



Seek and Listen
for
Christ's Calling in
Your Life



*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me*

- Jesus Christ

Seek and Listen *for* Christ's Calling in Your Life

Six lessons to prepare us to seek and hear Christ's call in our lives and the life of his church, in this age of dilemma.

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PREFACE

In 1964, the RLDS church provided a booklet titled, *The Call of Christ in an Age of Dilemma*. It was authored by Arthur Oakman and was intended to be a study book for the reunion season. With the hastening of events swirling in the world today causing unrest, uncertainty, and confusion, the recent clarion call sounded for us to seek and listen for Christ's call in our *Age of Dilemma* has never been more pertinent.

The hope and prayers associated with the material in this booklet is to create in each of us the desire to listen to Him who framed the heavens and earth — and to set aside our own self-righteousness and listen to the still small voice that calls us to love Him first, and our neighbor as ourselves.

As the Holy Ghost provided guidance to our minds in the selection of the lesson headings, we engaged in prayer and worship to make sure that we were listening to the Good Spirit as each chapter was developed. If you find truth in these words, then praise God as your understanding expands. If there are errors, it is a result of man's frailty.

God bless you as you **“Seek and Listen for Christ's Calling in Your life.”**

HE CALLS US IN THE WAY HE LOVES US THROUGH THE AGES

by Aaron Smith

God Calls Us in the Way He Loves Us

God is relational. At His heart, He is both three and yet one. The very foundation of Christianity is founded upon someone in flesh claiming they are equal to God (Matthew 16:19, John 5:18). This equality is relational in its most fundamental form. Jesus constantly reminds His followers that He did nothing save His Father tells Him (Matthew 11:28, 12:44, Luke 10:23, John 5:31, 8:28, 54). These actions were founded upon the closeness, the oneness He had with His Father. Without that oneness, He would not have known what to do or how to act in certain situations. He desired many times to be alone with His Father (Matthew 14:19-20, 26:36-40, John 6:15, John 17). The Spirit is recorded to have descended upon Him on His baptism (Matthew 3:45, Mark 1:8, John 1:31). This is the same incident upon which a voice was heard from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him.* The very nature of the God head is relational.

This relational nature is not reserved for God alone, but as an outgrowth of His creation—all of creation is relational. Many scientists will tell you of the interdependence the animal kingdom has with the plant kingdom and the plant kingdom to the mineral kingdom. Everything is eventually connected. This relational nature is expressed in almost every facet of the whole of creation, from the way the stars move and galaxies spin and the relation to gravity and each other, to how the eye depends on certain neurons to function and fire appropriately or it is worthless. This holds true no matter how far down we examine to our individual cell level, where the pieces of the cells are interdependent upon each other, as are even lower than that, the electrons as they *float* or *circle* around the nucleus, much like the planets orbit the sun.

One of the many lies that our society believes is that we, as men, are independent. We truly are unique. There is no one like us with the same DNA, the same thumbprint, or the same number of hair follicles. But our uniqueness does not mean we do not depend on other things for life.

Satan wants to divide and destroy. He seeks to isolate and stifle life. God seeks, through Christ, to bring the lost sheep back TO the fold. In the fold, they have a more abundant life and because the gifts and talents of the whole are brought to bear on the individual and thus, the creature is lifted up and God is magnified (DC 46:4b, 5c, 8a, Moroni 10:9,10, I Cor 12:12). The church has suffered greatly in our current wilderness due to our proclamation that we are independent branches. Anyone who has read scripture will tell you how long a branch will live when it is truly independent of the vine or root. It dies and withers quickly.

When the creation was yet young, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden. He created this world for a dwelling place among His creation. His desire is prophesied to be fulfilled in the end of this world when He makes a new heaven and a new earth where the city of the New Jerusalem will be for eternity, and God and Christ will dwell there and there will be no sun nor temple. His people who have been judged faithful will be able to dwell in that presence forever.

Whether we look at the beginning of the Bible or the end, we find God's desire to be with man. But where we live, in the midst of time, we do not see Him, and few actually hear His voice. Yet His voice is there, constantly calling (DC 43:6c). His voice was at the beginning calling to Adam and Eve, *Where are you going?* (Genesis 3:15). It will be at the end as well, when the bridegroom calls to His bride, *Come* (Revelation 22:17). This same God, down throughout time, has called us back to Him. His very relational nature desires to be one with his creation (John 17:21). He loves us (John 3:16) and in that love, His call to us to *Come up higher* has existed down throughout time (Genesis 22:2, Revelation 4:1).

Since we have fallen and are in a sinful state, God cannot reveal Himself to us in His perfect full nature. Man could not abide that presence. Instead, God has created avenues or paths of revelation that allow man to not only hear God, but see Him as well. (Genesis 6-8, Exodus 3:4, 19:9, Matthew 17:4, 3 Nephi 5:8, Ether 1:25-27, 66-81)

The first step in this process is that God must reveal Himself to us. We see that in many ways down throughout our human experience and not

just individually. Jesus established a church while on the earth. This church was a collective body – a relational body. This church was formed on the foundation of the revelation that he was the Messiah, God incarnate (Matthew 16). This fact could not be discerned by humanity alone. It had to be revealed by God Himself. Without that reaching down, both in the incarnation of Christ and in the knowledge of who He really is, we would continue to be in a lost state, forever separated from Him, therefore destroying the potential of the loving relationship that He desired.

The King of Love My Shepherd Is expresses a portion of this love in the words of the song:

“Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed, But yet in love he sought me;
And on his shoulder gently laid, And home, rejoicing, brought me.”

The calling is expressed in another hymn as well:

“Jesus calls us o’er the tumult, Of our life’s, wild, restless sea;
Day by day his voice resoundeth, saying, “Christian, follow me!””

That hymn goes on to express the initial call the disciples heard on the sea of Galilee and then in our daily lives. Because of Jesus’ great love for humanity, He sought in us a response, one which would allow this grand relationship to flourish and grow and develop eternal qualities. All of the principles of the gospel support this desire by God to restore us to fellowship—a deep and abiding fellowship with Him.

Each of the principles expressed in Hebrews 6 undergird this call, this love, this desire for relationship. Faith is our soul’s yearning for more in the things we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1, 6). Repentance, or a turning around to face Him, focuses our attention back on that relationship. Baptism allows us to *follow Christ* and enter the grave and come up victorious again. The laying on of hands continues this revelation in symbolizing the loving hands of a Father helping, healing, and directing. Resurrection allows us to live eternally in His presence. Eternal judgment is the final answer to this relational call of God’s love—how did I respond to this call and what did I do with my time that was allotted to me?

What we find is that the gospel, the good news of Christ dying to save mankind, is the keystone to this relationship. God truly, *so loved the world*, that Christ was offered up as an eternal sacrifice, so that we may be back in His presence. He did something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. It is truly by God's grace that we are saved. It is by His grace that we are called. It is by His grace that we hear His voice. The apostle Paul indicates that, *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8).

Without this foundational love, God could have waved His hand and left us to die and die eternally. But because of His love, God sought us. He has pursued us. He has left the 99 to find the one. In one way or another, we all share in the nature of *the one lost sheep*. In sharing in that sinful, wayward nature, we have need of God's nature to redeem us, cleanse us, and make us into the creation He originally designed. That creation was designed to be in His presence, to walk in His presence, and to ACT in His presence (Lectures on Faith 7:9d). If we cannot *act in the presence of God*, we cannot be saved.

Isaiah's experience exhibits all of this beautifully. He saw the vision, and God revealed Himself to Isaiah. God initiated this and thus it was an act of grace. Isaiah, quickly discerning whose presence he was now in, recognized his uncleanness before the Almighty. He cried out, *I am undone*. God, again in His grace, sent a messenger to take a live coal off the alter and touch it to Isaiah's unclean lips. It purged him and cleansed him. With this new found redemption, Isaiah then was able to answer the call of God of, *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Isaiah, now able to ACT in the presence of God, raised his hand and exclaimed, ***Here am I; send me!*** (Isaiah 6:1-8)

Because we are all unique, God's call to us may be as unique as well. He created us each as an individual, and even though we are to act in and as part of the whole, His relationship with us is intensely personal. God called Abraham to sacrifice the son of the covenant. In this way, Abraham would have not only a testimony of God's unfailing love for him and his son, but he would share in a small way the pain and agony the Father had as He willingly gave up His son for a sacrifice. This was

unique to Abraham because he had been chosen to be the father of many nations.

What we find is that God's call is universal. It is also ongoing. It is very unique to each one of us. In the way and manner we live and how we understand things, God will move to establish and develop a relationship with us. The key is will we hear the call? If our ears are not tuned to hear His voice, we will miss the call, we will miss the chance at eternal fellowship with the One who made us and created us. Much like there are different frequencies of sound, God's call is unique to our listening ear. In our world, dogs hear certain sounds humans cannot. We have created those whistles that will allow a dog to hear, but will not be heard by humans. In this, we have re-created a portion of who God is. His call to us is unique and individualized. But the foundation of it all is His intense, personal love for us.

Will you hear His call today? Truly He does call us as He loves us.

For reflection and discussion:

- 1. Describe how we can know that God is a relational being.*
- 2. What is the purpose of creation, specifically this earth?*
- 3. List as many ways as you can how God can reveal himself to us.*
- 4. Compare someone able to act in the presence of God versus someone who is not able to act? What is the difference?*

HIS TRUTH CALLS TO US IN EVERY DISPENSATION OF TIME

by Larry Cottrill

Periods of common apostasy have occurred throughout the history of the world. Proven time and again following periods of righteousness, people have often turned to wickedness. Alma 19:73-75 comes to mind, and it states: *Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, Wickedness never was happiness. And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.*

Alma, along with teaching his son in the passage above, speaks plainly that wrong choices will not lead to happiness...though they appear to be attractive, and many people seem to be making those wrong choices and *getting away with it*. When we choose to sin, we place ourselves *in a state contrary to the nature of happiness*, even if we don't see the full costs of our actions immediately.

