but really are all part of the same tree, sometimes covering acres.

### ENRICHING THE SOIL TO PREPARE IT FOR THE SEED OF ETERNAL LIFE

Alma's purpose was much more than trying to reconvert those Zoramites back to the true Church of God. He wanted to take them away from their great and spacious building of their law of good and evil so they could partake of the fruit of the tree of life. What an incredible task!

So now that he has told them that their first step has been accomplished because of their humiliating circumstances, they are ready for this second phase of believing in a CHRIST WHO WILL COME AND DWELL IN THEIR HEARTS. Let's notice his words carefully, for his first instructions are also for our benefit.

**Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves [totally submit] without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God [regarding the tree of life], and is baptized [die and are buried to the old judging way of life] without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know [by painful buffeting and chastening], before they will believe...**

**And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on His name [believe that His word is His bond]; therefore, He desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on His word.** (Alma 32:16 & 22)

To better understand this part of his sermon, we are ready to consider the 5th of the 24 questions.

#### Question No. 5. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO *DESIRE TO BELIEVE*?

Most of us keep telling ourselves that we are open to new discoveries, even when we suppose that new ideas might threaten to prove our previous positions to be in error. However, if there is anything we learn from human history and psychology, it is that most new ideas are *resisted* by all of us. This is true in science, politics, medicine and economics, as well as in religion. The truth is that most people do not desire to change what they already believe. It is called *not wanting to leave our comfort zone*. It is human nature among all people to have little desire to accept something different. That is why, down through the ages of time, all new ideas have at first been—

*ignored, then  
ridiculed, then  
contested and finally  
accepted as self-evident truths to be  
defended against the next wave of innovation and discovery.*

### OUR WORSHIP OF THE STATUS-QUO

Of course there is a place for honest skepticism and a concern about being too gullible.

However, in our great respect for the scientific method, skepticism can become as much a religion as faith. In such a case, the doors to great discoveries, especially spiritual discoveries, are virtually closed. That is why, it now seems to me, that Christ sadly declared to John on the Isle of Patmos regarding the lukewarm in His Church who sought the safety of spiritual conformity:

**I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”**<sup>(Revelations 3:15-16)</sup>

## **THE COURAGEOUS DECISION TO BE WILLING TO DESIRE TO BELIEVE**

So Alma is counseling the people that if what he is telling them is true, it could totally transform their lives to a much higher level of love, joy and peace. So, they might at least start with *a desire to believe*. That is actually a more gigantic step than most of us realize. Yes, it is easy to desire food, water, shelter and rest, but to desire something which means death to the cravings for the feelings of comfort and security—to be replaced with the desires of the Spirit—is frightening to say the least.

Elder Blackman, of the Seventy, said in a recent conference,

**Christ does not want your time, money or service. He wants you, all of you. And He promises that He will give you ALL OF HIMSELF. Again, as he proclaims, “I stand at the door and knock. If ANY MAN hear my voice and open the door, I WILL COME IN TO HIM AND WILL SUP WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME.”**

Christ gives his WORD! Can we let that word have at least a small place in our hearts?

### **Question No. 6. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE PLACE FOR A PORTION OF HIS WORDS?**

If someone of incredible wealth gave you a signed, sealed, and notarized contract that in exactly twelve months you would receive fifty million dollars, what would your life be like for the next year? Whether your new dreams would include plans for a beautiful mansion, world travel, a yacht and other luxuries, and/or assisting people who need a break, you would certainly find your life was already transformed because of the assured abundance.

Alma is talking about something much more wonderful than what we could do with such a monetary fortune. He is promising that each and everyone of us could partake of the fullness of God’s very own love which can be shed into the hearts of the children of men. As Nephi testified, **“Yea IT IS THE MOST DESIRABLE ABOVE ALL THINGS!”** And the angel added, **“Yea, and THE MOST JOYOUS TO THE SOUL.”** (1 Nephi 11:22-23)

### **Question No. 7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EXERCISE A PARTICLE OF FAITH?**

The pragmatic, practical, natural mind tends to believe something only when it is finally understood. In contrast, when some new information comes along which describes a reality which is supposed to be many times more magnificent and joyous than anything possible to the natural, logical, pragmatic mind, we tend to resist. The mind, which is usually threatened by incredible and spectacular descriptions of the unknown, usually tends to close up like a clam to protect its claim to near infallibility. It says, “This can’t be true or I would have already known about it.” Sound familiar?

Alma realized this characteristic, even among these hungry, destitute poor. So, in essence, he is saying—

“Folks, I know that what I am saying is a bit beyond what you can understand and accept at this time, but what if even a little bit of what I am saying is true? Wouldn’t that be



great enough to claim a little of it for yourself?

“So, my friends, let’s say that on a scale of 1 to 10, your interest is a little more than a zero, maybe like a “1.” Even a “1,” which is 10% of what I am promising, would be a great improvement over what you have now, would it not? But I can’t expect you to accept even 10% of my story on my word.

“All I want you to do is to give me enough of a reasonable doubt to allow for a *little hope* that it might be true. Because if you can do that, I can give you a little experiment to try for yourself to see if what I promise is at least 10% true.

“But to do this experiment, you must give me at least the benefit of a reasonable doubt. Just believe enough that you can at least hope that I am telling you the truth. So then you can exercise a particle of faith.”

As we have been considering the magnitude of what the promises of Christ really mean, you may have the same inner questioning. It is not that you find the fullness of the promises of Christ unbelievable, in and of themselves, but you may believe that such blessings just couldn’t happen to the likes of you. So you may have to ask yourself what Alma was really asking his audience to do. On a scale of 1 to 10, what if only 10% could turn out to be true for you? Then if you can give that a possibility, wouldn’t you desire to obtain at least that much?

### WE “*BELIEVE*” ONLY WHAT WE DO NOT “*KNOW*”

Alma next pointed out to these discouraged Zoramites that most of us tend to get “*faith*” and “*knowledge*” mixed up. We confuse believing and knowing. For example, you do not *believe* you are reading this page, you *know* it. You do *not know* that the sun is going to come up tomorrow, you can only *believe* it. Belief is less certain than knowing, but belief is still a vital function in our lives.

We are frequently saying that we *know* the gospel is true, when in reality, for most members, the gospel is something they believe to be true. Notice how Alma tried to explain this difference to his audience.

**Yes, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall *know of a surety*; then we shall *believe*.**

**Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man *knoweth* a thing he hath no cause to *believe*, for he knoweth it. And now, how much more *cursed is he* that knoweth the *will of God and doeth it not*, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression?**

**...And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things. Therefore if ye have faith ye *hope for things which are not seen*, which [you believe] are true...(Alma 32:26-27)**

**Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety *at first*, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. (Alma 32: 21, 26)**

### UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWING AND BELIEVING

Alma knew that the trouble with signs is that all they would KNOW is that they had experienced an amazing event. If they were to conclude that because of a miraculous event, they would *know* that all of Alma’s words would be true, they would be mistaken. That is *not knowing*. It is *only believing*. “Well,” one might ask, “what would be wrong with that?”

Alma knew that the *only power* that can bring us to a sure knowing about things of the Spirit is to start having *faith*, a willingness, an openness that those things *might be true*. Our

other alternative is to prematurely take them for granted or shake our heads and say, “No, I don’t think those things could be true!” Neither one will activate the power of true, energizing faith!

Why is that? If we are *open* to the *possibility* that something very marvelous might be true, on the one hand, and then allow ourselves to generate a dynamic *hope* that it might *really* be true, we are on the threshold of *exercising faith that it is true*. Faith becomes the energizer for action.

### BLIND FAITH AND CREATED FAITH

We can exercise blind faith by just accepting and become excited about what we are told. Ever since we were little children, we had to do that. But as we have grown up and found that we can’t believe everything we are told, we find it harder to have blind faith. Alma realized those discouraged people were in that position of no longer being able to have the benefit of blind faith. They had been cast out and rejected, thus deceived, by the very people they had trusted, their Zoramite leaders. They wanted solutions they could see, not dreams about things they could not see.

Now remember, Alma is trying to take them away from the tree of knowledge to none other than the tree of life. He knew he could not get them there in one big jump. In addition, he wanted them to realize that a sign, no matter how magnificent, could not take them there either. Only the power of their creating faith could do it, so he invited them to conduct an experiment by creating a little particle of faith. That will be Phase III.

### SUMMARY

As we study these pages on finding the mark, we can open up our view to the possibility that there is much more to the promises of Christ than we had ever imagined. Then, we can allow ourselves to hope that, as we make some room, Christ will begin to fill our hearts with such a blessing. That is all there is to Phase II, Preparing The Soil, with an expanded hope that Christ really means what He says, that the gift might be possible if we reach out in faith. It is called making a decision to hope that it might be true.

## Chapter XXVII

### PLANTING THE SEED

#### Phase III—The Experiment

Once a portion of the spiritual ground is cleared of the obstacles of unteachability and enriched with a better understanding of the promises of Christ, the season for planting God’s most precious seed is at hand.

