

360: March 8, 15: the Path to Perfection (Come, Follow Me Book of Mormon Weeks 8-9)

March 2-8 2 Ne 31-33
*March 9-15 Jacob 1-4

It feels like paradox, but in this life, perfection is about the way we relationship to our weakness, which impacts our relationship to grace, which puts us in proper relationship to Christ
And perhaps even when we are like our Heavenly Parents, perfection is more about our relationship to love and sorrow than being flawless

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Lesson: Two Sermons

Sermon 1: Nephi and the Doctrine of Christ

Nephi and the doctrine of Christ

Basic principles of the gospel: Faith, repentance, (link to this episode)

Preparation (basic principles) and sanctification and consecration (becoming and working)

Enduring and becoming (similar to work life integration rather than work life balance)

Finding the path

→ Scriptures → Holy Ghost → Christ → God →

2 Nephi 31:3 Cannot overemphasize the significance of this, has been foundational to my faith:

For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.

Once again the fundamental questions

Relationship between reality and revelation

Human and divine ratio in religion

If our God agrees with us completely, we are not worshipping God, but an idol: a God figure who justifies ourselves as we are

How I put all these pieces together (I see pretty much everything as ways of accessing our psychology and natures to catalyze growth, which allows me to respect and remain open to everyone)

- 1) God meets us where we are (but this is just a beginning point, not accurate)
- 2) God speaks to us according to our language so that we will understand
- 3) That means that reality is bigger than where we are and what we understand (Devout agnostic)
- 4) If our conception of God agrees with us, it means that conception is almost certainly an idol. (Because we aren't worshipping God, we are imbuing our own conceptions with the authority of God)
- 5) The purpose of the scriptures is to catalyze our own revelation and relationship with God
- 6) The "natural human being" is an "enemy to God" because we naturally want what is comfortable, familiar, safe, easy. We need to develop a taste for growth, to lean into pain even.
- 7) This is why I break down the goal of the gospel to maximize *wellness* (I consider myself a missionary for wellbeing). Wellness is not happiness, not even joy. It is the path to satisfaction, gratitude, healthy relationships, a life well lived, that puts us on the trajectory of Eternal Life. This is how I have broken down these gospel themes like "salvation" and "perfection" and "Christlike" in a way that is grounded in the human experience

Scripture → Holy Ghost → Christ → God → Transformation/Gospel
(I LOVE that in Latter-day Saint theology it doesn't stop at God)

32:3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

Following the path

Faith, repentance, baptism, holy ghost (will link to episode)

Faith: principle of power, putting idea into action

Repentance: take accountability, courageously face what we are doing wrong (often comes in the form of feedback from those we love)

Elder Christensen in 1995 Conference talk: Brother Brent Barlow posed a question to a group of priesthood brethren: “How many of you would like to receive a revelation?” Every hand went up. He then suggested that they all go home and ask their wives how they could be better husbands. He added, “I followed my own advice, and had a very informative discussion with [my wife] Susan for more than an hour that afternoon!” (*Ensign*, Sept. 1992, p. 17). A conversation like that could be a revelation for any of us.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/04/marriage-and-the-great-plan-of-happiness?lang=eng>

When you know better, do better (Maya Angelou, one of my dearest vows)

Baptism: Covenant, getting on the path, renewed every week during sacrament, renewing our willingness to submit and align ourselves with God and the Gospel

Holy Ghost: The key to sanctification and transforming of our natures (major theme of the scriptures)

Continuing the path

This gospel is a gospel of transformation not white knuckling

Elder Uchtdorf:

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2010-07-019-endure-to-the-end?lang=eng#p3s:8230&p3e:19420>

When I was a young boy, enduring to the end meant to me mainly that I had to try harder to stay awake until the end of our Church meetings. Later, as a teenager, I progressed only slightly in my understanding of this scriptural phrase. I linked it with youthful empathy to the efforts of our dear elderly members to hang in there until the end of their lives.

Therefore, enduring to the end is not just a matter of passively tolerating life's difficult circumstances or hanging in there. Ours is an active religion, helping God's children along the straight and narrow path to develop their full potential during this life and return to Him one day. Viewed from this perspective, enduring to the end is exalting and glorious, not grim and gloomy. This is a joyful religion, one of hope, strength, and deliverance.

Elder Bruce Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences*

Moreover, emphasizing God's mercy may lead some to believe they are entitled to divine protection against all of life's natural adversities. There is already enough theological difficulty for those who believe that their activity in the Church should somehow protect them from tragedy and sorrow. Our understanding of the Atonement is hardly a shield against sorrow; rather, it is a rich source of strength to deal productively with the disappointments and heartbreaks that form the deliberate fabric of mortal life. The gospel was given us to heal our pain, not to prevent it.

Many of our decisions are influenced more than they should be by our desire to avoid sorrow, distress, frustration, and other kinds of psychic discomfort. Sometimes we prefer almost anything to that kind of pain. Our culture has become as skillful in the art of neutralizing emotional and spiritual pain as in sedating physical pain. Medicine is, in a sense, symbolic of our age. Unquestionably, medicine is often a blessing; but the drugs of our time, both the literal and the figurative kinds, also offer escape—not only from pain but also from responsibility and reality. And thus some people have developed an instinctive inclination to chart their course by choosing alternatives that will minimize their exposure to the uncomfortable consequences of taking life as it comes. Avoiding or escaping discomfort becomes a guiding purpose of life, as if getting around such pitfalls were the essence of a happy life. The gospel teaches, however, that the presence of painful experiences is an important element in man's capacity ultimately to experience joy—and not just because it feels so good when the pain stops.