In his book *First Things First*, Stephen Covey says, *We are free to choose our actions, but we are not free to choose the consequences of these actions*. Lehi, in The Book of Mormon gives clear direction in 2 Nephi 1:120 telling us, *they[we] are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil*. Every time we make a choice, we are accepting the results which will inevitably follow.

Many people today are confused about the unchangeable nature of God's eternal laws. Some believe that there are no absolute laws. Others imagine that God will allow any misconduct because of His infinite and eternal love. We know the truth...God's love alone cannot get rid of the eternal consequences of sin. Only faith, repentance, and obedience to God's commandments can trigger the cleansing and redeeming power of Christ's Atonement.

Let's now cover a few examples of worldly conditions prior to revivals of God's great Truth and finish with guarding ourselves against personal apostasy.

The Days of Noah

After Adam and Eve's exile from Eden, the biblical narrative feels grim. In Genesis 5, Cain sides with the serpent and kills his brother in cold blood. A man named Lamech brags about his murderous, chauvinistic ways. Genesis 6 & 7 repeats the refrain, *and he died*, eight times revealing how death reigned over humanity.

Genesis 8: 1-22, shows the rapid advancement of evil. So, as we come to the time of Noah, sin has enveloped the whole world.

For reflection and discussion:

1. *What was the reason for the flood in the time of Noah?*—READ Genesis 8:10-15.
 - a. Verse 8 =
 - b. Verse 9 =
 - c. Verse 10 =
 - d. Verses 11-12 =
2. Verses 8:13 and 15 in Genesis state that...*it repented Noah and his heart was pained that the Lord had made man on earth.*
 - a. Why is it important that this was mentioned?
 - b. How is the Inspired Version (IV) different from the King James' version? (KJ) (Genesis 6:6-7)
 - c. What do we learn from the difference?
 - d. "Repented" means he was grieved/sorrowful in his heart. What grief or sorrow do we now carry that would be similar to that of Noah?
3. *God is loving and merciful, but also holy and just.* —READ Genesis 8:16-28.
 - a. Mathew 24:44 states, "But as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be also at the coming of the Son of Man."
 - i. What are the similarities now to that time of Noah?

- ii. *What are the things we know from Scripture that demonstrate how we could keep ourselves safe in today's world?*
 - iii. *As you read Noah's account, what inspires you to follow the Lord's direction today?*
 - b. *What is the significance of Noah finding grace in the eyes of the Lord?*
- 4. *The ark represented safety for those in the ark when the deluge began. —READ Genesis 8:37-38.*
 - a. *How is the safety of the ark similar to following God's Word?*
 - b. *Verse 38 tells us that the Lord shut them in. In what way(s) does the ark represent separation, and how does that apply to us today? [the day of grace was over...God himself shut the door (the only door) irrevocably separating the saved from the unsaved]*
- 5. *God entered a formal relationship with Noah and all living creatures. —READ Genesis 9:4-25.*
 - a. *In what ways has the promise to Noah been revealed throughout history?*
 - b. *Genesis 9:13 is only found in the IV and sets an additional lost truth that means what to us today?*
 - c. *What additional clarity do Genesis 9:22-24 bring that is not contained in the KJ version?*

BONUS: The final few verses of Genesis 9 tell an awkward story about Noah getting drunk on the wine from the new vineyard he had planted and cared for. —READ Genesis 9:27-29. While vague on details, this passage makes it explicitly clear that Ham has somehow dishonored his father. His story also demonstrates a common theme of Scripture: that all people, even those used by God, are fallible and prone to making mistakes.

The Days of Lehi

Jerusalem was going through a difficult period at the time of Lehi because internationally affairs were very unstable. The kingdom of Judah was caught politically between three empires: The Egyptians to

the southwest; the Babylonian empire, which was rising; and the Assyrian empire, which was dying. There were split parties in Jerusalem saying the safety of Judah would be greatest with the Egyptians, others said the Babylonians, and some said the Assyrians.

They all were aware of Isaiah's words where he had foretold that Hezekiah would not be overthrown by the Assyrians (Isaiah 36 & 37). And miraculously, it didn't work, and they were overthrown.

The people of Jerusalem believed they were invincible, and they could not be defeated. No matter what, God would intervene, defend the temple, and defend His city. Jeremiah and Lehi both came with the message that this was not true; the city would be destroyed. The people had forfeited their claim on Jehovah's protection. They were too far in sin.

For this reason and more, Lehi was told to take his family into the wilderness.

For reflection and discussion:

We begin with Nephi's final words.

1. *Who is Nephi speaking to, and why is he speaking(writing) to them?*
READ 2 Nephi 15:3-4, 16 and 1 Nephi 2:4.
 - a. *Verse 3 and 4 =*
 - b. *Verse 16 =*
 - c. *Intent from 1 Nephi 2:4 =*
2. READ 1 Nephi 1:3-5 and 1 Nephi 1:18-23
 - a. *What is the message of Lehi and to whom is it given?*
 - b. *Nephi speaks of the "tender mercies of the Lord" on the chosen faithful, but what is the "deliverance" from that he mentions?*
3. *Lehi is rewarded for his faith with a series of visions and dreams that added to his assurance, and he took further action by also prophesying of the destruction of Jerusalem. —READ 1 Nephi 1:13-23*
 - a. *What do the visions and dream signify?*
 - b. *Can you think of a recent time, or an event during your lifetime where prophesying/warning(s) were given in*

response to the world's happenings of the day? If so, what were the "asks" (repentance, giving of good deeds, etc.)?

- c. What did Lehi conclude about the works of God? God's throne? God's mercy?*
- 4. Lehi was commended by the Lord for being faithful in preaching to the Jews (1 Nephi 1:24-25), and he further exemplified his faith by his readiness to leave all of his earthly possessions and move into the wilderness not yet knowing the extent of the journey or trials he would face. (1 Nephi 1:26-27)*
 - a. In what ways have you been rewarded for your faith?*
 - b. Further, Did you give of yourself more greatly to the work of faith?*
- 5. Lehi laid the foundational doctrine for the Nephites, and we are the recipient of the Truth from his faithful relationship with God. What will you do with the following truths?*
 - a. READ 2 Nephi 1:34 (2 choices)*
 - b. READ 1 Nephi 3:4-6 (fallen man)*
 - c. READ 2 Nephi 1:63, 2 Nephi 1:69-71 (man is lost without mercy from the Lord)*
 - d. READ 2 Nephi 1:114-115 (once again Lehi links the fall and the atonement) READ 2 Nephi 1:116*
 - e. READ 1 Nephi 3:16-19 (destiny of the House of Israel and definition of what it means to be grafted)*
 - f. READ 1 Nephi 4:16-19 (gospel to be restored)*
 - g. READ 2 Nephi 2:10-24 (choice seer)*

BONUS: Though Lehi's faith wavered one time in the face of extreme hunger and hardship (1 Nephi 5:24-25) and many of us would have reacted similarly, he had been a pillar of strength before that and would be thereafter. Even though he was a prophet, he was still a human being.

Lehi's wavering brought chastisement from the Lord and the deepest of sorrow to Lehi, yet it did not cost him his prophetic calling. The Lord still allowed him to use the Liahona and receive instructions for the people he had been called to preside over. —READ 1 Nephi 5:31–33

The Days After Christ and Prior to Restoration of the Gospel

While Jesus was on the earth, he established His Church among his followers. After His crucifixion and the deaths of His Apostles, the fulness of the gospel was taken from the earth because of widespread apostasy. The results lead to principles of the gospel being corrupted, portions of scripture were lost all together, and changes to the organization of the church gave way to missing priesthood ordinances. The Spirit of God was available, so far as any man would believe. John the apostle, and the three Nephite disciples, were ministering among the earth. Although many spoke with sincerity about the Savior and His teachings, not one had the fulness of the truth or priesthood authority from God. Whatever form of Godliness existed in the churches set up by individuals was deprived of divine power.

In 1820, appearing before Joseph Smith, God and His Beloved Son initiated the restoration of the fulness of the gospel. While we have opportunity to “know” this fulness of the gospel, we must guard ourselves against personal apostasy. As part of Lehi’s vision, he saw 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 off and were lost.”

How do we escape the “great mist of darkness?” Simply stated, by obeying the commandments and keeping our covenants. More broadly, we must be active in the living out of our faith in relationship to the God of truth and life. In speaking of these times, the Savior said, “For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant.”

When a person openly and consciously renounces faith in God, apostasy is already deeply rooted. What we cannot deny is that its beginning was the result of persistent, prolonged sinning.

Before we tackle questions about personal apostasy, we should start with Moroni’s testimony. —READ Moroni 10:22-31.

For reflection and discussion:

1. *What are common first steps that lead to a falling away?*
2. *How and when do you lose the Holy Spirit as a guide?*
3. *When is love for self in conflict with Truth?*
4. *What is the cause and result of not bearing good fruit?*
5. *What role does temptation and sin play?*
6. Those followers of the Truth with the Holy Ghost as guide...
 - Do not live hidden, double lives; Do not destroy the faith of others; Do not deny the authority of God and His Kingdom on earth; Do not let go of the iron rod or try to redefine it.—READ DC 77:2c
 - Are not fooled by voices of the adversary
 - Do depart from sin; Do make personal worship a priority; Do repent daily,

What are your dos and don'ts?