The potential of this seed is incomprehensible to our minds, even though the mind will find it hard to believe such a statement. Alma acknowledged this fact to his bewildered disciples. After all, how could they *know for certain* that his promises about Christ’s being able to dwell in their hearts was true? So he challenged them to test the idea by trying an experiment regarding the properties of this Christ-Idea itself.

**Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot *know* of their surety *at first*, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.**

**But behold, if ye will *awake and arouse your faculties*, even to an *experiment upon my words*, and *exercise a particle of faith*, yea, even if ye can no more than *desire to believe*, let *this desire work in you*, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.** (Alma 32:26-27)

### THE NATURE OF A TRUE EXPERIMENT

Alma is suggesting they make a test with an honest experiment. Experiments are very valuable if they are done as a true experiment, which is merely to find out what happens. Most people are unwilling to try something unless they are fairly confident that the effort will produce satisfactory results. That is really not an experiment. Instead, it is trying to do the “right” thing which is supposed to produce the “right” result.

Since the positive result of an untested procedure is difficult to determine in advance, many people hesitate and usually do little if anything at all. The viable alternative is to decide whether the idea looks interesting enough to conduct an experiment. An *experiment always works* because we always get to *see what happens*. That is the sole purpose of an experiment.

### ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR OWN EXPERIMENT?

Alma is also talking to you from the dust, saying, “**Even if ye can no more than *desire to believe*, let *this desire work in you*.**” But you might say, “Oh, I believe already! I really see what you are talking about. I don’t have a doubt in the world.”

Yes, you probably wouldn’t have read this far without being thrilled and excited about these wonderful teachings of the prophets we have been considering. So the first step is for you to answer the question God asked Adam, “**Where art thou?**”

Now that you understand the four levels of the gospel as seen in Lehi’s vision, are you still in the great and spacious building of the temporal law? Alma knew that most of those listening to him were on that first level, humbled but still complaining and blaming. If so, this chapter is to remind you that it is time to die to that life and let a desire for much more grace work in you. The simple fact is that you cannot stay a proud citizen of that building and successfully try Alma’s experiment.

### THE EXPERIMENT IS FOR THOSE ON THE SECOND LEVEL

Notice that Alma acknowledged that some might be humble seekers just because of the word. His message on humility was to bring all of them up to that spiritual level so that they could hunger and thirst after the prize, the fruit of the tree of life.

If you are already on at least the second level, the strait and narrow path of spiritual ideals, then you have already tasted some wonderful samples of the fruit and enjoyed frequent drinks from the fountain of living waters. Yes, hopefully, you have already experienced some wonderful spiritual blessings.

Yet, you may still be doing what Nephi did in his earlier years, making those feelings into ideals, thus remaining somewhat impatient because you seem to have reached a spiritual plateau. That is okay! You are doing fine, letting this desire work in you, feeling these swelling motions, yearning for the tree to continue to grow within your heart. You have completed the experiment on this level because you have come to a perfect knowledge that the seed is good.

### THIRD LEVEL PEOPLE ARE READY FOR A DIFFERENT TYPE OF EXPERIMENT

In contrast, you may have already moved to the third level, the iron rod, participating in Christ’s integrative process of experiencing life more and more in His infinite wholeness. If so,

your experiment on the second level is over and you are busy nurturing the tree. There are some interesting ways to conduct different kinds of spiritual experiments on the third and fourth levels, which we will consider in the next four chapters.

Whatever place you are, take stock for a moment and realize that this is perfect for you, for the here and now. Perfection means you are right on target, *exactly* according to plan! At the same time, perfection always includes the opportunity to go further into discovering more of who you are, even until you know in fullness. Even then, there will be more to discover. Being whole and complete and still evolving is another paradox.

The basic principles of experimenting are the same even though what we seek varies at different levels. So learning how to go from *some* faith to *some* perfect knowledge by the experimental method can serve you at each step toward reaching and partaking of the tree of life. So now we are ready to work on the 8th question of the 24.

### **Question No. 8. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “AWAKE AND AROUSE YOUR FACULTIES?”**

Paul said, speaking to members, “**Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.**” (Ephesians 5:14) So if believers are to wake up, the first question to ask is—“*What has been asleep?*”

The Lord is calling the children of Zion to wake up to a far greater spiritual reality than most are presently experiencing. To do that, we must awake and arouse our faculties. What faculties? The *mind* for one and the *heart* for the other. And how do we do that?

You will have noticed, if you are ready, that reading these books on *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown* is doing just that. They were written for that purpose, to awaken and arouse your faculties. If you are not ready, these pages are just fascinating information at best, or plain apostate, New Age bunk at worst. But if you are finding, as you read, it is hard to breathe at times and that you need to get up and walk around, praising God and marveling at the mysterious ways of the Lord, then you are probably ready to continue your experiments of surrender on the Third and Fourth Levels.

### **Question No. 9. WHAT IS THE SEED OF FAITH YOU ARE TO PLANT IN YOUR HEART?**

Alma explained how to conduct an experiment with the incredible, incomprehensible miracle of truly coming unto Christ.

Now, we will compare the word unto a seed.  
 Now, if ye give place,  
 that a seed may be planted *in your heart*,  
 behold, if it be a *true* seed, or a good seed,  
 if ye do not cast it out by your *unbelief*,  
 that ye will *resist* the Spirit of the Lord,  
 behold, it will begin to *swell within your breasts*,  
 and when you feel these swelling motions,  
 ye will begin to say within yourselves  
 it must needs be that *this is a good seed*,  
 or that the *word is good*,  
 for it beginneth to *enlarge my soul*;  
 yea, it beginneth to *enlighten my understanding*,  
 yea, it beginneth to be *delicious to me*.

(Alma 32:28)

Now, let's get clear about what this seed of faith is. You might say, "Oh, I know. It is faith that Christ will complete His work in my heart by growing the tree of life."

Correct! Notice that faith in the seed deals with what Christ will do, not faith in your own self to produce the miracle of the tree. It will require faith in yourself that you have sufficiently cleared the ground by realizing that in and of yourself you are, by your very nature, incapable of doing anything which is truly pure and fully holy. So the first step to planting this new type of faith is to sincerely accept your total unworthiness, and to *submit* to a power which is infinitely greater than anything you, in your mortal state, could provide. Actually, that is a *great leap of faith*—faith that the one and only thing you can do in purity, with no ulterior motives, is to *surrender*, to leave it up to Him, how and when He chooses.

We remember that king Benjamin was told by an angel that we must YIELD. Remember, "yield" means to *step aside*. I found that if I was to yield, I had to know from WHAT to WHAT? He said from my own physical identity, called the natural man, to the spiritual identity, called the "enticing of the Holy Spirit." The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to testify within our hearts of the reality and majesty of the cleansing and purifying power of Christ, which is the MARK.

### **Question No. 10. HOW CAN WE CAST OUT THE SPROUTING SEED BY OUR UNBELIEF?**

What creates unbelief? The biggest source of unbelief is doubting our own worthiness, especially the lack of real intensity of our desire. We are so accustomed to living off the tree of knowledge of good and evil that we keep thinking, as we are taught by the preparatory gospel of the do's and don'ts, that we must be good enough. You can surrender that conditional thinking when you realize that **YOU WILL NEVER, EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH, NOT EVEN WHEN YOU ARE IN THE REST!**

It seems that down deep in most of us is a fear that if we went deep enough, we would find something so dreadful that we hesitate to look. What we are most afraid of is that we might find out, even after all of our self improving, that we are still "*nothing*." Do you know the feeling?

Well, friend, the good news is that, ultimately, that is what all of us are— "*nothing*,"—meaning **NO THING**. We are Spirit, and Spirit is what all things are made of, therefore it is infinite and eternal. When we see that Spirit is really everything, then it stops being a "thing" at all, for it has no top, bottom, middle or anything else characteristic of **A THING**. Infinite and eternal God is not a thing, though as a God-Being, He certainly is. That is another paradox! In total reality, He is much, much more than just a Being, and so are we.

Knowing our true "*no-thing-ness*" is the evidence of knowing, at least in part, the *mind of Christ*.

As king Benjamin testified to his people who had come to this blessed understanding:

**I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and YOUR OWN NOTHINGNESS, and His goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures [as finite human beings], and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility.** (Mosiah 4:11)

### **Question No. 11. IN WHAT WAY IS YOUR UNBELIEF RESISTING THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD?**

A man came to Jesus with his son who was possessed and whom the disciples had not been able to heal. As he pleaded for his son's life, the Lord said, "**If thou canst believe, *all things are possible to him that believeth*. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF.**" (Mark 9:23-24)

Because of the fall, we are all cut off. How can we really believe when we cannot see who

we are? We cannot! That is where we start. Yes, we believe in a way, but unbelief is our nature, provided by the Lord Himself. So we acknowledge the blessing of what faith we have, and *surrender the rest of our lack of faith to Him*.

### ACKNOWLEDGING THE EXPERIMENT AS BEING COMPLETE

Alma encouraged his disciples to anchor in the reality of what they experienced from their experiment. We do not do that when we say, “I believe it is true as long as I can feel it is true.”

It is easy to make those swelling motions into an ideal and conclude that when they are there, one is spiritual, and when they are not, one has become less worthy. Doing that is the trap which will cause one to wander from the path, blinded by the mists of darkness. So Alma is giving us encouragement to *lock in the truth*, to anchor in the reality of the success of our own *experiment*.

**Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea, nevertheless *it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge*.**

**But behold, as the seed swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith, for ye will say I *know* that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.**

**And now, behold, *are ye sure* that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea, for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness. Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.**

**And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs *know that the seed is good*.**

**And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is *perfect in that thing*, and your faith is dormant; and this *because you know*, for ye know that the word hath *swelled your souls*, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your *understanding doth begin to be enlightened*, and your *mind doth begin to expand*. (Alma 32:29-34)**

### SUMMARY

An experiment is done to see what happens rather than trying to fulfill a *need* by doing the *right thing*. Alma’s experiment is to enable people to confidently move out of the great and spacious building to joyfully join those on the strait and narrow path. The basis of this experiment is to plant the seed of faith in Christ’s promise of growing nothing less than the tree of eternal life, his pure and perfect love, within our hearts. We initiate this by arousing our faculties of both the mind and the heart, choosing both positive thoughts and feelings to build up the power of great desire. As the seed of faith grows and our bosom swells with anticipation and joy, we have then come to a perfect knowledge that this is a good and rewarding path to be on.

## Chapter XXVIII

### Part I

## CARING FOR THE SEEDLING

### Phase IV — The Change of Focus

Once the experiment has been completed, the seed has indeed swelled and sprouted, a shift must take place. No longer are the seekers in limbo. Right there in their own hearts, they have a

real, live miracle. Each has a delicate seedling of none other than Christ's greatest gift, a baby tree of life.

**And now behold, after ye have tasted this *light* [of the spiritual law] is your knowledge perfect? ... Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.**

**And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us *nourish it with great care*, that it may get root, that it may *grow up*, and bring forth *fruit* unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root and grow up, and bring forth fruit.** (Alma 32:34-37)

### NOURISHING IT WITH GREAT CARE

Most of us do not realize that at this juncture, there are three, not two, possibilities. The first two are obvious, the third is not. (1) The tree can be neglected and it will die. (2) It can be properly nourished and it will thrive. Then what would be the third? (3) The other alternative is that we can graft in some shoots from our well established tree of knowledge, which will take the strength from the roots, and it will become a tree that will never give us the fruit which is sweet, pure, and white above all others. Believe it or not, that is exactly what we have done on the milk level of the gospel, as Liahona Saints, wherein we continue to live by LAW, even *the spiritual LAW*. As Lehi warned, thus we **“perish from that which is good and become miserable forever.”**

In Lehi's tree of life vision, these are the people on the *strait and narrow path* who became lost in the *mists of darkness* and never reached the tree of life. This is our vanity and unbelief which has kept us under condemnation. This is the way many are called but few are chosen. This is how we can walk in darkness at noon day. This is why most Latter-day Saints, over a lifetime of faithful activity, fail to grow the pure and holy tree of perfect love in their hearts.

### CHANGE OF FOCUS FROM MILK TO MEAT

Therefore, to correctly take the next step requires a basic shift, which we are calling, The Change of Focus Phase. This is the time that we are to give up our faith in the milk, the preparatory gospel of *trying but failing* to be perfect “servants” of Christ. Milk is the OLD covenant of obedience by God's law.

The change of focus is from the milk to the meat, from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life. Meat is the NEW covenant of obedience by perfect love. *This is a totally different way of coming unto Christ*. No longer are we asked to be a perfect servant, which of course we have failed to do.

Now, as we come to Him in meekness and lowliness of heart, He invites us to be A JOINT-HEIR WITH HIM, wherein we will be able to walk in the *light* as He is in the light. Only through faith in this promise can we enable the seedling to grow and mature *as the tree of life instead of the tree of knowledge*.

As Alma said, **“Ye have tasted this *light* [so] ye will say: Let us *nourish* [this light] *with great care*, that it may get root, that it may *grow up*, and bring forth *fruit* unto us.”**

### DYING TO ONE LEVEL, COMING ALIVE TO THE NEXT

This major shift requires a dying to the Second Level and moving to the Third Level of the Gospel, the flaming sword or rod of iron. Just as the shift from the temporal law of the First Level to the spiritual law on the Second Level required an entirely different way to experience Christ, this next phase involves an even greater change in the *way we experience Christ*.

Even on the Second Level, we were still seeing Christ through the eyes of separateness. By

our faith, we experienced our Redeemer sending us inspiration by His Holy Spirit to tell us what to do. As we gained more of His Spirit, that is exactly what He does do. Thus we have become Liahona Saints, trusting the Spirit to tell us everything necessary to continue successfully on our journey.

Those wonderful inspiring instructions, accompanied with the burnings of the bosom, are the thrilling fruits of the first comforter. So one might ask, “Why would I want to change such a wonderful relationship with Christ?” My answer is, “Because you want to nurture the tender seedling of the tree of life, the fruit of which *takes you beyond separateness!*”

### **PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMFORTER**

Ultimately, having the “mind of Christ” is to experience *total union with all creation* and is called the *second comforter*. (D&C 88:1-86) This *oneness* is the essential ingredient of His perfect love. To enable us to do so, the Lord will take us out of our comfort zone of the spiritual law by *breaking us loose* from our old belief. What belief? The belief that Christ WANTS to *tell us everything that we should do*.

Yes, by the *old covenant* of the law, we are called to be perfect, ideal servants. Of course, we fail. Our own failure, if we are honest, will awaken us to the realization that as servants, no matter how obedient, we will still be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:21) Why is that? Because a servant’s obedience is secondhand righteousness, i.e., that of the master and not of the servant.

His *new covenant* is to call us to be *joint-heirs* in which He will give us His mind, His point of view, which is His love. As a joint-heir, righteousness is the manifestation of one’s own inner wholeness. The second comforter is a state of being whole and complete in Christ’s love. As such, we are in *harmony with what is* rather than in *contention and conflict*.

### **LEARNING TO READ SCRIPTURES AS MEAT INSTEAD OF MILK**

Coming out of our false security of the law is essential to nurturing the seedling. Let me give you an example of how we misread some of our clearest scriptures in our desire to stay as servants. Nephi said the following words to his worried and fearful followers:

**For behold, again I say unto you that if ye shall enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.** (2 Nephi 32:5)

What does “all things what ye should do” mean? On the milk level it means that we should not decide anything by ourselves but wait upon the Spirit to direct us in EVERYTHING we do. Which tree is that? Yes, the forbidden tree of knowledge. We believed, since God knows all things, He should tell us what is right and then we will never make a mistake if we do it exactly as instructed. Isn’t that what Nephi is telling us? On the tree of knowledge, yes, but not on the tree of life.

### **THE SPIRIT WILL TELL YOU ALL THINGS TO DO TO EXPRESS HIS LOVE, NOT DOS AND DON'TS**

Are you ready for a bomb shell? Yes, the Spirit will let you be a robot as long as it takes to wake you up. But when you start nurturing the tree of life and change your focus, the Spirit will start telling you ONLY two things. These two are ALL YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW *TO BE LIKE HE IS ON THIS EARTH*. They are GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS!

You see, my friend, what else really matters? Well, those on the strait and narrow path think EVERYTHING ELSE MATTERS, like who to marry, what job to take, where to live, what is right and wrong, etc. etc. Well, it is true that if God is trying to create Heaven on earth, everything like that would matter. But do you notice we, including God, have created anything BUT Heaven on earth. As a Church, we can’t even go back to redeem Zion, for goodness sakes!



## IF *ALL* THINGS WORK FOR GOOD . . .

You see, once we understand the principle “**THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT *LOVE GOD***” (Romans 8:28), then we can make an amazing discovery. We can discover that if everything works for good, then *one thing is about as good as another*. Now, hang on for a bit more. I know this may not make any sense yet! I did not say that one thing is as comfortable as another, nor as constructive as another. But if it is really true that *ALL* things work for good, then you can no longer come from fear. Remember, perfect love casts out fear. So if you had *no fear*, realizing that all things will give you *valuable experience*, then, my friend, *what would YOU want to do with your life?*

“Well,” you might still say, “I want to do what God wants me to do.” But God wants you to do what *YOU* want to do so that you can learn from your own choices. In other words, when are you going to accept responsibility for running your own life and accept cheerfully the responsibility for what happens? Remember, it must be *for your good* since you do love God. Right! *That is what being a joint-heir is all about!*

This is what you begin to find out as you change your focus about Christ not being separate and start nurturing the tree of life in your inner being. You begin to realize that if all things are made by Christ and of Christ, then all things would have to be working for the good of all—though not necessarily for the comfort of all. This is called the *liberty in Christ*.

