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# LDS Counselor Ratings of Problems Occurring among LDS Premarital and Remarital Couples

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*A fundamental purpose of this study was to furnish marriage preparation providers (counselors, educators, and ecclesiastical leaders) with information about specific problem areas that might be encountered in LDS first marriages and remarriages. A structured questionnaire was sent to a national sample of LDS counselors, defined as members of the Association of Mormon Counselors & Psychotherapists (AMCAP). These LDS counselors rated 29 problem areas that couples might encounter in a first marriage or remarriage. Results were analyzed in an attempt to determine the most frequently occurring, most damaging, and most difficult problems to deal with in LDS first marriages and remarriages. Findings suggest that "unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse," "communication," "money management/finances," "decision making/problem solving," "power struggles," and "sex" were all identified as the most frequently occurring problems/complaints which first time LDS marriages might encounter. For LDS remarital couples, "communication," "children," "problems related to previous marriage," "unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse," "money management/finances," "power struggles," and "decision making/problem solving," were identified as most frequently occurring problems. These findings suggest specific areas of focus in LDS marriage preparation programs and for those who assist couples in preparing for marriage. A secondary comparison of the findings with those of a sample of Protestant clergy counselors confirmed strikingly similar identification and ranking of problems for LDS and Protestant premarital and remarital couples.*

Geiss and O'Leary (1981) stated that marital problems are one of the three leading reasons people enter therapy. Alleviating marital problems and divorce would save enormous personal, social and economic costs (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993; Duncan & Markman, 1988). Even though treatments for marital problems have generally proven effective (Doherty & Simmons, 1996; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993), it can be argued that "treatment programs are akin to closing the proverbial barn door after the horse has left" (Markman & Hahlweg, 1993 p. 29).

In the United States, out of 100 marriages occurring

on a given day, some 54 are first marriages for the bride and groom, while the other 46 are marriages in which at least one of the partners have been married previously

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(Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). With divorce rates suggesting that approximately 40 % of first marriages, and an even higher percent of remarital couples will eventually divorce, alleviating divorce could be seen as one of the primary tasks of mental health professionals (Stahmann, 2000).

In the recent years there have been several studies highlighting the benefits of marriage (Center of the American Experiment and Coalition for Marriage, Family & Couples Education, 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2001; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). There has also been important literature focusing on methods for improving preparation for marriage (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000; Stahmann, 2000; Williams, Riley, Risch, & Van Dyke, 1999). At the same time, professional and lay interest and activity in marriage preparation activities in communities and churches has increased dramatically with such efforts as marriage mentoring, community marriage initiatives (McManus, 1995), and a major national organization, the Coalition for Marriage, Family & Couples Education (CMFCE) with its web site and annual meeting focusing on marriage preparation and marriage enrichment (see <[www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com)>).

Wright (1977) has argued that a major contributor to marital problems and divorce is inadequate preparation for marriage. Bagarozzi, Bagarozzi, Anderson & Pollane (1984) recommend that the most effective preparation takes into account developmental tasks that a couple must resolve successfully if they are to enjoy a satisfying relationship. Since all couples do not face the same issues or developmental tasks, many experts (Fowers, Montel & Olson, 1996; Bishop, 1993; Williams, 1992; Bagarozzi, et al., 1984; Schumm & Denton, 1979) recognize a need for preventative counseling tailored to specific groups or populations, such as religious denominations (Anderson, Browning, Evison & Van Leeuwen, 1998; Center for Marriage & Family, 1995; Bishop, 1993; Rolfe, 1985; Bagarozzi, et al., 1984; Schumm & Denton, 1979; Boike, 1977; Microys & Bader, 1977; Wright, 1977; Oates & Rowatt, 1975; Gangsei, 1971).

Koltko (1990), citing May (1980) and Shippy (1985), stated that because of their beliefs, history and culture, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) are a distinct ethnic and religious group. With LDS church members representing the fifth largest religious body in the United States (Koltko, 1990; Stark,

1984), and with LDS divorce rates similar to the national average (Heaton, 1992), it is probable that a counselor or therapist will work with LDS clients. In anticipation of this event, it seems important for counselors to be aware of information which may be helpful when working with LDS couples preparing for a first marriage or remarriage, or for helping them adjust after marriage.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to discover which problem/complaint areas LDS mental health professionals identify as the most (1) frequently occurring, (2) most damaging to marriage and (3) most difficult to deal with in marriage preparation among LDS premarital and remarital couples. The sample consisted of members of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP), who were asked to rate 29 potential problem areas that couples might face, as identified in a previous study of marriage problems (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981). Geiss and O'Leary (1981) affirmed that it was appropriate to seek information from practitioners to determine guidelines for focusing and directing research and clinical practice. In the present study, AMCAP members were the practitioners studied.

Giblin (1994) stated that effective premarital counseling needs to provide couples with a realistic sense of potential problems associated with marriage and family life. Knowing specifically what needs and problems should be addressed is one of the most important tasks related to successful premarital counseling (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997; Williams, 1992; Bagarozzi, et al., 1984; Schumm & Denton, 1979). It was anticipated that the results of this study would be useful to marriage preparation providers who may work with an LDS population.

### METHOD

#### Sample

The sample used in this study came from members of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP) living within the United States:

AMCAP is an international professional organization of counselors, psychotherapists and others in helping professions whose common bond is adherence to the principles and standards of the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints. Individual opinions and ideas do not necessarily reflect those of the AMCAP board or the general AMCAP membership. AMCAP is neither sponsored by nor does it speak for the LDS church or its leaders. (AMCAP, 2002)

A "Marriage Preparation Provider Questionnaire for AMCAP Members" (MPPQ-AMCAP) was sent to each of 847 AMCAP members living within the United States. A postage paid return envelope was included. Two weeks following the initial mailing of the questionnaires, a follow-up reminder was sent to each person indicating the importance of returning the questionnaire. In order preserve anonymity of the AMCAP members surveyed, only two sets of mailing labels were generated with no identifying information kept by the researchers, so that additional follow-up to those who did not return a questionnaire was not possible.

Over a period of six months, 350 usable MPPQ-AMCAP questionnaires were returned (41%). This response rate was determined to be acceptable, considering that the response rate for a major national study of marriage and family therapists was 34%, which was viewed as "typical for questionnaires sent to professionals" (Doherty & Simmons, 1996, p. 12). Information from the last page of the six-page MPPQ-AMCAP survey was used for this study. The last page was accurately and totally completed by 231 respondents. Doherty & Simmons (1996) suggest that there is variation in response rates on different parts of a questionnaire. That was certainly confirmed by this study: The lower usable response rate on the last part of the MPPQ-AMCAP questionnaire may be attributed to the length of the questionnaire and the extremely careful reading required for completion of the final page.

### Sample Demographics

The MPPQ-AMCAP questionnaire contained questions with regard to demographic variables such as marital status, professional identification, number of years experience in profession, gender, age and the number of premarital and remarital couples seen in the last twelve months.

Nearly all of the 231 responding AMCAP members were married (203 or 87.9%) at the time they completed the survey. Of those married, 175 (75.8%) were currently married to their first spouse and 28 (12.1%) were remarried. Of those not currently married 11 (4.8%)

had never been married, 4 (1.7%) were separated, 8 (3.5%) were divorced and 4 (1.7%) were widowed. All respondents indicated membership in the LDS Church.

In response to professional identification approximately 90% identified as mental health professionals. Of those identifying themselves as mental health professionals, 67 (29%) identified themselves as "social workers;" 61 (26.4%) identified themselves as "counselors;" 43 (18.6%) "marriage and family therapists;" 28 (12.1%) "psychologists;" 6 (2.6%) "clinical sociologist," and 1 (.4%) as a "psychiatrist." The remaining 10% identified themselves as something other than those already described.

The mean number of years of experience in these professions was identified as 15.8 years. The majority of respondents were male 149 (64.5%) with 82 (35.5%) female. The mean age of respondents was 48.9 years. Respondents reported that the mean number of premarital couples seen during the previous twelve months was 3.3 couples. Also they reported an average of 2.5 remarital couples seen during the same time period.

### Procedure

Using the same 29 problem areas outlined by Geiss & O'Leary (1981) (with the exception that the term "premarital affairs" was used instead of "extra-marital affairs"), AMCAP members were first requested to estimate the percentage of LDS first marriage and remarriage couples who would have problems or complaints in each of the 29 areas. Next, they were requested to indicate five problems areas that would be most damaging to an LDS first marriage and remarriage. Lastly, the AMCAP respondents were requested to select five problem areas they believed would be most difficult to deal with in premarital counseling with LDS first marriage and remarriage couples. Respondents were asked to give these ratings separately for both first marriages and remarriages.

## RESULTS

### Most Frequent Problems

Table 1 contains information on LDS counselor's estimates of the percentage of LDS premarital and remarital couples who would have problems/complaints in each of 29 problem categories. The MPPQ-AMCAP questionnaire asked the respondents to estimate the percentage of LDS couples (first marriages and remarriages) who would have problems/complaints in each of the 29 areas listed.

**Table 1**

Mean Percentage Estimates and Ranking by LDS Counselors of Most Frequently Occurring Problem Areas for LDS Premarital and Remarital Couples

For LDS Premarital Couples. (N=218)	%	For LDS Remarital Couples. (N=192)	%
Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse	70.7%	Communication	71.3%
Communication	68.9%	Children	70.7%
Money management/finances	57.9%	Problems related to previous marriage	63.7%
Decision making/problem solving	54.4%	Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse	60.3%
Power struggles	53.1%	Money management/finances	60.2%
Sex	50.4%	Power struggles	56.4%
Role conflicts	45.9%	Decision making/problem solving	55.5%
Demonstration of affection	43.1%	Sex	49.2%
In-laws/relatives	39.8%	Role conflicts	48.1%
Employment/job	38.3%	Serious individual problems	47.6%
Value conflicts	37.8%	Demonstration of affection	46.0%
Children	37.2%	In-laws/relatives	44.8%
Household management	34.2%	Value conflicts	44.2%
Serious individual problems	32.5%	Jealousy	41.5%
Jealousy	31.5%	Employment/job	39.7%
Lack of loving feelings	29.0%	Household management	38.1%
Conventionality	27.9%	Lack of loving feelings	37.5%
Recreation/leisure time	27.5%	Pre-marital affairs	36.1%
Pre-marital affairs	27.2%	Recreation/leisure time	30.1%
Personal habits/appearance	23.6%	Conventionality	29.8%
Religious differences	23.0%	Religious differences	29.3%
Friends	22.9%	Friends	27.7%
Addictive behavior other than alcoholism	20.8%	Addictive behavior other than alcoholism	27.5%
Physical abuse	20.1%	Personal habits/appearance	27.0%
Incest	18.3%	Psychosomatic problems	26.9%
Psychosomatic problems	18.2%	Physical abuse	25.1%
Health problems/physical handicap	14.0%	Incest	23.2%
Alcoholism	13.5%	Health problems/physical handicap	20.6%
Problems related to previous marriage	13.2%	Alcoholism	20.0%

As shown in Table 1, LDS counselor ratings of the percentage of occurrence for each of the 29 problem areas in LDS first marriages ranged from 71% to 13%. Six areas emerged in which counselors rated problems as occurring in at least 50% of first marriages. Those six areas and the estimated percentage of occurrence included: Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse 71%, Communication 69%, Money management/finances 58%, Decision making/problem solving 54%, Power struggles 53%, and Sex 50%. The other 23 problem areas and LDS counselor's estimates of the percentage of LDS premarital couples who would have each problem/complaint are shown in Table 1.

Also, as shown in Table 1, LDS counselor ratings of problems occurring in LDS remarriages ranged from 71% to 20% for the 29 areas. There were seven areas in which counselors rated problems as occurring in at least 50% of remarriages. Those seven areas and the estimated percentage of occurrence were: Communication = 71%, Children = 71%, Problems related to previous marriage = 64%, Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse = 60%, Money management/finances = 60%, Power struggles = 56% and Decision making/problem solving = 56%. The other 22 problem areas and counselor estimates of the percentage of LDS remarital couples who would have each problem/complaint ratings are shown.

### Most Damaging Problems

Table 2 contains the ratings by AMCAP members as to which five of the 29 problem areas would be most damaging to LDS premarital and remarital couples. The top five (of 29 areas) rated as most damaging problem areas for LDS first marriages rated were: (1) Communication, (2) Incest, (3) Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse, (4) Physical abuse, and (5) Money management/finances.

Also, in Table 2, LDS counselor ratings as to which

**Table 2**

Ratings by LDS Counselors of Five Most Damaging Problem Areas for LDS Premarital & Remarital Couples

For LDS Premarital Couples	For LDS Remarital Couples
1. Communication	1. Communication
2. Incest	2. Incest
3. Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse	3. Children
4. Physical abuse	4. Problems related to previous marriage
5. Money management/finances	5. Physical Abuse

five of the 29 problem areas would be most damaging to LDS remarriages are shown. The five most damaging problem areas rated for LDS remarriages were: 1) Communication, 2) Incest, 3) Children, 4) Problems related to first marriage, and 5) Physical abuse.

### Most Difficult to Treat Problems

Table 3 contains AMCAP counselor estimates as to which problems/complaints would be most difficult to deal with in premarital counseling with LDS premarital and remarital couples. The five most difficult problem areas to treat with couples entering a first marriage were: 1) Incest, 2) Serious individual problems, 3) Sex, 4) Alcoholism, and 5) Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse.

Also, in Table 3, LDS counselor ratings of problems which would be most difficult to treat in working with LDS remarriages are shown. The top five most difficult to treat problem areas in working with LDS remarriages are: (1) Problems related to previous marriage, (2) Incest, (3) Serious individual problems, (4) Children, and (5) Alcoholism.

## DISCUSSION

### LDS Counselor Perceptions

The results of this study revealed the problems/complaints that LDS counselors rated as the most frequently occurring, most damaging to marriage, and most difficult to deal with in premarital counseling with LDS premarital and remarital couples. Such information can be useful to mental health professionals who work with premarital couples as well as others such as educators, teachers, and those who work in ecclesiastical roles and settings.

It can be noted that for those couples entering first marriages, four of the six most frequently occurring problems are related to skills. Thus, communication, decision-making, power struggles and dealing with money management and finances are all problems that can be resolved, or more effectively dealt with, by skill building or skill enhancement. We agree with others that virtually all couples can benefit from skill enhancement (Stanley, 2001). That is not to say that all couples are deficit, rather that the skills in such areas as those mentioned can be reviewed and strengthened. In fact, skill enhancement and enrichment are among the very pur-

Table 3

Ratings by LDS Counselors of Five Most Difficult Areas to Deal with in Marriage Preparation for LDS Premarital & Remarital Couples

For LDS Premarital Couples	For LDS Remarital Couples
1. Incest	1. Problems related to previous marriage
2. Serious Individual Problems	2. Incest
3. Sex	3. Serious Individual Problems
4. Alcoholism	4. Children
5. Unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse	5. Alcoholism

poses of premarital intervention by counselors, educators, and ecclesiastical leaders.

The other two top problem areas for first marriages, unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse, and sex, are areas that can often be resolved and more adequately dealt with when couples have appropriate information about what to expect in marriage. Here formal information such as reading books or articles and taking classes can be helpful. Informal means such as talking with parents, counselors, teachers, and ecclesiastical leaders can also be helpful.

For LDS remarital couples, the resolution of four of the seven frequently occurring problems identified can be seen as related to skill enhancement. Two others areas, "unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse" and "children" fall into the category of obtaining appropriate information about what to expect in marriage and when children are already present in a remarriage. One problem area often facing remarital couples, that of problems related to a previous marriage, is in the category requiring more therapeutic work and should usually be handled with a trained professional. Here the couple can likely benefit from conjoint and/or individual therapy. When non-therapy trained premarital workers such as ecclesiastical leaders, teachers, or marriage mentors come across a couple facing issues related to a previous marriage, or other deeper problems, appropriate referral or consultation should be made.

### Comparison of LDS and Protestant Clergy Counselor Ratings

Because the authors had access to similar data from a national study of Protestant clergy premarital counselors, it was decided to compare the results of the present study and those of a study of clergy premarital counselors and their perceptions of the most frequent, most



**Table 4**

Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Most Frequent Problems Faced by Couples Entering a First Marriage

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse	1. Communication
2. Communication	2. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse
3. Money Management/Finances	3. Money Management/Finances
4. Decision Making/Problem Solving	4. Decision Making/Problem Solving
5. Power Struggles	5. Power Struggles

**Table 5**

A Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Most Frequent Problems Faced by Remarital Couples

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Communication	1. Communication
2. Children	2. Children
3. Problems Related to Previous Marriage	3. Problems Related to Previous Marriage
4. Money Management/Finances	4. Power Struggles
5. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse	5. Money Management/Finances

**Table 6**

A Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Problems Most Damaging to First Marriages

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Communication	1. Communication
2. Incest	2. Money Management/Finances
3. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse	3. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse
4. Physical Abuse	4. Alcoholism
5. Money Management/Finances	5. Physical Abuse

**Table 7**

A Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Problems Most Damaging to Remarriages

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Communication	1. Communication
2. Incest	2. Alcoholism
3. Children	3. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse
4. Problems Related to Previous Marriage	4. Power Struggles
5. Physical Abuse	5. Children

damaging and most difficult to treat problems facing premarital couples whom they counsel. In that study, the sample was 238 clergy representing six denominations

from 44 states and every geographical region in the United States (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997).

The results of the clergy study and the present study of LDS counselors showed similar results in the rankings of the top five problems facing couples entering a first marriage (see Table 4).

The top five problems as rated by LDS and Protestant clergy counselors are the same. Only the first two areas are inverted in rank. Here is evidence that, from the perception of religious counselors preparing couples for first marriages, it is important to include information and discussion of marital expectations, communication, money management and finances, decision making and problem solving, and recognizing and dealing with power struggles.

Looking at the rankings for remarriages in Table 5, LDS and Protestant clergy counselors share the same overall perceptions of which are the most frequent problems (of 29 problems listed) for couples who are planning to marry where at least one partner has been previously married. Communication, children, and problems related to a previous marriage all emerged as being ranked the same in frequency—1, 2, and 3. Both groups rated money management/finances as being in the top five problems (# 4 by LDS counselors and # 5 by clergy counselors). Power struggles was ranked as # 4 by clergy counselors. LDS counselors ranked unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse as # 5.

As to the most damaging problems to first marriages and remarriages, the LDS and clergy counselors ranked communication as the most damaging problem for both first marriages and remarriages. See Tables 6 and 7. It is generally accepted that communication is a skill that is necessary for, but not sufficient for, a satisfactory marital relationship (Stanley, et. al., 1998). Perhaps that is what these counselors are saying, that communication is a core skill and without good communication a couple can likely do little else in the marriage.

It is noted that both the LDS and clergy counselors identified and ranked four of the same 29 problems as being most damaging to first marriages. Both groups included physical abuse among the most damaging problems. In addition, LDS counselors ranked incest as being in the top five most damaging problems while Protestant clergy counselors included alcoholism as being among the five top problems.

When asked about the most difficult problems to deal with in marriage preparation both groups identified

**Table 8**

Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Problems Most Difficult to Deal with in First Marriage Preparation

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Incest	1. Addictive Behavior other than Alcoholism
2. Serious Individual Problems	2. Alcoholism
3. Sex	3. Serious Individual Problems
4. Alcoholism	4. Incest
5. Unrealistic Expectations of Marriage or Spouse	5. Physical Abuse

**Table 9**

Comparison of LDS Counselor and Protestant Clergy Responses to Problems Most Difficult to Deal with in Remarriage Preparation

LDS Counselors	Protestant Clergy Counselors
1. Problems Related to Previous Marriage	1. Incest
2. Incest	2. Alcoholism
3. Serious Individual Problems	3. Addictive Behavior other than Alcoholism
4. Children	4. Serious Individual Problems
5. Alcoholism	5. Physical Abuse

much more severe problems than the earlier questions of most frequent and most damaging problems. As shown in Tables 8 and 9, the problems identified are generally those requiring intensive individual, couple, or family psychotherapy. Both groups of counselors identified incest, serious individual problems and alcoholism as being among the top five most difficult problems to deal with. The findings here are useful to alert marriage preparation providers as to the reality of such problems as incest, alcoholism, serious individual problems, physical abuse, and addictive behaviors other than alcoholism. Appropriate referral can then be made.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of marriage in the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is clear: "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God ... marriage between man and woman is essential to his eternal plan" (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995, p. 102). Over 25 years ago, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

I believe that the most important single thing that any Latter-day Saint ever does in this world is to marry the right person, in the right place, by the right authority, and that ... the most important remaining thing that any Latter-day Saint can ever do is so to live that the terms and conditions of the covenant ... will be binding ... now and forever. (McConkie, 1975, p. 38)

Yet, the LDS church endorses no standardized program or process of marriage preparation or premarital education. And while this may be an accurate statement of church policy, there is much effort put forth by ecclesiastical leaders and lay church members to assist in preparing for and strengthening marriages (Holman, Larson & Stahmann, 2000). It is to that end, that the perceptions of LDS counselors in regard to the frequency, severity and difficulty of dealing with 29 potential marital problem areas which might be encountered in LDS first marriages and remarriages, is relevant. It is anticipated that these results may be useful for counselors, educators and clergy in developing marriage preparation programs designed to prepare LDS couples for common challenges.