BONUS: Making sure that we transfer faith in ourselves to faith in Christ is paramount in safeguarding us from falling away. The following are considerations in making this an honest transfer to the Lord: praying to feel properly sorry, praying for mercy and forgiveness, praying for spiritual instruction and guidance, reading the scriptures daily, keeping the commandments, trusting in Christ.—READ Moroni 7:5-8

Additional scriptures for consideration:

Genesis 3:1-5, Deuteronomy 13:1-18, Joshua 7:20-21, Luke 12:8-9, 47, Romans 2:8-10, Acts 20:28-31, Hebrews 10:23-25, 2 Nephi 11:90-94, 4 Nephi 1:29, DC 1:3d-4a, D&C 84:1, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7-9, 2 Peter 2:1-2

**HE CALLS US TO RUN THE RACE WITH PATIENCE
FOR THE PRIZE OF ETERNAL LIFE**
by Jay Havener

The focus of this class is based on Hebrews 12:1–3 and I Corinthians 9:24–27 paraphrased here:

Wherefore as we see we are surrounded by a throng of those who have exhibited the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ, (pointing to Hebrews 11). Let us shed our encumbrances and our besetting sins and run with steadfastness, constancy, and endurance in the battle that is before us, fixing our eyes upon Jesus the example and perfecter of our faith. The one whom we can rely upon. who for joy, we were set before him; endured the cross thinking nothing of the disgrace; took up the place of honor and authority of the divine power of His Father. We must think over Christ who bore the contradiction of His righteousness compared to the sinners He died for, lest we grow weary and weak in our souls and not able to finish the race.

We discern that all run the race and exert themselves, but one lays hold of the heavenly reward. In this manner, exert yourself that you may take possession of Christ's holy power and influence over your mind. All others obtain a perishing crown (temporal) but we (who lay hold of the heavenly reward) obtain an imperishable crown. Paul stated that he also ran without uncertainty and he fought not to beat the air, but with discipline, he kept his body sanctified lest he proclaimed the Gospel to others having been unproved.

Class Materials

Note to the Teacher: This material is designed to provide you with a line of thought as it relates to running the race and competing for the prize of eternal life. You may, as you review these materials, have other scriptures or your own experiences that relate to running the race with patience. You are encouraged to make this class your own with testimony, discussion, and other avenues of exploration of the theme.

For reflection and discussion:

Discuss and explore running a race. There is a race of short endurance requiring us to sprint. There is another race that requires a steady, measured pace.

1. *Is there a place in our spiritual lives for one type of race or the other?*
2. *When might a sprint serve you as opposed to a long-distance race?*
3. *When might a long-distance race serve you better?*

Exploring Terminology

1. Synonyms for patience that relate to Hebrews 12:1 – diligence, endurance, fortitude, humility, perseverance, persistence, self-control, and tolerance.

Relate these terms to our spiritual lives.

2. Synonyms for race as it relates to Hebrews 12:1 – course, relay, marathon, and sprint.

Relate these terms to how we may endeavor to run the race set before us.

What is the course set before us?

How might a relay race relate to our work in the church?

Is a marathon a measured pace or a quick pace?

Is there a time for a sprint in a marathon?

Is the race always to the swift?

Digging into the Scriptures related to running the race

- Mosiah 2:43–45; All things done with wisdom and order; else our strength is weakened.
- DC 3:1d–e.
- Luke 8:11–15 with emphasis on verse 15 as it relates to patience.
 - Patience = Steadfastness, constancy, endurance, and perseverance.
 - The runner’s riddle – Perfect race vs. imperfect race Proverbs 24:16.
- Luke 21:12–18 with emphasis on verse 18
 - DC 1:4–5; weak things to show power of the Holy Spirit because of covenant and repentance.
- Hebrews 5:1–4; with emphasis on verse 3 tied to Romans 15:1–4.

Restoring truth; being patient in pursuing that truth in a dying world

- 2 Corinthians 4:1–10.
- 2 Corinthians 6:1–10.
- Luke 16:4–12.
- DC 81:6a-c.

Learning from the wisdom of those who have run the race before us

- Hebrews Chapter 11; The Hall of Faith.
- 2 Timothy 1:5; Heritage of the faith of our progenitors.

For reflection and discussion:

Coasting or Running?

1. *Are we coasting (drifting) with no desire to win the prize?*
2. *What happens when we coast along spiritually?*
3. *What happens when we coast along in our church attendance or work?*
 - Having the form of Godliness. (2 Timothy 3:5;)
 - Let no man say I am tempted of God. (James 1)
 - *If you are standing still, you are backsliding.* —Mishael Onyiego sermon on backsliding.
 - *If a man have only correct doctrine to offer me, I am sure to slip out at the first intermission to seek the company of someone who has seen for himself how lovely is the face of Him who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. Such a man can help me, and no one else can.* —A. W. Tozer

Perseverance: The significance of the “kick” to put your all into the race set before you

Even in a marathon, where a steady pace is required for the bulk of the race, there comes a point where the runner must overcome his body’s fatigue, and his lungs screaming for air, to find another gear to finish the race. If the runner listens to his body, then the race is lost. However, if the runner desires and overcomes his muscle’s fatigue, there comes a point close to the end of the marathon, where the runner finds a new source of energy, and becomes almost as fresh as he was when the race

was started. This is known as the “kick point.” When the runner gets to this point without regard to his body’s fatigue, the race is in hand.

How might this explanation of a runner running a marathon relate to our spiritual race?

- Be assured of the strength of God’s Holy Spirit
 - I Corinthians 14:8
 - What kind of trumpet call does your life give?
- Hold nothing back – you have but one opportunity.
 - Acts 20:19 – 24
 - Jacob 1:19 – 20
 - DC 16:3e – 4b

**They all lined up so full of hope, each thought to win that race,
or tie for first, or if not that, at least take second place.
Their parents watched from off the side, each cheering for their son,
and each boy hoped to show his folks that he would be the one.**

**The whistle blew and off they flew, like chariots of fire,
to win, to be the hero there, was each young boy’s desire.
One boy in particular, whose dad was in the crowd,
was running in the lead and thought “My dad will be so proud.”
But as he speeded down the field and crossed a shallow dip,
the little boy who thought he’d win, lost his step and slipped.
Trying hard to catch himself, his arms flew everyplace,
and midst the laughter of the crowd he fell flat on his face.
As he fell, his hope fell too; he couldn’t win it now.
Humiliated, he just wished to disappear somehow.**

**But as he fell his dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
which to the boy so clearly said, “Get up and win that race!”
He quickly rose, no damage done, behind a bit that’s all,
and ran with all his mind and might to make up for his fall.
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win,
his mind went faster than his legs. He slipped and fell again.
He wished that he had quit before with only one disgrace.
“I’m hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn’t try to race.”
But through the laughing crowd he searched and found his father’s
face**

with a steady look that said again, "Get up and win that race!"
So he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the last.

"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought, "I've got to run real fast!"
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight, then ten...

but trying hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell again.
Defeat! He lay there silently. A tear dropped from his eye.

"There's no sense running anymore! Three strikes I'm out! Why try?
I've lost, so what's the use?" he thought. "I'll live with my disgrace."

But then he thought about his dad, who soon he'd have to face.

"Get up," an echo sounded low, "you haven't lost at all,
for all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

Get up!" the echo urged him on, "Get up and take your place!

You were not meant for failure here! Get up and win that race!"
So, up he rose to run once more, refusing to forfeit,
and he resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been,
still he gave it all he had and ran like he could win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again.

Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.

They cheered another boy who crossed the line and won first place,
head high and proud and happy — no falling, no disgrace.

But, when the fallen youngster crossed the line, in last place,
the crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race.

And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud,
you would have thought he'd won the race, to listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."

"To me, you won," his father said. "You rose each time you fell."

And now when things seem dark and bleak and difficult to face,
the memory of that little boy helps me in my own race.

For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all.

And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face,
another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race!"

Attributed to Dr. D.H. "Dee" Groberg

**JESUS CALLS US TO BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS
AND LET NOTHING SEPARATE...**
by Steve Kropp

*Let **nothing separate you** from each other and the work hereunto **you** have been called; and I will be with **you** by My Spirit and presence of power unto the end. Amen. (DC 22:17b)*

Thirty-one% of people over 30 who were raised Christian identified as religiously unaffiliated in 2020, compared to just 8% in 1990. Pew Research (The adversary continues to create barriers that keep mankind from choosing “to serve the Lord.”)

Understanding Division

The very quotable scripture from Joshua 24:15 brings to our attention the essence of division. Not necessarily the tangible division between nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples of the world, but the more important division that takes place in our minds. The very words, “Choose you this day...” IT IS PERSONAL! - requires an ability to think clearly about a subject and in response “rightly divide” wherein you will put your trust. Today, in the time it takes you to read though this material, you will be answering the question Joshua put to the people of his day.

Mankind is now peering into the next dispensation of time and many are losing their faith—the one thing that can deliver us in our time of need. That faith which once guided mankind through thick and thin, and in the restored gospel, through the many divisions occurring since the mid-1800’s when a young prophet was spoken to from heaven and told to “*proclaim these things unto the world.*” (DC 1:4)

For those who have spent even a minimum amount of time studying the Inspired Version (IV), The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants (DC) of this faith, you have undoubtedly come across this notion of being of **One Heart and One Mind** and as stated above, allowing nothing to separate us not only from this work but also from each other.

With that thought in mind, take a few minutes and ponder deep in your heart as to why we have become so fractured and divided from what once was a singular faith? Could the division be, in some divine way, a method of bringing His people to an understanding of Jesus's words: *Think not, that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, **but a sword**. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.* (Matt 10:30-31) This is what I call a *divine division*, and Jesus has reinforced the idea that if we choose Him, there will be division as we become one with Him.

In our modern society there are a few scattered neighborhoods that are *walled*, but for most of the 9 billion + people on this earth, we live without walls. However, we are as separated and divided as if we had walls and barred gates up to heaven. We could look at the world at large and examine the walls that exist between nations, countries, and a few select cities; however, our thoughts for this class will look at the physical walls only as metaphors. Consider the separation we have between ideas, interpretations of scripture and the way the restoration (since the experience in the grove) has drawn the boundaries of our thinking and even limits with whom we will worship.