## SOME CAN ABUSE THEIR IDEA OF THE LIBERTY IN CHRIST

Paul found it necessary to continually remind the Saints in his day to honor their liberty in Christ rather than abuse it. This is what he wrote to the Church at Galatia:

**Ye have been called unto the liberty, only *use not liberty for an occasion in the flesh*, but by *love serve one another*.**

**For *all the law is fulfilled in one word*, even in this: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*.**

**But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are *contrary* the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.**

**But *if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are NOT UNDER THE LAW*. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, *hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife*, seditions, heresies, *envyings*, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall *not inherit the kingdom of God* [the fruit of the tree of life]. **BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE****

**JOY,  
PEACE,  
LONG-SUFFERING,  
GENTLENESS,  
GOODNESS,  
FAITH,  
MEEKNESS,  
TEMPERANCE;**

***against such there is NO LAW. And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.*** (Galations 5:13-26)

The purpose of the rod of iron is to prepare us for the full liberty in Christ in which His love is the rule rather than His law. When we live by His love, remember, we live spontaneously, like the wind, rather than rigidly and self-righteously. To start preparing for this day of

liberty, there is a natural habit we will want to reduce and finally eliminate.

### THREE QUESTIONS OF ETERNAL TORMENT

You will kill that seedling in your heart, in short order by continually asking any one of *the three questions of fear*. I call them the three questions of eternal torment. We tend to ask these questions all the time because we are taught to do so by the tree of knowledge.

We even sing a beautiful song, “Choose the Right.” In that song we read that there is a right and wrong to every question. Wouldn’t it be nice if there were? In reality, there are both advantages and disadvantages to almost every question. To know which answer would be totally the best, we would have to know the potential future results of either choice, then the results of the choices which would follow, on and on into eternity.

What might look good in the short run could turn out to be the worst in the long run. The alternative is to recognize that there are no absolute, definitive answers to these questions. That is why these questions do not exist on the tree of life.

On the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there is nothing but these three questions. Believe it or not, they are part of what makes up the mist of darkness for those on the spiritual path. They are the temptations of the devil to create anxiety, worry and doubt. So what are these three questions which will poison your precious little tree? They will sound very familiar, but it is easy to see that they do produce most of the misery the devil seeks to create in our hearts. Here they are—

#### THE THREE QUESTIONS OF ETERNAL TORMENT

**Question 1. *Did I do the right thing?***

**Question 2. *Am I doing the right thing?***

**Question 3. *Will I be doing the right thing?***

If you really want an extra burden of worry and concern, just expand those three questions to include others by saying “they” instead of “I.” Did *they* do the right thing? Are *they* doing the right thing? Will *they* be doing the right thing? We are so used to living by all these questions, we might find it difficult to live without them. So what question could we ask if we stopped asking any of those questions? There is *one question* you can constantly ask which is the *question of eternal aliveness*, a question that truly nurtures the seedling of the tree of life. It is this:

#### THE QUESTION OF ETERNAL ALIVENESS

**What am I interested  
in experimenting with?**

This brings us back to what Alma wanted us to do with the seed of faith in the promises of Christ. A true experiment, remember, is to see what happens, not to produce the “right thing.” There is no other way to live without fear. There is no other way to *nurture the tree of life*.

But those on either the First or Second Levels, when they hear even a suggestion of this kind of talk, will throw up their hands in fear of what they might do if God did not give them all

of this knowledge of good and evil. Yes, and of course they are right—if we are still under the fall, thus *carnal, sensual and devilish*. Then we *need* to come from fear. But what happens when we begin to come from the pure love of Christ? Paul explained how *love* takes care of *everything*, naturally and spontaneously, rather than rigidly by fixed ideals:

**...love one another** [with Christ's gift of love], **for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF.**

**Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.** (Romans 13:8-10)

After Paul told the members this, he challenged them to *wake up* and cast off the *works of darkness, which is doing good only because one is afraid to be bad*. Paul continued:

**It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation** [perfection] **nearer than when we** [first] **believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness** [trying to live by the commandments without the pure love of Christ], **and let us put on the armor of LIGHT** [love]. (Romans 13:11-12)

Remember, the commandments are given because they are necessary for those who *refuse to walk in the light when it is noonday*. That light is pure love, and it does not come from the tree of knowledge but from the tree of life. So which tree do you chose to grow within your heart?

### THE ERROR OF TRUSTING IN THE STRAIT AND NARROW PATH

Those Liahona Saints on the spiritual law “feel” their spiritual guidance is right, of course, because they believe that a path which leads to the pure love of Christ *should* be very *strait* and exceedingly *narrow*. Yet, as they must admit, this trying to live as “perfect servants” *fails* to produce *the pure love of Christ*, which casts out all fear in their lives. Actually, living second-hand righteousness creates *dedicated rigidity, spiritual self righteousness and inflexibility*, leaving little room for Christ to expand their unconditional love.

The preparation process for growing the tree of life and finally partaking of the fruit is a step by step dying to the old way of judgmentalness. This requires becoming poor in heart even more deeply than before.

Changing focus is not easy for Liahona Saints because those beautiful, spiritual experiences on the strait and narrow path make them feel so confident and secure in their dependence upon Christ. Remember, Lehi saw that when the mists of darkness blinded those on the path, most wandered off and were lost. The reason is that up to that time, whether on the temporal law of the written word or by personal revelation, they have diligently converted all of this information into CONCLUSIONS of *what ought to be and kept comparing these ideals with WHAT IS!*

### WHY FEW ON THE PATH ARE INTERESTED IN THE IRON ROD

When the path is hidden in the confusion of the mist of darkness, why is it that few look for the iron rod? Simply, the iron rod symbolically represents the next level. Remember that with all four levels, a higher level is designed to be rejected by those on the level preparatory to it. Those on the spiritual law level are dismayed by those they see going through a spiritual purging symbolized by the flaming sword. It certainly appears that those enduring that strange process are very confused and have lost their fixed and sure knowledge of what should and should not be. So when their own strait and narrow path becomes uncertain, they refuse to acknowledge its failure.

Why? Because the Liahona Saints believe such a confession would be a denial of the rightness of their spiritual blessings. They do not think they need a humiliating way of experiencing Christ. “*After all,*” they had probably thought while the path was still clear, “*why would I need to get down on my knees to crawl along with that plain old rod of rusty iron when the strait and narrow path is totally adequate for the journey? I already have the knowledge of exactly what God wants.*”

But now, in their bewilderment, unknowingly caused by the mist of darkness hiding the clear boundaries of the path, they have three choices: (1) just stand still and do nothing, (2) keep walking as if nothing had happened and get lost, or (3) become humble, give up being so “wise,” and acknowledge that they no longer have the answers. Out of this being poor in Spirit, they can try another experiment of faith by getting down on their knees and start reaching around for that iron rod of a chastening Christ.

### SUMMARY

This Phase IV, *The Change of Focus*, is to stop trusting in the strait and narrow path and accept Christ’s offer for an alternative to judging. We do this by praising Him for *what is, exactly the way it is*. Seeing that all things work for good in God’s infinite plan, we realize that as we love others with His love, we will do no one ill, thus we are truly fulfilling the spirit of the law. This is honoring our liberty in Christ. Instead of asking the three questions of eternal torment, we begin to realize that life offers continual opportunities to experiment with what His love puts into our path.

## Chapter XXIX

### Part II

## CARING FOR THE SEEDLING

### Phase IV — The Change of Focus

We want to increase our understanding on the meat level of Alma’s challenge to grow the tree of life in our hearts. This requires a change of focus from separateness to seeing that all things are by Christ and of Christ. To assist us, if we are willing to give up the forbidden tree, Christ will begin to reveal to us *His personal, infinite Presence*, line upon line, grace upon grace. We can begin to understand that all things are exactly as He has contemplated them. But such knowledge is a two edged sword and can cut both ways. So Alma warns us of the tenderness of the seedling at this critical transition period.

**But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought [about His promises] for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root, it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.** (Alma 32:38)

By combining Alma’s instruction with Lehi’s vision, since both have to do with reaching the tree of life, we can better understand how following the strait and narrow path by our own view of things must be exchanged for the “not knowing mind” of the iron rod.

Remember, finding the iron rod does not remove the mists of darkness. What it does do is provide a way to safely proceed through this period of not seeing the borders of the path. We will find ourselves in a new, paradoxical relationship with God, called the *certainty in uncer-*

*tainty*. We no longer *trust God* to give us unfailing knowledge of good and evil, truth and error. Yet, at the same time, we TRUST GOD MORE THAN EVER BEFORE. We are calling this having a “not knowing mind” because we *know* that we *do not know* what we are “*supposed*” to do yet we know that *all things work out for our good*.

### WHAT ARE THE MISTS OF DARKNESS?

We have already found that Nephi was told that the mists of darkness represented the temptations of the devil. Now, notice that this dark mist did not bother people in the great and spacious building, only those on the path. Let's reread what the angel told Nephi about the meaning of the mists of darkness:

**And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which *blindeth* the eyes, and *hardeneth* the hearts of the children of men [who are on the strait and narrow path], and *leadeth* them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.** (1 Nephi 12:17)

Stalwart Liahona Saints are probably not going to like what I am going to say next. These symbolic mists are spiritual, not temporal. Because of the excitement of having attained the spiritual level of the law, it is very difficult to know when we are blinded, when our hearts are hardened, and we are being led into broad and strange roads, even while we proclaim absolute loyalty to the spiritual gifts, called the strait and narrow path of Christ.

Remember, at this time we are still on the tree of knowledge, even though on a high level of that tree. Yes, we have been wonderfully blessed, but to get to the tree of life, we must be weaned away from the tree of conclusions which give us such assurance that we know the *only way*.