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# The Paradoxical Nature of Sin: Explorations on the Nature and Uses of Falling Short in Life

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*Sin is an inevitable reality of mortal experience and represents a paradox: although sin should always be shunned, it nonetheless plays a necessary part in our spiritual growth and progress. This paper explores the nature of paradox, the relationship between good and evil, and the ways in which the reality of sin can ultimately be used for human learning, development, and evolution. Innocence and purity are virtues, but the humility and suffering which accompany sin can open the way, through the atonement of Christ, to far greater virtues: compassion, charity, tolerance, and understanding.*

Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression, my eyes are opened... (Moses 5:10)

Joseph Smith offered a profound insight when he said, "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest" (1844 letter to Daniel Rupp; see Smith, 1976, vol. 6, p. 428). In other words, by examining paradoxes, we can discover truth. More recently, M. Scott Peck (1987) made a similar comment:

If a concept is paradoxical, that itself should suggest that it smacks of integrity, that it gives off the ring of truth. Conversely, if a concept is not in the least paradoxical, you should be suspicious of it and suspect that it has failed to integrate some aspect of the whole. (Peck, 1987, p. 238)

This, of course, doesn't mean that all paradoxical concepts are true, but rather, that if ideas have a paradoxical nature to them, they are more likely to be true than those without a contrary side. What then are paradoxes? Paradoxes are seemingly contradictory or incompatible

ideas which, when combined together, contain truth. Not surprisingly, the gospel contains numerous paradoxical statements and ideas:<sup>1</sup>

Many who are first shall be last and the last first.  
(Mark 10:31)

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matt 23:12)

He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant.  
(Matt. 23:11)

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:39)

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.  
(Matt. 5:5)

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In spite of the seeming inconsistencies inherent in this small sample of gospel teachings, we still accept such statements as containing profound spiritual truths. We do this because we believe the big picture the gospel provides, which asserts a reality separate from the things of this world – a reality in which charity, faith, humility, and sacrifice are eternal, blessed virtues, and are rewarded. Because we accept a larger, paradoxical scheme of a universe which is both spiritual and temporal, these smaller paradoxes make sense: the meek of the earth really can inherit the glories of heaven, and the humble really can be the strongest of all. Paradoxes, then, are devices which can be used to help us see at a deeper level, to change our perceptions of reality. They encourage us to challenge traditional concepts, to explore new possibilities, to soften rigid boundaries and categories, and thus to undergo not just a change of mind but a change of heart, which is repentance in its most basic form (see Toscano & Toscano, 1983).

Sin represents such a paradox – although we are commanded to always avoid and shun sin, it nonetheless plays a necessary part in our spiritual growth and evolution. While not the only way to grow and develop, the processes of sin and atonement provide a significant portion of life's most powerful lessons. Sin is one of mortality's riskiest experiences, but this risk was foreseen and deemed necessary by an omniscient, benevolent God. This idea may strike many as unorthodox, speculative, or even dangerous. Yet, it may not be as radical as it seems. I have long recognized within myself that my own mistakes and sins have ultimately served a crucial role in furthering my development and learning. My professional and ecclesiastical experiences, as well as statements by church leaders, have reinforced these truths. President Joseph F. Smith said:

It is for the benefit of his sons and daughters that they become acquainted with evil as well as good, with darkness as well as light, with error as well as truth, and with the results of the infraction of eternal laws. Therefore, he has permitted the evils which have been brought about by the acts of his creatures, but will control their ultimate results for his own glory and the progress and exaltation of his sons and daughters, when they have learned obedience by the things they suffer. The contrasts experienced in this world of mingled sorrow and joy are *educational in their nature*, and will be the means of raising humanity to a full appreciation of all that is right, true and good. (Smith, 1998, p. 286)

Many scriptures encourage us to ponder the gospel, and to seek further light and knowledge regarding the mysteries of God (1 Nephi 2:16, 10:19; Mosiah 2:9; Alma 12:9-11; 3 Nephi 17:3; Moroni 10:3; D&C 6:7, 11:7, 42:61, 63:23). Pondering is, by its very nature, speculative. If done with a sensitivity to the Spirit of Truth, such "seeking" can be positive and beneficial in various ways. It can help our faith to remain vibrant and alive. It can be an antidote to dogmatism. It can shed new light on previously accepted truths. It can broach new categories of thought. Mormonism, perhaps more than any other Christian faith, provides rich and fertile ground for speculation because its theology is so open-ended; a faith which teaches that God has created "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33) and asserts "as man is God once was, and as God is man may become" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:368) provides endless avenues for pondering. We may shy away from speculating for fear of being wrong, being deceived, or somehow discovering something new which would challenge our faith. These are real concerns. However, such concerns should not outweigh the opposing risk of being lulled into complacency by our comfortably accepted traditions and unofficial creeds (such as "faithful Latter-day Saints only vote Republican").

The proper role of speculation should not be to create new doctrine, a new gospel, or a new church; rather, it should be to move us further into our religion and deeper into our faith and convictions, ultimately serving to enhance our desires for Christian discipleship and the embracing of life.

The sections which follow briefly outline philosophical and spiritual principles relative to sin's paradoxical nature and discuss some of the potential "uses" of falling short in life. These ideas support the view that sin, along with its attending effects, provides an important component in the growth process. Although inherently destructive, sin can, with divine help, ultimately be transcended and play an essential part in the betterment of humanity.

#### THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: CONTINUAL VS. DICHOTOMOUS

Consider these three quotes:

We must beware thinking of good and evil as absolute opposites ... Recognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativizes the good and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole. (Jung, 1958, p. 329)

Dichotomizing pathologizes. Isolating two interrelated parts of a whole from each other, parts that need each other, parts that are truly “parts” and not wholes, distorts them both, sickens and contaminates them. (Maslow, 1970, pg. 13)

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one. (Lehi, 2 Nephi 2:11)

A common belief is that good and evil represent static, permanently affixed, dichotomous extremes which have no relation or connection with each other, as represented by these two figures:



According to this view, all goodness is a state of purity, all evil is a state of corruption, and never the twain shall meet. A more accurate view of these concepts depicts them as existing on a continuum, rather than as entirely separate and distinct:



When good and evil are understood in this way, we realize that they exist on a gradient, and that, while polarized, they are not dichotomous.<sup>2</sup> Such a view does not obliterate nor confuse either category (as warned against in Isaiah 5:20), but rather acknowledges the complexity of each, and the difficulty in clearly demarcating where one wholly begins and the other completely ends. Thus choices or actions might be evaluated as being “better” or “worse,” rather than as being entirely good or entirely evil. For example, is it a greater good to be present at church to give an assigned lesson, or to risk being late or absent in order to provide assistance to someone stranded on the roadside? Is it a greater good to give money to a beggar who asks, even if he might spend the money on alcohol or drugs, or to withhold in order to avoid contributing to his substance abuse? Or is it a greater evil to drop a nuclear weapon over a large civilian population in hopes of swiftly ending a war, or

to face the enemy’s military might on a soldier-to-soldier basis, and take the attending casualties? Questions such as these support the view that good and evil are entities-in-relation, inextricably intertwined with each other, both theoretically and practically. Goodness is meaningless without evil to oppose it, since neither good nor evil can be actualized without the presence or potential of the other (2 Nephi 2:11, 13, 23). No one can live utterly uncontaminated by evil: every good can go bad. An angel can become a devil, but by the same token, every evil can generate a good.

### THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXT

Once good and evil are viewed as a continuum rather than as dichotomous extremes, context becomes vitally important in decision-making.<sup>3</sup> An action taken in one context could be deemed as exalting or righteous, whereas the same action taken by the same person in a different context could be considered both damaging and unrighteous. Even with respect to such seemingly black-and-white alternatives as killing or not killing, stealing or not stealing, context can make a significant difference. Consider, for example, the classic case of Nephi and Laban (1 Nephi 4). Nephi was commanded by God to take possession of the plates, but Laban did not wish to part with his property. Nephi faced a difficult situation: either disobey God and fail to bring back the plates, or listen to the Spirit which encouraged him to break certain commandments in order to obey God – to behead the drunken and defenseless Laban, impersonate him, take his property, and flee with it into the desert. Another example involves a comparison between the Anti-Nephi-Lehis (Alma 24) and King Saul (1 Samuel 15). In one context, the Anti-Nephi-Lehis’ refusal to inflict harm on an enemy in any way, even in defense of their own lives, was deemed an example of great righteousness, while in another context, King Saul’s refusal to completely annihilate the Amalekites signaled his fall from grace.

Moses 6:60 further suggests a contextual, continual understanding of good and evil: “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified.” As Robert Gleave (2000) has suggested, one approach to understanding this verse is that a hierarchy is depicted which involves differing paradigms of life in a gospel context. The foundational

paradigm addresses entering into the waters of baptism as a token of one's obedience to and acceptance of Christ and the new covenant. New church members come into the church from a variety of contexts. A potential exists for much confusion and uncertainty. These fledgling members need a structure which places their feet firmly on the gospel path: rules, commandments, and guidelines provide this needed structure.

As new members increase in experience and maturity within the gospel, becoming more familiar with the rules, laws, and structures of the church, this beginning paradigm becomes insufficient in and of itself. They realize that the commandments can sometimes be in collision.<sup>4</sup> In situations such as these, the second paradigm becomes important: "by the Spirit ye are justified" (Moses 6:60). The Spirit can prompt us toward which of two seemingly righteous or less righteous alternatives to choose – even which commandment to break – in a given situation. Paramount here is that it is not self-interest which reigns supreme, but rather the workings of the Spirit, guiding toward the right choice given the context involved.

Gleave (2000) goes on to suggest that this approach should not be confused with situational ethics. Real-life decision-making is complex because it so often includes multiple backgrounds, circumstances, and conditions. Subtle interactions between a loving, patient, tutoring God and a struggling son or daughter with mortal limitations offer a much richer reality than can be captured by the concept of situational ethics. Through sensitivity to the Spirit, a divinely appointed grounding exists upon which to base decisions. Choices are not, however, limited only to dichotomous deciding with either/or, right/wrong possibilities. Rather, life presents a "mixed bag" in which few choices are clearly flawed or clearly without flaw. Even righteous choices can contain shades of gray; conversely, even some of the worst decisions can be motivated by positive desires, intentions, and aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: POTENTIAL VS. ACTUAL

Every person who ever lived has inevitably sinned (Romans 3:23). While it would be a logical fallacy to assume "inevitability presumes necessity," the ubiquity of sin is nonetheless an intriguing reality. As members of the same eternal species, gods, devils, and human beings

each possess the potential for doing good and evil. Having the potential for evil is not a tragic attribute. God has this potential. This is because he is a free and intelligent being. Ancient prophets have underscored this reality by declaring that God could cease to be God if he did or did not do certain things (2 Nephi 2:13; Alma 12:31; 42:13). In spite of this, God actualizes only the good. This is why the scriptures say that God is good and there is no darkness in him (1 John 1:5). Devils, on the other hand, have the capacity to do good, but actualize only evil, while human beings actualize both good and evil – and therefore have the capacity to ultimately become either gods or devils.

Ancient scripture and modern revelation declare that God's spirit sons and daughters had the potential for good and evil premortally, just as they do now (D&C 29:36; Moses 4:6; Abr. 3:19, 22, 23; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:4, 9). One-third of his offspring ultimately made choices incompatible with either their remaining in the heavens with God or coming to earth mortally. Were all of these individuals entirely evil, totally devoid of any good or virtuous qualities? By the same token, does the fact that those who aligned themselves with Jehovah imply they only chose the good in their premortal state, or that they were entirely holy? Both seem unlikely, especially in light of D&C 93:38, which states that premortal spirits were *innocent*, not perfect, from the beginning. As Fischer (2001) has pointed out, this is an important distinction. Perfect spirits do nothing wrong, and thus have nothing held against them. Innocent spirits are, by contrast, not perfect, but they are not held responsible for failings or shortcomings. For reasons not fully understood, the one-third who chose to align themselves with Satan were cast down to Earth in disembodied form, actualizing only evil, while the remainder were given the privilege of experiencing mortality, to be allowed to actualize both good and evil – both to refine and to prove which each one would ultimately prize (Abr. 3:25).

Why do human beings actualize evil? Church members typically endorse one of two opposing views:

- that human beings are *spiritually flawed* (this is *not* the same as saying humans are inherently evil) – that in spite of one's best efforts, no one cannot consistently avoid evil and choose good;
- that human beings are *spiritually sound*, but lack the proper guidance and direction to be consistently good.

Knowing which perspective we endorse is significant, because these beliefs lay a foundation for how we approach our own and others' lives. If we are spiritually flawed, then spiritual empowerment (becoming "born again"), replenishment (renewal of covenants), and regeneration (progressive repentance) is called for. If we are spiritually sound but unenlightened, then the answer is knowing proper laws, receiving proper guidance and education, and then following these to the letter. The scriptures support the first alternative as the ultimate solution (1 Nephi 10:6; Mosiah 4:5). Because humanity is *fallen*, no matter how hard we might try to live by all the proper teachings, moral exhortations, directives, and commandments we are given, we will not always be able to choose good and will need a Savior's grace to be redeemed (2 Nephi 25:23; Mosiah 2:21). Rules, regulations, and exhortations are both helpful and necessary, but they are not sufficient in themselves to keep people from actualizing evil. The potential for sin can be clarified by the law, but not eliminated by it. That is why the law can only be a schoolmaster to teach us of our plight and encourage us to look for the cure: Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24).

#### THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: BRINGING GOOD OUT OF EVIL

For man must strive, and striving he must err.  
(Goethe, 1998, *Faust: Part One*)

Because good and evil are so inextricably linked together, no one can live utterly uncontaminated by evil. As a result, God can either write off humanity completely, or he can work, over time and throughout eternity, to reclaim as many as possible. Fortunately, he chooses the second alternative (Moses 1:39). It is not enough for him to say, as did Milton's God (in *Paradise Lost*):

...Whose fault?  
Whose but his own? Ingrate! He had of me  
All he could have; I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, but free to fall...  
...they cannot justly accuse  
Their maker, or their making, or their fate...  
...they themselves decreed  
Their own revolt, not I...  
...they themselves ordained their fall.  
(John Milton, 1998, Chapter 3, Book III)

Mere condemnation does not make a bad or painful situation better. More is required if good is to be brought out of evil, if paradise is ever to be regained – and God does much more. He does not obliterate us out of existence for our evil, but consistently extends himself to his creations, most often in subtle, quiet, gentle ways, offering us grace after grace, unworthy though we may be, that our evil may ultimately be transcended (2 Nephi 9:10). God is good not because he is utterly disassociated from evil, but because he is willing, through personal sacrifice, to bring good out of evil. Examples are many, but a few include the redemption of Saul/Paul (Acts 9), and the sin of David and Bathsheba giving rise to the lineage of the Messiah (Matt. 1:6). Through experiencing the transformation of evil into good, human beings grow and evolve spiritually. And as Moses 1:39 points out, human spiritual evolution is the process by which God continues to be glorified: "For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

#### THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST: VEHICLE OF PARADOX

The ideas presented thus far help explain the potential role of sin and its transcendable nature. However, the degeneracy and estrangement caused by sin would remain a permanent, ironclad reality without the one true source of syntropy in the universe: the atonement of Jesus Christ. Without the atonement, sin has no paradoxical nature. The atonement turns sin on its head – good is brought out of evil, light out of darkness, fullness out of emptiness, health out of sickness, and perfection out of imperfection. Through the atonement of Christ, evil does not remain a permanent fixture on the eternal landscape, shutting humanity out from God's presence forever. Christ's great and last sacrifice is the renewing life-source, the cleansing power extended to humans by which the pain, suffering, and damage done by sin can be eradicated and ultimately transcended.

Resisting sin as a primary "test" of mortality is a truism so widely accepted in the church that it hardly bears mentioning. Yet none but Christ has been able to live completely free of sin. Does this imply that he is the only one who has ever passed the test? The answer is "yes" only if we assume that "passing" means living a sinless life. Rather than living without sin, our objective, as the scriptures point out, is to "endure to the end" (1 Nephi 13:37; Alma



32:15; 3 Nephi 27:16). Dr. Hugh Nibley, in his regularly pithy style, has defined this small phrase as meaning “continuing to forgive, and continuing to repent” (Nibley, 1985). This suggests what is already known: everyone will be unsuccessful in the attempt to completely avoid impurity. Humanity’s primary objective therefore becomes to *progressively repent* while immersed in the manifold convolutions of a telestial world. If this is the case, how can the reality of sin in our lives be of any use to us?

#### FALLING SHORT IN LIFE: POTENTIAL USES

Sin and repentance are a natural process of growth initiated by Adam and Eve and made possible by the teachings, example, and atoning, unconditional love of our Savior. (England, 1997)

A well-known maxim states that one way or another, life gives us precisely what we need. Some have called this idea the “school of hard knocks.” Perhaps another way of stating this is to say that we play out in life core vulnerabilities and issues until they are learned or mastered. This is not to say that life doesn’t often just “happen,” but rather, it is to say that everyone has certain strengths and weaknesses; the multifaceted conditions of life provide stimulus for all to project and act out the capacities for good and evil (Fischer, 2000). This idea is similar to what is known in psychology as the “projective hypothesis,” which asserts that when confronted with an ambiguous stimulus, human beings will project upon that stimulus their own individual modes of perceiving the world and behaving in it. Such “projections” will be both for the good and the bad; strengths and weaknesses will be played out. In other words, along the way, everyone will make poor choices and commit sins. But this need not be tragic. To the extent that many sins spring from core vulnerabilities, these sins can be of use if recognized as arising from areas of deficiency or specific weakness. Sins inevitably have consequences, and consequences can be instructive. They enhance learning, and with learning, resolution often follows. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities need to be addressed and accessed if they are to be ultimately worked through. Sometimes, making specific errors and mistakes allows for learning and resolution at the deepest level.

This brings up the issue of vicarious learning versus real-life experience. Without question, human beings do

learn a great deal through vicarious channels, such as through observing others,<sup>6</sup> reading books, and hearing stories. We may be much better off learning certain lessons vicariously (i.e., “the easy way”) rather than “the hard way.” Yet, if vicarious channels were sufficient for all the types of learning upon which eternal life is based, then why even come to earth? Why not simply observe from the safety of the heavens the foibles of a few mortals on earth and resolve not to repeat their mistakes? Anyone looking sincerely within will likely concur with Theodore Reik (1948), a brilliant student of Freud’s, when he said,

... [I seem to have had] an inability to learn from other people’s mistakes. All the wisdom of proverbs and all exhortations and warnings seem useless to me. If I am to learn from the mistakes of others, I must make them on my own ... [What’s more], I am almost incapable of learning from my own mistakes unless I have repeated them several times. (Reik, 1948, p. xii)

Vicarious channels of learning, significant though they may be, are insufficient in and of themselves to learn certain lessons. Take, for example, the experience of pain, whether it be the physical pain of an injury, or the emotional pain accompanying the loss of a loved one. The film *Shadowlands* (Attenborough, 1994) portrays these realities quite well: C.S. Lewis (portrayed by Anthony Hopkins) discourses time and again in a very heady, intellectual way upon the meaning and nature of suffering. It is not until his own beloved suffers from and ultimately succumbs to a ravaging cancer that he realizes truths about suffering he never could have learned, no matter the number of books read or lectures given on the subject. This is not only true of such morally neutral experiences as physical pain and relational loss, but also of the morally charged, personal vulnerabilities everyone possesses.

I do not believe we are placed on earth to see if we can somehow manage to learn everything the easy way. If so, humanity has failed miserably, as no one has been able to do that. Rather than the purpose of life being the successful avoidance of all things impure, life’s purpose seems to include accessing both strengths and weaknesses, ultimately coming to prize the good through experiences of both obedience and disobedience. Real experience is a vital component in this process (2 Nephi 2:11-15).

Conventional wisdom asserts that people are never

better off for having sinned, that people are always better off for avoiding sin. While these ideas may have a certain face validity to them, they are also problematic on various levels.

First, such ideas are inherently pessimistic. They do not inspire hope. They tend to encourage despair over ground lost in the lifetime battle with sin. Everyone has sinned and will continue to sin. If the conventional wisdom is true, no one can never really be "better off" – the situation is ultimately hopeless because lost ground can never be regained.

Perhaps more than being merely pessimistic, such ideas seem to fly in the face of personal experience with what the prophet Amulek called the "infinite and eternal atonement" of Christ (Alma 34:14). One way the atonement is indeed infinite is that it is limitless in its ability to heal, to mend – and more than this, to enhance – what one was previously, so long as one stands before the Lord as a truly penitent soul. Everyone who has ever sinned and gone on to experience the full measure of the atonement can attest to this.

Finally, conventional wisdom asserts purity as the hallmark of God and the primary ethic for living a godlike life, whereas the revolutionary vision Jesus brought emphasized *compassion* as the truly godlike quality (Borg, 1994). While these two ideas need not be incompatible, they often come into conflict in life, just as they did in the time of Jesus. A striving for purity encourages separation and distance from everything deemed to be unclean. Compassion, on the other hand, encourages a striving for inclusiveness, tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. Compassion, in its literal sense, means "to feel with." To experience compassion is to feel the feelings of another person in a deep visceral way, and to be compassionate is to be moved to do something for another person because of those feelings. Compassion becomes possible only by developing the ability to relate others' difficulty, suffering, and pain to our own.<sup>7</sup> If we feel threatened by or disconnected from the reality of our own "shadow"—our dark and often troublesome inner self—if we do not allow ourselves to acknowledge the reality of our own inner complexity and sinful tendencies (Jung & Jaffe, 1989), we are much more likely to project upon others a spirit of rejection and intolerance. We tend to be repulsed by or to hate in others what is hated or unacceptable in ourselves (Matt. 7:1-5).