We follow the temptation to worship the creation, (i.e., The Restored Church) instead of the creator. Author Rick Joyner put it this way in his book, *There were Two Trees in the Garden:—When we worship the creation, instead of the creator, we have a form of godliness and we deny the power thereof.*

Does this sound familiar? Where have similar words been shared with mankind? (II Tim 3:5)

The words of Christ in 1831 were *greatly needed*, as they appear in DC 46:1c, *nevertheless, ye are commanded never to cast anyone out from your public **meetings**, which are held before the world.* The walls that have been erected in the restoration preclude us from worshipping with likeminded brothers and sisters due to the mental barriers we build and

the limits we place on a God to work with all those who are earnestly seeking the Kingdom. (DC 46:2)

The material we use in the construction of our modern walls is an interesting combination of experiences, thoughts, interpretations, misunderstandings, traditions, positions, half-truths, unforgiveness, our self-righteousness, and of course pride. In each generation, there are those who are ultra-focused on “their way is the best or only way,” and in this mindset, the temptation to use scripture for our own purpose is born. (Otherwise known as priestcraft). In 2 Nephi 11:106, *He commandeth that there shall be no **priestcrafts**; for, behold, **priestcrafts** are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain, and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.*

Take a moment and ponder in your minds how Jesus dealt with priestcraft in Palestine and Zarahemla, and envision how He deals with it where you reside right now.

1. Ye blind **guides**, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel; who make yourselves appear unto men that ye would not commit the least sin, and yet ye yourselves, transgress the whole law. (Matthew 23:21)
2. O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiff-necked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you; yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind **guides**; yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light; (Helaman 5:40)
3. And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances, because of **priestcrafts**, all having corrupt minds. (DC 32:1e)

In each of these scriptures, God is calling us to break down the barriers that keep us from seeing Him and worshipping in spirit and in truth.

As I sit here listening for that Good Spirit to guide my heart, head, and hands in preparing this material, I am also anticipating a priesthood

retreat this coming weekend on Jan. 28, 2023, at which the focus of our attention will be on: *Study **to show** thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not **to** be ashamed, rightly **dividing** the word of truth.* (2 Tim 2:15) If you have received and accepted the calling of God to serve Him, then you are determining (by the way you exercise your stewardship), if you are chosen to enter and sup with the bridegroom or only-called. *For many are called, but **few chosen**; wherefore all do not have on the wedding garment.* (Matt 22:14) Therein lies division once again, between those called to the work and those who are chosen to enter. Pause in your heart and ask for the Holy Ghost to work inside of you to respond to this **Love** that was spoken of in Chapter 1, and *Come unto Christ and let nothing separate you.*

Looking Backwards at Division

From the beginning of time, mankind has developed a sense of protection and safety associated with a good wall or “*a continuous vertical brick or stone structure that encloses or divides an area of land.*” With very little effort, one can make the metaphorical leap and how we build mental walls.

*Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire; come, and let us build up the **wall** of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Building back that which had been burnt and destroyed.* (Neh 2:17)

That we be no more a reproach. This was a motivating factor for Nehemiah, and I suggest to you now could very well have application in these latter days.

*Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building **walls** of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities, and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land.* (Alma 21:129)

Each of these ancient walls were erected to preserve and to protect a certain people from encroaching enemies. They were also a symbol of

strength and organization as well as a sense of belonging to all those who resided inside those ancient walls. It is easy to see, given the predisposition of our race, how we take comfort in our mental walls.

I hope for the purposes of this class, we can be honest with ourselves and break down the defenses and walls created in each of our minds. How many times do we create walls in the form of a self-inflicted prison in our minds and gradually lock them down. Then, we only allow in those ideas that conform to our *walls*. Thus, as human beings we become prideful when we are affirmed of how good we are. (vs. being transformed). We should all take a moment and confess in our hearts and say with our mouths the words of Moses when confronted with the Holiness of God, ***man is nothing*** (DC 22:7) and also with the words of Christ when His disciples called Him good, *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me **good**? There is **none good** but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* (Matt 19:17). These are exactly the kind of self-righteous/proud walls Jesus attempted to break down—the mental and spiritual walls we create endeavoring to keep the world out and confirm each Sunday how good a person we are in comparison to the world. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a precise example of how the Master was trying to break down the societal barriers that existed between those who were **all of the seed of Abraham**.

Maybe you can identify with the very calling of Matthew and how Jesus was breaking down the societal barriers in the minds of His own disciples to begin to understand the **worth of all souls**. Especially those who are willing to come unto Christ and be perfected in Him. Even if you are a Samaritan woman with a terrible track record of picking men, He is willing to drink from your cup and share with you the instruction He received from His Father in Heaven, *And the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father **seeketh such** to worship him.* (John 4:25)

This Samaritan woman shared the teaching of her Fathers in Samaria and knew enough to quote the Rabbis in Jerusalem. Jesus, sensing her inquiry sought to break down a wall that existed in her mind. Who is correct: the Jews worshipping in Jerusalem or the Samaritans

worshipping in the mountain? Can we relate any modern-day examples within the Restoration movement or with Christianity at large? Do these same walls exist when it comes to worshipping God? Jesus's response to the woman's inquiry is like a nuclear bomb to the well-intended self-righteous divisions that plague mankind. Pause for a moment and consider the self-constructed walls that hold you captive.

The Master addressed this in the "religious" people of His day, by speaking very direct in the effort to free their minds of the religious prison they had constructed for themselves.

Side note: How did the disciples approach the scene they faced when they caught up with Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman? Can you see their traditional walls being tested but holding firm?

And upon this came His disciples, and marveled that He talked with the woman; yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? (Luke 4:29)

The following scripture from Matthew 21 reveals the great length the Master went to get those religious leaders of His day to identify the self-inflicted walls their system had created:

*They say unto him, He will destroy those miserable, wicked men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus said unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doings, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. For whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, **they perceived** that He spake of them.* (Matt 21:43-47)

Although they perceived, they were still unwilling to entertain the thought that they were in need of repentance—or possibly that they were blind and looking beyond the mark...?

I preached at a revival event in the Fall of 2022, and at this event were ministers from various restoration groups. Prior to this revival gathering,

I was in a meeting with several Restoration Branch priesthood where I was asked the following question: *Why would you be willing to share the stage with men from factional groups of the Restoration, people might think you are one of them?* (Please pause and ponder this statement.) Our modern-day walls are well positioned to give rise to those in our day and time who, “...look beyond the mark” (Jacob 3:23) and focus more on being right vs. allowing this same mind to be in us that was in Christ Jesus. The mind that not only sat at dinner with publicans and harlots, but called them to share in His wedding feast and His glory.

The ancient “spiritual” walls had been established and reenforced over hundreds of years between Israel and Samaria. The Jews could not stand the publicans who were traitors and turncoats of the worst kind. The Restoration is divided in ways that will not even allow us to worship with those who are not aligned with our thinking.

Jesus specifically focused on breaking down the first two walls. How is He moving in your life today, to break down the mental and spiritual walls that violate? (DC 122:17b)

*Therefore, get ye straightway unto my land; break down the **walls** of mine enemies, throw down their tower, and scatter their watchmen;* (DC 98:7f)

The walls we have constructed cannot be thrown down by the same level of Telestial thinking by which they were constructed. We cannot use the examples of men to somehow reassess and build more accurate walls. Christ’s example of showing love and forgiveness to even those who are our enemies and who spitefully use us, is the key.

A.W. Tozer, in the following quote, understood the preeminent standard that sets our hearts and minds on a path to oneness:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers

meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

Recognizing and confessing the walls we have understandably built over time will not be the soul factor in delivering us from these self-imposed prisons. However, the key that unlocks that prison can be found in the sacrifice we are to bring: "brokenness or being undone, (Isaiah 6) and contrition (Ether 1:112), the walls and thus separation disappears as we become tuned to God instead of trying to be tuned to each other.

In the endowment series, #6, Arthur Oakman reminds us of these attributes acutely present in this Faith: ***"The worse sin Latter Day Saints commit, do you know what it is: the achieve a standard of righteousness and the draw a line and if you don't come up to their standard of righteousness, God pity you. Their righteousness becomes God's righteousness, and they condemn everyone else who doesn't conform to their way of thinking. This is a sin to which Latter Saints are peculiarly subject. Let no man then judge another but let him examine his own life and his own heart and seek to function at the maximum capacity, physically and spiritually."***

For reflection and discussion:

1. *How is Christ calling you to join Him in the prayer He offered in John 17? Will the spirit inside of you allow your self-constructed walls (i.e., images of your gods) to be thrown down and Jesus's desire for you be realized?*
2. *Find in Genesis, evidence that God is revealing His desire to gather His people together that they may be one.*
 - a. *Genesis 7:70 And righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine own elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare; an holy city, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called **Zion**; a New Jerusalem.*

3. *Find in the Book of Mormon, evidence that God still desires to gather His people together that they may be one.*
 - a. *IV Nephi and 3 Nephi 7:20*
 - b. *Also, the very fact that God separated Lehi and his family from Jerusalem to preserve fruit unto himself through Joseph's fruitful bough that ran over the wall.*
4. *Find latter day evidence that God changes not and is/will gather His people together that they may be one.*
 - a. *III Nephi 4:58*
 - b. *Rev. 19:9*
 - c. *D&C 1:7; 8a-c*

**JESUS CALLS US TO BE AWAKE
WITH OIL IN OUR LAMPS
by William (Vim) Horn, elder**

The Cry Has Gone Forth—*Repent and Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord!*

This cry has been heard down through the ages—in Isaiah’s time, John the Baptist’s, Lehi’s, Alma’s, and finally in our day, through Joseph Smith the prophet. While the cry has been heard through the ages, given the hour, **it is especially significant in our time.** *For verily, verily I say unto you, that ye are called to lift up your voices as with the sound of a trump, to declare my gospel unto a crooked and a perverse generation: for, behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and for the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard.* (DC 32:1c,d) Saints, we are in the hastening time, and it’s past time for us to hasten our repentance, our preparation and to thrust in our sickles.