“Hope”

The sanctifying grace of the Savior Jesus Christ is the source of an entire cluster of blessings and powers. The Atonement not only atones for our sins and compensates for our inadequacies, it is also the source of spiritual endowments that develop and ultimately transform our very nature. The agent by which many of these forces enter our lives is the Holy Ghost, that “Comforter” whose “visitation” “filleth with hope and perfect love”—or hope and charity. (Moroni

8:26.) It is "by the reception of the Holy Ghost" that "ye may be sanctified," sanctified," following repentance and baptism. (3 Nephi 27:20.) Some manifestations of this sanctifying process may reflect the Holy Ghost's mission to act as a comforter, to bear witness of the Father and the Son, and to "teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance." (John 14:26.) The gift of the Holy Ghost thus goes well beyond a right to divine inspiration and guidance. It is by the Holy Ghost that we receive access to certain gifts of the Spirit, many of which are enumerated in D&C 46—such as the gift of knowing "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (D&C 46:13.) Further evidence of the Holy Ghost's influence may be found through the "fruit of the Spirit"—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Galatians 5:22-23.) As with other gifts involved in the bestowal of grace toward perfection, the gifts of the Spirit are not given only to those who are themselves perfect; rather, they "are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do. . . ." (D&C 46:9; emphasis added.)

While we should not look excessively at the negative side of things, the Lord does expect us to accept and deal with the realities we see. As he said to Moroni, "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. . . . I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness." (Ether 12:27-28.) Being realistic about our limitations will make us face some questions and some facts that leave us uncomfortable. But that very discomfort can motivate us toward real growth. As has been said by President Harold B. Lee, the true Church is intended not only to comfort the afflicted, but to afflict the comfortable.

Hafen, Bruce C.. The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences . Deseret Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Elder Hafen:

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2004/04/the-atonement-all-for-all?lang=eng>

His plan is developmental—line upon line, step by step, grace for grace.

So if you have problems in your life, don't assume there is something wrong with you. Struggling with those problems is at the very core of life's purpose. As we draw close to God, He will show us our weaknesses and through them make us wiser, stronger. If you're seeing more of your weaknesses, that just might mean you're moving nearer to God, not farther away.

Almost is especially enough when our own sacrifices somehow echo the Savior's sacrifice, however imperfect we are. We cannot really feel charity—Christ's love for others—without at least tasting His suffering for others, because the love and the suffering are but two sides of a single reality. When we really are afflicted in the afflictions of other people, we may enter “the fellowship of his sufferings” enough to become joint-heirs with Him.

May we not shrink when we discover, paradoxically, how dear a price we must pay to receive what is, finally, a gift from Him. When the Savior's all and our all come together, we will find not only forgiveness of sin, “we shall see him as he is,” and “we shall be *like him*.” I love Him. I want to be with Him.

Pressing forward/transforming our natures

“Enduring to the end” (becoming a version of ourselves that wants nothing else)

I barely recognize this version of myself. I never knew I could be so calm, so accepting, so compassionate and caring... so good at driving.

Pray always (2 Nephi 33)

Attitude and orientation of prayer

“Many of us, if not all, may be saved (2 Ne. 33:12, and that's after his revelation of the destruction of his people!) Universalism (we've discussed progression between the kingdoms, which I think the temple teaches)

Sermon 2: Jacob and priorities and fidelity

Anxiety and Accountability (THIS is key. This is why we need our natures changed. We need to develop a taste for anxiety and accountability, increase our sensitivity which increases our suffering)

1:19: And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.

Side note: Where's Sam? Jacob 1:13 Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.

Sensitivity

Jacob 2:9: 9 Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds.

Sensitivity anxiety accountability

Hardening deadening denial

What wakes us up?

Wealth and priorities (Right target, right order, right work)

Jacob 2:18-19: **18** But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

19 And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.

Pride (comparison)

Jacob 2:21 **21** Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever.

■ Humility

- Honest assessment, nothing more, nothing less
- Lack of comparison (delight in excellence, no matter who its attached to)
- Teachable, always correctable

Sex and love, families and fidelity (This is an amazing, powerful sermon on healthy family relationships) I appreciate the temple recommend question #6 that asks whether our family relationships are in alignment with the teachings of the Church

2:28 God delights in chastity and whoredoms are an abomination (lots of scriptures that we'll break down)

2:31 31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. (Domestic violence, marital rape, abuse, coercion)

2:35 35 Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.

Jacob 3:6-11

6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.

7 Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?

8 O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.

9 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.

10 Wherefore, ye shall remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them; and also, remember that ye may,

because of your filthiness, bring your children unto destruction, and their sins be heaped upon your heads at the last day.

11 O my brethren, hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death; and loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil, to be cast into that lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death.

Sexual morality go deeper than single means no married means yes (this can lead to the dangerous assumption that being married means we are entitled to sex)

Treat your partner as a person (what they think and feel matters, open communication, vulnerability, ready to be challenged, the only consent is conversation)

Treat sex as sacred (brings up powerful feelings and consequences)

“Whoredom” using another’s soul and sex as an object to gratify yourself

Pure in heart and firm in mind

Challenging clarity vs. comforting complexity (Jacob 4)

Problems are complex but solutions are simple (feel, show up, serve, work)

Do we seek for what we cannot understand? Explanations can be avoidance

Put your mind where your feet are. Show up to today. Put in the work.

Conclusion: Faithful humble becoming alignment

Epistemology and pride go together better than we’d like to think

We don’t know everything about God

We don’t know everything about our spouse

We don’t know everything about ourselves