On a related note, what if it *were* somehow possible to avoid sin and impurity entirely through sheer act of will? If human beings striving to achieve personal purity have difficulty being humble and compassionate now, how much worse would it be then? Innocence and purity are virtues, but the humility and suffering which accompany sin open the way, through the atonement of Christ, to far greater virtues: compassion, charity, tolerance, and understanding. These are the virtues Christ championed in his most memorable parables (Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 15:11-32), particularly in *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-37). Conventional wisdom asserts this parable is a story about being a helpful neighbor. But in the first century Jewish social world, this parable had a much more pointed meaning; it was a story about two men (the priest and the Levite) who according to Jewish law were to keep themselves pure so they "passed by" a man who had been assaulted and left for dead. By contrast, the Samaritan, who was considered seriously unclean by that same system of purity laws, showed deep and practical compassion. Thus, the parable is not just about two unkind people and one nice guy, but it is about two pure men and one outcast – and which of the three was actually more godlike (Borg, 1994). It is practically impossible for innocents to attain true compassion and its cousin virtues, because an innocent has no way of understanding suffering or people's weaknesses. An awareness of one's own flaws and imperfections, and the suffering which results from this, encourages humility. And it is only when humble that people can see themselves as they truly are, and thus become teachable – soft, reliant, submissive, willing to surrender to God (Ether 12:27).

Through the atonement of Christ, sin can eventually be utilized for the spiritual learning and redemption of humankind; if this is true, then it is only Satan who truly has no hope in the end, because evil ultimately ceases to be evil. Adam and Eve's fall gave humanity the opportunity to learn from direct experience (Moses 5:11). This gift, superceded only by the immeasurable grace of Christ's atonement, makes possible a richer, fuller, more actualized life than Adam and Eve's innocence, or our own, could ever have achieved.

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## ENDNOTES

1. See Toscano & Toscano (1983) for further discussion of paradox and gospel speculation
2. I first became exposed to this idea by Dr. Lane Fischer of BYU when he taught, "Although good and evil may be polarized, they are not dichotomous."
3. I am indebted to Dr. Robert Gleave of BYU whose paper, *Sorrow, Suffering, and Evil: Is There Reason to Hope?* was highly influential in my understanding of these ideas. I have borrowed much from his ideas on contextual-hierarchical decision making and how these differ from situational ethics.
4. Carl Jung put it well when he said, "It is just by following Christian morality that one gets into the worst collisions of duty" (Jung, 1958, p. 54).
5. Note that this is meant to disagree with the saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Indeed, it would be much preferred to be surrounded by very unreliable people — those who have good intentions but never actually carry them out — than people who do not have good intentions to begin with. As a therapist, it is much easier to work with a positive impulse already present than to attempt to bring one into existence.
6. The psychologist Albert Bandura (1977, 1986) conducted numerous watershed experiments during the 1960's and 70's which unequivocally showed that children learn a great deal simply by observing others and the consequences of their actions.
7. It should be pointed out that Christ was the epitome of compassion although we believe he never sinned; yet the connection between personal experience with suffering and the ability to be compassionate still remains: Christ "descended below all things that he might comprehend all things" (D&C 88:6). Because of the atoning miracle, we know Christ is able to not only have perfect compassion for the sinner, but to take upon himself the full weight of the repentant sinner's sins though he himself never sinned.

## Sin and Evil: A Commentary on The Paradoxical Nature of Sin

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**D**r. John Rector's article, "The Paradoxical Nature Of Sin," provokes serious thought and contemplation. His emphasis on the curious nature of paradox and the virtue of compassion rings true.

Because I agree with him on every principle, this commentary will expand on only one point – the relationship between sin and evil. These are not synonymous: sin is the knowing violation of divine law; evil is defined as bad things happening (see Elder Orson F. Whitney in Green, 1963, pp. 435-436). Understanding the difference between the two is based on an understanding of divine law.

The divine laws of God the Father, established before the creation of the earth, govern every aspect of existence. Some of these laws have been discovered by science and amply demonstrate the cause-and-effect relationship that exists in our universe. No one may abolish or alter the laws which govern our existence (Widtsoe, 1960).

The prophet Joseph Smith said, "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge" (Smith, 1980, 4:588). Thus salvation is a process of discovering, understanding, and applying through obedience, our knowledge of those laws.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are bound by the laws of the universe just as much as we are, and They always work through these laws. Furthermore, according to Elder Orson F. Whitney, some of these "... laws are fundamental. The Almighty did not create them,

but he controls them and overrules their workings for the welfare of his creatures" (Green, 1963, pp. 471-472). These pre-existent laws are part of the nature of ultimate reality, beyond the control of God's creative powers. It seems logical that among these laws is the law which decrees the necessity of opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:11, 15) as well as the law of agency (D&C 29:34-35). Elder Whitney also pointed out that "the gospel, like all other creations, was organized out of materials already in existence – eternal principles adapted to the needs of man and the purposes of deity" (Green, 1963, p. 438).

During the great council in heaven, Satan proposed to do away with the law of agency (Moses 4:1-3). Satan did not understand that God the Father was in no position, because of the laws of the universe, to approve a plan of forced obedience. As President John Taylor pointed out, "everything in Nature is governed strictly according to immutable, eternal, unchangeable laws" (*Journal of Discourses*, 20:112). Jesus, with his superior knowledge and understanding, knew that no alternate

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plan was possible. In fact, without real agency, existence is quite meaningless (2 Nephi 2:23). Ironically, while trying to deny the agency of others, Satan and his followers exercised their own agency in order to rebel against God (D&C 29:36; Moses 4:3). Satan and his followers could not accept the idea that agency cannot be denied, and so chose to live a lie for eternity (D&C 76:25,33,37).

Sin can only happen because a superstructure of laws exists, as Alma demonstrated when he asked rhetorically “How could he sin if there was no law?” (Alma 42:17). The possibility of sin is essential in order to experience opposition (2 Nephi 2:16, D&C 29:39). Without the possibility for opposition and sin there can be no progress (Moses 5:11) – and the Plan of Salvation is all about progress. Our earthly existence is necessary for the children of God to advance so they may become like him (Abraham 3:25-26). Life here is a test, and that testing can only come through exercising agency (2 Nephi 2:27; D&C 101:78), making real choices between good and evil. The ability to sin is necessary.

Elder Orson F. Whitney defined sin as the knowing violation of divine law (see McConkie, 1979, p. 735). The key word here is *knowing*. There is a distinct difference between *evil* and *sin*, which Elder Whitney stated quite eloquently:

Sin is the transgression of divine law as made known through the conscience or by revelation. A man sins when he violates his conscience, going contrary to light and knowledge – not the light and knowledge that has come to his neighbor, but that which has come to himself. He sins when he does the opposite of what he knows to be right. Up to that point he only blunders. One may suffer painful consequences for only blundering, but he cannot commit sin unless he knows better than to do the things in which the sin consists. One must have a conscience before he can violate it. (Green, 1963, pp. 435-436; also quoted in McConkie, 1979, p. 735 [note that a printer’s error left out part of the first sentence in Green, 1963])

A person’s conscience comes from the Light of Christ, which is given to every person born in the world (D&C 84:45-46). Social and environmental conditions can erode and destroy this precious gift that all are born with. But the young man or woman raised in a society that encourages promiscuity or other such sins would certainly be held much less accountable than a person raised within the LDS church and taught the correct principles with respect to these sins (see D&C 101:78). Perhaps this is what President Joseph F. Smith meant when he said: “all men will be held accountable for the use they make of the light which they possess” (1919, p. 205).

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# The Promise of Hope: Where to Turn in Troubled Times

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The events of September 11, 2001, were unprecedented in the history of this great nation. They have given cause for all to pause, ponder and to put life in its proper perspective. These events have added a new dimension of stress in the lives of many who were already experiencing personal struggles. To some the "perfect brightness of hope" (2 Nephi 31:20) has been diminished to a fading flicker, causing them to have feelings of fear rather than faith.

## PERSPECTIVE

We must view these and future events from an eternal as well as from an earthly perspective. These events are in keeping with the great Plan of Salvation. These earthly experiences are a part of our testing through trials and tribulations. In the preparation process the Savior gave the purpose for which we must be tested during these earthly experiences. He said:

My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them.  
(D&C 136:31)

Struggles are a part of the sacred sanctification process. We must remember that there are no soft or slothful ways to become sanctified to the point that we are prepared to live in the presence of the Lord one day. The battle from the beginning, and the one that will be

the fight to the finish, has been over the choices we make in this life. These choices will determine our eternal destiny. We cannot always be in control of everything that happens to us in this life, but if we so choose we can be in control of how we respond to all that happens to us.

## Focus

During these troubled times when many stand in need of added strength to deal with these difficulties, attention must be given to a comprehensive approach to supply these needs. To receive hope and to make positive changes involves focusing on the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of life. It is like putting on "the whole armour of God" (see Ephesians 6:13).

My focus today centers on the spiritual sources of strength in one's pursuit of hope, health, and happiness. I believe this singular area of strength forms the foun-

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dation for all other sources of strength during a person's times of need. This in no way implies that the other aspects of a person's life are of lesser importance or of lesser effectiveness. It is my feeling that without a focus on the spiritual, the other focuses will be less effective.

## Hope

Hope is an expectation of things to come with a feeling of surety. It is seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Hope is the eternal flame that burns within and lights the way from our earthly home to our eternal home. It is centered in Jesus Christ and is our constant compass in our times of need. It is so essential to our sense of well-being and our wellness. Moroni explained, "And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair" (Moroni 10:22). Hope diminishes feelings of discouragement, doubt, and even depression. It awakens courage and faith within the human spirit. The Apostle Paul said hope is the "anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:19). There is an old Scottish proverb that says, "Were it not for hope, the heart would break." Elder Russell M. Nelson explained the interrelationship of hope, faith and charity with these words: "Faith is rooted in Jesus Christ. Hope centers in his atonement. Charity is manifest in the pure love of Christ" (Nelson, 1997, p. 60). As we cultivate the light of hope it will increase in intensity and we will be filled with faith and charity. To find and nurture hope we should focus on our sources of divine strength and upon our sources of personal strength, for God "shall supply all our need" (Philippians 4:19).

## DIVINE STRENGTH

We are never alone during our times of need. Heavenly Father has blessed each of his children with at least three sources of divine strength. He has given us our agency to choose to draw upon these in our times of need.

## Light of Christ

The Light of Christ is a spiritual power. It is universal in nature and "proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" (D&C 88:12). It not only lights the universe but is also given on a personal basis to each of Heavenly Father's children. The Savior explains:

And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man

through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. (D&C 84:46; see also D&C 93:2)

Moroni counseled, "For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:16). We do not live in spiritual darkness, as our conscience helps us to discern right from wrong. President Joseph F. Smith stated:

Every man is enlightened, the wicked as well as the good, the intelligent and the ignorant ... each in accordance with his capacity to receive the light. (Smith, 1939, p. 62)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie describes the *Light of Christ* with these words:

The Light of Christ ... dwells in the hearts of all men ... It is the instrumentality and agency by which Deity keeps in touch and communes with all his children, both the righteous and the wicked ... One of its manifestations is called conscience, through which all men know right from wrong. (McConkie, 1985, p. 257)

It is our spiritual compass, which if followed, will lead us to receive the greater light of the Holy Ghost. We were born with a clear and clean conscience filled with the light of Christ. The Savior taught, "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning" (D&C 93:38). Upon reaching the age of accountability the Savior said:

That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men. (D&C 93:39)

Sin and disobedience cause a darkening of the Light of Christ. As a result we become weakened to temptation (see Titus 1:15). Continued disobedience can eventually lead to becoming "past feeling" (see Ephesians 4:19, 1 Nephi 17:45, Moroni 9:20). We are never alone in our times of need when we have the Light of Christ.

## Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost will teach, comfort and protect us during our times of need. The Spirit is sensitive and can be easily offended; sin is offensive to the Holy Ghost and will cause him to withdraw from our presence. When the Spirit withdraws we are left with feelings of

darkness in varying degrees, and feelings of sadness, and often with feelings of depression.

When a people are living in conflict with their spiritual values and with the sacred covenants that they have entered into, they will experience emotional and spiritual pain. These feelings will be increased if they are in conflict with the principles that the Holy Ghost has borne witness to. The resolution of these conflicts begins with true repentance and a renewed desire to be obedient.

The Holy Ghost is a perfect teacher to those who are receptive to the Spirit and who are teachable. The Spirit never teaches those who are not teachable. Nephi counsels, "Receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:5). The Spirit will enlighten our minds with both spiritual and temporal truths. The Savior said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind. (D&C 11:13; see D&C 76:10, D&C 6:15)

The Spirit never teaches that which we are not capable of understanding; therefore, the Spirit often teaches us "line upon line, precept upon precept" (D&C 98:12, 2 Nephi 28:30). He not only increases our knowledge and understanding (D&C 76:12) but also increases our memory of things once taught:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

One of the great roles of the Holy Ghost is to give comfort to those in need. He brings us peaceful and comforting feelings. He also brings feelings of love, hope and encouragement to all who seek him in their times of need (see Moroni 8:26). He focuses on the "peaceful things" (D&C 36:2; D&C 39:6).

We are never alone if we have the Holy Ghost as a near constant companion to teach and comfort us during our times of need.

### Personal Savior

The Savior knows each of us in a personal way. He is aware of our needs and our concerns. He gives us assur-

ance of his awareness with these words: "I say unto you that mine eyes are upon you. I am in your midst and ye cannot see me" (D&C 38:7). Elder Dallin H. Oaks explains the meaning of the Savior being in our midst:

The Savior is in our midst, sometimes personally, frequently through his servants, and always by his Spirit." (Oaks, 1991, p. 14)

He knows everything about each of us. This includes our thoughts. He counseled Ezekiel of old, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezekiel 11:5). Ammon warned: "He knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Alma 18:32).

The Savior knows our weaknesses (D&C 62:1) and our actions (D&C 121:24). He stands ready to assist us through all our struggles. He has promised that he will respond to our righteous requests that we make to Heavenly Father. "Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you" (D&C 88:64).

He will comfort us in our times of need (Jacob 3:1). He gives us a spirit of hope and a feeling of comfort and confidence that we can overcome the obstacles that we face. Listen to his words of counsel and comfort:

Fear not, little children, for ye are mine, and I have overcome the world ... and none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost. (D&C 50:41-42)

Because of his infinite love for us, he is our advocate with Heavenly Father. He pleads our cause with the Father. He counsels:

Lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father. (D&C 29:5)

If our struggle is with sin, we must remember that he stands ready to forgive us if we truly repent. Too often we forget that he is a loving, caring and merciful God. Some may feel that there is no hope because they have failed too many times. The Lord has counseled that there is great hope for the sinner who truly repents:

If he confess his sins ... and repenteth in the sincerity of heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive also. Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them. (Mosiah 26:29-30)



The results of true repentance and remission of sins bring peace, hope, joy and a clarity of conscience (see Mosiah 4:3). Alma described the feeling with these words:

I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And, oh, what joy and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! (Alma 36:19-20)

The atonement of the Savior is infinite in nature and gives us great hope. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught this principle with these words:

I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ. (Packer, 1995, p. 20)

If we so choose, we are never alone during our times of need with a Personal Savior.

### PERSONAL STRENGTH

The Divine sources of strength are given to us by Heavenly Father based upon our personal worthiness. We have also been given personal sources of strength. These sources require not only worthiness but also an active involvement on our part.

We gain personal strength during our times of need through controlling our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, exercising faith, fasting, scripture study, pondering our patriarchal blessing, receiving priesthood blessings, listening to priesthood counsel, and by seeking and receiving personal revelations.

#### Thoughts

Our thoughts are one battleground of the struggle with Satan. There are important concepts concerning our thoughts and how they affect us during our times of need. Our thoughts can control our lives in either a positive or negative way. Proverbs counsels "For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). President Marion G. Romney spoke of the struggle for the control of our thoughts and thus our lives with these words:

The great overall struggle in the world today is, as it has always been, for the souls of men. Every soul is personally engaged in the struggle, and he makes his fight with what is in his mind. In the final analysis the battleground is, for each individual, within himself. (Romney, 1980, p. 66)

Thoughts tend to attract their own kind. Negative thoughts attract other negative thoughts and feelings. Disappointments lead to feelings of doubt, discouragement and even depression and despair. When we think positive thoughts they will attract other positive thoughts and feelings. While fear leads to failure, faith leads to fulfillment. The Savior explained this concept when he said:

For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth ... light cleaveth unto light. (D&C 88:40)

The brain is like a video recorder: every thought we think, every feeling we feel, every word we speak, every image we process is stored for future use. But we are in charge of the camera. The film is fast and the focus is fierce. The film which is not erased by the process of repentance will stand the test of time and be taken with us into eternity for full review.

We must discipline ourselves to think positive thoughts during the difficult days of our lives. The Savior counseled, "let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly" (D&C 121:45). The Apostle Paul taught the Philippian saints:

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ... think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

#### Feelings

To feel is a Christlike characteristic and a divine gift. Our emotional responses to our earthly experiences are stored in the cells of the brain. These cells become a storehouse for our emotions. We have been blessed to be the keeper of the keys to this emotional storehouse. If we so choose we can be in control of which emotions we choose to retrieve and to relive. When we emotionally respond to a present experience with positive, uplifting feelings we have a tendency to relive the positive feelings of our past. Unfortunately some portion of our negative

responses to present experiences is drawn from our storehouse of negative feelings.

There are common feelings that we experience as we face troubled times. These seem to be natural and may serve some useful purposes in our lives. But they can also become condemning and controlling factors that may lead to negative results. The counsel seems clear in the scriptures as to our responses to the negative aspects of these feelings. I will address only two of these, *worry* and *depression*.

### Worry

There is a difference between a conscious concern about a matter and a feeling of worry. Concern is positive while worry is negative. Worry ranges from discomfort to despair. In the extreme it can be a truly painful emotion. The counsel seems clear as how we should deal with feelings of worry.

First, we should take comfort in the knowledge that Heavenly Father is keenly aware of our needs and our feelings. The Savior counseled: "For your Father, who is in heaven, knoweth that you have need of all these things" (D&C 84:83).

Second, we are counseled to live one day at a time. The Savior said: "Therefore, let the morrow take thought for the things of itself" (D&C 84:84).

Third, the Psalmist gave counsel that we should "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalms 55:22).

Fourth, Paul taught the Philippian Saints that we should leave much of our negative past behind and focus on the present and the future:

This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark. (Philippians 3:13-14)

### Depression

Depression is sometimes difficult to deal with. There are no simple solutions in serious situations. There are many organic and non-organic causes of depression. I will focus on the non-organic, many of which involve unresolved personal problems.

The Lord has given counsel that will be helpful in decreasing the degree of depression that a person may be feeling. Some feelings of depression come from sin. Moroni explained "despair cometh because of iniquity"

(Moroni 10:22). President Benson counseled that "sin creates disharmony with God and is depressing to the spirit" (Benson, 1986, p. 2).

If the source of depression is sin, we must seek relief through the cleansing power of repentance. We will then be "filled with joy, having received a remission of [our] sins, and having peace of conscience" (Mosiah 4:3). The Lord also counsels us to petition him in prayer to find relief from suffering:

Pray always, that you may come off conqueror.

(D&C 10:5)

If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful.

(D&C 136:29)

There is great power in prayer to relieve feelings of depression. When we search the scriptures and apply them, we will find strength and relief from our suffering. Alma counseled, "the words of Christ [will] carry us beyond this vale of sorrow" (Alma 37:45). It is most important for those who are depressed to be involved in meaningful activity and for them to develop healthy patterns in their life. They should indeed be "anxiously engaged in a good cause" (D&C 58:27). The Savior counseled that all should:

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated. (D&C 88:124)

### Faith

It is essential that we have sufficient faith to make changes in our life. Faith gives us power to make these necessary changes (see 2 Nephi 1:10). If we do not have sufficient faith, we cannot change or be healed of our infirmities. Our weaknesses can never become strong without full faith. It takes faith to be healed (see 3 Nephi 12:8). It takes faith to get answers to our prayers (see D&C 10:47). Moroni reminds us that "hope cometh of faith" (Ether 12:4).

We must never underestimate the power of the Lord even when we feel personally powerless. Nephi reminds us of the infinite power of the Lord with these words:

Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children

of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him. (1 Nephi 7:12)

### Fasting

The Lord has commanded us “Ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” (D&C 88:76). Great power is received as we fast and pray concerning our struggles and our spiritual welfare.

When we fast we should do so with a purpose, with prayer and with “an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 4:5). We should strive for mastery of self, having pure thoughts, and meditate and ponder spiritual things. We can gain added strength through scripture study during the fast. We should listen to the promptings of the Spirit as we seek solutions.

We should petition the Lord in soul-searching prayer for strength and deliverance from the bonds of our behaviors. Jacob counseled:

Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause ... (Jacob 3:1)

Fasting and prayer will help us control our thoughts, feelings, passions and appetites. We can bring these and our bodies under subjection of our spirits. We will experience added spirituality, strength, power and humility. We will be able to get answers to our prayers and enjoy feelings of peace and comfort. Our guilt will be swept away as we truly repent. Ill feelings will be removed from our souls and we will experience an increase in love. We will become free from undue worry.

### Scripture Study

We can receive great comfort and counsel as we prayerfully ponder the scriptures during our times of need. When faced with an increased need for understanding and direction we should search the scriptures for answers. Nephi counseled:

Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. (2 Nephi 32:3)

The scriptures should be of the greatest importance to us. Our spiritual survival during our stress and struggles is greatly dependent upon the strength that we receive

from searching the scriptures and applying the principles in our lives.