The cry to repent, to prepare the way of the Lord, and to thrust in our sickles, is closely aligned with why the Lord restored His Church. *And verily, verily I say unto you, **that this church have I established and called forth out of the wilderness;** ...I say unto you, that the field is white already to harvest; wherefore, thrust in your sickle, and reap with all your might, mind, and strength. Open your mouths and they shall be filled...yea, open your mouths and spare not, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your backs, for lo, I am with you; yea, open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying, Repent, repent and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;* (DC 32:2a-f).

In DC 1:6; 34:4; and 43:5, the saints were told that the coming of Christ was, *nigh at hand*. In DC 85:25d, they were told to prepare, *for the judgement of our God is come: behold, and lo, the Bridgroom cometh, go ye out to meet him*. This warning was given to the church in 1832, over a 190 years ago. *Saints, if the great day of the Lord was “nigh at hand” as described in DC 43 in 1831, then we are on the threshold of the great day of the Lord now. And so the call that must go forth, to repent and prepare, is one that can no longer be abdicated to future times and future generations. It is our responsibility to embrace that challenge and*

to share in it in such a way that those around us might be impacted by that call which is ours. (A Study Guide: Preparing to Be Endowed, CRE July 2001)

None of us knows the exact time when the *bridegroom cometh*, but ALL of us need to live our lives with the expectation that He will come in our life time. All through the ages, time has been moving towards this group of people. No one since the death and resurrection of Christ really knowing whether they were this group or not. Each generation having a desire that they might be that people. Each generation encouraged to be patient, *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord...establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh* (James 5:7,8).

We may be that posterity that lives when Christ returns. I hope we are, but it shouldn't affect our response to the call to repent and prepare. It doesn't matter if we are the ones present when Christ returns—what matters is that we are prepared to go forth and meet Him, **whenever it is**. Within 70 to 80 years each of us will find ourselves standing before the *keeper of the gate...the Holy One of Israel... [who] employeth no servant there* (2NE 6:81), whether it be on his return, or when we die. No one knows either hour. Hebrews 11:13 reflects the need for faithfulness: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them...*

Repent and Prepare the Way of the Lord – The Parable of the Ten Virgins

In DC 45:10, we are told that when Christ shall come in His glory, then shall the parable concerning the ten virgins be fulfilled; *for they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived...They shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day, and the earth shall be given unto them for an inheritance.* In DC 32:3, the Saints were admonished to be faithful, to be prepared for the coming of the groom. *wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the*

Bridegroom; for, behold, verily, verily I say unto you, that I come quickly; even so. Amen.

With the above understanding concerning the fulfilment of the parable, we have clear direction that its message is pertinent to us today. This class will review this familiar parable to see what we can learn from it in regards to the call that has gone forth, *repent and prepare the way of the Lord*.

CONTEXT—Let's start by looking at the context of the parable. At the end of Matthew 23, we find Jesus in the temple, weeping over Jerusalem, declaring that he is the one they were looking for, and they, refusing to see, would see him no more until His return, *in the clouds of heaven* (v.40). When he shared this, His disciples understood that he would come again on the earth after he was, *glorified and crowned on the right hand of God* (v.41).

In Matthew 24, the disciples question Jesus concerning the temple. Jesus responds, then draws apart, and his disciples approach him with two more questions concerning what he had shared in the temple. The first question pertained to, *the destruction of the temple and the Jews*, the second to, *what is the sign of thy coming; and the end of the world?* (v.4) After responding to the first one, Jesus responds to the second question and expounds somewhat on what will take place in the last days; affirming that the Son of man shall come, that there will be signs, but stresses that no one knows the hour, and calls on the faithful and wise to not slumber, but to be awake and prepared, *for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh* (v.51).

WATCH and PREPARE—The parable of the ten virgins speaks to the day, *before the Son of Man comes*, and likens the kingdom of heaven, *unto ten virgins, [subjects of the kingdom on earth], who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom*. Who are the virgins in the parable? The virgins are guests of the bride (the church), members of the bridal party, or members of Christ's church who have a belief in Christ, and profess to be waiting for His return. The number ten among the Jews is identified as a complete/whole number—in this context, it represents the whole church. The message of this parable to, **WATCH**

THEREFORE; [prepare therefore] *for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh* (Mat 25:12), is directed to all believers.

To become part of the wedding party we must exchange our filthy rags, and be clothed with purity, even the robe of righteousness, to wear to the wedding feast. (2N 6:35) Christ is God's gift of righteousness. By His blood are we sanctified. As with blind Bartimeus, who sat by the road as Jesus passed, we must toss away our filthy, self-righteous garments, and run to Jesus. He will provide us with sight, and a new garment of righteousness fit for the wedding feast. (Mark 10:49-54)

Entering the wedding feast without a wedding garment is an offense to the king. Those doing so will be removed. *For many are called, but few chosen; wherefore all do not have on the wedding garment.* (Matt 22:11-14) In Luke 12, we are told to be dressed and ready and have our lights burning, to be prepared for the Lords return, *that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately...Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching; for he shall gird himself...and will come forth and serve them* (vs.39-40).

We understand that His return is certain, but the time is not, so we are to watch. Luke 21 confirms the suddenness of His return and the need to be vigilant in this regard. *For as a snare it shall come on all...and I say unto all, Watch ye therefore, and pray always, and keep my commandments, that ye may be counted worthy to escape all these things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man when he shall come clothed in the glory of his Father.* (Luke 21:35-36) The parable of the 10 virgins speaks to the importance of what it means to watch and prepare.

FOOLISH and WISE—Ten virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom, representing a common expression of the acceptance of the gospel and expectant joy of the coming bridegroom, Christ. Five of the virgins were foolish and five wise. There is a general sense that the number, or proportion of virgins, is significant because it acknowledges that a great portion of those who claim to be true followers Christ fall short of the mark.

It could be said that the foolish virgins represent shallow Christians, professed followers who are imprudent and careless with their faith, and lack perseverance—unfaithful stewards of the gospel. These are they who started on the path, some even tasting precious fruit of the tree of life, but fell away (1NE 2:66-76). The foolish have some oil, but not enough. They could be likened unto the seed which fell on stony ground with some earth, but lacked the depth needed to grow and yield fruit (Mark 4:5). The oil that they started with is soon used up, their lamps grow dim, go out, and they have no more. Jesus spoke of the foolish. *This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit, in vain do they worship me* (Mark 7:7).

The wise virgins represent sincere, serious Christians, followers who are prudent and thoughtful, and have *perseverance*—faithful stewards of the good news. These are they who went forth to the end of the path and tasted the fruit that filled their souls (1NE 2:78). The wise have an abundance of oil. They are those who were planted in good ground, and yielded much fruit (Mark 4:7).

LAMPS—As was the Jewish custom, weddings were generally after sunset, so the virgins went forth with their lamps to await the coming of the bridegroom, and with his coming, to assist with lighting the way of the wedding party to the wedding feast. All ten brought lamps—What do the lamps represent? Various things have been proffered, but in context of the parable, one consideration is that the lamps represent the outward expression of those who profess to have a belief in Christ. Just carrying a lamp though isn't enough. Our lamps must be burning to be effective. Being prepared is about having oil for our lamps that keep them burning. It could be said that the burning light of the lamp is a true disciple's **faith in action**, a needed light in this dark world (Mat 5:16).

OIL and VESSELS—The reference to *wise and foolish virgins* in the parable addresses their conduct in regards to oil and vessels. The wise bringing a vessel with extra oil, and the foolish not. So, the operative concerns are the importance of oil, and having a vessel to carry it in. Proverbs 21:20 speaks of those who are wise, who obtain oil, use it prudently, and reserve it for future use. The foolish, on the other hand,

spendeth it up as they get it, and have none left for when it is needed. Without oil, without the Holy Spirit in our hearts, our lamps are empty, unable to light the way, and we are unable to fulfil our calling, to serve God and one another.

IMPORTANCE of OIL—As the lamp represents the outward expression of our faith, the oil represents the inward strength of our faith, the working of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives. It is the gift of the Holy Ghost, burning in our lives, that energizes our faith and offers light to those around us.

The gift is freely given to *all those who diligently seek him* (1NE 3:26), but in order to be used, it requires a *consecrated heart* and our response (Prov 23:26). This response includes receiving the gift to purify our lives, and to set our lives on fire, that our lives might be lights in a dark world. Without the gift operating in our lives, it is impossible for our lights to shine, for our lives to bear fruit. The gift is given that we might bear fruit in, and through our lives.

RECEIVING OIL—To receive oil, we must engage with the source of all oil. At times God anoints us with a significant portion of oil to accomplish His purposes, but more often we receive oil a drop at a time. Through study, prayer, fasting and humble service we draw near to God. Richard Neill, speaks of making spiritual deposits into our spiritual storehouse every time we pray, fast, study, serve others, show love towards God and our neighbors, and keep his commandments. He concludes that, *if we have surplus in our spiritual storehouse [our vessels] not only can we take care of our needs, but we have extra...to help others.* (*The Window is Open*, 2019)

Our vessels are filled with oil when we, *hunger and thirst for righteousness* (Matt 5:6), when we express, *humility and fear of the Lord* (Prov 22:4). The apostle Paul commends the Ephesians to be wise, to understand God's will, to lay aside the excesses of the world and, ***be filled with the Spirit;*** [BY] *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; Submitting yourselves one to another in*

the fear of God (Eph 5:17-21). When we are connected to the source of that holy and pure oil, when it takes residence in our hearts and we receive oil continually, our cups run over (Psalm 23:20) and we are positioned to go and meet the groom. God's ability to provide oil, always exceeds our ability to receive it.