So how would the Lord shake us loose when we are hanging on so tightly, so incorrectly confident that our tree of *knowledge* IS the *tree of life*?

### THE NECESSITY OF MISDIRECTION

Only after Christ allows our spiritual gifts, guidance and prophecies to begin to fail may we recognize that we are on the spiritual dead-end of the Second Level. As we gain more and more knowledge, the ultimate goal of pure, unconditional love continues to elude us, even though we may fail to admit it. Paul assured us that pure love inevitably replaces imperfect, finite conclusions, i.e., the tree of life must replace the tree of knowledge.

**Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, *they shall fail*, whether there be tongues, *they shall cease*; whether there be knowledge, *it shall vanish away*...For when that which is *perfect is come*, then that which is *in part* shall be done away.** (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

Mormon explained the same principle when he said that everything is set up to fail, except one thing, which is the pure love of Christ, the union of all things.

**Cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, FOR ALL [OTHER] THINGS MUST FAIL—But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever.** (Moroni 7:46-47)

So, fellow Liahona Saints, be prepared. Christ doesn't wait until after our love has been perfected for His spiritual guidance to sometimes fail. Instead, Christ will begin to give us misdirection by which we have the chance to be weaned away from the tree of knowledge.

It is for this reason that the iron rod is not a popularly chosen alternative for those who are, unknowingly, wandering off from the strait and narrow path. As far as they know, since they are blinded by the mist, they are still on the path and doing just fine.

I could give you many examples that happened to me and others that I have observed, but let me give you one that involved the founding members of the Church.

## TRYING TO PAY THE DEBT FOR PRINTING THE *BOOK OF MORMON*

After the *Book of Mormon* finally came off the press, the little group of believers needed to pay a large sum to the printer. The book was not selling as expected, so they did not have the money. Joseph received a revelation through the Seer Stone that Martin Harris was to sell part of his farm and be reimbursed later as the book sold. Yet the land failed to sell.

As months went by, the situation became desperate. Then they heard that there were people in Canada who would pay a large sum for the copyright. Joseph again inquired of the Lord. He was shown that, yes, this was the way the Lord had arranged for them to solve the problem. Everyone gave a sigh of relief. The Lord was again providing a miraculous escape.

## THIS REVELATION WAS NOT FROM GOD

Oliver Cowdery and Hyrum Page took what little money was available and went to Canada. The two men finally returned empty handed. Everyone was devastated and confused. They urged Joseph to ask the Lord why the revelation failed. Joseph looked into the Seer Stone and dictated the brief and terse answer he received: **“Some revelations are from God, some are from men, and some are from the devil. This revelation was not from God.”** (An Address to All Believers in Christ, pp. 38-39)

I can assure you that this was not the first, and certainly would not be the last, such misdirection the early Saints were put through by a loving but chastening God.

The tree of knowledge must fail in the end. It is not the tree which reveals eternal life. So, sooner or later, the Lord will see to it that situations arise when, if we are truly honest, we will realize that we have lost our way. It is then that He may help us find another way. The other way is to no longer think we know what *ought to be*, strange as that may sound. In that state of surrender, more like a child, we will be a responsible joint-heir instead of a doting servant.

## HOW I WAS LOST IN THE MIST OF DARKNESS FOR MANY YEARS

In Chapter XI, I related how, as it turned out, I spent 10 years, from 1967 to 1977 on the strait and narrow path, most of that time blinded by the mist of darkness without even knowing it. During the prior 20 years I had been trying to live the spiritual law with only tentative success. Then, finally, in the summer of 1966, at the age of 45, I began to realize that I had never really surrendered. That is when, as I related in Book I, I planned to spend as much of 8 weeks, if necessary, to yield my spiritual life to the Lord. I went to a lonely beach in Baja Mexico. Within a week the Lord had blessed me with the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. This was my first major breakthrough on the level of the spiritual law. I was mistakenly convinced that I had finally reached the fruit of the tree of life. But to my surprise, there was still fear in my life. So I responded by struggling even harder with myself and trying even more diligently to help others who were seeking.

## CONVERTING MULTIPLE REVELATIONS INTO FIXED CONCLUSIONS

Along with a growing number of friends over the next few years, we began to have wonderful revelations, visions, prophecies and even visitations. Soon, in my continued zeal, I lost the path in the illusions of converting incredible revelations and intense study into knowledge of what ought to be. Our first wake-up call came when our prophecies regarding impending events which were supposed to be a prelude to the Second Coming did not take place. One thing after another began to disappoint us. Then as I became more acquainted with early Church history, I concluded that Joseph Smith had been involved with the same kind of problems. I became so “wise” that I left the Church, but still felt I was on my own spiritual path. That wandering in strange roads of brilliant conclusions lasted until the summer of 1977.

## GOING FROM MISDIRECTED CONFUSION TO THE CLARITY OF THE IRON ROD

Then, in an amazing, two hour experience, the Lord let me know that I had totally missed the mark, that I didn't have the least idea how He really works with each and everyone of His children. He showed me how everything that had gone on, both in the history of the Church and in my own life, was exactly as it was designed to be. You can imagine what a shock that was after all of the self-righteous, "so spiritual" judging I had been doing.

Then I was shown how the Church will fulfill its miraculous mission in the years to come. I saw how the Brethren would eventually lead the Church—the very Church I had disowned—through an incredible transformation. When I saw what that would be like, I pled to be allowed to regain my membership and was given assurances that, eventually, this too could take place.

### THE NEXT TEN YEARS ON THE CHASTENING OF THE IRON ROD

From 1977 to 1987, I was continually being shown that I knew less and less about what ought to be and more and more about how perfect the world was just the way it is. Even though every effort to be allowed back in the Church was blocked, I could see the hand of God in those obstacles. It was simply a matter of patiently waiting upon the Lord and *staying in motion*. I no longer waited or even asked the Lord to tell me what was the "right" thing to do, but with a "not knowing mind," I was choosing to accept what I found in my path, moment by moment. It was an incredible ride, let me assure you.

In essence, I was gradually losing my own agenda of what ought to be. Instead, I noticed the many options life was placing before me. Since I did not know which would be "the right choice," and instead of asking God what to do, I would gather information, stay in motion and choose what experiment I wanted to run. Gradually, I gave up more and more of my zeal and found greater and greater levels of trust and peace. I knew that regardless of my choices, all things would work for my good.

### PARTAKING OF THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE

In April of 1986, I heard President Benson call the Church out from under the condemnation. My heart jumped with amazement. It sounded to me like the shift would soon be taking place, but what did I know? Within a year, the Lord blessed me with "the five minutes of gazing into heaven," which incidentally lasted much more than that. In the months that followed, there were several other such experiences, each so different but equally revealing. In this process, my experience of myself and the world shifted. As I wrote in Book I—

**Gradually, a very unique and powerful blessing began to unfold. It was not only different from any experience I had ever had before, but even any that I had imagined. Eventually, I began finding myself walking more and more continuously in a marvelous, strange new world. Even though it was the same world I had always known, it was being experienced as a totally different place...**

**A completely different level of that love was now being experienced—not just some of the time, but ALL of the time. That love was not a special feeling, like I had experienced on occasion, but a different way of seeing the world. I was startled to notice that *fear was gone from my life!* I am not saying that I still did not look both ways before crossing a street. It was just that I now found myself living with a greater, inner knowing that everything was working out perfectly.** (Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark, pp. 13-14)

I watched events unfold in my life in a gradual but very deliberate pace. It was not long before I was rebaptized, and later, all my blessings were restored. Returning to the Church after twenty years was a wonderful reawakening. It was a joy to be under authority, truly willing to

enthusiastically do whatever it was I was called upon to do. I did not teach nor was I given the ability to write for a number of years. Then, wonderfully, the Lord let me start telling bits and pieces of my own story of discovery.

### **CHOOSING TO COME OUT FROM UNDER AUTHORITY**

My recent decision to break ranks was not done by revelation. Though I feel very close support from beyond the veil, I accept total responsibility for the choice as a joint-heir of Christ. I still totally support the Brethren in their dedicated opposition to anything that would weaken the structuring effectiveness of the milk of the gospel within the Church. The mission I have chosen, in line with President Benson's call, is to clearly proclaim the majesty of the revelations the Lord has already laid before His chosen people, especially in the *Book of Mormon*. As I have said in the Preface, I am doing so without authority so my views are not binding upon anyone.

It is no mystery to me that the average member of the Church can read these incredible scriptures and not see what you are probably seeing. Nor could most members read this book and feel the witness of the Spirit as you may be doing. The fact is that the Brethren are exactly right. The majority of members must not see these things yet. As Paul found, that many Saints who do "good-out-of-fear" may start using the idea of the liberty in Christ for license to sin. Remember in Lehi's vision, he saw the first group that made it all the way to the tree of life couldn't take the criticism and wandered off **"into forbidden paths and were lost."** (1 Nephi 8:28)

So let's continue with changing our focus to the iron rod.