The scriptures provide food for our spirits, which is as important as physical food is for our bodies. It is not enough to read the scriptures; we must truly search them. Random reading results in reduced retention; however, a studious search of the scriptures will result in great strength during our struggles. The Apostle Paul gives insight into another result of this search. He said: “We through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

The scriptures are replete with powerful promises to those who follow the counsel of the Lord. We should ponder these powerful promises and develop faith and trust in the Lord. His promises are sure. The Savior gives us marvelous promises that should strengthen us. He counsels:

Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you ... (D&C 68:6) And inasmuch as ye are humble and faithful and call upon my name, behold I will give you the victory. I give unto you a promise, that you shall be delivered this once out of your bondage. (D&C 104:82-83)

### Patriarchal Blessing

Our patriarchal blessings are another source of personal strength. President Ezra Taft Benson gave great insight into one of the purposes of a patriarchal blessing. He said of the Savior:

He knows in advance every strategy the enemy will use against you ... He knows your weaknesses and he knows your strengths. By personal revelation you may discover some of your strengths through a careful and prayerful study of your patriarchal blessing. (Benson, 1988, p. 214)

Elder James E. Faust also taught the principle of power in a patriarchal blessing in helping us to deal with our difficult days. He said:

God knows our spirits; he knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our capabilities and our potential. Our patriarchal blessings indicate what the Lord expects of us and what our potential is. Our blessing can encourage us when we are discouraged, strengthen us when we are fearful, comfort us when we sorrow, give us courage when we are filled with anxiety, lift us up when we are weak in spirit. (Faust, 1982, p.6)

## Priesthood Blessings

When we find ourselves in troubled times or on difficult days, we may seek a priesthood blessing. For the blessing to be effective, we must be humble and teachable. We must be willing to submit our will to the will of the Lord as spoken to us in the blessing. This blessing can be a great source of counsel from the Lord. Our minds can be enlightened and our knowledge and understanding quickened. Our vision can be expanded. The Savior has given a powerful promise concerning that which will be spoken by the priesthood holder who is giving the blessing:

And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost ... shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord and the power of God ... (D&C 68:4)

We must have full faith and complete confidence in the counsel that we receive. We must have courage to follow the counsel. If we do so, we will receive added power to succeed in our struggles.

A priesthood blessing should be a great source of comfort to us. It is the means by which we can have feelings of peace, hope, and love. Our confidence can be restored as a result of the blessing.

Our mind and body can become invigorated. Our spirit can be renewed and we can feel a divine determination to deal with our difficulties. We can feel the presence of the Lord and the companionship of the Spirit.

## Priesthood Counsel

During the days ahead we must carefully listen to the counsel of the living prophets. Their counsel takes precedence over all other counsel. As Satan increases his works of destruction, there is an ever-increasing need to listen to the voice of the prophet.

The Savior has counseled us to listen to our priesthood leaders as well as the prophet. He said: "...whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). Some unfortunately choose not to listen. At times they resist counsel. It is no wonder that the Lord lamented: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Why is it that some choose not to listen to counsel? They have some *natural man* tendencies, such as:

## Rationalization

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28:8)

## Complacency

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

## Delusions

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. (2 Nephi 9:28)

## Forgetfulness

Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one." (Alma 46:8)

In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me. (D&C 101:8)

There is great safety in troubled times in listening to the voice of the prophets and our priesthood leaders. If we do so, we have no need to fear what may come in the future.

## Personal Revelation

When we speak to Heavenly Father we do so by means of prayer. When he speaks to us he does so by means of personal revelation. This two-way, divine communication is critically important to our success, to our sense of well being, and to our spiritual salvation. We always pray to Heavenly Father and to him alone. Our prayers are rendered in the name of the Son and communicated by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Receiving personal revelation is not a passive process, it involves proper preparation. To pray is to have a conversation with Deity. We are instructed to pray often (2 Nephi 9:52), to ponder before we pray (D&C 9:8), to ask for the right things (D&C 8:10, D&C 88:65), to avoid vain repetitions (3 Nephi 13:7), and to ask in faith (3 Nephi 18:20) with humility (D&C 112:10) and with sincerity (Moroni 7:9). Personal revelations come by the promptings and impressions of the Spirit to both the mind and to the heart.

Manifestations of the Spirit come to the mind in a variety of ways, as enlightenment (D&C 6:15) and through the scriptures (2 Nephi 32:3). They may come in the form of instant recall (John 14:26), or as an audible voice (Helaman 5:30). Sometimes they come by way of counsel from leaders (D&C 1:38), by dreams or visions (1 Nephi 8:2) or by visitations (Alma 32:23).

The Spirit also reveals the will of the Lord through the feelings of the heart. These feelings come in the form of peaceful feelings (D&C 6:23), warm spiritual feelings (D&C 9:8), compelling feelings (D&C 128:1) or darker feelings of stupor of thought (D&C 9:9).

We have been given the promise that, "If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge" (D&C 42:61).

### COUNSEL

In our present and future times of need, we can take great comfort and confidence in the counsel we receive

from the scriptures. It will give us great hope and will strengthen our faith and our resolve. We should prayerfully ponder the following and countless other passages of counsel that the Lord has provided for us in the scriptures:

Look unto me in every thought, doubt not, fear not.  
(D&C 6:36)

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

The words of the Savior would be appropriate concluding counsel here:

Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another. (D&C 90:24)

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

All of the counsel found in the scriptures and given by the Brethren is counsel of hope. It reflects the love the Savior has for us and his desire that we succeed and enjoy health and happiness. We have a rich repository of resources from which we can receive spiritual strength during our times of need. There are no other ways to gain strength in our times of need. If we follow this counsel, we will find infinite strength and will have the promise of hope. To this I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE SPRING 2002 AMCAP CONVENTION - 4 APRIL 2002

## Faith and Healing: The Role that Faith Can Play in Healing – Incorporating Both a Medical and Ecclesiastic Perspective

ELDER JAMES O. MASON

*Second Quorum of the Seventy, 1994-2000  
and  
Bountiful Utah Temple  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

**T**hank you for that kind introduction. The only part of the introduction that's important is the last part – who my wife is, and about our children and grandchildren. When you have gray hair, like I have, you know that “you can't take it with you.” But we can take our families, and that is all we really want anyway. It is a privilege to be invited to participate in this convention. I begin by extending my appreciation to all of you for the services you render. I've served in a number of capacities in the Church, and you and your counterparts received many referrals from me while I served as a Bishop, in several Stake Presidencies and as a General Authority. I pay tribute to your skills and your integrity and the healing that you provide to members and those not of our faith. You are part of an honored and respected profession.

I want to say a word about my current activities in the Bountiful Utah Temple. Of all the things I've had the privilege of doing, in and out of the Church, no other assignment has provided the peace of mind, satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that is associated with worshipping and serving in the temple. It is a crowning life experience for my wife and me. I've come to comprehend the significance of the healing that occurs in the temple. You would be surprised at the number of peo-

ple who come to the temple specifically to seek the healing influence of the Lord. You might also not realize the amount of time patrons spend there, not only performing vicarious ordinances for those on the other side of the veil, but also meditating and pondering in the Celestial room. Many heartfelt prayers are offered. I know these prayers are heard and appropriately answered.

You might also be surprised to know how many names are included on the prayer roll of the Bountiful Utah Temple. Those names represent the concerns, desires and prayers of members of the Church who see the temple as a source of healing in their lives and the lives of loved ones.

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The temple, of course, deals with eternity. I heard yesterday that one of the illustrious philosophers of this age, the late Woody Allen, said, "Eternity is very long, especially the end" (Allen, 1992). I think he really caught the spirit of it!

I'd like to begin talking about faith and healing from the perspective of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by using two scriptures. The first is a statement the Savior made when he appeared on the American continent after his resurrection: "Woe unto him that shall say there can be no miracles" (3 Ne. 29:7). The second is found in Ether: "If there be no faith, God can do no miracles" (Ether 12:12).

I testify that a God of miracles dwells in the heavens above and that miracles occur in the Church in these latter days. It is refreshing to see what is happening in health services regarding faith and healing. On March 14-16, I participated in a conference sponsored by Harvard Medical School, George Washington University and the Beth-Israel Deaconess Medical Center on faith and healing. Representatives of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist religions participated.

A particularly large number of Protestant Christian faiths participated. All there were united in the belief that good health care services are not provided until both the scientific and spiritual dimensions of our existence are considered. The subject and content of the conference on faith and healing would not have taken place while I was attending medical school during the 1950s at the University of Utah, or doing an internship and residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and the Harvard Medical System in Boston. We would have been labeled as quacks had I, or anyone else, been involved at that time in these discussions. Significant progress is beginning to occur in linking health care services and faith. Many medical schools have established departments dealing with faith and health care. It is refreshing to see what is happening across the width and breadth of this nation. I hope it continues.

In President Gordon B. Hinckley's current book, *Stand A Little Taller* (2001), he quotes from James, chapter 5:

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14)

President Hinckley continues:

The power to heal the sick is still among us. It is the power of the Priesthood of God, it is the authority held by the Elders of this Church. We are indebted to the dedicated men and women of science and medicine who have conquered so much of disease, who have stayed the hand of death. I can't say enough of gratitude for them. Yet they are the first to admit the limitations of their knowledge and skills in dealing with many matters of life and death. The mighty Creator of the heavens and the earth has given to his servants a divine power that sometimes transcends all the power and knowledge of mankind. (Hinckley, 2001)

That is the position of our Church. It has been the position since its restoration. We acknowledge that the Savior Jesus Christ healed using the magnificent powers he possessed. The Holy Priesthood is *after the Order of the Son of God* (JST-Heb. 7:3, Alma 13:7-9). The Savior healed in accordance with the faith of the sick and afflicted (Matt. 9:22), or the faith of those who asked him to heal loved ones (Matt. 8:6-10). The Savior healed by uttering a word or phrase, or by performing some act such as making a paste of spittle and clay (John 9:6). He instructed his disciples to lay hands upon the sick (Mark 16:18; Mormon 9:24). Healings occurred long before the earthly advent of the Savior. The Old Testament (Num. 21:8; 2 Kings 5:14) and the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 3:5; Alma 5:8) contain numerous examples of healing miracles before the time of Christ.

It is insightful to review the history of the restored Church regarding healing. In its early history, the annals of the Church are replete with examples of faith healing. The 7th Article of Faith, written by the Prophet Joseph Smith, states, "We believe in the gifts of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, *healing*, interpretations of tongues, and so forth."

As a boy I was deeply impressed by an account I read in the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Pratt, 2001), one of the early apostles of this dispensation. I would like to share that account which touched my heart and became the inspiration for my faith in healing. It was the beginning of my understanding that the Lord was concerned about our physical well being. Elder Pratt related this experience:

I accompanied Joseph Smith over the Mississippi in a skiff to visit some friends in Montrose, Iowa. Here many were lying sick and at the point of death. Among these

was my old friend and fellow servant, Elijah Fordham. He was now in the last stage of deadly fever [Brother Fordham was one of those afflicted by an epidemic of cholera that hit the saints on the west bank of the Mississippi River]. He lay prostrate, and nearly speechless with his feet poulticed. His eyes were sunk in their sockets. His flesh was gone. The paleness of death was upon him, and he was hardly to be distinguished from a corpse. His wife was weeping over him and preparing clothes for his burial. (Pratt, 2001)

It must not have been very comforting for Brother Fordham to watch his wife preparing clothing for his burial, but that's the way they did things in those days. Continuing the story:

Brother Joseph took him by the hand and in a voice and energy which would seemingly have raised the dead, he cried, "Brother Fordham, in the name of Jesus Christ arise and walk." It was a voice that could be heard from house to house and nearly through the neighborhood. It was like the roaring of a lion, or a heavy thunderbolt. Brother Fordham leaped from his dying bed in an instant, shook the poultices and bandages from his feet, put on his clothes so quick that none got a chance to assist him, and taking a cup of tea and a little refreshment, he walked with us from house to house, visiting other sick beds and joining in prayer and administrations for them while the people followed us. And then one thing occurred after that, that I'd like to record because I think it's significant. Brother Joseph, while in the spirit, rebuked the elders who would continue to lay hands on the sick from day to day without the power to heal them. Said he, "It is time that such things ended. Let the Elders either obtain the power of God to heal the sick or let them cease to administer the forms without the power." (Pratt, 2001)

I told that story frequently during the five years my wife and I spent preaching the gospel and overseeing the growth of the Church in Africa. Many members were in extreme poverty by our standards. Even when they had money, many were isolated from the meager health services available in major cities. I have seen miracles in Utah, but even a greater abundance of miracles occurred among those obedient members in Africa, who had no alternative other than turn to the Lord for the healing of physical and emotional maladies. Their faith was magnificent!

It is interesting to contemplate the marriage, so to speak, in the Church between health services and faith healing. President Brigham Young was skeptical of medical practitioners. He felt that the members should largely scorn university or academically-trained health professors. An 1849 edition of the *Millennial Star* gives some idea of the attitude of early Church leaders toward the medical profession:

The difference between the treatment of cholera by the LDS and those *learned ignoramuses* called doctors, may be easily perceived by the following: By a report of the Board of Health we find that at least two thirds of those who have been attacked by cholera have died, or in other words, helped out of the world scientifically. Whereas out of at least one hundred cases that have been administered to by the elders of the Church in and around Glasgow, only four have died. (*Millennial Star*, 11,4, February 15, 1849, p. 62)

Isn't that a wonderful scientific study – comparing healing through the Priesthood with health care outcomes obtained "scientifically"? We now recognize that at that period of time, even the best-trained doctors were unable to prevent and cure epidemics or diseases. They utilized phlebotomy, for example. That's the last thing we would do today – bleed people who are acutely ill. They purged their patients with large doses of calomel, a mercury compound that is recognized as a poison today. Those were the major treatments employed by the medical profession at a time when a living prophet wisely warned, using my words, "scorn those guys, don't get near them."

Isn't it interesting – it's a testimony to me – to see what happened as medical care began to be placed on a sounder scientific base? About the time Louis Pasteur discovered germs and other scientists began to put the healing arts on a firmer basis, President Brigham Young altered his thinking. In the latter 1870s, he encouraged the Relief Society to sponsor sisters to attend Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. Participants returned to Utah as doctors who particularly served patients with medical problems associated with childbirth and pediatrics.

#### HEALTH SERVICES AND FAITH HEALING ARE NOT IN CONFLICT

Understanding the conditions for exaltation helps our comprehension of how modern health services and faith



healing may interact. Nephi taught, “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23). Doing all we can to stay well or recover from illness should be our goal. The Word of Wisdom (D&C 89) is a certain foundation for health promotion and disease prevention. Many of the commandments contribute to the prevention of emotional illnesses and other problems you as a professional group deal with. Members embrace prevention and treatment while enjoying the blessings of faith healing.

At the conference on spirituality and health, I was asked where we start in the LDS Church: do we start with medicine or with faith? I answered that I don’t think Church members give it a second thought. Faith is the foundation from which they can reach out to providers of health services.

In this context I quote another statement by President Hinckley:

The history of this Church is replete with miracles of healing. I know that. I am confident of that. I recall once when I arrived in Hong Kong I was asked if I would visit a woman in the hospital whose doctors had told her she was going blind and would lose her sight within a week. She asked if we would administer to her and we did so, and she stated that she was miraculously healed. I have a painting in my home that she gave me which says on the back of it “To Gordon B. Hinckley in grateful appreciation for the miracle of saving my sight.” (Hinckley, 1997, p. 343)

President Hinckley apparently was uncomfortable with what the woman had written on the back of the painting. He told her, “I didn’t save your sight. Of course, the Lord saved your sight. Thank him and be grateful to him” (Hinckley, 1997).

President Spencer W. Kimball also spoke on healing:

A question often asked is “If miracles are a part of the gospel program, why do we not have such today?” The answer is a simple one. We do have miracles today – beyond imagination. If all the miracles of our own lifetime were recorded it would take many library shelves to hold the books which would contain them. What kind of miracles do we have? All kinds: revelations, visions, tongues, healings, special guidance and direction, evil spirits cast out. Where are they recorded? In the records

of the Church, in journals, in news and magazine articles, and in the minds and memories of many people ... The rationale says, many people are administered to and are not healed. This is true as it has been in all times. It was never intended that all should be healed or that all should be raised from the dead, else the whole program of mortality and death and resurrection and exaltation would be frustrated. (Kimball, 1982, pp. 499-500)

We read in the Doctrine & Covenants: “And the elders of the Church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for and lay their hands upon them in my name; and if they die they shall die unto me, and if they live they shall live unto me ... And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them” (D&C 42:44,46). Those are the promised blessings of prayer and anointing the sick. If we had time, I suspect that each one of you could stand up and relate personal experiences related to faith healing. I certainly can – from my childhood growing up in a Latter-day Saint home, in my home with a wife and children, and in my practice. Members are careful about talking about sacred things because we are commanded “They shall not boast themselves of these things, neither speak them before the world: for these things are unto you for your profit and salvation” (D&C 84:73).

Faith is a prerequisite for healing, it is not a consequence of healing (Kimball, 1972). With some hesitation, I share an experience from my practice. One day I was called to see a nine-year-old boy at the Primary Children’s Hospital in Salt Lake City. The day before his admission to the hospital he complained of headache. He had a slight fever and his mother kept him home from school. The next morning she had a hard time arousing him and realized that this was not the usual problem that goes away by itself. She drove him to the hospital where the doctors that attended him observed that he was semiconscious and had a high fever. The boy’s stiff neck led them to suspect that he might have meningitis. A small needle was inserted between his vertebrae to obtain a sample of spinal fluid. The fluid was cloudy as it dripped into a test tube. It should be crystal clear, like spring water. After the fluid was spun down in the centrifuge and put under a microscope, many bacteria and white blood cells were present.

I had been asked to come to the hospital to consult on how to treat this critically ill boy whose blood pressure

was now falling. Massive doses of what we hoped were appropriate antibiotics were started intravenously along with medications to maintain his blood pressure. As we left the boy's room after we had done everything we could, I had doubts that he would survive until morning, and felt that if he did live, he would have lifelong impairment.

I met the boy's mother and father in the hallway. They had been excluded from his room during the medical procedures. I told them the diagnosis, what had been done, and that the prognosis was guarded. The father asked, "Dr. Mason, would you help me administer to my son?" I said to myself, "I'm the wrong person, I have all these doubts about the outcome of this illness." But, what could I say? I reentered the boy's room with his parents. The father anointed the boy and asked me to confirm that sacred ordinance. Brothers and sisters, I put my hands on his head and the Spirit told me at that very moment – there was no question about the outcome, he would live and have no damaging after-effects. I blessed him to that end. As I left that room the second time my outlook was completely changed. I had felt the prompting of the Spirit and promised a complete recovery. The promise was fulfilled.

I am sure that the antibiotics helped, but there was a power greater than medicine that resulted in the boy's rapid recovery. You and I can testify of other experiences of that kind. Some are more subtle, but there is no question that they occur.

In our Church, we recognize a number of sources of healing power. Prayer is one; I believe prayer is more commonly applied in healing than any other modality. Scripture study is another source of power. We turn to the scriptures for comfort and strength when we are troubled with matters of great concern. Partaking of the sacrament is another. How many thousands of silent prayers are offered during that quiet time while the bread and water, the emblems of the Savior's atonement, are distributed and partaken of? I have already mentioned the healing influence of the temple and the temple prayer roll. The inspired counsel that Bishops and other Church leaders provide is a significant source of healing power. Fasting and the payment of fast offerings is another.

During the conference on faith and healing, common modalities ran through the talks given by the representatives of the various religions. Prayer, in one form or another, was common to all. The "sacraments" was a frequently used term by those of other religions as a source

of faith and power. I am not referring to our sacrament, but a group of practices and ordinances that other churches observe. I found that there was little emphasis on scripture study by others. The Rabbi mentioned the Torah, but it was not in the context of scripture reading by lay members. There was no mention of the temple or fasting by the other religions. The only other mention of anointing with consecrated oil was by a representative of the Catholic Church (known as *extreme unction*).

I wish these talks had been available to me before I began practicing medicine. It would have been very useful had I better understood the belief systems of all my patients. I hope that those of you who are caring for those of other faiths will try to know something about their beliefs. Thereby, you can better assist them in focusing their faith. This is a marvelous way to help others – by recognizing and respecting their beliefs, and by assisting them to use their faith as part of your treatment.

I would like to conclude with some observations on faith healing as it relates to your profession. I hope you will forgive me because I am not an expert in the fields you represent. With acute diseases like cholera or typhoid fever, if one survives for a few days the disease is healed completely; it is over, one way or the other. This is not usually the case with the illnesses and conditions you encounter in your practices. Your illnesses usually take a chronic course, with ups and downs that are exacerbated by many factors. Let me illustrate what I am talking about by using diabetes mellitus as an example. Diabetes is caused by either too little insulin being produced by the pancreas or by insulin resistance: the body may produce antibodies that inactivate insulin. This chronic disease may become acute and life threatening. When the life threatening stage is healed, the patient still has diabetes and must continue to take insulin and remain on a special diet. As you know better than I do, your areas of practice – including mental illness, addiction, alcoholism, abuse, gender confusion, and such things – are chronic, lingering problems. Healing the acute episode does not always eliminate the underlying, chronic genetic or acquired pathology.

Is faith healing, with its various modalities, applicable to the illnesses and conditions you treat? My answer to that question is a loud and emphatic *yes!* Faith healing is not just applicable to acute physical conditions. Your areas of practice are also susceptible to healing by faith. Your patients may be healed immediately or over time.

The story of the Savior's raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46) illustrates the marvelous extent of the Lord's power to heal. After the Savior was taken to the tomb, He asked those with him to roll away the stone. Certainly it is easier to remove a stone than to raise the dead. The onlookers could handle that. But Martha was concerned. She explained that he had been in the tomb for four days, "by this time he stinketh" (verse 39). The Savior proceeded without any apparent hesitation or comment. In a loud voice he commanded, "Lazarus, come forth" (verse 43). And Lazarus emerged, still wrapped in burial cloths. The Savior said, "Loose him" (verse 44). Again, he allowed them to do what they could and used his faith and sacred power to do what they could not.

The power of God can bring forth a dead man who has lain in the tomb for four days. Then God can, if he wishes, restore pancreatic insulin producing cells and heal diabetes. He can also restore abnormal brain chemistry. He can fix anything that needs restoring. The power is there. A loving and powerful Heavenly Father, if it is in our eternal best interest, can and does repair those things that need it. He lets us move stones and take off burial wrappings, expecting us to do all we can before and after he intercedes.