EMPTY and CLEAN VESSELS/HEARTS—*And behold the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire; and they could speak forth marvelous words. (HE 2:111)* The vessels spoken of in the parable represent the hearts of faithful believers. The oil, as shared earlier, is the Holy Spirit. In order for the Holy Spirit to find place and reside in our hearts, there must be room in our vessels and they must be clean. If our vessels—our hearts—are filled with worldly concerns, they cannot be filled with eternal ones. If our vessels are unclean, the pure oil we receive becomes tainted, and the ability of the Holy Spirit to work in and through our lives is limited. Our preparation must involve repenting and emptying our hearts of worldly distractions, and inviting the purifying fire of the Holy Ghost to cleanse them, and assist us with guarding our hearts against future temptations. Only then, can our vessels and lamps, filled with pure oil, burn continually and brightly. Just as God commanded this for the children of Israel in a physical sense (Lev 24:2), so too he commands it in a spiritual sense for our lives.

Jesus taught that out of the heart proceed all manner of sinful, evil things, that defile a person. (Matt 5:18; Mark 7:15, 20). In 3 Nephi 7:34, it confirms that this will be so in the last days with many being, *lifted up in the pride of their hearts*. As with King Asa, our hearts, our vessels, must be perfect with the Lord (1Kings 15:14). Our vessels must be filled with pure oil, if we are to be servants of righteousness (Rom 6:16-18) Our preparation must include asking God to not leave us, but to *incline our hearts unto him, that we would walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments* (1Kings 8:57, 58). In his book, *How to be Perfect*, Andrew Murray suggest that, *what was at first but a little seed — the perfect heart — has grown up and borne fruit; the perfect heart is now a heart in which the love of God is perfected. Love has taken full possession, and reigns throughout the whole being*. If we will allow, God

will fill our vessels with pure oil, and our lives will be filled with joy.
(MOS 2:35)

For reflection and discussion:

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 provides us with an understanding of what is involved in receiving additional oil for our vessels.

1. What have we done with the oil we have received?
2. How has the oil you have received been magnified in your lives as you have used what you received?

WAIT and PREPARE—*The bridegroom tarried* (Mat 25:4). He was **not delayed**, but **He tarried**. Why did the bridegroom, Christ, tarry and delay His return? He tarried because many things needed to come about before He came again and passed judgement. The Gospel needed to go forth, unrighteousness in the world needed to ripen, and the faithfulness of His saints needed to be tried. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise and coming, as some men count slackness; but long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (2Pet 3:9).

From Habakkuk 2:3, we are aware that some visions have appointed times, *but at the end it [the vision] shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*. Having this perspective, we understand that His tarrying is but a probationary period for this world and our lives. This **IS** our time to prepare!

*This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God: yea, behold, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors...therefore I beseech of you, that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; For after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, **if we do not improve our time while in this life**, then cometh the night of darkness, wherein there can be no labor performed* (AL 16:228-230).

Our Christian walk starts through a narrow gate and continues on a narrow, straight path that leads to life eternal, if we continue on the

path to the end when we die, or when Christ returns (2NE 15:10). We are warned against wasting the days of our probation, and are assured that God will provide us with all we need to fulfill our calling (2NE 6:55). We are told to, *be wise in the days of our probation, to strip away, all uncleanness*. Encouraged to ask, *with a firmness unshaken, to not yield to temptation, and admonished to, serve the true and living God* (MOR 4:94). Alma makes it clear that, *this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God: yea, behold, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors...therefore I beseech of you, that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; For after this day of life...then cometh the night of darkness, wherein there can be no labor performed.* (AL 16: 228-30)

Many of the early saints following Christ's ascension believed His return was imminent. With the delay of his return, many past and present professed believers have, and continue to procrastinate the day of their salvation, *until it is to everlastingly too late.* (HE 5:51) While Christ may tarry past our expectations, His return is not delayed, and we should not become careless and weary of preparing for his return. He is King and we are subject to His will, His timing.

For reflection and discussion:

1. How are we spending our days, using what God has provided?
2. What is tempting us that we need the Holy Spirit to resist?
3. What needs to be cleansed so we can fully serve God?

SLUMBERING and SLEEPING—*They all slumbered and slept* (Mat 25:4). The word **All** should give each believer some pause for consideration. What happens when all is well? When things go smoothly? When we are in the routine of life? Often we relax, are at ease, become less focused, become drowsy, become sleepy, and we slumber. While we slumber our guard is down and we become indolent. We stop **watching**, and are taken by surprise!

Most believers are not as the evil servant described in Matthew 24:55, but many live as in the days of Noah before the flood, not watching, but slumbering and sleeping. (Mat 24:43-54) While we wait, ALL are subject

to being pacified, and lulled and dulled into a false sense of carnal security by the adversary.

Many say, ***all is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well. The warning though is sounded, then and now, Wo be unto him that crieth, All is well; yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost...[and say] We have received, and we need no more.*** (2NE 12:25)

Christ's question in the garden to Peter should resound in the ears of all believers, *What, could ye not watch with me one hour?* (Mat 26:37) His response to Peter was to, *watch and pray*, (v.38) that he [Peter] not enter into temptation. He knew the hearts of his disciples, but understood that they were weak. In His compassion, he bade them to, *Sleep on now and take rest*, (v.43) for the time to arise and go would come soon enough. The wise slumber and sleep with hearts that are full—they are strong in the faith. On the mount of transfiguration, *Peter and they who were with him [John and James] were heavy with sleep, [BUT] when they were awake they saw his glory* (Luke 9:32). The foolish slumber and sleep with hardened, or empty hearts—they are weak in the faith. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us* (1John 2:19).

For reflection and discussion:

1. What causes us to slumber? How is it manifested in our lives?
2. Are our guards down? If so, in what ways?
3. How are we slothful and indolent?
4. How do we stay awake and arouse our faculties?

THE CRY WILL COME—At midnight, an unusual and unexpected time, the cry was made that the bridegroom cometh. *Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the Lord your God, and hear the word of the Lord concerning you; the Lord who shall suddenly come to his **temple**; the Lord who shall come down upon the world with a curse to judgment; yea, upon all the nations that forget God, and upon all the ungodly*

among you (DC 108:1a). From 2 Peter 3:10...*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall shake, and the earth also shall tremble.*

For reflection and discussion:

1. Who will make the cry?
2. Are we prepared to listen? If not, how are we preparing to hear?

GO YE OUT to MEET HIM – Our response, our preparation, is **not about** the coming of the bridegroom, **it is about** our readiness, our ability to be able to go forth and meet him to fulfill the measure of our creation. Lehi warning his sons to awake and, *put on the armor of righteousness*, to shake off the chains by which they were bound, *and arise from the dust*, is good counsel for all who prepare to go out to meet the bridegroom (2NE 1:38-39). Paul’s counsel to the Ephesians to, *Awake...and with the light of Christ to no longer walk as fools, but as wise*, circumspectly. *Redeeming the time*, making up for lost opportunity, and doing the Lord’s will, is worthy of our consideration today (Eph 5:14-18).

The cry for all people has gone forth. *Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom.* [slumber and sleep no longer.] *Behold, and lo, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.* Unless commanded to tarry, as a people we are commanded to gather to Zion in preparation for His return. *Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord* (DC 108:3c-d).

For reflection and discussion:

1. What is our response to Peter’s question? *If then all these things shall be destroyed, what manner of persons ought ye to be in holy conduct and godliness, Looking unto, and preparing for the day of the coming of the Lord ?* (2Pet 3:11-12)
2. Do you believe that preparing for the great day of the Lord involves gathering to Zion?
If so, how is that to be accomplished in our current state as the church?

ARISE, MAKE FINAL PREPARATION—While all ten virgins were slumbering and sleeping, the oil in their lamps became low or was used up. Without having enough oil in their lamps to keep them burning, their wicks became dry, and the front edge became burnt, black, and hard. Upon awaking, all ten virgins arose and began to make their final preparations to go out and meet the groom. The five wise virgins filled their lamps with oil from their vessels and began to trim the wicks of their lamps. Without oil for their lamps, the five foolish virgins quickly realized that efforts to trim their lamps was pointless, and so they sought for oil, when there was none to be had.

As I pondered on this verse, it was brought to my mind that the **wick** represents our faith. When we slumber, and our faith is not being fed by the Holy Spirit, our hearts become hardened, our faith becomes weak, and our lamps grow dim or go out. When there is oil for our lamps, our wicks, our faith, are again able to draw upon that life-giving oil. Then our wicks, saturated with oil more, must be trimmed of the burnt, hard edges that formed while we slept, in order to be lit and once again allow the full expression of our faith to burn brightly, lighting the way of the Lord.

For reflection and discussion:

1. What hard edges in our lives need trimming for our lamps to burn brightly?
2. What final preparations need to be made to go forth and meet the bridegroom?

THE DOOR WILL BE SHUT—There is a time, when there is no more time to prepare for His coming. The next five verses of the parable (Mat 25:7-11), speak to what will happen to those who have not repented and made preparation for His coming. Some will frantically seek for oil, when it is time for oil to be burned. Their seeking is still not focused on preparing the way for the groom, but on themselves, seeking to not be excluded from the wedding feast. The primary message is that there is no more time to buy oil, and there is no way for the five wise virgins to share their oil. While those caught unprepared seek to remedy their situation, the bridegroom comes, and the door to the wedding feast is

shut. The message delivered by Samuel to the self-righteous Nephites stands as a warning to us today: *But behold, your days of **probation** are past: **ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation, until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure;** (HE 5:51).*

STILL TIME TO WATCH and PREPARE—We watch and prepare for His return, and the fulness of his kingdom to come about. However, while we wait, His kingdom is here within us, when we will allow His Spirit to find residence in our hearts. When the Kingdom is in our hearts, it will find expression in the life of His church as we gather to worship the King, and go forth to accomplish His work. When we do this, we become a people of one heart and one mind, His heart and mind, and He will look down upon us and call us Zion. (Gen 7:23) What was the condition of the world when this took place before?...*there were wars, and bloodshed among them; but the Lord came and dwelt with His people, and they dwelt in righteousness. And the fear of the Lord was upon all nations, so great was the glory of the Lord which was upon His people.* (Gen 7:20-21) It is past time for us to respond to His call to repent and prepare for His return. His Kingdom is present, and His return is assured.