### **WHAT IS IT LIKE TO GRASP THE IRON ROD?**

Let us continue with Lehi's allegorical vision of the rod of iron because it also describes this phase of nurturing the seedling within our heart. To give you a better feel for what he saw, let your imagination play for a bit.

**Picture in your mind that you, in a spiritual sense, have left the great and spacious building, scary as that would be, and, along with a few others, have found this strait and narrow path that leads to yonder tree of life, which is so gloriously beautiful and white that it takes your breath away. As you start joyfully down the path, you sense a self-contained confidence because you know exactly where you are to walk and not to walk. In other words, you are sure that you know how to earn these spiritual blessings of the Spirit so that they will continue to increase.**

**Then, all of a sudden, a very dark, black fog completely envelops you and the others on the path. It becomes so dark that you can't see your hand in front of your face. At first you panic, waiting for the darkness to leave, but it doesn't.**

**You can sense that most of your friends are still happily walking and are getting further away from you. Since you know that you can no longer see the path, you decide to just stop and think for a bit. Then, you remember having seen that there was this iron rod on the ground which also follows the path, so in desperation, you get down on your knees to see if you can find it.**

**Suddenly, as you finally touch the end of the rod, you jump back with alarm. The rod gives you a shock that shakes you to the very bone. You pull back in disappointment and exclaim, "Ouch! I can't use this rod."**

### **STAYING WITH THE ROD THROUGH THE DISORIENTATION**

**But the darkness still remains. The rod is your only hope of reaching the tree. So, tenderly, cautiously, you grab the rod again. Its powerful jolt hurts, but you try hard**



to bear it. Perhaps it hurts enough to make you groan from the shock. You are frightened, bewildered, but you know you must not give up! Yet you wonder if you can hold out. You know that the wonderful tree is still a long way off.

Then you get an idea. You take off your coat, wrap it around your hands, and grab the rod through your coat. Now the electric shock is more bearable. “Wow! Yes,” you say to yourself, “it still hurts but now I believe I can make it.”

At this point, you may be wondering why I am having you imagine the iron rod being charged with electricity. Well, take my word for it! Christ just doesn’t want our blind obedience or even our agreement any more. He wants us to take dominion within our hearts, to come from greater love rather than pre-decided conclusions. The problem is that we do not easily surrender our inner dependency on His law. So the Lord uses many different ways to shock us into seeing how we have less than pure intent.

I’ll give you an example from our Church History as to how the iron rod is not painless. There is an earlier experience Joseph had, showing how the Lord was willing to brutally and literally shock him so he could discover that, in spite of outward obedience, he had impure intent in his *needy* heart.

### THE SYMBOLISM OF JOSEPH SMITH AND THE GOLDEN PLATES

Remember the first time Joseph Smith went to the Hill Cumorah and tried to pick up the gold plates. Oliver Cowdery recorded Joseph’s experience:

**On attempting to take possession of the record, a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him, in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before... He therefore made a third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditating, he exclaimed, “Why can I not obtain this book?”** (A New Witness For Christ in America, Vol. I, p 98)

Moroni immediately appeared and rebuked him, saying, “**Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord.**”

Only then did Joseph realize that, although he had acted exactly as he had been told, his heart, almost subconsciously, had been rejoicing with a sense that the gold plates would end the family’s extreme poverty. He had to learn that this precious treasure, just like the fruit from the tree of life, was not for *personal gain of any kind*.

But, fortunately, you have some insulating materials at hand to help you handle His rebukes. I called it your coat. I will explain in the next chapter what is represented by your protective clothing.

### SUMMARY

This is the time to prepare to move to the Third Level of the Gospel by changing your focus from separateness to oneness. Your focus changes in the way you see yourself and the world, from the darkness of the apparent mess the world is in to the light of seeing the perfection of all things in and of Christ. By remembering that the *hand of God is in all things*, you will be able to surrender more completely and peacefully to the process provided by the Infinite Christ of which *you* are made. Yes, **YOU!** *You are a totally loved individualization of the life and light of the world.* You now have the choice of surrendering, moment by moment—giving up the necessity to judge, resist or condemn and peacefully surrender to His careful purifying process.

## Chapter XXX

### Part III

## CARING FOR THE SEEDLING

### Phase IV — The Change of Focus

Let's remember that the Great and Spacious Building Saints have always been the vast majority, at least in the past. In the same way, the next largest group has been those on the strait and narrow path, the Liahona Saints. Even fewer are those grasping the chastisement of the iron rod. For the benefit of all three levels, the scriptures speak of the fierce wrath of God who is both jealous and often angry. Yet the teachings of Christ have shown that those are not the true characteristics of our Father in Heaven. Then why is the wrath of God spoken of so often, even in the Doctrine and Covenants?

#### GOD IS REVEALED AS A GOD OF WRATH TO WEAN US AWAY FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

My friend, there is good reason why a good shocking and a shaking, from time to time, by the apparent wrath of God might be helpful to us. If you are choosing to go all the way with Christ, and remember, you don't have to, then be properly warned.

In the *New Testament* Book of Revelations we find an amazing declaration of *Christ, Himself, as a fierce and wrathful* Lord and King. As you read it, look for the hidden meanings. The major theme of this prophecy is the subjection of the "nations." As you read what John was told, remember Lehi's vision of the dark mist covering the path and iron rod.

**And His name is called *the Word of God* [the iron rod]...**

**And out of His mouth goeth *a sharp sword*,  
that with it He should smite *the NATIONS*;  
and He shall rule them **WITH A ROD OF IRON**;  
and He *treadeth* the winepress  
of the *fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*.  
And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh  
*a name written*, **KING OF KINGS,**  
**AND LORD OF LORDS.****

(Revelations 19:13-16)

As a likeness of our inner world, what are the "nations" which are to be ruled by a rod of iron? In a spiritual sense, it is talking about cleansing the inner vessel. Christ will come into our hearts to bring His gift of perfect love. To do so, He must first subdue the diverse "nations" that are in each of us, which refers to the multitudes of "conclusions" within our hearts.

Each conclusion, each decision, has become a judgmental power center and has taken on a life of its own. It has become an *entity of the self*, with its own personality and determined will. Altogether, these "nations" within the "self" must come under total submission to Christ or be destroyed. So with Christ's sharp sword, even a flaming sword, He will "smite the nations," the many "selves," of which the natural man is made. Each of our "selves" falsely claims to know how to rule and reign over this earthly kingdom of ours and must be overturned.

## SEEING THE *INNER* SYMBOLISM OF THE SECOND COMING PROPHECIES

The prophecies describing the Second Coming are not just predicting future historical events. They also describe, symbolically, an inner Second Coming in which Christ will rule and reign in His personal tabernacle, your body and your life, bringing about His Millennium, His rest, in your life.

Let's look at one of the graphic prophecies of the Second Coming and see how it may symbolically describe the Armageddon which must first take place inside each of our hearts:

**And it shall come to pass, that in all the land [of our heart], saith the Lord, *two parts* therein shall be cut off and die; but the *third* shall be left therein.**

**And I will bring *the third part* [those who are not killed] through *the fire*, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name, and I will hear them. I shall say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.** (Zechariah 13:8-9)

Does that sound like the flaming sword to you, my friend? It certainly does to me. The sweet fruit of the *tree of life* brings the *Millennium to the heart*, called entering into the *rest of the Lord* from this time henceforth until we rest with Him in Heaven.

## GOD IS CRUEL IN ORDER TO BE KIND

Why would a loving God do things like this? To strip us of our pride and greed! As Alma asked, **“Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God.”** (Alma 5:28) And we might add, unless we are stripped of pride, neither are we prepared to pluck the fruit from the *tree of life*.

When we are still on the level of the spiritual law, we desire to possess the tree of life to fulfill our “*need*” to end our *spiritual poverty*, just as young Joseph wanted to end his family's poverty. Our old motives come from our need (greed) to fulfill what is supposed to be best for our own present and eternal comfort. We have those *needs* because of *fear*—fear of *losing a reward* if not fear of punishment.

The purpose of the *refiners fire* is to help us reach a point of complete *trust in surrendering*. If we want to “come home” while still in this life, we are to give up the claim to our life for His sake. To live without fear requires passing through the gauntlet of spiritual adversity, not to merit the blessing, but to be able to eventually **“bare ALL things, hope ALL things, believe ALL things and endure ALL things in love, joy and peace.”**

Let's remember, pain in this life is *inevitable*, but suffering is *optional*, depending upon our point of view! **“Ye shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.”** The Infinite Christ is the Infinite Truth that finally does set us FREE.

## THE MEANING OF THE INSULATING COAT

In your imaginary mind trip, I suggested that *you use your coat* to help *insulate* your hands from His buffeting and rebukes. The coat that I referred to is the way you can use the information in the first chapter in this Section III.

What we considered is how Christ *contemplated the whole of the events taking place on earth*, past, present and future, in the infinite and eternal “NOW,” and ordered them into existence. This *understanding*, or should we call this an *OVER-STANDING*, like an overcoat, allows us to trust Christ's wisdom and, therefore, the eternal value in every experience.

The reason I waited until this last section to give you those revealing articles by Joseph Smith and Neal Maxwell is to help you see, at this point, why an understanding of the *Infinite Christ* is not only essential, but it can also work to reduce your suffering during this confusing, chastening, transition period.