I am impressed with a conference address given in 1992 by Elder Richard G. Scott. You are probably aware of what he said: "Unless healed by the Lord, mental,

physical, or sexual abuse can cause you serious enduring consequences" (Scott, 1992, p. 31). This is also true of all the conditions you are asked to treat. The Lord is a partner in your profession.

Healing occurs in many ways – and faith is the foundation. Knowing that Heavenly Father and his Only Begotten Son desire to help and heal us builds confidence as well as faith. Recognize that God is the supreme healer who will not only heal but will also empower us to do so, using our skills and our faith.

I testify of the healing power of the Gospel. When we drink the healing waters of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are promised that we will never thirst. Ultimate healing occurs when we cast our burdens upon the Lord (Matt. 11:29). I have family members that suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder. Medications help. However, a priesthood blessing, either with or without consecrated oil, brings refreshing relief from those acute, crippling symptoms. I know of the power of healing in the fields in which you practice.

I bear my testimony that you have a power within you that goes beyond your academic training, beyond your wonderful skills and professional experience. It flows from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and gives you the ability to go beyond yourselves, and to assist patients to draw upon a divine source of power that can even raise the dead. I so testify to that, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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## Dealing with Fear and Depression in a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Context

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*Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be guided solely by attention to intra-psychic or intra-familial factors. As the surrounding social and cultural environment continues to become more unstable, threatening, and dangerous, fear and depression become increasingly common, reality-based responses. These responses are not a surprise to those acquainted with ancient and modern scriptures, which predict times of unprecedented trouble with accompanying widespread terror and despair; and which also identify a clear and peaceful path through such troubles. This paper examines socio-cultural forces which continue to exacerbate the fear and depression problems of our time, as well as the cognitive underpinnings of these destructive forces. It identifies an alternative, more healthful response to the context of our current social environment. Finally, it articulates what AMCAP and its individual members can do to "publish peace" in these times of unprecedented and ever-escalating cultural turmoil.*

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For over twenty-five years, AMCAP has stood as a refuge from the storm for its members. "Mormon counselors and psychotherapists" have gathered at conventions to share their ideas about how to help others with methods and principles consistent with the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a profession that has long minimized the importance or validity of spirituality in human life, AMCAP members have sustained and encouraged each other in the development and application of techniques that meet a high standard of both spiritual and professional excellence. Many of these ideas have been published in the *AMCAP Journal*, recorded on convention tapes, discussed in regional areas, and applied in hundreds of clinical practices and mental health settings throughout the world.

After this quarter-century of discussion, mutual support, and development of ideas and techniques, it is

*time to gather, synthesize, and share what we have learned. In the midst of a secular storm that blusters not only through our profession, but increasingly throughout every dimension of our culture, reaching every age group and segment of population, the need to expand the influence and extend the reach of the refuge we enjoy becomes ever more urgent.*

AMCAP members are, by definition, professional helpers – people that others turn to in times of trouble. Hundreds of AMCAP members serve thousands of

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individuals and families in many nations. But in a world increasingly troubled and full of commotion, the need to communicate pure and healing ideas to larger numbers of people becomes increasingly important.

We may never see the faces of those who most need what we have – LDS therapists hungry for peer support but living in remote areas where they can never attend an AMCAP convention; religiously-minded counseling students seeking a spiritual anchor in their training; bishops and other Church leaders the world over who must provide needed counsel on increasingly complex and delicate topics; and troubled people of all genders, ages, and in many locations seeking to find wise and dependable answers to their problems. What AMCAP members enjoy has a far wider potential application and relevance than may have been previously supposed:

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it. (D&C 123:12)

Certainly AMCAP does not, by any means, replace the authoritative voice of the leaders or official publications of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in proclaiming truth. But it can provide a credible, professional “second witness” (D&C 6:28) to the validity and practical helpfulness of principles taught by the Church. We who by virtue of our profession stand as front-line witnesses of pain, and who have front-row seats to the personal tragedies and triumphs of modern individuals and families, have a rare and specialized opportunity to bear witness of truth. For we see as do few others, the devastating consequences of slighting the counsel of the Almighty – just as we are privileged to see, in our daily work, the incomparable preventive and healing power of his instructions, atonement, and other gifts to his children. We see the principles of the gospel at work – not just in our own lives and families, but in those of many others. We see up close the wreckage that results when such principles are disregarded, and replaced with the philosophies of men. Our experience with multiple human situations makes us credible witnesses and commentators about current social

problems and their solutions.

Some of us are trained to assemble data from many individuals and situations into thoughtful research, providing needed perspective so that individuals may more effectively make data-driven decisions, rather than be buffaloes by the ever-present propaganda of the “politically correct” media. Some are gifted to articulate theories about human behavior that are consistent with gospel principles, to replace or refine current guiding theories that are inconsistent with those revealed principles. All have something to offer. *The time has come to draw all of these gifts together, all of these wonderful insights and applications, to bless and uplift an ever more troubled world.*

Twenty-first century tools have been carefully prepared over the last several years to carry out the challenge given by our previous two AMCAP presidents, Dr. Jan Scharman (Scharman, 1999) and Dr. Lane Fischer (Fischer, 1998) to “expand our influence” for good. These tools include an expanded website and this electronically-based AMCAP Journal – tools that will allow AMCAP members to share their ideas – first with one another, then with a broader audience, at a level never previously possible.

At the latter end of these twenty-five-plus years, AMCAP has matured into an organization that is ever more prepared to help nourish a world hungry for dependable truth. And the timing of these developments could not be more appropriate, given the pressing and escalating challenges of the era. Perhaps it could be said of this organization, as of many individual Latter-day Saints: “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

#### **“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”: THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND THE CURRENT SOCIAL-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

In the first quarter-year of the new millennium, AMCAP sponsored a convention (March 29-30, 2001) based on the theme, “*When Men’s Hearts Fail Them: Dealing with Fear and Depression.*” A professional convention addressing the topic of depression was by no means a unique feature at that time on the mental health landscape. But the addition of “fear” as a topic of discussion was a relatively new idea, one that many AMCAP therapists responded to with a shock of fresh recognition.

But as discussion proceeded, many vague but influential client fears were identified – mothers and fathers fearing for their children in a world of disrupted social values and increasingly pervasive violence; young men and women hesitant to form committed love relationships for fear that they wouldn't prove permanent after all; couples afraid to bring children into an economically and socially unstable world; youth and children afraid to go to school in the face of increasing school violence; primary and secondary victims of abuse afraid to trust anyone; and among many Latter-day Saint clients, an unsettling fear that all those awful "latter-day" prophecies they had heard throughout their lives might really come true after all – maybe even within their own lifetimes.

Only 19 months later, as this article is being prepared [October 2002], the topic of fear – even of terror – is no longer new, uncommon, or ambiguous. A mere five months after AMCAP's convention on fear and depression, terrorist attacks fell with sudden ferocity upon New York City and Washington DC. While a horrified nation and world watched, thousands of lives were ended or changed forever. Within a short time, serious economic ramifications became evident, economic conditions that worsened with the revelation of financial misconduct of various major business executives. Stocks dropped; unemployment soared; and the retirement reserves of many evaporated or were greatly diminished, virtually overnight.

A "War on Terrorism" was actively initiated, bringing an unprecedented level of security checks and public vigilance, emphasizing the ever-present possibility of another horrific attack. In recent months, that war on terrorism has escalated into an urgent presidential plea that initiating war in the Middle East is necessary, to eliminate serious dangers from biological, chemical, or even nuclear weapons allegedly being stockpiled and concealed, ready for unexpected strike at any time.

Newspapers are consistently replete with stories of violence and terror. In current headlines, an efficient sniper in the Washington DC area took 13 lives, one by one over three weeks' time, escaping all detection by authorities throughout that time period, leaving DC residents terrified to even leave their homes and buy groceries. A few months ago, headline stories in Salt Lake City involved two different abductors stealing

directly into the homes of local residents, and snatching away young girls, apparently for sexual and violent victimization. One girl has never been found, despite diligent and widespread community search. The other was rescued by a neighbor's vigilance, but only after suffering significant terror and abuse.

Indeed, daily local and national news is continuously permeated with stories of fear, terror, and varieties of violence including family violence, street violence, school violence, terrorist violence, and the oncoming shadow of war. Not surprisingly, depression and anxiety disorders correspondingly continue to multiply among all age groups, from the very young to the very old. Suicide, addiction, self-injury and turning to pornographic materials are only a few of the methods people sometimes use to cope with this burgeoning stress, bringing in their wake new cycles of pain for themselves and those around them.

In such times, the prophetic words of Elder Ezra Taft Benson, spoken in 1974, ring more true and relevant than ever:

We live in an age when, as the Lord foretold, men's hearts are failing them, not only physically but in spirit [see D&C 45:26]. Many are giving up heart for the battle of life ... As the showdown between good and evil approaches, with its accompanying trials and desolations, Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression. Yet, of all people, we as Latter-day Saints should be the most optimistic and the least pessimistic. For while we know that [D&C 1:35-36] "peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion," we are also assured that "the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst." (Benson, 1974, p. 65)

The scriptures record Jesus Christ's prophetic insight into this peculiarly latter-day "heart failure" and its cause: "men's hearts failing them *for fear*" (Luke 21:26). They also record his prediction that "*Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*" (JS-Matt. 1:10). Certainly such statements are increasingly descriptive of contemporary culture. In an age of terrorism and violence, of rampant divorce and parental abandonment of children, of pornography and culturally-sanctioned promiscuity, few are confident that they can afford to

open their heart and take a chance on love, tenderness, and emotional vulnerability. So increasingly, it is becoming counter-cultural to care. In many cases, as predicted, the love of many is indeed "waxing cold."

"What's love got to do with it?" a rock star belted out several decades ago (Britten & Lyle, 1984). Simple fulfillment of sexual appetite may seem far less risky than investing in a marital relationship that statistically has a greater than 50% chance of failure. A flickering pornographic image on a computer screen may appear far less dangerous than a real person who may break your heart, take your money, and take your life out of your own exclusive control.

Yet as Jesus affirmed:

The love of many shall wax cold; But he that remaineth steadfast and is not overcome, the same shall be saved ... You shall also hear of wars, and rumors of wars; *see that ye be not troubled*, for all I have told you must come to pass ... And again, because iniquity shall abound, the love of men shall wax cold; but he that shall not be overcome, the same shall be saved. (JS-Matt. 1:10-11, 23, 30.)

Though paralyzing and unhealthy, there is nothing more natural (Mosiah 3:19) in a chronically and increasingly stressful environment than to become "troubled" – to fear and despair; or to become too battle-weary to continue caring. This cannot be attributed exclusively to individual or genetic pathology – to personal "chemical imbalance" or family "dysfunction."

The broader social environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century could easily be described as *depressogenic*. Pervasive violence and abuse, economic instability, family breakdown, wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, pornography and other degrading and destructive media, are just a few of the potentially depressing or frightening factors that may surface as everyday elements in 21<sup>st</sup>-century life and awareness. Concern about such factors is not evidence of mental instability, but of reality-based awareness of outside threats that can strike ever closer to home.

Fear and depression in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may thus have as much (or more) to do with what is going on in the world as what is going on in the individual psyche or household. Therefore, old therapeutic strategies designed to resolve primarily intrapsychic, biological, or

family dysfunctions may be insufficient to meet the demands of a new, larger, more threatening reality. Cognitive restructuring, improved communication skills, psychoanalysis of past events, Prozac or Valium may soften the impact of surrounding circumstances, but they cannot remove the real and present danger inherent in them – or the fear and depression emerging from them.

Social work is traditionally a mental-health discipline with a "person-in-environment focus" (Council on Social Work Education, 1983). The impact of the environment on the individual and his or her level of wellness has long been the object of social workers' attention. Such a perspective can be useful in a contextual assessment such as that being suggested here.

Church leaders and authors in recent years have frequently used the phrase "environment" to describe the spiritual, emotional, and cognitive context of modern life. Their various observations reveal "environmental" challenges in our time that may prove even more dangerous and disabling than the factors already discussed – "spiritual terrorism" that may prove even more destructive than the attacks of September 11.

For while external threats may threaten a sense of physical and economic well-being, internal attacks can erode the very foundations of effective decision-making and emotional and spiritual well-being. Therefore, as the Savior instructed,

Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

#### COGNITIVE UNDERPINNINGS OF 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY FEAR AND DEPRESSION

In assessing and treating individuals, many therapists utilize the insights and treatment strategies of cognitive therapy. It is axiomatic in this type of therapy that distressing feelings and their resulting problem behaviors stem not exclusively from outside events, but from one's internal reaction to them. On an even deeper level, cognitive therapy holds that feelings and behaviors, as well as daily thoughts, are affected by schemas, or deeply-held generalized beliefs, often formed in childhood, which constitute a template for reaction to oneself, the world, and the people in it.

It may be useful to apply a similar model of cognitive assessment to broad cultural trends that are influencing large numbers of individuals and families. If many in the culture are struggling with depression, fear, anger, impulse control, or other factors seen in modern society and clinical settings, perhaps the problem is not exclusively the troubling circumstances or events of modern life (serious as they are), but rather the cognitive mindset with which the culture has socialized people to interpret these events. And as in individualized cognitive therapy, if consistent patterns of thought can be identified which contribute to dis-ease and dysfunction, then replacement of those thought patterns may facilitate a more healthful response in both emotion and behavior.

Are there "cultural thought patterns" that affect, on a macro level, the individual beliefs and behavioral responses of people on a micro level? In an age of pervasive mass media, sharing ideas and views (whether healthy or unhealthy) is possible to an extent and breadth never dreamed of before. A book written in 1972 by a prominent journalist, Robert Stein, was insightfully titled *Media Power: Who is Shaping Your Picture of the World?* Stein observes:

The subject of this book is the picture of the world that you and I carry around in our heads: who puts it there, why, how and under what conditions.

Beyond our limited daily experience, it is television, radio, newspapers, magazines and books – the media – that furnish our consciousness with the people, places and events that we agree to call reality. But reality, in a literal sense, is what happens to three and a half billion people all over the world twenty-four hours a day. Out of that teeming experience, the media can only give us, in words and pictures, a representation of tiny fragments that are deemed significant...

By shaping our picture of the world on an almost minute-to-minute basis, the media now largely determine what we think, how we feel and what we do about our social and political environment. (Stein, 1972, xi-xii)

Stein's point is well taken. Out of literally billions of people, situations, and places in the world, taking place minute by minute and hour by hour, the media turns its powerful lens on only a miniscule portion of the total human experience. And indeed, to do otherwise

would be impossible. Media is a finite medium, able to focus only on one image at a time, in a finite number of minutes, hours, and seconds. The question is – who selects what is to be portrayed, and why? How are events deemed "significant" or not? What is the standard by which one situation or message is chosen over another?

Knowing that only one segment of "reality" can be presented, out of billions of possible alternatives, and that only one interpretation of that chosen "reality" can be presented at a time, media programming should be regarded as a social responsibility of paramount importance. That selected and edited picture of "reality" goes to a mass audience consisting not only of experienced and thoughtful adults, but of impressionable youth and children just beginning to form their cognitive template of the world. Therapist and anthropologist Mary Pipher has observed:

We must remember that all television [and one could argue, all media] is educational. It teaches values and behavior. Children are manipulated from the time they can sit in front of a television ... In the last decades of our century, for the first time since the 1500's, children have access to the same information that adults have ... Children are not sheltered from what has been considered for hundreds of years to be adult material. (Pipher, 1996, pp. 14-17)

Of course, this opportunity to influence the beliefs and behaviors of many, including children, has not always been used responsibly or wisely by media producers. One author observes the following about media content and its effect on audiences:

It is not really new or profound to point out that television executives have for years claimed that they are not capable of influencing our actions or changing behavior, but for decades America's major corporations have paid them billions of dollars for a paltry few seconds or a minute to do just that. To sponsors, media executives claim that just a few well-placed seconds can control how America will spend its hard-earned money. But to Congress and other watch-dog agencies they argue that they are not responsible for causing viewers to change the way they will respond to any emotionally charged, potentially violent circumstance



that they may subsequently find themselves in. This in spite of the fact that, as of 1994, there have been more than two hundred studies demonstrating the correlation between television and violence. (Grossman, 1995, p. 328)

This author, Colonel David A. Grossman PhD, self-described as “a psychologist who is also a historian and a career soldier” (Grossman, 1995, p. 253), paints a sobering picture in his book *On Killing*. Grossman relates that in World War II and every previous war, the firing rate of soldiers (the percentage of soldiers who actually shot and killed enemy soldiers) was about 15-20%. This low percentage was due to the natural (and psychologically healthy) reluctance human beings have to taking other human lives.

So to increase the percentages and create more effective, lethal soldiers, military training was adapted to dehumanize the enemy and desensitize soldiers to the reality of killing. Rather than traditional bulls-eye targets (which look nothing like people), soldiers were trained to fire on increasingly realistic human-shaped targets. These were created from various materials – cardboard, balloons – even milk bottles filled with red paint, producing a realistic effect when they were shattered by gunfire, emulating human dismemberment. The soldiers (most often impressionable teenagers) received strong verbal and physical reinforcement for their success in destroying these human-like targets.

Meanwhile, soldiers were also taught to dehumanize the enemy through focusing on a specific body part as a target (such as above the right eye), and through repeated propaganda characterizing the enemy as dangerous, sub-human, and deserving of violence. These methods produced a remarkable improvement in the firing rate – up to 95% in the Vietnam War, as killing became literally instinctual under threat of attack.

Grossman emphasizes that such soldiers have not proved any threat to society upon their return, as they are *specifically trained to fire only under authority* of a commanding officer – an extremely important limitation. He notes that police officers and professional snipers are now typically trained with these same methods, including that same crucial limitation – firing only under authority.

Grossman then describes how these incredibly effective methods of conditioning people to kill have

been replicated in the mass media, particularly through television, movies, and interactive video games, which are as available to children as they are to adults. These elements include:

1. *continual exposure to violent scenes* that desensitize viewers to the human consequences of violence;
2. *glorification of violent “heroes”* in the movies and on television who resolve their various challenges by gunning down those who oppose them; and
3. *reinforcement for participating in violent entertainment*, such as the popcorn, candy, and warm presence of a date at a movie, or the escalating numbers on a video arcade scoreboard, garnered for shooting down realistic, human-looking targets – all occurring without the all-important “safety catch” of training to fire only under authority, for lawful purposes.

Grossman notes the impact of classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and social learning in these “training experiences,” warning that:

Adolescents in movie theaters across the nation, and watching television at home, are seeing detailed, horrible suffering and killing of human beings, and they are learning to associate this killing and suffering with entertainment, pleasure, their favorite soft drink, their favorite candy bar, and the close, intimate contact of their date ... We do a better job of desensitizing and conditioning our citizens to kill than anything [any military trainer] ever dreamed of. If we had a clear-cut objective of raising a generation of assassins and killers who are unrestrained by either authority or the nature of the victim, it is difficult to imagine how we could do a better job ... *How did we become so hardened? The answer to that question is that we, as a society, have become systematically desensitized to the pain and suffering of others* ... We are reaching that stage of desensitization at which the inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment: vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it. (Grossman, 1995, pp. 302, 310-311)

Though this is perhaps the most alarming example of misapplication of media power to instruct and condition others, and to shape a world view (particularly in our youth), it is certainly not the only one. Mary Pipher,

in her acclaimed book, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, noted:

With puberty girls crash into junk culture ... They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated ... They know something is very wrong, but they tend to look for the source within themselves or their families rather than in broader cultural problems ... Corporate America encourages girls to consume products such as Cokes and designer jeans, and chemicals such as alcohol and nicotine, to sedate their natural and understandable pain ... The junk values of our mass culture socialize girls to expect happiness and regard pain as unusual. Advertising suggests that if you aren't happy, something is wrong. Pain is presented as something that can and should be avoided by consuming the right things. (Pipher, 1994, pp. 12-13, 202)

In her next book, *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families*, Pipher continued:

Our children are growing up in a consumption-oriented, electronic community that is teaching them very different values from those we say we value. The role of parents has changed dramatically. Good parents used to introduce their children into the broader culture; now they try to protect their children from the broader culture. Good parents used to instill the values of the broader culture; now they try to teach their children values very different from the ones the world at large teaches ... For the first time in two thousand years of Western civilization, families live in houses without walls. That is, they live in a world in which walls offer no protection. Technology has brought the outside world into the living room ... Crime on the nightly news makes all places feel dangerous. Electronic media seeps into the interstices of homes and teaches children ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that are at odds with common sense. Families are reeling under the pressures of a culture they can't control ... The media forms our new community. The electronic village is our hometown ... Parents and children are more likely to recognize Bill Cosby or Jerry Seinfeld than they are their next-door neighbors ... These [media] relationships feel personal. But they aren't. We "know" celebrities but they don't know us.

The new community is not a reciprocal neighborhood like earlier ones. David Letterman won't be helping out if our car battery dies on a winter morning ... Jane Fonda won't babysit in a pinch ... These vicarious relationships create a new kind of loneliness – the loneliness of people whose relationships are with personae instead of persons. (Pipher, 1996, 11-13)

Pseudo-relationships, junk values, junk culture – Pipher sees these as components of media and other modern cultural influences that create powerful deterrents to effective family life and to healthy life building. Relationships with (media-created) two-dimensional people, crafted from imagination to create passive entertainment for viewers and profit for producers, do not provide effective preparation for life with real people. Three-dimensional, real living human beings do not exist solely to provide gratification for others. Yet significant media consumption – even of innocuous programs – can condition viewers of all ages to respond to other people as two-dimensional providers of need-fulfillment and pleasure – or deterrents to it, in which case anger, rudeness, or even violence are becoming increasingly commonplace responses (Faust, 2000, p. 43; Hinckley, 1998, p. 50).