In DC 142:5, the Lord encourages us: *The hopes of my people and the goals of my church, while not yet fully realized, and at times and to many seemingly distant, are closer to realization than many recognize.* He assures us that, ***It is yet day when all can work***, but admonishes that, ***the night will come when for many of my people opportunity to assist will have passed.***

**THE FATHER CALLS US
TO BE A LIVING SACRIFICE FOR HIM
By Eric Odida**

INTRODUCTION

Behold, now it is called today (until the coming of the Son of man), and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned (at his coming); for after today cometh the burning: this is speaking after the manner of the Lord; (DC 64:5a)

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, sacrifice means, *an act of offering to a deity something precious*. It also means, *destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else*. The English word *sacrifice* comes from the Latin, *sacrificare*—to make sacred, that is, to permanently transfer something from the human (common) realm to the divine/supernatural (sacred) realm.

As saints we understand that Christ's death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice (Alma 16:210) and that we are called upon to live our lives in ways that testify of our covenant to live our lives in the place of him who died in our place. But when it comes to actual sacrifice, we struggle with what it looks like or what it means for our everyday lives. This is true in many aspects of our lives.

So, what does sacrifice mean to us? In everyday common social life, a happily married couple is constantly making sacrifices for one another. Parents make huge sacrifices for their children. People drawn to a cause like to care for the sick or fight for justice often sacrifice remunerative careers and comfort for the sake of their ideals. In the ages of patriotism, people made sacrifices for their countries. In strong communities' people make sacrifices for one another when someone is in distress or needs help. Sacrifice is the superglue of relationship. It bonds men to one another. But what is the covenant meaning of sacrifice?

THE ORIGIN AND REASON FOR MAKING SACRIFICES

From the scriptures we understand that the sacrificial system was introduced after sin. The Old Testament sacrificial system established the structure and frame of reference with regard to God's redemptive purpose. Sinners may obtain divine favor if an acceptable substitute could be found to offer to God in sacrifice. Animal sacrifices were initiated for man to understand God's justice and mercy.

Sacrifice required the renunciation of something that belongs to the person making the offering. Thus, sacrifices were made from domestic animals and food grains. Another important concept is the element of substitution. The idea is that the thing being offered is a substitute for the person making the offering, and the things that were done to the offering were things that should have been done to the person making the offering. *It was understood that sacrifices* had no satisfaction effect unless the person making the offering sincerely repented of his or her actions before making the offering and made restitution to any person who was harmed by the violation. The third important concept is the idea of coming closer as derived from the Torah definition: The essence of sacrifice is to bring a person closer to God.

The ancient Hebrew sacrifices were understood to involve the transfer of offerings from the common to the sacred, from human beings to God. In the Torah, one of the most helpful ways to think about sacrifices is as "gifts" given over to God. It was not just the giving but also the acceptance of such gifts that was important. This is because the meeting of the two expressed a relationship of commitment, care, and love.

Another thing to note is that in the ancient times anyone could personally make the offerings. Later temple sacrifice was instituted which required a mediator. The solemn service of the sanctuary typified the grand truths that were to be revealed through successive generations. Making the offering in the holy Temple instilled the powerful message that it should really be the offender's blood spilled and body burned, were it not for God's mercy in accepting a substitute and a ransom. This visceral experience was a humbling encounter, subduing one's negative traits and carnal desires.

In making the offering, an animal without any defect or spot was required as sacrifice in place of the person who was guilty. This was a shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ in place of sinful men. *Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!* (John 1: 29)

GOD PERFORMED THE FIRST ANIMAL SACRIFICE

The scriptures testify that the gospel was taught from the beginning by angels, by the gift of the Holy Ghost and by God's own voice.

Soon after Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord revealed to them the law of sacrifice. *Unto Adam, and also unto his wife, did I, the Lord God, make coats of skins, and clothed them.* (Genesis 3:27)

The Lord likely killed the first one or two animals and offered them as a sacrifice in place of Adam and Eve. He did it because He wanted Adam and Eve to understand that while He was offering them grace by allowing them to live and also to cover their sins, something innocent had to die in their place.

And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God; and should offer the firstlings of their flocks for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord. And after many days, an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying, Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him, I know not, save the Lord commanded me. (Genesis 4:5-6)

No doubt they practiced and taught this law and duty to their children. *And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God; and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.* (Genesis 4:12)

Abel was following this law when he took his offering to the altar. *And Abel, he also brought, of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering...*(Genesis 5:7)

GOD'S PEOPLE MUST MAKE SACRIFICES

And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God; and should offer the firstlings of their flocks for an offering unto the Lord. (Genesis 4:5)

And it came to pass after these things, that God did try Abraham and said unto him, (Genesis 22:1-2)

Go, and gather the elders of Israel together...18 And they shall hearken to thy voice; and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. (Exodus 3:16-18)

SACRIFICES ARE ONLY BENEFICIAL IF THEY ARE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

The prominent ideas in ancient sacrifices were sin, guilt, and judgment on the one hand and satisfaction, expiation, forgiveness, and reconciliation on the other. Sacrifices are designed to satisfy God's law of justice and mercy, and it is only with this satisfaction secured that the person making the offering finds forgiveness.

The key objective in any sacrifice then is its acceptability. This is critical now as it was then, otherwise all the efforts not cognizant of this are a loss to the one making the offering.

And Abel, he also brought, of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering, but unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. (Genesis 5:7)

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh. (Hebrews 11: 4)

And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, (Genesis 9: 4-5)

...and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept. (Job 42:8)

THE ANCIENT PROPHETS DECLARED CONDITIONS FOR ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES

(1) Obedience to God by Service to Men

When making the sacrifice it is important for the offerer to examine his heart's equivalent of the outward actions. Do his outward performances reflect or testify of his inward attitude and convictions? The design of a righteous offering is intended to bring the offerer to a place where he lays down his all and answers to God's will in his life.

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6: 6)

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; And rend your heart, and not your garments, and repent, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and he will turn away the evil from you. (Joel 2:12-13)

Additional References: (Jeremiah 22:13-15) (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

(2) Focus On The Heart

Biologically the heart is a fist-sized organ that pumps blood throughout our bodies. It's the primary organ of our circulatory system. Of all the organs within the body, the heart is preeminent in terms of the centrality of its location, the richness of its connections to all the cells within the body, and particularly, the intensity of its energy transmission.

It is the individual heart which receives from outside itself sources of information its related mind organ cannot access on its own, and in turn, transmits information to other hearts by the countless sources of energy which contribute to its own wisdom. Since the heart focuses differently from the mind, we therefore come fully to appreciate and understand a given situation. The way in which our hearts *hear* and *understand* a predicament will determine the manner in which we respond to it.

In the scriptures the heart is the status of our deepest feelings. It's the truth of who we are. The heart is also where we make choices. So, the concept of the *heart* is best understood as the *inner person* – the seat of our mind (thoughts), emotions (feelings), and will.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.
(Proverbs 4:23)

Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days;
(DC 64:7a)

...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

(2) (i) Need for A New Heart

The framework of the ancient sacrifices was to bring man to the understanding of the deadliness of sin. How that sin consumes man, dominating him from inside outwards until he is lost to the workings of the spirit of God. The point of recovery is the same inside of man; his heart. Thus the outward performances were accompanied by this learning for man's benefit in fulfilling the requirement of repentance.

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like a fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. (Jeremiah 4:4)

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; 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 31:31)

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:25-28)

(2) (ii) Need for A Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit

What do men give to the God who owns everything as recompense? How can they give back to him that which in the first place was his and hope to have satisfied the need for justice? Is it really the animals and the material things rendered to him by men in offering? What does man really own that he can render to The God who is the creator of all things including the breath that sustains man? The willful heart is what belongs to man: And with this his sins. Thus the place of offering is man's spirit and heart.

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:16)

Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness; even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. (DC 59:2e)

Additional References: (3 Nephi 4:50) (Psalm 34:18)

THE ANCIENT SACRIFICES AND IT'S LAWS POINTED TO CHRIST JESUS

Christ Jesus was the reason and meaning of the ancient sacrifices. Thus in a very real sense the theme of sacrifice constitutes the faith of the saints. The gospel came into the world to proclaim the one true sacrifice for sin which God had provided. No other earthly efforts could save them. In its historical setting the law of sacrifices attempted to instill in men the discipline of obedience even as it pointed them to the only one true sacrifice.

And he said unto them, Marvel not that I said unto you, that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new. Behold, I say unto you, that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore, it hath an end. (III Nephi 7:4-6)

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered continually year by year make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshipers

once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-2)

...but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. (Alma 16:207-210)

Additional References: (Alma 14:75-77) (Leviticus 16:15-22) (Exodus 12:13-27) (Galatians 3:24-27)

JESUS CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD IS THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9: 11-14)

Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. 10 By which will we are sanctified through the offering once of the body of Jesus Christ.” (Hebrews 10:8-10)

Additional References: (III Nephi 4: 47-49) (Hebrews 10:19-22) (Ephesians 5:2) (1 Timothy 2:4-6) (Moroni 8:9) (Colossian 2: 6-14) (Romans 5: 8-10) (Isaiah 53:5-12)

MAKING SACRIFICES AS A TRADITION IS CONTEMPT OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD JESUS

Routine sacrifices lacking of careful consideration is counterproductive, and even harmful to the offerer and the whole body.