As we have read from Elder Maxwell—

**What a vastly different view of life the doctrine of foreordination gives to us! Shorn of this perspective, others are puzzled or bitter about life...The disciple will be puzzled at times, too. But he persists. Later he rejoices and exclaims over how wonderfully things fit together, realizing, only then, that with God—things never were apart!”** (Ensign, February 1979)

Accepting, even conceptually, this new “infinite and eternal” point of view of Christ’s TOTAL involvement in the world can serve you as a protective buffer when experiencing the inevitable chastening for your stiffneckedness. In other words, in a symbolic way, it works like insulation for the *way you hold things in your life*, with this overview of understanding. With the trust that comes from this “over-standing,” you will find it easier to *roll* with the disappointments and problems in life.

Now you can confidently grasp the iron rod and proceed, hand over hand, even without “seeing” where you are going—accepting by faith that you are moving slowly but surely toward the day of harvesting the fruit from His tree of life. That *faith* is a trust that Christ knows *exactly what He is doing with you*, that you are totally and safely in His hands, **INSTEAD OF IN THE FRAILTY OF YOUR OWN HANDS!**

### **LETTING THE LAW BECOME DEAD DOES NOT MEAN FORSAKING THE PATH**

Let me emphasize again that all of these allegories are spiritual, not temporal. Recall that both the iron rod and the path went together to the tree of life. **“I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron.”** By following the rod, one automatically stays on the path! The difference is not in direction, it is in the focus! One works and the other does not. One is rigid and vain. The other is spontaneous and meek, yet purposeful!

When Nephi, as an older man, finally let the law become dead, he still kept the commandments. Why? Did he keep them because he was afraid not to? No! Was he still trying to earn his exaltation? No, I think not! Notice that Nephi instructed his family to do the commandments as far as *they were expedient*. So why did he keep the commandments? It was because the Lord had asked him to, that’s why!

**Wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; YET WE KEEP THE LAW BECAUSE OF THE COMMANDMENTS.** (2 Nephi 25:25)

It is very easy to throw the baby out with the bath water. The shift is not in the doing, but in the perception. Instead of coming from the old way of fearful pride in obedience, we come from the new way of love and liberty. That shift is provided through a very thorough chastening process which we have found is symbolized by the iron rod.

As will be emphasized throughout these four books on *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown*, the Lord has put you in the Church to enable you to walk the talk without having to wander off into forbidden paths. Fixed ideals create burdens of duty. Love creates the wisdom of free choice, the liberty in Christ.

It is at this point that we begin to better understand these swelling motions, which brings us to Question No. 12.

### **Question No. 12. WHAT ARE THESE SWELLING MOTIONS WITHIN OUR BREAST?**

On the Second Level, these swelling motions are the rewards for our living by our ideals. But as we move to the Third Level, they are not seen as rewards at all, for they have nothing to do with our worthiness. They are unearned gifts, called grace, of a loving Christ.

Yes, on the Second Level, the swelling motions proved to us that the experiment worked. They took us from faith to a certainty. But as we move into the Third Level of the flaming

sword, we begin to hold these spiritual feelings more lightly. Instead of making them into an *ideal* of what we *crave to* experience more and more, we simply acknowledge that, in spite of our total unworthiness, His grace-filled love still abounds.

Let me use my own experience as an example of how my praying has been totally altered. Each time I go before the Lord, I do so with a smile upon my face. I freely and lovingly acknowledge that *I am worthy of nothing* and that *He needs me for nothing*. I know that we are all unprofitable servants. I know that He could totally change the world into Heaven this very instant, and someday He might, and He doesn't have to wait on me to help Him do it.

It is in that state of mind that I go into my joyous thankfulness that *He is not only blessing me but also using me, even with all of those interesting weaknesses He has blessed me with. In that experience, in that relationship, there are no burdens, there is no heavy labor.*

So now we come to the question about enlightenment.

### **Question No. 13. HOW DO WE ENLIGHTEN OUR UNDERSTANDING?**

What is enlightenment anyway? How about the obvious? It is the quality of lightening up! Of course! Believe it or not, enlightenment starts by ceasing to take spirituality so seriously. All that seriousness has to do with the tree of knowledge where life is continually teetering on the edge of possible disaster. On the tree of life, LIFE is the miracle of the universe. Didn't Christ say, "My yoke is easy and my burden is LIGHT?" Is this another area in which we have believed IN Him, but failed to really *believe Him*? Love, joy and peace is a celebration of the very existence of life.

Ultimately, enlightenment is a shift. It is a shift from identifying ourselves totally as this little self—the self that is locked within our skin—to the Infinite Self. When we do experience that Infinite Self, possibly by the brief gift of gazing into heaven, the Self we get in touch with is the same Self that every other person gets in touch with when they become enlightened.

### **Question No. 14. HOW DO WE GAIN PERFECT KNOWLEDGE BY THIS LIGHT?**

As Alma declared, the spiritual law on the Second Level becomes perfect knowledge as we are blessed with the *feelings of grace*. The reality of the indwelling presence of the Spirit, the revelations, the joy, the swelling motions in the breast provide great assurance for a time. Therefore many choice Liahona Saints stay at this Second Level, even if the new found blessings gradually taper off and occur less and less frequently, or at times, totally fail.

In contrast, going to the Third Level is a continuation of the process of *discovery*. Growing the mature tree of life requires constant care, from grace to grace.

### **TAKING THOUGHT FOR ITS NOURISHMENT**

We exercise our faith by taking thought. The sweet feelings may come and go, but we choose to see the world as the majesty of His creative glory, *just the way it is and the way it is not*. Alma counsels us very forcefully:

**But if ye neglect the tree, and take *no thought* for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.**

**Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground [understanding] is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.** (Alma 32:38-39)

Christ said, "**Resist not evil!**" (Matthew 5:39) At the same time, we are told, "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**" (James 4:7)

So we are counseled to resist the devil, but not the evil he creates. Why is that? Because if we resist his evil, we will become what we resist. *What we resist tends to persist. What we focus on expands.* In other words, we are to resist the source of darkness, but not the darkness itself. How does that work?

We cannot have both trees at the same time, so we continually surrender to Christ our *thoughts and feelings*. Remember, what He reveals at this stage are two precious things—*forgiveness and gratitude!* Wouldn't that be nice if we could be in that space all the time? Oops! We just grabbed another ideal. Actually, in our weakness, we just can't stay in that space CONTINUALLY. We are vulnerable to the *temptation* to return to our *ideals of what ought to be*. When we do, *we face the chastening* from time to time.

### LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR MIGHT

It is in this area of our thoughts that we are to let Christ heal our unbelief by surrendering our mind and heart to Him instead of to the devil. It is called loving God with ALL OUR MIGHT. We make up our mind that the Tempter is not going to get us re-attached to his tree of death, and if he does for a bit, it will not be for long. But that is easier said than done. So what do we do?

There is a wonderful way to do our own housekeeping so that we can keep expanding space for the growing tree of life. When a negative thought crosses our mind by—

finding fault,  
impatience,  
worry,  
blame,  
comparing,  
justifying, or whatever,

we know that our adversary, Lucifer, is setting us up so he can feast on our misery by pulling us back to his “wise” tree of knowledge. At minimum, he is helping us have *a busy* mind, and at maximum, a glitch, right in our solar-plexus. If so, we have just bitten on one of his temptation apples. So we treat the rascal with respect and calmly but firmly send him packing.

Please learn the following words by heart and use them immediately whenever you are being pulled back to comparing “*what is*” with “*what ought to be*.” Say firmly, but not angrily, within yourself—

***“Hello, Mr. Devil, now you  
go back to hell where you belong!”***

Don't laugh! The *Accuser-part* of our mind, our unbeliever, can't stand the light of day. When he is caught in the act, and we send him off, our mind and feelings of urgency instantly clear and we are free to return to gratitude for the miracle of our life.

Remember, ANY TIME you feel a glitch or find you have a busy mind with negative or justifying thoughts or feelings, take charge and use that polite but firm command. Don't bother to argue with him. If you do, he will usually win. At certain times you may be casting him out half a dozen times in an hour. But gradually, his *beer-party* supplied by your *anguish and misery* gradually dries up. You will find him bothering you less often.

If you do not catch him *in time*, he may refuse to leave. In such a case, you may have to

confidently add to these words, “in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord.” He will go for sure, but that doesn’t mean he won’t be back. And it could be shortly, but this time, catch him at the first glitch.

## SUMMARY

As we conclude these three chapters on The Change of Focus, it is easy to feel some overload as you sense the weight of following Alma’s straight forward instructions. However, in this third and concluding chapter on Phase IV, Caring For The Seedling, you are reminded to lighten up, allowing yourself to enjoy the ride you and Christ have prepared to experience jointly with praise and thanksgiving. The Accuser, which Christ has wisely provided, will see to it that you pay dearly if you listen to the judgmental approach to things. But now you know you can send him back to hell where he belongs, any time, any day. This is called loving God *with all your MIGHT*.