Dr. Terry Warner (2001) cites a quotation he encountered in childhood that inspired much of his work: "To the immature, other people are not real." Warner writes movingly of the difference between what Martin Buber called "I-Thou" relationships, in which people value each other as beings of equal worth and validity, and "I-It" relationships, in which people view others simply as means to their desired ends, or as resented obstacles to those ends (Warner, 2001, pp. 41-50). Two-dimensional media relationships, in which other people are presented only as objects for sexual and/or violent fantasizing, or to inform of experiences or products designed to make one "happy," can certainly condition young and old minds to create "I-It" relationships. Further, as Pipher observes:

Ads manipulate us into being dissatisfied. As businessman B.E. Puckett said, "It's our job to make people unhappy with what they have" ... Advertising teaches us to live on the level of the pleasure principle. This leads to impulse-control problems and to feelings of entitlement. "I am the center of the universe and I want what I want

now." This thinking creates citizens who are vulnerable to quick fixes. It leads to citizens filled with self-pity, which is the flip side of entitlement ... Advertising teaches that people shouldn't have to suffer, that pain is unnatural and can be cured. They say that effort is bad and convenience is good and that products solve complex human problems ... The propaganda that life is made happier by purchases encourages adults and children to make bad decisions about their time and money ... *Our current value system emphasizes profit over human well being.* (Pipher, 1998, pp. 93-94)

Secular commentators are not alone in their concern about the destructive potentials of media influence in shaping beliefs about the world and other people, and behavior generated from such beliefs. In 1995, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin noted:

Our Heavenly Father opened the windows of heaven and gave his children the Word of Wisdom to warn against consuming substances that can damage and destroy our physical bodies. He likewise has, through prophets, cautioned against consuming the steady diet of evil that is offered relentlessly in today's media, especially magazines, movies, videocassettes, video games, and television. The windows of computer monitors and television screens can bring to us very useful information, but they can also bring information that is evil, degrading, and destructive.

The Lord has warned repeatedly against the evils and designs of conspiring men in our day who would enslave us to our appetites and passions by tempting and tantalizing us with obscene images, words, and music. Through his servants the Lord has cautioned us strongly not to take into our minds thoughts that can harm our spirits.

Since 1950, Church leaders speaking in general conference have counseled us some seventy-five times against unhealthy media consumption. In recent years, as standards of public decency and morality have declined and as public media have reflected and often led that decline, these words of loving concern from inspired shepherds of the Lord's flock have come with more frequency and greater urgency. The watchmen on the tower have raised a warning voice.

I add my own voice. I suggest that we pay greater heed to voices of warning that our Father in Heaven has raised

against the forces of Satan that come so easily and so pervasively into our homes through the media. I think of all the words of counsel and direction that we have received on this matter as constituting collectively a "word of wisdom for the mind." Just as we exercise great care about what we take into our bodies through our mouths, we should exert a similar vigilance about what we take into our minds through our eyes and ears. (Wirthlin, 1995, p. 75)

Small wonder, then, that the new *For the Strength of Youth* booklet addressed by Church leaders to LDS teens includes these prophetic instructions:

Whatever you read, listen to, or look at has an effect on you. Therefore, choose only entertainment and media that uplift you. Good entertainment will help you to have good thoughts and make righteous choices. It will allow you to enjoy yourself without losing the Spirit of the Lord.

While much entertainment is good, some of it can lead you away from righteous living. Offensive material is often found in websites, concerts, movies, music, videocassettes, DVDs, books, magazines, pictures, and other media...

Do not attend, view, or participate in entertainment that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way ... Have the courage to walk out of a movie or video party, turn off a computer or television, change a radio station, or put down a magazine if what is being presented does not meet Heavenly Father's standards. Do these things even if others do not. (The First Presidency, 2001, pp. 17-19)

Ancient prophets, with inspired foresight, likewise gave instructions for people living amidst prophesied latter-day corruption. Moroni, writing directly to a latter-day audience, instructed:

I will show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then you may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for

he persuadeth no man to do good, no, nor one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. (Moroni 7:16-17)

Media can contribute significantly to the building and strengthening of cultural values and widespread beliefs, whether for good or for evil. General Authorities have been increasingly vocal in recent years about the media – not just in warning of its dangers, but in appreciating its great power for good, when used appropriately. President Hinckley rarely speaks to General Conference audiences without expressing profound gratitude for the media technologies that allow Church members across the world to gather as one great family and hear the voices of Church leaders, an experience that otherwise would be impossible for those living in distant lands (e.g., Hinckley, 2002).

Recent years have also seen the development of an official Church website <<http://www.lds.org>>, including a full on-line archive of Church magazines, scriptures, and other resources. A new missionary site <<http://www.mormon.org>> allows people to investigate the gospel at their own pace in the privacy of their own homes. Similarly, AMCAP leaders in recent years have worked diligently to begin harnessing the power of media tools to facilitate the sharing of gospel-based information for counselors through its website, <<http://www.amcap.net>>.

Indeed, modern technology and mass media can do virtually limitless good when applied to positive principles. However, many of the beliefs and behaviors taught by the popular media can only exacerbate the problem of widespread fear and depression.

#### **THE GOSPEL OF SHERM: SECULARISM, HEDONISM, ETHICAL RELATIVISM, AND MATERIALISM**

Mass media and advertising have brought into society's homes simplified but powerful expressions of idea systems which were once discussed only in elite academic circles. They are constantly paraded before impressionable minds, both young and old, in language easy to be understood – accompanied by stories and images that cheerfully demonstrate the behavioral application of these "philosophies of men." This should come as no surprise to those who recall President Joseph F. Smith's warning early in the twentieth century that:

There are at least three dangers that threaten the Church within, and the authorities need to awaken to the fact that the people should be warned unceasingly about them. As I see these, they are flattery [see Jacob 7:1-5, D&C 10:25-27] of prominent men in the world, *false educational ideas*, and sexual impurity. (Smith, 1914, p. 476)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has referred to these ideas as "today's malevolent *isms*" (Maxwell, 1995, p. 66). They may be organized and summarized as follows:

**Secularism:** God is irrelevant in human affairs, or is even non-existent. Human reason and resources are sufficient alone to meet human needs.

**Hedonism:** The pursuit of personal pleasure is life's principle purpose. Every impulse should be satisfied. All pain or discomfort is negative and should be avoided at all costs.

**Ethical Relativism:** Personal preference and situational factors determine morality. People should do what seems right or feels good to them. Moral reality is what you think it is.

**Materialism:** Only that which is tangible or physically measurable is real and of value. Material products and services are the source of human happiness, safety, and healing.

As urged by President Joseph F. Smith, Church leaders throughout the past century have warned unceasingly about the dangers of such "false educational ideas" (President Smith's danger #2), which tend to have the net result of encouraging "sexual impurity" (President Smith's danger #3), among a host of other social ills, all of which are proselytized through "the flattery of prominent men in the world" (President Smith's danger #1).

These "prominent men," one could argue, may include not only authorities in a variety of academic disciplines, but also well-known media celebrities. For who is more "prominent" in a typical twenty-first century life than the actors and newscasters whose *two-dimensional* presence accompanies many individuals and families through their various activities in various locations for many hours each day; or the music star whose larger-than-life, poster-sized image is a cherished centerpiece of many children's bedrooms?

Examining each of these “malevolent *isms*” in turn, let us review some of the numerous statements Church leaders have made throughout this past century regarding each of these ideas, which together can be characterized as the *gospel of SHERM*:

### Secularism

The foundation and wellspring of all the others, this idea was described in the 1980’s by President Ezra Taft Benson as follows:

As a nation, we have become self-sufficient. This has given birth to a new religion in America which some have called secularism. This is a view of life with the idea that God is not in the picture and that he has nothing to do with the picture in the first place ... All events are explained from a “humanistic” frame of reference. This removes the need for faith in God or a belief that he is interested in the affairs of men. (Benson, 1988, p. 319)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught in the 1970’s:

In a sense, *eternalism* sees the individual and his potential as one might view an acorn and the subsequent forest. *Secularism* sees the individual as a very important and very real, but very temporary, phenomenon in the cosmic landscape – which leads inevitably to other values and emphasis. When life-style takes the form of “me” and “now” rather than “us” and “always,” apparent consequences are inevitable. (Maxwell, 1974)

President Benson elaborated on the behavioral (or “life-style”) consequences of eliminating a belief in God and his relevance in human affairs:

Some would justify their immorality with the argument that restrictions against it are merely religious rules, rules that are meaningless because in reality there is no God. This you will recognize is merely an untruthful rationalization designed to justify one’s carnal appetite, lust, and passion. God’s law is irrevocable. It applies to all, whether they believe in God or not. Everyone is subject to its penalties, no matter how one tries to rationalize or ignore them. (Benson, 1988, p. 281)

The First Presidency issued a statement on March 9, 1979, declaring,

We ... deplore the growing efforts to establish irreligion, such as atheism or secularism, as the official position of the United States of America, thus obscuring and eroding the rich and diverse religious symbols of our public life. (News of the Church, 1979)

The same year, Elder Neal A. Maxwell warned,

Irreligion as the state religion would be the worst of all combinations. Its orthodoxy would be insistent and its inquisitors inevitable. Its paid ministry would be numerous beyond belief ... This new irreligious imperialism seeks to disallow certain opinions simply because those opinions grow out of religious convictions. (Maxwell, 1979)

Only thirteen years later – ten years ago – Elder James E. Faust commented on the direction of social and political developments:

The new civil religion is, in my opinion, coming dangerously close to becoming a state religion of secularism. (Faust, 1992, p. 71; see also Ballard, 1992)

Even more recently, Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of “the slums of the spirit created by spreading secularism” (Maxwell, 1995, p. 67).

These “slums of the spirit” engendered by secularism could be discussed at length – its impact not only on religion, but on the creative and performing arts, and on the physical and behavioral sciences. Its influence shapes modern views on history, literature, education, politics (especially social policy), and individual lifestyles. When God’s guiding principles are removed from these significant arenas, the inevitable result is confusion and deterioration. When he is eliminated as the acknowledged source of law and truth – or even as the source of existence – a significant void of meaning is created, a void that other “malevolent *isms*” rush in cheerfully to fill.

### Hedonism

Elder Maxwell has written: “Of all today’s malevolent ‘isms,’ hedonism takes the greatest toll ... For some, their god ‘is their belly’ [Phil. 3:19], as are other forms of anatomical allegiance!” (Maxwell, 1995, p. 67). The message that life’s basic purpose is to have fun and expe-

rience personal pleasure is rampant in the cultural environment of modern life. As a close corollary, the avoidance or elimination of pain, discomfort, or even inconvenience is encouraged, particularly through product advertising. Hedonistic lifestyles, pleasure resorts, and chemical paths to pleasure and pain relief (both physical and emotional) are becoming increasingly common fixtures on the modern landscape. Elder Boyd K. Packer has noted:

We live in a day when the adversary stresses on every hand the philosophy of instant gratification. We seem to demand instant everything, including instant solutions to our problems. We are indoctrinated that somehow we should always be instantly emotionally comfortable. When that is not so, some become anxious – and all too frequently seek relief from counseling, from analysis, and even from medication. It was meant that life would be a challenge. To suffer some anxiety, some depression, some disappointment, even some failure is normal. ... Teach our members that if they have a good, miserable day once in a while, or several in a row, to stand steady and face them ... There is a great purpose in our struggle in life. (Packer, 1982, p. 94)

“Struggle in life” is not consistent with a philosophy of fun, pleasure, and pain avoidance. Aldous Huxley, in his classic futuristic novel, *Brave New World* (1932), painted a chilling picture of a technologically-dependent, hedonistic society. Social and genetic engineering, elimination of religion and family, encouragement of unrestrained sexual expression including in the very young, intense titillating media, and all-purpose use of “soma” (a prescribed drug used in various doses to eliminate all awareness of pain or stress), were among the strands of the social fabric he envisioned in his nightmarish account.

In his introduction to the 1946 edition, Huxley noted that only fifteen years after writing the novel, many of his predictions were materializing at an astonishing rate. “Nor does the sexual promiscuity of *Brave New World* seem so very distant,” he observed.

“All things considered it looks as though Utopia [the world he described in the novel] were far closer than anyone, only fifteen years ago, could have imagined. Then, I projected it six hundred years into the future. Today it seems quite possible that the horror may be

upon us within a single century” (Huxley, 1946, xii-xiv). If Huxley were on hand today to observe current hedonistic, sexual, and cultural trends, he would likely lament that he was not far from correct in that sad assessment.

Of hedonism and its social impact, especially widespread fatherlessness, Elder Maxwell has noted: “These and related consequences threaten to abort society’s future even before the future arrives! Yet carnalists are unwilling to deny themselves, even though all of society suffers from an awful avalanche of consequences!” (Maxwell, 1995, p. 67).

### Ethical Relativism

Elder Maxwell has observed:

As prophesied, ethical relativism is now in steep crescendo: “Every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world” (D&C 1:16). Without the lamp’s perspective, gross distortion results [see Jacob 4:13]. (Maxwell, 1995, p. 68)

If the basic standard for decision-making, on an individual and on a societal level, is “do what feels good” or “do what seems right to you” without guidance from unifying universal law, then indeed “gross distortion results,” with consequences including (to name only a few) unbridled sexuality, rationalized violence, unwise consumption, and unethical business practices harming many people. The idolatries, or counterfeit religious systems, of previous cultures at least unified them in a consensus of where to center their worship and how to conduct their lives. In an ideological system where “every man walks after the image of his own god,” where self-interest is the primary good and prime directive, community breaks down, as individual appetite becomes the only omnipotent, omnipresent deity acknowledged and obeyed. Elder Maxwell insightfully asked:

How can a society set priorities if there are no basic standards? Are we to make our calculations using only the arithmetic of appetite? ... A society not based on key values like loving our neighbor will inevitably subsidize selfishness and will place a premium upon an apostate form of individualism at the expense of community ... If self-interest is the final determinant, why should we be

inconvenienced by the needs of others? A value-free society focuses upon things like “me” and “now” – it has little sense of history out of which to fashion the future.” (Maxwell, 1978)

Unfortunately, disciples of ethical relativism are often not content to indulge their desires privately. What begins as “I want it, therefore it’s right” on an individual level progresses to political demands to make “it” a *protected* right, ultimately seeking to silence all alternative views. What starts as a demand for personal license and the right to decide one’s own values ends as a tyrannical imposition of those chosen values on others. This is most often the case in matters pertaining to sexuality and family life, such as abortion, premarital sex, birth control, sex education, easy divorce, same-sex attraction, and First Amendment “rights” to create and distribute violent or pornographic media, denying the rights of others to even edit out elements they find offensive. Apparently others are to sit silently by, swallowing the “second-hand smoke” of such initiatives.

### Materialism

President James E. Faust, in an address given just two years ago entitled “Shield of Faith,” observed:

Technology may help us communicate with each other and the world, but not with God. I wish to sound a voice of warning to this people ... Any of us can be left behind, drawn away by the seductive voices of secularism and materialism. (Faust, 2000, p. 18)

The cultural message is ever-present that material products are needed to produce happiness, pain relief, warm intimate relationships, and personal fulfillment. Mary Pipher observes:

We are even encouraged that it’s patriotic to spend. Our economy depends on massive consumer spending on nonessentials. We must buy to keep America afloat whether we can afford to or not. (Pipher, 1998, p. 94)

“Or not” is a phrase replete with significance, given the elevated levels of consumer debt and numbers of personal and business bankruptcies that spring from such indiscriminate spending.

Materialism confers upon human beings the ignoble identity of “consumer.” Imagine, children of the Creator of the universe, being taught that their function in society is primarily to “consume” human-built products! Further, materialism conditions people to regard others as objects for their consumption or to meet their needs (a particularly lurid condition in the materialistic universe of pornography). Spouses evaluate each other, both initially and over time, on their partner’s ability to “meet my needs” and “make me happy.” Failure to consistently produce these effects results in spouses being traded in, like so much merchandise at a Wal-mart return desk.

In the face of such trends, Peter’s predictions become ever more descriptive of current conditions:

There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in *damnable heresies, even denying the Lord* that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And *many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.* And through covetousness shall they with feigned words *make merchandise of you ...* (2 Peter 2:1-3, emphasis added)

Noting the consequences of such “damnable heresies,” Elder Maxwell observed in April 1996:

All about us we see the bitter and abundant harvest from permissiveness. A perceptive person has acknowledged, “The struggle to live ethically without God has left us not with the just and moral order we imagined, but with disorder and confusion. Something has gone radically wrong with secularism. The problem has more than its share of irony, for secularism, in the end, has converted itself into a kind of religion. Now the transition has become complete: the state has become the church” (Peter Marin, “Secularism’s Blind Faith,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Sept. 1995, 20). The more what is politically correct seeks to replace what God has declared correct, the more ineffective approaches to human problems there will be ... I have no hesitancy, brothers and sisters, in stating that unless checked, permissiveness, by the end of its journey, will cause humanity to stare in mute disbelief at its awful consequences. (Maxwell, 1996, p. 68)

In 1998 Elder Maxwell commented on the emotional consequences of these philosophical ideas:

There is an increasing and profound sense of existential despair in the world. A grumpy cynicism now pervades politics. Many feel burdened by society's other accumulating anxieties. Even those who are spiritually secure themselves can sense a chill in the air. *Cold secularism causes some of that shivering ...* There is so much unsettlement and divisiveness. No wonder the subsequent loss of hope almost inevitably sends selfishness surging as many, resignedly, turn to pleasing themselves. (Maxwell, 1998, p. 62, emphasis added)

Despair, grumpiness, accumulating anxieties, coldness, divisiveness, hopelessness, selfishness, resignation, unwise but desperate satisfaction of animal impulses – these are not couched in the clinical language of the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). But it is not a far stretch to suggest that these emotional ills Elder Maxwell identified may closely resemble the presenting symptoms of those troubled souls who fill our therapy offices, seeking relief and comfort.

The gospel of SHERM, which may indeed be the generalized macro-“cognitive distortion” that underlies so much contemporary human suffering, continues to be taught in a variety of forms, including academic teaching and writing, and widespread media distribution. The “helping professions” are not devoid of it. In fact, many writers credit psychology with much of the popularization, distribution, and creation of application strategies for the anti-value systems discussed here, including authors cited earlier (Pipher 1996, Grossman 1995, Huxley 1946). Elder Ezra Taft Benson commented in 1969:

The world worships the learning of men. They trust the arm of flesh. To them, men's reasoning is greater than God's revelations. The precepts of man have gone so far in subverting our educational system that in many cases a higher degree today, in the so-called social sciences, can be tantamount to a major investment in error. Very few men build firmly enough on the rock of revelation to go through this kind of indoctrination and come out untainted. Unfortunately, of those who succumb, some

use their higher degree to get teaching positions even in our Church educational system, where they spread the falsehoods they have been taught. (Benson, 1969, pp. 12-13; 1988, p. 319)

Wherever and however it is taught, the gospel of SHERM, a powerful modern idolatry (D&C 1:16, Isaiah 2:5-22), separates its disciples from the true and living God. It encourages them to substitute the precepts of men for the wisdom of God (2 Nephi 28). It tantalizes them with the promise of liberty and pleasure, but leaves them ultimately empty, without a secure anchor for their lives. It brazenly invites its adherents to live “without God in the world,” with consequences documented in sober warning words by multiple scriptural witnesses:

Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness. And now ... all men that are in a state of nature, or I could 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 41:10-11)

They are without God and Christ in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind...as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they. (Mormon 5:16, 18)

These sad words are tragically descriptive of many today, whose lives are impacted and partially directed by the gospel of SHERM – the secularistic, hedonistic, ethically relativistic, materialistic values paraded continuously through the media and the popular culture, to children and youth as well as adults. As contemporary waves grow fiercer and taller, as social and economic conditions worsen, as pervasive training in violent and sexual behavior bears its inevitable and sorrowful fruit, many indeed feel “tossed about upon the waves ... without anything wherewith to steer” them (Mormon 5:18).

Such is the depressive, anxiety-inducing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which AMCAP therapists find themselves. Situated to serve, positioned to make a difference, perhaps indeed AMCAP and its members are “come to the kingdom for [just] such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).



### **“PUBLISHERS OF PEACE” – HOW AMCAP MEMBERS CAN BUILD AND MAINTAIN HOPE WITHIN THEMSELVES, THEIR CLIENTS, AND THEIR CULTURE**

Over the previous pages, the broader context for 21<sup>st</sup>-century depression and fear has been examined. Social, environmental, cultural, and philosophical factors contributing on a macro-level to the micro-level distress of individuals and families has been explored. This discussion has described why simplistic assessments of “chemical imbalance” or “family dysfunction” are insufficient by themselves to address the full range of concerns creating today’s emotional distresses, and has discussed the multi-level stressful impact on today’s clients of environmental factors, including:

- *external social conditions*, such as economic instability and widespread violence;
- *media power*, which is often used for destructive purposes; and
- *anti-moral philosophical ideas*, attractively packaged and widely distributed, which affect the inner core of everyday consciousness and decision-making.

In such a cultural context, how, in addition to current therapeutic strategies, can AMCAP therapists best help those distressed souls who come to them, seeking direction and comfort? Addressing the three factors identified above, a few suggestions may be helpful.

#### **Teach Perspective**

In responding to social conditions and events, clients can be helped to recognize that *although the bad exists, it is not all that exists*, even in these times of turmoil. For every building decimated on September 11, there are thousands of others that remain standing. For every sniper in Washington DC, there are thousands of law-abiding, peaceful, even kindly, individuals – in every city throughout the world. The media’s unavoidable tendency to focus on chosen fragments of reality can cloud our awareness that “real” reality is a lot bigger and multifaceted than what is being portrayed. And, to a significant extent, far more benevolent.