See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in

worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God: and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in no wise be cast out. (Mormon 4:95)

... that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy son” and “that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him. (DC 17:22d-23b)

Additional References: (3 Nephi 8:60-62) (1 Corinthians 11:23-30) (Amos 1:7-14) (Isaiah 1:11-17) (Isaiah 58:6-10) (Amos 5: 21-26) (Micah 6:6-8)

SACRIFICE IS THE ASSURANCE OF OBTAINING FAITH

The New Testament law of sacrifice is the law of Christ, the Celestial law and the law of the Kingdom of our God and his Christ; it requires a response that calls for laying down our all on the altar of sacrifice for he who laid down his life and gave up his all for us. From the beginning this was the lesson taught by animal sacrifices. By it we choose eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father and his Christ. (DC 76:5 *these shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ for ever and ever:*)

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 no wise 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 10:29-30)

When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make sacrifice, because he seeks to do his will, he does know most assuredly that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that has not nor will not seek his face in vain... 8a It is in vain for

persons to fancy to themselves that they are heirs with those or can be heirs with them, who offered their all in sacrifice... 10a Those then who make the sacrifice will have the testimony that their course is pleasing in the sight of God, b and those who have this testimony will have faith to lay hold on eternal life, c and will be enabled through faith to endure unto the end, and receive the crown that is laid up for them that love the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. d But those who do not make this sacrifice cannot enjoy this faith because men are dependent upon this sacrifice in order to obtain faith. e Therefore they cannot lay hold upon this eternal life because the revelations of God do not guarantee unto them the authority so to do. 11a All the saints of whom we have account in all the revelations of God which are extant, obtained the knowledge which they had of their acceptance in his sight through the sacrifice which they offered unto him. 12a But those who have not made this sacrifice to God do not know that the course which they pursue is well pleasing in his sight. (Lectures on Faith 6:7e-12a)

Additional References: (Hebrews 11: 24-27) (Alma 13:48-50) (Hebrews 11:35-38) (Mosiah 13:6)

SACRIFICE IS THE LAW OF CHARITY

Chabad: *What could sacrifice possibly mean in a religion in which God is the creator and owner of all? ...What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism and why does it remain important even today? The simplest answer is this: We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for. ...To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give. Sacrifice is the choreography of love...In the ancient days, sacrifices were so important – but not as they were in other faiths but precisely because at the beating heart of Judaism is love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.*

Torah: *The ancient Hebrew scripture tell us that we are each in the image and likeness of God Himself; and that if you wrong a human being, you are abusing the only creation in the universe on which God has set His image. A sin against any person is a sin against God. To love God is to love our fellow humans. To honor God is to honor our fellow*

humans. We may not ask God to listen to us if we are unwilling to listen to others. We may not ask God to forgive us if we are unwilling to forgive others. To know God is to seek to imitate Him...to bring God's presence into the world by making others aware that God's word sanctifies life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

It is in and with sacrifice that our love is measured. Thus love is not something to feel or to receive but to give because love is a life of the cross. Sacrifice is the process of dying to self for Christ. We learn sacrifice by practice. We start at the shallow end and progress to the deep end. As we practice we move further and further away from self and deeper and deeper into the person of Christ. By it we practice the life of Christ. It is the means to perfection and the path to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

Additional References: (1st John 2:7-11) (DC 42:8a) (Matthew 23: 8) (1 John 3: 14-18)

Our highest goal in sacrifice is to come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; unto a perfect man even as our Heavenly father is perfect. In the pursuit of this we recognize that God is love and he that dwelleth in God dwelleth in love. And this commandment have we from him: That he who loveth God love his brother also.

SACRIFICE AS THE PRINCIPAL LAW OF THE KINGDDOM OF ZION

As we sacrifice our selfish desires and serve God through the others and diligently obey the commandments of God we become more like our Lord and Savior. As we embrace the way of Christ, we start appreciating the potential of each man at their possible best. We thus focus on that

potential guided by the words and the spirit of our Lord. The way of the cross becomes our way; both men and women the youth and children, sacrifice becomes our way of life as a people. We leave for our Lord and for each other. Sacrifice becomes our law.

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5)

Verily I say unto you, All among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice; yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command, they are all accepted of me, for I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit. (DC 94:2f-3b)

And now, behold, if Zion do these things, she shall prosper and spread herself and become very glorious, very great, and very terrible; and the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say, Surely Zion is the city of our God; and surely Zion can not fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there, and the hand of the Lord is there, and he hath sworn by the power of his might to be her salvation, and her high tower; therefore verily thus saith the Lord, Let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion, THE PURE IN HEART; therefore let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn; (DC 94:5a-5c)

Additional References: (Matthew 22: 35-38) (Mark 10: 19) (DC 46:4a) (DC 42:8b-11c) (Mosiah 2:32-36) (Mosiah 1:48-49) (Hebrews 13: 16) (Philippians 2:4) (Colossian 3:1-9) (DC 129:9a-c) (DC 98:5k) (DC 81:4d) (DC 130:7d) (DC 82:2b) (Hebrews 13: 15-16) (Psalm 119: 164) (I Chronicles 23:27-31) (Mosiah 12:2-9) (DC 132:3a-4)

SACRIFICE IS THE ONLY MEANS TO OBTAINING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PROMISES

A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things, never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things; it was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through

the medium of the sacrifice of the earthly things, that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. (Lectures on Faith S6:7a-d)

Verily I say unto you, All among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice; yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command, they are all accepted of me, for I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit. (DC 94:2f-3b)

Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake, shall find it again. And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake, is not my disciple. (DC 100:6a)

And all they who suffer persecution for my name, and endure in faith, though they are called to lay down their lives for my sake, yet shall they partake of all this glory. Wherefore, fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full. Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul, and seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life. (DC 98:5h-j)

And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham! Abraham! And Abraham said, Here am I. And the angel said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only Isaac from me. (Genesis 22:11)

Additional References: (DC 24:3a) (Luke 14:26-28,34) (Alma 10:107) (Alma 14:49-51) (Mosiah 11:201) (DC 81:4c-g) (DC 124:8a-B)

BECOMING A LIVING SACRIFICE

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God is. (Romans 12: 1-2)

In making the blood sacrifice (where the victim loses their life), the one offering the sacrifice holds himself up by an unbreakable vow and oath to live in the place of the victim. The new covenant demands that the saints lay down their lives in the place of Jesus Christ as he also laid down his for them. Thus they become living sacrifices. A living sacrifice is a life that is lived in the place of another at the expenses of that which could have been lived by the victim. In Christ Jesus a living sacrifice is the only life that is accepted by God because it is lived in the place of the son that he gave out in their place. It is the life that at all times and in all places and in all things chooses what's best for the greater good and the advancement of the kingdom of God at its own deprivation. It is the life lived in pursuit of God's will. God's will was and is Christ's single objective.

Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice, saying, Father, it is finished, thy will is done, yielded up the ghost. (Matthew 27: 54)

All those who humble themselves before God and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, (DC 17:7b-c)

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then are all dead; And he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory... 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ

forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. (Colossian 3:1-14)

Retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you: (Mosiah 3:8)

Additional References: (Ephesians 5:1-2) (Colossians 3:23-24) (Romans 6:6)

BECOMING A LIVING SACRIFICE REQUIRES DEVINE INSPIRATION OR REVELATION

For a man to lay down his all, his character, and reputation, his honor and applause, his good name among men, his house, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children,, and even his own life also, counting all things but filth and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, requires more than mere belief or supposition that he is doing the will of God, but actual knowledge; realizing that when these sufferings are ended he will enter into eternal rest, and be a partaker of the glory of God. (Lectures on Faith S.6: 5a–b & 7a-d)

The travesty is when men fail to recognize who they really are before God; when they have not come to the knowledge of the Excellency of God, his holiness, his greatness, his might and power and all that he really is. When by the gift of the Holy Spirit this is revealed to men, they readily submit themselves to the life of the cross. This element of knowing who we really are compared to the excellency of God, allows us to worship in Spirit and in Truth.

Job testifies thus—I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5)

Additional References: (Mosiah 2:1-2; 61-62) (Helaman 4: 57-58) (Alma 19: 113-114) (Mosiah 2:8-10)

IT IS GOD’S WILL THAT MEN RECEIVE DEVINE REVELATION AND INSPIRATION FROM HIM

Behold, this is my will; ask and you shall receive, but men do not always do my will; therefore, if you cannot obtain five hundred, seek diligently that peradventure you may obtain three hundred; (DC 100:6d)

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. (Luke 12:35)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men; For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him; For he that diligently seeketh shall find; And the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in this time as in times of old; And as well in times of old as in times to come; ... 37 For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me. (1 Nephi 3:26-40)

Additional References: (3 Nephi 6:19) (Alma 12:14-15) (DC 85:16b-f)

CONCLUSION

God does not need our sacrifices. God is infinite and 'needs' no material sacrifices. Sacrifices are a way of balancing the spiritual and physical nature of man according to that which everyone is willing to receive. Everyone enjoying that which they are willing to receive: Some settling for the lessor because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. Sacrifices are the steps that bring the carnally minded man to the lowly place of the Son of God, unto a perfect man. Thus we can say that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. We shall have undergone the process that he

designed to bring us to where he and his heavenly father are, that we may overcome in all things by his steps and by his word and by his spirit.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come. And whosoever will lose his life in this world, for my sake, shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls; for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16: 25-29)

A land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord cometh; and I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts. (DC 38:4e)

And now, behold, if Zion do these things, she shall prosper and spread herself and become very glorious, very great, and very terrible; 5b and the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say, Surely Zion is the city of our God; and surely Zion can not fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there, and the hand of the Lord is there, and he hath sworn by the power of his might to be her salvation, and her high tower; 5c therefore verily thus saith the Lord, Let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion, THE PURE IN HEART; therefore let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn; (DC 94:5a-c)