## Chapter XXXIII

## CONCLUSION

As I mentioned in the Preface, during the last four years since writing *Book I, Looking Beyond the Mark*, I had written much, using a number of different approaches to this book, *Book II, Finding the Mark*.

As it has turned out, most of that material has not gone into what this book has finally turned out to be. Possibly much of it will show up in *Book III, Entering The Rest*. Be that as it may, I have been literally amazed at what the Lord has helped me put on these pages. It is so different than I had expected in many ways, and in other ways, it is exactly what I expected.

Using three separate sections has been helpful because it enabled us to focus on one subject at a time, even though we were interweaving them together. Let’s review what we covered in each of the three sections.

### SECTION I

#### THE FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL

This understanding had been so helpful to me over the years that I kept hoping that I could start this book out with the concept of the Four Levels.

However, every time I tried to explain these levels, I bogged down with complex conceptualization. Then when I discovered that the strait and narrow path Lehi saw represented the Second Level, I could see that his vision would be the framework for that part of this book. I hope that it has been as useful to you as it has been to me.

### SECTION II

#### UNDERSTANDING THE NEW COVENANT

Since the new covenant has a totally different meaning when viewed from the preparatory gospel than it does when viewed from the fullness, I was again perplexed as to how this gulf could be described in a way that would show the value of both approaches, even though one ultimately creates burden while the other creates liberation from burden.

As I started exploring the scriptural references on the new covenant, I saw that interpreting

the meaning of the covenant from the preparatory gospel is, actually, what the OLD covenant was all about. The old covenant cannot and will not be fulfilled, but the new covenant can and will. In fact, *that is the covenant*—

**And again, if ye by the grace of God are *perfect in Christ*, and deny not His power, then are ye *sanctified in Christ* [not in ourselves] by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, WHICH IS IN THE COVENANT OF THE FATHER unto the remission of your sins, *that ye become holy, without spot.* (Moroni 10:33)**

So it was a thrill to see how our scriptures, not just in the *Book of Mormon*, but in the *Bible*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*, all witness that the new covenant having to do with a miracle that God will do in the hearts of the children of men.

### SECTION III

#### GROWING THE TREE OF LIFE IN OUR HEARTS

Once we see how the bestowal of the pure love of Christ is what the new covenant is all about, we can understand what Alma was teaching on the deeper, meat levels of the gospel. This deeper *over-standing* can enable all of us to better appreciate this great prophet, along with the entire *Book of Mormon*. I totally concur with President Ezra Taft Benson, when he said:

**The *Book of Mormon* must be reenthroned in the minds and hearts of our people. We must honor it by reading it, by studying it, by taking its precepts into our lives and *transforming them into lives required of the true followers of Christ.* (Ensign, November 1986. pp. 79-80)**

#### TRYING ALMA'S EXPERIMENT TO ATTAIN THE *FIRST LEVEL*, THE TEMPORAL LAW

I tried Alma's experiment of surrender when I was on the first level to gain a testimony of the Restoration during the early part of my mission in 1942. It worked. I woke up one morning amazed that although I still had tons of questions, I no longer had any doubts. What a relief that was, but why? Well, I had finally stopped struggling—*after a great deal of struggling!*

#### TRYING ALMA'S EXPERIMENT TO ATTAIN THE *SECOND LEVEL*, THE SPIRITUAL LAW

I again tried the experiment of surrender when I was at a dead-end on the first level, heavily burdened with the impossibility of living all of the commandments. I finally decided I would stop doing "my share" and let God do with me whatever He wanted.

That was what I was doing on the beach in Baja Mexico in 1966. It worked and introduced me to the Second Level. I lost my heavy burden of why we were not moving ahead dynamically with the latter-day work. Then I had the baptism of fire, which was being wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, which introduced me to the joy and inspiration of the spiritual law.

Those blessings catapulted me from the great and spacious building to the strait and narrow path. But why, at the age of 45, did it finally happen? Simply, I had again stopped struggling—after a great deal of struggling.

#### TRYING ALMA'S EXPERIMENT TO ATTAIN THE *THIRD LEVEL*, THE IRON ROD

In 1977, after ten years of struggling to more completely perfect the spiritual law in my life, I was seeing the relative futility of the strait and narrow path. I finally became tired of trying to make the spiritual law produce what it was supposed to provide, which I believed was to be a glorious feeling, called the pure love of Christ. So again, I began experimenting with surrender-



ing. I could see it was no longer up to me.

One day, while driving over the Arizona desert, in company with my wife, Dorothy, I was suddenly experiencing myself as “Source,” the source of the world around me. In that space, I saw that I, the I Am that I Am, had created Max exactly the way Max has been, is and will be.

In that profound experience, I recalled my wonderful Mormon parents. I had been happily out of the Church for 7 years, and had actually felt some real disdain for what I concluded was the “foolishness” I had left behind. So in this experience of being “Source,” I found my “finite self” asking my “Infinite Self” why I had created myself a Mormon. In the two hours that followed, I saw exactly why! I saw how perfectly designed this world was. In fact, I saw the PERFECTION of imperfection. That included Joseph Smith, the Church, and even this loose cannon called Max Skousen.

Friend, I saw the plan! I really saw how His hand is in ALL things. I saw why the Church needed to be just the way it is to become the great marvelous work and a wonder it will be in the years to come. That experience *restored my testimony ten fold*

The Lord was not brutal to me as I deserved. In fact, I was treated very kindly. What actually happened is that He put my hand on His iron rod so that I could get back on the path without needing to know where I was going. Why did it happen. Simply, I had again tried the experiment of surrendering. I had again stopped struggling—even after much less struggling.

### **TRYING ALMA’S EXPERIMENT TO ATTAIN THE FOURTH LEVEL, THE TREE OF LIFE FRUIT**

Nearly 10 years later, in 1986, I heard President Benson instruct us to search in the Book of Mormon to find out how to walk in the light at noonday. I renewed my efforts and began experiencing more forgiveness and love than ever before. After nearly a year of being kindly chastised and rebuked, I continued trying Alma’s experiment of surrendering. It was not to attain something I needed. That was not my concern. I found that I did not need to struggle at all.

Finally, the Father allowed me to enter into His rest by beholding what the fullness of His glory means. At that point, just as John promised, all fear left my life, never to return. Yet that experience WAS TOTALLY DIFFERENT THAN I HAD EXPECTED. Would you please keep that in mind. Whatever it is you will pluck from the tree of life, it is not what you would expect. Otherwise, Christ would not be a mystery.

### **DOES IT TAKE EVERYONE THIS LONG?**

You might want to ask me, “Well, if it took you this long, how can most people expect to move through these levels and come all the way to Christ?”

Well, first of all, you are already well on your way. Many, many members of the Church are! Consequently, they are coming into the rest much faster. It seems to me that the Lord has started removing the veil that He has held over the eyes of modern Israel.

That is what President Benson’s message was all about. That is why, I truly believe, the Lord has blessed me in writing this book. While I fully believe that the Brethren are doing exactly what the Lord wants them to do, which is keeping the preparatory gospel in its clear, strong and structured place—it is the Father, directly, not indirectly, who will teach those who come to Him, having been nurtured through the flaming sword, to partake of the precious fruit of the tree of life.

Remember, the hidden key to inner peace, all along the way, is the celestial attitude of gratitude. Gratitude is THE GREAT ATTITUDE! The devil is not very happy about you doing that, of course, so just be aware of his tricks and send him back to hell where he belongs. Practice David’s 100th Psalm, truly making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Joyfully follow the counsel

of Paul, who said:

**Be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Ephesians 5:18-20)

### **I ACKNOWLEDGE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART**

Let me acknowledge you for giving me the privilege of sharing this way of understanding the teachings of the Lord and His prophets. Over the years that the first book has been in the hands of readers, many have let me know of the blessings they have received by accepting the Savior's invitation to truly open the door of their hearts and invite Him in to sup with them.

As I find myself understanding the scriptures that God has entrusted to the Latter-day Saints, I am so overwhelmed with the majesty, the mystery, the power and the promise that He has shared with us. Our scriptures are a leaven that will eventually raise the whole loaf to fulfill His plan of establishing the glory, even the glory of Zion. And there is absolutely no question in my mind that such a transformation of the Church will be accomplished by and through those who preside over it.

**NOTE: I want to give you a parting gift.** A dear friend, Kathi Neff, created a sweet acknowledgment to me for assisting her in planting Christ's seed in her heart. I want to end this book by sharing it with you. As the Lord has blessed me with the privilege of sharing this seed with you, you are in a position to now share this seed with others. Either way, God will continue to bless you in His eternal light!

### **THE GARDENER**

**You stood before me,  
seed in hand, and said, "Plant it deep—  
deep within your heart." And I did.**

**First as the gentle tender roots took hold,  
I, too, clung to the law  
and all that was familiar.**

**But as the sprouts pushed forth  
and grew into a mighty trunk—  
my soul opened wide and my eyes awoke,  
and I could see as He sees.**

**Now, as I feel the branches reaching out to  
embrace, enfold, and experience—**

**The tree grows strong.  
Heaven opens to my view  
The fount of living water spills out  
the drops of gratitude,  
and I am whole.**

**And I give thanks for you—  
*who gave to me the seed.***

**Kathi Neff**