Gospel perspective, for LDS clients or religious-minded others, can build latter-day hope as few other things can. The Savior’s teachings about the last days, outlining both their tribulations and their glories (D&C

45, 38, 133), the on-schedule ripening of both the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13; D&C 86:1-7), the foreknown maturation of the fig tree (Matt. 24, JS-Matt.) and other such insights can provide great strength and reassurance of God’s omniscience. A preview and full understanding of his plan for the world can prepare faithful souls for the escalating stresses of latter-day living, just as childbirth education can prepare mothers to deal with the increasingly intense pains of childbirth. Prepared mothers learn to manage and interpret their pains as progression toward something wonderful – the birth of their baby. Gospel perspective allows individuals to do the same with the signs of the times.

As the Savior encouraged his disciples, when they were shaken by his description of latter-day circumstances, “*Be not troubled, for, when all these things shall come to pass, ye may know that the promises which have been made unto you shall be fulfilled*” (D&C 45:34, see also verses 26-46). In the midst of widespread cultural decay, the kingdom of God is, as predicted, beginning to roll forward and shine forth as never before. Temples dot the earth – 114 at present. The message of the gospel is flooding the earth, through an army of missionaries and through the wise application of media power and technology to its rightful function – to spread saving truth (Ballard, 1996; Scharman 1999). Zion is beginning indeed to rise in beauty and in holiness (D&C 82:14).

Nature daily reminds us that as night progresses to its deepest blackness on one portion of the planet, so the sun rises in magnificent shining glory on another – *both occurring at exactly the same time*. So it is in the times we live in – Zion and Babylon each continuing to ripen steadily, side by side. Real as it is, the bad is not all that exists. That is the crucial, comforting message of perspective.

#### **Teach Discernment**

In a world where “the bad keeps getting badder, and the good keeps getting gooder,” it is crucial to develop the ability to tell the difference between the two. Previous generations of parents taught their children, “don’t believe everything you read.” Modern parents would be wise to teach themselves and their children, “don’t believe everything you see and hear” – particularly in the mass media.

Moroni chapter 7 offers crucial keys for the development of this ability to discern between good and evil.

First (see verses 13-19), that which leads to faith in and obedience to Christ comes from God, and is good; that which leads away from him is not of God, and can only lead to misery. Second (see verses 20-48), one can apply the great standards of faith, hope and charity to this crucial discernment process. That which is of God strengthens faith, hope, and charity – the pure love of Christ – it is a positive influence, and can be enjoyed and embraced with confidence (see 1 Thess. 5:21, AF 13). That which fosters the opposite of faith (fear), the opposite of hope (despair), or the opposite of charity (anger, hatred, violence, lust) is of a darker origin, and should be strenuously avoided as the destructive cancer that it is.

Extensive clinical experience has demonstrated that clients afflicted with fear, despair, anger, or lust (particularly teens) are frequently feeding that emotional affliction with media or music whose messages and styles are specifically designed to produce and amplify those same dark emotional responses. The self-injury and suicidal behavior becoming rampant among youth is *taught*, boldly and deliberately, by certain “alternative” rock bands. These bands frequently are discovered to be the favorite bands of suicidal, violent or self-mutilating teen clients. Similarly, violent children are frequently found to have been gorging on media violence.

Even non-religious clients can be helped to see how their choices of media, music, and behavior can significantly influence their own and their children’s feelings, values, decisions, and overall well-being (or lack thereof). Taking in media and cultural influences with fully conscious awareness and activated decision-making – directly deciding which influences to permit and which to avoid – gives individuals and families power which they may otherwise not be conscious of. That is the clarifying, strengthening message of discernment.

### Teach faith, family, and fellowship

The philosophical *gospel* of *SHERM* is specifically designed to destroy religious faith and the crucial relationships of family and community, by encouraging individuals to pursue their own pleasure and objectives without regard for divine law or the impact of their choices upon others. Such ideas are powerful – *but only if they are internalized and acted upon*. Mary Pipher (1994, p. 291) has observed, “I believe that the best

defense against bad ideas is *better* ideas.”

The restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most rich and fertile of all environments from which to extract these healing, protective, “better ideas” about man’s relationship with his God, family, neighbors, community, and individual self (see Maxwell, 1976). It is rich in power to heal and to comfort, to change hearts, to give peace and lasting joy that no external experience can eliminate (Romans 8:35; John 14:27, 16:33) or effectively emulate.

In October, 2002, Elder Richard G. Scott made a stunning promise to those suffering from heavy burdens, including past abuse:

Complete healing will come through your faith in Jesus Christ ... Ponder the power of the Atonement. Pray to understand how it can heal you. (Scott, 2002)

Few other healing processes, if any, can extend this generous promise of “complete healing.” Dr. Scott Richards (AMCAP Vice-President, 2001-2003) has explained:

All secular theories and approaches take God out of the picture – they don’t consider or accept the idea that God exists and that he can make a difference in our lives. A theistic psychology and psychotherapy asks, “If we take seriously the notions that God exists and that he can bless and heal us, what are the implications of this for our understanding of human development, psychopathology, therapeutic change, and healing?” ... *Theistic psychology* and *theistic psychotherapy* [are] terms [used] to refer to psychological theories and therapeutic practices that take seriously the idea that God exists and that there are transcendent spiritual influences that can assist us in coping, healing, and growing. (Richards, 2001)

Indeed, when God is put back into his rightful place at the center of human life – especially in the exquisitely tender process of healing souls, relationships, and families – so much can change so quickly, and so deeply. “Transcendent spiritual influences,” even “complete healing,” can come into our clients’ lives, as they learn to turn their pains and sorrows over to him who is rightly called “The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6, 61:1-4). Our professional labors can distract them from that

central healing work, or can point them directly to it – to him who really is our Savior, lawgiver, healer, judge, and rightful king.

AMCAP has long been symbolized by four arrows pointing to a single center. AMCAP's published mission statement [see p. 128 herein] clarifies:

What is the center upon which those arrows converge?  
It is The Living Christ – Christ whom we serve by serving our brothers and sisters in need, Christ whom we approach by our own spiritual strivings. (AMCAP Journal, 2000, p. 87; 2002, p. 128)

Indeed, when Christ and his teachings are at the center of our therapy, our research, our theory-building, our networking with other professionals, and (most importantly) our personal and family lives – miracles can and do happen. Our work can become inexpressibly satisfying, as we become part of a great force for good, even in these turbulent times. Such a focus can help us, as Christ-centered mental health professionals, to extend his love, declare his truth, and participate in his work of healing hearts and bringing to pass true “at-one-ment” (John 17:20-23) while working with individuals, families, and communities.

Amidst the devastation of September 11, 2001, something remarkable happened: America caught a rare and precious look at itself – un-scripted, un-air-brushed, and unedited. For a brief, unforgettable interval, regular television programming was interrupted, and the face of the American people was caught on tape, in the midst of its deepest grief. Significantly, it was not the accustomed media face of *SHERM*. It was the face of a people who came together to pray, to express love for their families and friends, to extend themselves in meaningful, even self-sacrificial service to their fellow beings. It was the face of *hope*. It was the face of *faith, family, and fellowship*. It was, sadly, a face that was all too soon transformed back to the usual media norm. But it was enough to let every observer know – reality is much bigger and better than what is usually seen on television and in the mass media. Mary Pipher (1996) believes that:

People cannot be whole and healthy unless they connect their lives to something larger than their personal happiness ... We need to be connected to each other ... The new

millennium will be about restoring community and rebuilding the infrastructure of families. (Pipher, 1996, p. 32)

To that wise assessment, AMCAP would add: The new millennium will also be about restoring and strengthening faith, that Jesus Christ and his teachings are *still* the standard for human behavior and relationships – indeed, the only dependable, productive, and everlasting standard.

### CONCLUSION: PUBLISHING PEACE

More than two-and-a-half centuries ago, Isaiah wrote, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that publish peace; that bring forth good tidings of good, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isaiah 52:8). AMCAP members can be among the publishers of that healing peace. The definition of the word *publish* is “to make publicly known; announce” (*Webster’s*, 1984, p. 483). As never before, through wise use of 21<sup>st</sup>-century tools, AMCAP is prepared to assist in gathering, then “making publicly known,” those healing ideas regarding Christ-centered “theistic psychology” and “theistic psychotherapy.”

Sometimes this “publishing” will need to be in the elevated language of academia, so scholars and professionals may hear these ideas in their own “mother tongue” (see Maxwell, 1976). Even more often, it may need to be spoken in everyday language accessible to every man, woman and child – language that is “easy to be understood” (1 Nephi 14:23; 2 Nephi 25:4, 8). The secularized idolatrous *gospel of SHERM* is widely proclaimed today in both of these languages. To make the kind of cultural and spiritual difference that is so sorely needed, effective “publishers of peace” will need to do the same.

In our professional and personal associations with clients and colleagues, through contributing to the *AMCAP Journal* and other professional publications, by using and expanding the website and other internet resources, and in a variety of other ways – we as AMCAP members can indeed “gather, integrate, and share” what we have learned about healing lives and healing families, with Christ at the center of our efforts. May God bless and guide us as we labor to do so, that his precious children may be fed, comforted, and healed, in a truly inspired 21<sup>st</sup>-century context.

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## Spiritual Perspectives in Marriage and Family Relationships

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When I completed graduate school at BYU, I was assigned to the Church's institute of religion at Weber State University. There, I taught a class on marriage only to find that most of the students were single. They didn't even know when to laugh at my jokes about marriage. So I took my act on the road, out into the stakes of the Church where married couples were struggling with real problems. As I began to teach these short courses of six to eight weeks, I started getting phone calls. The individual on the other end of the line would say, "I think our problems are a little more complex than what you covered in the class in Clearfield (or Layton, or Kaysville), so we were wondering if we could come and see you privately?" I agreed. But before I hung up the phone, they would often surprise me by saying, "Oh, by the way, if you can't fix us, I'm afraid this is it; I don't think we'll stay together if you can't help us." Talk about pressure!

That kind of statement from a caller would drive me to my knees: "Heavenly Father," I prayed earnestly, "what theory that I learned in graduate school should I use with this couple? They are threatening divorce if I can't help them." It was very serious to me at the time. After asking the Lord over a period of time, the answer from him was clear: "get the Saints to live the gospel." Consequently, I have tried over the years to help the saints understand and apply the principles of the gospel in their marriage and family situations.

Since that time I've learned that many of the Saints are not convinced that the gospel is the key to a successful

marriage—because most think they already know the doctrines of the gospel and are living them. They assume that because they hear them every week in Church, there's nothing new that they haven't heard. What does Lehi's trip through the wilderness have to do with my three-year-old's temper tantrums or my husband's spending habits?

It seems to me, as I look at the statistics on dysfunctional families, that many are not "getting it" in the Church—we are not making the connection between the doctrines of the kingdom and resolving marital and family issues.

I think we are embarrassing the Lord and his prophets with the extent of divorce, abuse, and marriage and family problems that keep surfacing in spite of the fact that we have greater access to resources that could help us: church books and magazines, temples, videos, counselors, manuals, general conference addresses, etc.

The classic story regarding the inability to apply

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gospel principles to family problems comes from our own Carlfred Broderick, PhD [*AMCAP President, 1982-83*]. A number of years ago I asked him to write a chapter for one of my books (Brinley & Judd, 1995). In the article, he indicated his surprise that divorce rates among Church members mirrored those of the population in general. He gave this explanation:

[Our] problem[s] seem to come in making the special applications from the general Gospel principles to the specific marital situation.

The point was illustrated vividly in a recent experience with a colleague. He is Jewish and one of the finest family therapists I know. I have referred close friends and relatives to him with good results. One day a[n LDS] woman called me to see if she could make an appointment to bring in her family for some counseling. Their problem was a rebellious teenager and an escalating power struggle between her and her parents that was getting out of hand.

After only a couple of weeks I got a call from my friend. "Carl, I need some help with this couple you referred to me."

"What's the problem? They probably just need to loosen up the parental iron fist a little."

"Of course. If they don't, this kid is about to run away from home or attempt suicide or do something else drastic. But, Carl, every time I suggest any movement in the direction of loosening up they patiently explain to me that I just don't understand their religious obligations as Mormon parents to keep this kid in line. Frankly, I don't know how to deal with this. I don't want to attack their religious beliefs, but the situation is explosive."

I thought a moment and then said, "Here's what you do. First, tell them that since you have started working with them on their problems you have developed a real curiosity about the Mormon religion. Then say that there is one issue that keeps coming up when you ask about it that has you mystified. You keep hearing about some 'War in Heaven,' but you can never quite figure out what it is about."

"That's it? I just ask them to explain this 'War in Heaven'?"

"That's it."

"Carl, what's the 'War in Heaven'?"

"It doesn't matter; just do what I said, and let me know how it goes."

A few days later he called: "Carl, I can't believe it; I did

what you said and it was like magic."

"So tell me about the session."

"Well, as you suggested, I told them that since I started working with them I got sort of interested in the Mormon religion. You wouldn't believe the response. Even the rebellious teenage kid promised to give me a copy of some book on the church with the family picture in the front. Then I said there was just one thing that kind of confused me about their beliefs. I kept hearing about some 'War in Heaven.' What was this 'War in Heaven'? Well, the mom in this family didn't as much as take a minute to collect her thoughts. In seconds she has launched into some story about a Council in Heaven and two Plans and she gets about three minutes into it and she stops cold in her tracks and gives me a funny look and says, 'Alright, Doctor, you've made your point.' From that point on they were like putty in my hands. It was like magic, Carl, what is this 'War in Heaven'?" (Broderick, 1995, pp. 11-12)

Another story comes from a good friend who taught marriage seminars for the parents of those with children in the Anasazi wilderness program (see Sanchez, 2000). During a break one day, an LDS mother came to him and asked, "What book would you recommend to improve marriages?" He picked up a scriptures triple combination that was on the table and handed it to her. She refused it saying, "Well, I already know about that. I mean something helpful and practical to a married couple in our day and time." When he tried again to hand her these scriptures she responded, "Look, you professionals read stuff to help people improve their marriages; now, can you tell me what it is that you read?" He made one last attempt to hand her the triple combination.

I have found that many of the Saints have that same mindset. They agree that we need the standard scriptural works for Sunday worship, of course. Besides, we need to prepare missionaries for the field; they must learn the scriptures before they go into the world to serve the Lord. But the attitude is that if there is a marital problem or a parent-child issue, the gospel is inadequate to resolve those types of problems. The only recourse, we think, is to leave the gospel framework and find someone trained in professional secular studies who can *really* help us solve our problems.

Thus, we have had a dichotomy in the church for a long time. Bishops and stake presidents and religious educators are accused of telling the saints to just pray harder, read the scriptures, and keep the commandments—and they can solve any problem. In contrast, counselors send

the message that, “you can’t solve personal and marriage problems just by reading the scriptures and praying.” Those of us who work with couples and families agree that with serious mental issues, more help is needed than can be provided by the bishop and stake president, by the scriptures or the prophets. I think most of us understand that if an accurate diagnosis of bipolar, schizophrenia or other mental abnormalities is made—one that goes beyond relationship problems—these people need medication and perhaps special insights into their problems to help them re-orient to the real world. On the other hand, for the relationship problems that most couples and families face, it seems that we don’t draw on the powers that come from a knowledge of the plan of salvation; that is, gospel principles.

Now, I realize that when people pay money for professional services that a therapist cannot exactly launch into a theology lesson. I am glad that I can; I have that luxury because I teach at a university and don’t depend on counseling for my source of income. So, when people come to me (from marriage classes or groups where I speak), I can have a theology lesson with them. And, I do remind them of the purposes of mortality and the importance of marriage and family relations in the Father’s plan. My “therapy,” so to speak, is to review with them the principles of the plan of salvation. It is obvious to me that couples in trouble over relationship issues are not applying gospel principles to resolve their difficulties. But professional psychotherapists would have a hard time reviewing the plan of salvation. Besides, they deal with many who are not members of the Church, or who are part-member families where the gospel is a source of contention in the marriage. But I agree with Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1984):

One of the great blessings flowing from ... latter-day revelation is the crucial, doctrinal framework known as the plan of salvation, the plan of happiness, or the plan of mercy ... So vital is this [plan of salvation] that if one stays or strays outside it, he risks ... misery. In fact, most human misery represents ignorance of or non-compliance with this plan. A cessation of such mortal suffering will not come without compliance to it. (Maxwell, 1984 p. 21)

Let me explain my point. The “pop psychology” of our day generally says that marital problems can best be solved by this formula:

- an increase in the quantity of communication,
- better communication skills, and
- greater listening skills.

These three ideas are thought to be the common solutions that most people on the street view as essential to resolving typical marital and family problems. My first reaction is, “well, it sounds good; it sounds like it should work; all right.” And, of course we all can agree that we can do better in the way we communicate in our families. But to concentrate on these ideas as solutions is not the Lord’s approach, nor do I find it in the scriptures, nor do we hear about it in general conference sessions from prophets, seers, and revelators. It seems to me that the Lord does not approach marriage and family problems from a “communication” perspective.

Let’s think about our practices as Latter-day Saints. Have you men ever been in a priesthood meeting where you were split up into pairs so you could practice rephrasing what your partner said so that you could learn better listening skills to use with your wife and children? Have you women ever been to a Relief Society meeting where you practiced making *I-statements* so as to become better able to express your feelings without being accusatory? I don’t think so— and I don’t think the gospel system will change in our lifetime.

Many people in the Church today cannot figure out why we study the teachings of Presidents Brigham Young, Joseph F. Smith and Harold B. Lee when President Gordon B. Hinckley’s greatest concern is families in the kingdom falling apart; recall his statement:

I am concerned about family life in the Church. We have wonderful people, but we have too many whose families are falling apart. It is a matter of serious concern. I think it is my most serious concern. (Hinckley, 1995a, p. 6)

I suppose many of the saints would propose that what we ought to do is to get single adults together in the same classes to work on dating skills while married couples work on communication skills until they become proficient.

What do the Lord and his prophets teach? They label marriage and family problems as *heart problems*, as *selfishness*, as *pride* issues. President Spencer W. Kimball (1982, p. 313) has said that every divorce is the result of selfishness; President Ezra Taft Benson (1989) called our attention to the destructive nature of pride,

while President Gordon B. Hinckley (1991) provided this perspective:

Why all of these broken homes? What happens to marriages that begin with sincere love and a desire to be loyal and faithful and true one to another? There is no simple answer. I acknowledge that. But it appears to me that there are some obvious reasons that account for a very high percentage of these problems. I say this out of experience in dealing with such tragedies. I find selfishness to be the root cause of most of it [broken homes]. I am satisfied that a happy marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well being of one's companion. Selfishness so often is the basis of money problems, which are a very serious and real factor affecting the stability of family life. Selfishness is at the root of adultery, the breaking of solemn and sacred covenants to satisfy selfish lust. Selfishness is the antithesis of love. It is a cankering expression of greed. It destroys self-discipline. It obliterates loyalty. It tears up sacred covenants. It afflicts both men and women. Too many who come to marriage have been coddled and spoiled and somehow led to feel that everything must be precisely right at all times, that life is a series of entertainments, that appetites are to be satisfied without regard to principle. How tragic the consequences of such hollow and unreasonable thinking! ... There is a remedy for all of this [marital stress]. It is not found in divorce. It is found in the gospel of the Son of God. He it was who said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). The remedy for most marriage stress is not in divorce. It is in repentance. It is not in separation. It is in simple integrity that leads a man to square up his shoulders and meet his obligations. It is found in the Golden Rule ... There must be recognition on the part of both husband and wife of the solemnity and sanctity of marriage and of the God-given design behind it. There must be a willingness to overlook small faults, to forgive, and then to forget. There must be a holding of one's tongue. Temper is a vicious and corrosive thing that destroys affection and casts out love. There must be self-discipline that constrains against abuse of wives and children and self. There must be the Spirit of God, invited and worked for, nurtured and strengthened. There must be recognition of the fact that each is a child of God—father, mother, son, and daughter, each with a divine birthright—and also recognition of the fact that when we offend one of these, we offend our Father in Heaven. (Hinckley, 1991, pp. 94-98)

Notice that President Hinckley did not discuss communication, listening or skills as solutions at all. He did not talk about our inadequacies in communicating with each other. What the prophets discuss are not terms that you generally use with people in a professional setting (although you could translate them into similar terms). Prophets teach principles. If we could eliminate selfishness and pride in our hearts, they tell us, we would all perform more effectively as married partners and as parents.

I maintain that communication is neutral, that it can be used two ways: to bless or curse. Notice how well we communicate in public when we want to influence someone or we are trying to gain new customers. But, we can also use communication to be critical, sarcastic, temperamental, moody, or use the "silent treatment." What makes the difference as to how we communicate with others? The answer from the Lord and the scriptures has to do with our *heart condition*.

#### A CHANGE OF HEART

What do we know about *heart conditions*? They come with *soft* or *hard* properties. A *soft* heart is reflected in one's humility, in a softness of tone and demeanor from one who is pliable, humble, anxious to learn from others and who is full of charity; one who is a peacemaker, a companion, and a "therapist" to loved ones. A *hard* heart is possessed by one who is typically defensive, moody, uncooperative, arrogant, manipulative and who discourages open dialogue and unity.

For example, if a wife were to say to her husband, "Honey, I know you are busy with your graduate work (or getting your business off the ground), but I need more dad for our kids. They hardly know you. You leave early in the morning, come home late at night. I really need more help with the children."

If a soft-hearted husband felt the anguish in his spouse's voice and his heart was not hard or defensive, how would he respond to his wife's plea? He would probably say something like this, "Honey, I've got to get this business off the ground or they are going to foreclose on our home. But, I know you're right. I've felt the same way. Let's plan together how I can get more involved. Any ideas?"

How would a hard-hearted husband respond to the same wife's request? "I can't believe how much you complain. Don't you like the home we live in? Don't you



understand what it costs to make payments on this place? Do you think that I like working that much? I wish you could see it from my point of view for a change!”

Defensiveness in this husband’s hard heart is obvious. Would such a reply encourage a wife to want to share more of her feelings with him or would she hesitate to bring up a substantial issue again just to get her head bitten off once more? It is not that this husband doesn’t know a better way to respond. He would not say such a defensive thing to a complete stranger or a neighbor. But when hearts are hardened, we manifest defensiveness, anger, or grumpiness. We would certainly not act that way in front of other people, or just after payday, or if we wanted our spouse to be intimate that evening!

What is it, then, that softens hearts and keeps them soft? Recall Elder Boyd K. Packer’s statement:

*True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel. Our behavior is not totally controlled by natural impulses. Behavior begins with belief as well. Beliefs are born of philosophies, of doctrines. Doctrines can be spiritual or secular, wholesome or destructive, true or false. (Packer, 1986, p. 17; italics added)*

I see the Lord’s model this way (see Mosiah 5:2 and Alma 5:11-13 to see the model in scriptural form):

*True doctrine ➤ softens hearts ➤ behavior modification*

Let me illustrate how doctrine softens hearts through the following principles.

#### PRINCIPLE I—THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

Through his atonement, the Savior made it possible for us to be resurrected as male and female. Once resurrected, we can never die again (D&C 11:45). If death is no longer possible, that means that we will be immortal males or females. If we marry in the temple and remain worthy, we can be married sweethearts forever. Mortality will not end our relationship. If a husband really believes that his wife is to be his sweetheart not just for a few years

of mortal life, but to be an eternal companion, lover, the mother of his children both here and in eternity, his wife forever—how would he treat her? How should he treat her? If a wife really believes that the man she agreed to marry is to be her husband, lover, the father of her children both here and hereafter, an eternal companion—how would she treat him? How should she treat him?

This “heart principle” is illustrated in a powerful way in the Book of Mormon:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people ... And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, *because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.* [and the results were] ... there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered ... and there was no contention in all the land. (4 Nephi 1:2-18)

These Nephites were righteous, then, for approximately 200 years. Here is a question to consider: “Why were these Nephites, even with large families, able to go 200 years without contention and fighting amongst themselves?” Did the Savior establish an extensive series of communication seminars for the Nephites to attend? Likely not. According to the record, it was because they had the *love of God in their hearts*. After touching the resurrected Lord, they understood the doctrine of the resurrection very clearly. They could now appreciate the work of the Savior. Jesus Christ made available to them as married couples, through his atonement and resurrection, the possibility of being together forever.

In looking at this example a little closer, we read that all 2,500 survivors of the great destruction in that area of

the promised land went forth and physically touched the Savior. I don't think this was an open house for the Savior (it appears more like a priesthood ordinance between the Savior and those who felt of the prints and wounds; perhaps if we had the full story, we would relate it to something revealed in modern temple worship). I picture a Nephite husband, after this rather profound experience, saying to his wife:

Sweetheart, do you know who that man is? Do you realize what we just did? He is Jesus Christ. He made this earth and all the worlds we see at night in the heavens. He is the God of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lehi, Nephi, Alma, Helaman. Remember the teachings of King Benjamin, Abinadi, and Samuel and their prophecies about him? Sweetheart, notice that he is a man. I too, am a man. I will someday die, as will you, but we will be resurrected as a male or female. We can then no longer die. That means if we love each other here in this life we could be husband and wife forever! Oh, honey, you've got to help me. I don't know how to be a husband to you. I know there are times when I really frustrate you. Please teach me how to be a better husband to you. We need to talk, we need to listen to the prophets, we need to read the scriptures.

I think his wife would be equally humbled. Perhaps she would say:

Sweetheart, if you can stand me that long, I will try to stand you. I don't know how to be your wife for that long of a period of time. I know that I upset you in this life. You'll need to teach me, we'll need to talk, we'll need to listen to the prophets, to read the scriptures. We'll have to help each other.

I picture the father reaching down and grabbing one of their children going by and saying to his wife:

Sweetheart, do you realize who this little guy is? This is one of Heavenly Father's very own spirit children and he has lent him to us to practice on; we are *apprenticing* as spouses and parents! If we can get this child back to his heavenly home, then our Father will reassign this child to be part of our eternal family. Oh, honey, I don't know how to be a father. I get so frustrated with the few we have. You'll have to help me. We need to talk. We need to

listen to the prophets. We need to read the scriptures and teach our little ones in a family setting.

I picture his wife saying:

Honey, I don't know how to be a mother. I frustrate the kids so many times, as you know. You'll have to help me. We have to talk more. We have to read the scriptures and listen to what our prophets are telling us.

And they both would understand this insight:

Once we are resurrected, we will begin to have the kind of children our heavenly parents had in the premortal life, the kind of beings we were before this mortal life. If we live forever after this life, we could have another large family. We must prepare now for that eternal opportunity.

This scripture from 4 Nephi (1:2-18) indicates that when individuals understand the basic truths about marriage and family relations, their hearts are softened and humbled and they want to be a blessing to each other and to their children.

The Book of Mormon is filled with comments on the human *heart condition*. There are 453 references to *heart* issues in this sacred text. The Lord seems to be saying to its readers: first soften your heart by understanding my doctrine, and then your behavior will match your beliefs.

### Heart Versus "Communication Skills" Solutions

Let me come back to the *heart issue* versus the world's emphasis on *communication skills*. I indicated that the pop psychology of our day suggests that the solutions to marital problems are (a) to talk more, (b) to be better skilled in communicating, and (c) to listen more effectively to each other—all good suggestions *if* our hearts are soft. If they are not, you easily see the folly of trying to solve marital problems through those means. Consider:

- When you try to get people who don't like each other to communicate more, it does not lead to a peaceful solution. To put Prime Minister Sharone and Yassar Arafat together and let them *talk it out* won't bring peace to the Middle-East. Why or why not, do you suppose?
- When people like each other, they communicate quite adequately.

- \* We are all good listeners when we are motivated by self-interest to be such. We are quite cordial in public settings, around a boss or supervisor, which indicates that we do have the necessary ability to treat others well when we want to.

Think of it this way: if President Hinckley or President Monson were to be your constant companion, how would you behave? Would you need to take a communication class before they began their companionship with you? Would you need to learn new ways of speaking or communicating, or would you function quite well because of what you already know and the opportunity you had to spend time with them?

My point is that unless our hearts are softened, unless we have the “love of God” in our hearts, as did the Nephites mentioned in 4 Nephi, we will not use our ability to communicate in positive ways to bless our spouse and children. In fact, I would say it this way: if all we do is stress communication skills to people without softening their hearts, we will simply make people more clever fighters!

I confess to having trouble with the term *communication skills* when we are talking about a spouse or children. This will no doubt sound heretical, but hear me out. A skill is developed by practicing over and over in order to improve our ability to do something better. We need skills to play basketball, football, to play a musical instrument, or to operate a computer. There are specific dexterity skills that we can improve by repetition. But talking about “skills” in family relations doesn’t seem to be the issue. I don’t ever recall asking a husband to practice expressing his love to his wife in this manner:

“Honey, I love you,” he says.

“No,” you tell him, “that was not the right intonation; try it again.”

“Honey, I really love you.”

“Good, that’s better; she will like that.”

I don’t think we should do that with people. Love either exists in your heart so that the expression is genuine, or it will not be said. Saying something that one does not feel or believe would be an attempt to manipulate, extort, or flatter. Practicing saying things better so that we can coerce people into doing something we want

them to do seems to me to be the wrong approach. Again, when our hearts are soft, we do not need to practice saying things in the “right” way.

We can improve hand-eye coordination, our ability to strike the keys on the piano or computer more proficiently. Perhaps lawyers can even practice oratory skills or debate logic. But they are in the business of manipulating people and decisions. I have found very few people who married individuals they thought were incapable of talking or speaking. They would have not married such an individual if that were the case. Suppose your daughter came to you and said, “this guy is so sarcastic, so hard to understand! Sometimes he will go half the day without even talking to me. But I am so glad we are getting married next month; I can hardly wait!” You would probably be very surprised to hear that! The fact is, most of us marry with the idea that this person we are going to spend our life with is good at sharing heartfelt feelings with us—or we would not make the commitment.

Now, there is another side of communication that does need our attention. When a person shares his/her feelings with a spouse and the other person ignores, indicates disdain, rolls the eyes, negates the message or is critical or sarcastic, then we have a different problem. It now becomes a matter of spouses or family members not wanting to share their ideas and thoughts with one who disregards or disrespects feelings or opinions. But, this is something different.

Looking at it from a *heart* perspective, as I see it, a great marriage is developed as people are able to repent, to apologize, to make a more effective effort to meet the needs of their spouses and children. It is a matter of sensitivity, compassion and charity, not an inability to speak or carry on a conversation. We prove that we can communicate well when we are courting.

In case I was alone in this thinking, I looked through years of conference talks to see how many times “communication skills” were used by the apostles and prophets in their remarks. I found only one reference to “communication skills” – by Elder Dallin H. Oaks. He stated, “Persons spend many hours mastering *communication skills* in other mediums, such as poetry or prose, vocal or instrumental music, and even the language of access to computers” (Oaks, 1993, p.18). In this regard, one of my married students shared the following experience:

A key point from our class that I wholeheartedly applaud is the folly of focusing on communication skills to save a marriage. My ex-wife and I went to a few different marriage counselors and every one of them tried to treat our “communication skills.” My biggest frustration with counseling was, in fact, this “communication training.” None of them ever seemed to understand that communication was the least of our problems. We were really good at talking with each other. We could maintain civility and stick to the issues even during our biggest fights. We knew what our problems were and were looking for more of a mediator to add an unbiased perspective, but every one of the counselors practically refused to address the issues we brought up and instead focused on *how* we were talking to each other. It was very frustrating.

#### PRINCIPLE 2—THE SAVIOR’S DISDAIN FOR CONTENTION

Here’s another principle that should help soften our hearts—the Savior’s *disdain for contention*. It is obvious that there are a lot of people who contend with each other. They holler and yell, or they may be quietly angry. Contention is offensive to retaining the Spirit of the Lord; recall the words of the Lord to the Nephites:

And there shall be no disputations among you as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine as there have hitherto been. For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away. (3 Nephi 11:28-30)

Can Latter-day Saints be yelling at each other and retain the Spirit of the Lord? Recall the *Joseph Smith Translation’s* correction of Ephesians 4:26, “can ye be angry, and not sin?” And, in Proverbs (16:32) we read, “he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.” Couples who yell at each other or their children offend the Spirit of the Lord.

I have always loved this story as told by David Whitmer about Joseph Smith and his wife Emma:

One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation [of *The Book of Mormon*], something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it – something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchard, and made supplication to the Lord, was gone about an hour – came back to the house and asked Emma’s forgiveness, and then came upstairs where we were and then the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful. (Roberts, 1930, p. 131)

#### PRINCIPLE 3—COVENANTS

Covenants provide us with the power to live righteously in a fallen, wicked world. When I think of this principle, I think of an experience I had in Las Vegas (with apologies to the saints there). I have the chance to travel there occasionally to address the saints on marriage matters. On one occasion, on the way back to my hotel, I noticed a number of business establishments not available in Provo. The depravity and sensuality of mortals amazed me – and Las Vegas is the worldly public forum for voyeurism and sordid happenings. When I was alone in that desert city I wondered what my wife at home thought of my being away from her. Was she worried about me being there surrounded by such “interesting” business establishments? Then it dawned on me why she had confidence in my sensibilities—she knew that the two of us had been before our Father in Heaven years ago and made promises to him that we would not do anything that would embarrass each other or cause either one of us to lose our eternal relationship with each other or our family members. On the other hand, while I was away from her I never worried that she would fall prey to the wiles of the devil because I recalled that she, too, made similar promises to the Lord in sacred precincts.

#### PRINCIPLE 4—COVENANTS WITH THREE MEMBERS OF THE GODHEAD

We covenant with all three members of the Godhead when we marry in the house of the Lord. Apparently, all but two ordinances of the gospel—baptism and sealings—are performed in the name of Jesus Christ. These two ordinances include a commitment to the entire

Godhead. These two ordinances are necessary to qualify for entrance into and exaltation within the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom. We might ask the question, "What interest does the Father have in the success of our marriages?" These thoughts come to mind:

- The Father instituted his plan of salvation so that we could become as he is (Moses 1:39).
- He is married and wants us, as his children, to enjoy what he enjoys. As spirits, we were unable to marry in the pre-mortal life, so this life becomes our first opportunity to get married, as our Heavenly Father has done.
- He lends us some of his very own children to "practice" on. As a parent, he is interested in their coming to earthly homes where they can experience good role models and excellent teachers. He created the earth so that we could leave our pre-mortal home and apprentice in the great adventure of marriage and family life during our mortal lives. When children are old enough to exercise their agency and leave your home, parents lose influence over them and don't normally interfere in children's lives unless they ask for help: they must grow through personal experiences with good and evil.

What interest does Jesus Christ have in the success of your marriage? Answers may be:

- The Savior gave his life for us to be forgiven, resurrected, and to allow our marriage covenants to still be valid.
- We can have our sins forgiven when we apologize, repent, and change our behavior.
- We belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus directs the labor of the kingdom of God; it is his priesthood and prophetic direction that we sustain.
- He, like the Father, hates contention between marriage partners (3 Nephi 11:28-30), and he is absent when couples are fighting and contending. Divorce should be unthinkable, except in cases of extreme disobedience.

What interest does the Holy Ghost have in our success? Answers may be:

- He has the assignment to be with us, to monitor our lives as individuals and as a married couple.

- He inspires us to do better, to eliminate personality characteristics that are negative and destructive to marriage relationships.
- He, too, hates contention and leaves us when we mistreat each other.

#### PRINCIPLE 5—PROCLAMATION ON THE FAMILY

Further principles to assist us in marriage are given in *The Proclamation to the World on the Family* (Hinckley, 1995b). This document contains a summary of doctrine and counsel on issues of marriage and parenting. In this proclamation, prophets, seers, and revelators of our day suggest that "successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work and wholesome recreational activities" (Hinckley, 1995b, p.101). If Latter-day Saints would contemplate how each of these nine suggestions would strengthen marriages, we would gain added power to be more effective spouses and parents.

#### PRINCIPLE 6—REPENTANCE

There is great therapeutic value in repentance when two (or more) people apologize to each other. It is very difficult to get people to apologize, but if they will, they will feel the Spirit of the Lord come back into their lives and associations. "Say nothing but repentance to this generation," the Lord counseled in D&C 6:9 and 11:9. Repentance is open to us whether we offend God or men. Selfishness and pride prevent both men and women from apologizing and correcting offenses and hurt feelings. It is obvious that repentance is a difficult principle for mortals to apply within the marriage covenant.

Consider the results if one or the other spouse would repent and share his/her heart in this manner:

Honey, I know that you are not happy and I know that I'm not happy. I think we have gotten away from doing the simple things that brought us together in the first place. I felt inspired to marry you and I've heard you say that you felt good about marrying me. Apparently, we have just gotten away from our initial goals. I know that I have not been the kind of husband/wife I should be and I'm going to start now to be the kind of spouse you hoped

I would be when we planned our marriage. I hope you will join me in prayer, in some scripture study, in getting back to the temple, and in renewing our intimacy again.

Generally when we apologize, our spouse is also humbled and is willing to take responsibility for his/her part in our waywardness. If both marital partners will take responsibility and repent, the Spirit of the Lord returns to their union.

### PRINCIPLE 7—THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Perhaps this scenario will take place at a future time:

A wife will be asked the following question, "How did you enjoy being married to your husband?" If her response is, "whew – am I glad that's over; that was not a lot of fun for me!" Your children will be asked, "Tell me about your dad." Consider the implications if they answer, "I really did not like my father; he was so temperamental, so impatient. He was quite abusive; it was not enjoyable for me and other family members to be around him." A husband will be asked about his wife's traits, "How did you feel about being married to your wife?" If a husband answers, "I really didn't enjoy being married to her—she is such a domineering woman; she always had to be right; she was not interested in intimate contact, and she spent money very unwisely," there is not much likelihood that the marriage will continue. The children will be asked, "tell me about your mother." Again, consider if the response were to be: "my mother was seldom home; she was always gone somewhere. I came home to an empty house most of the time; and when Mom was home, she was not easy to get along with—she was certainly not my best friend. She seemed to be upset most of the time so I spent a lot of my time at my friend's place."

For marriage to continue beyond this life, a wife's response should sound something like this: "My husband was the greatest man I knew in mortal life. He was kind to me and to our children. Our children loved their father; he taught them so many things. He was terrific. He taught them how to play, to work hard, and they loved him. I loved him dearly because of the way he treated me and our children."

Children should respond like this, after being asked about their father's behavior: "My dad was my hero. I loved spending time with him. He was patient with me;

even when I made mistakes, he was kind and loving. He taught me the gospel and was an inspired father. I served an honorable mission because of him. I learned the gospel at his feet."

A husband's response to the question "tell me about your wife," would imply hope for an eternal relationship if the comments were something like this: "my wife was a saint to live with; she was the kindest, sweetest woman I ever knew. She loved me, she loved the children, she gave her life for their welfare and happiness. If I can't be married to her, I am not interested in marriage with anyone else."

And the children will no doubt be asked about their mother. If the response sounds something like this, there will be rejoicing on the part of both parents and children: "my mom was the sweetest soul I ever knew. She took us to soccer and music lessons; she cooked and she taught. I learned to pray at her knee; she was a great blessing to all of us children. She was a wonderful mother."

If such are not the kinds of reports given by your family members, perhaps you are kidding yourself about an eternal marriage and family relationship. Here is the way Elder Robert D. Hales (1996) explained the concept:

As taught in this scripture (D&C 132:19), an eternal bond doesn't just happen as a result of sealing covenants we make in the temple. How we conduct ourselves in this life will determine what we will be in all the eternities to come. To receive the blessings of the sealing that our Heavenly Father has given to us, we have to keep the commandments and conduct ourselves in such a way that our families will want to live with us in the eternities ... The Lord clearly declares, "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22). (Hales, 1996, p. 65)

Too many people think that because they married in the temple, they will be together regardless of whether or not they liked each other in mortality. How silly! Why would someone who did not like his/her spouse in this life suddenly love them after we revert back to a spirit existence after death?

### PRINCIPLE 8—THE DOCTRINE OF THE PRE-MORTAL LIFE

We lived in the pre-mortal realm for ages and eons, eagerly anticipating the opportunity to come to this

earth, marry, and become parents ourselves for the very first time in our long existence. How disappointing it would be for us, as well as for our Heavenly Father, if we don't succeed in marriage and family when we have waited so long to come to the earth and participate in this ultimate adventure of our eternal lives—marriage and family relations?

#### PRINCIPLE 9—THE DEGREES OF GLORY

We learn from the Lord's instructions through the prophet Joseph Smith that only those who obtain the highest degree of glory will continue to be married and capable of parenthood:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other; but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase. (D&C 131:1-4)

The prophet Joseph Smith taught this principle:

Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation, by the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood, they will cease to increase when they die; that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection. But those who are married by the power and authority of the priesthood in this life, and continue without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost, will continue to increase and have children in the celestial glory. (Smith, 1976, pp. 300-301)

#### PRINCIPLE 10—THE CURSE GIVEN TO LUCIFER

The first time any of us could be married or become parents is when our spirit body, (which is the offspring of Heavenly Parents) and our flesh body (sired by mortal parents) were united together. Satan rejected the plan of the Father (D&C 29:36, Moses 4:3) in the pre-mortal life and therefore he will never obtain a body of physical element (D&C 76:25,33,37). His curse, therefore, is to never be a husband or father. Undoubtedly, his greatest efforts in our behalf are to prevent us from marrying

and becoming parents. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1955) taught:

Some will gain celestial bodies with all the powers of exaltation and eternal increase ... In both of these [lower] kingdoms there will be changes in the bodies and limitations. They will not have the power of increase, neither the power or nature to live as husbands and wives, for this will be denied them and they cannot increase ... Some of the functions in the celestial body will not appear in the terrestrial body neither in the telestial body, and the power of procreation will be removed. (Smith, 1955, pp. 287-288)

Elder Orson Pratt gave this insight:

Could wicked and malicious beings, who have eradicated every feeling of love from their bosoms, be permitted to propagate their species, the offspring would partake of all the evil, wicked, and malicious nature of their parents ... It is for this reason that God will not permit Satan and his followers to multiply; it is for this reason that God has ordained marriages for the righteous only; it is for this reason that God will put a final stop to the multiplication of the wicked after this life; it is for this reason that none but those who have kept the celestial law will be permitted to multiply after the resurrection ... for they alone are prepared to beget and bring forth [spirit] children. (Pratt, 1853, p. 157; see also *Journal of Discourses*, 13:186)

#### A CASE STUDY

These and other doctrines should have the effect of softening our hearts and changing our behavior to motivate us to incorporate Christlike traits in our lives, attributes that are so abundantly presented in the scriptures. To illustrate their use in a counseling situation, I submit the following from an earlier writing (Brinley, 1994):

Paul and Clara were an older couple who been married for over thirty-five years. As I visited with them on several occasions, it was clear that their marriage was a disaster, and had been for many years. Yet they had stayed together and reared a number of children. Though they attended church, their marriage, from nearly every aspect, was a disaster. As I met with them several times, they seemed to take pleasure in cataloging each other's sins in

front of me. As soon as one took a breath, the other began his or her list of offenses against the spouse. I listened patiently until I felt that I had the courage to intervene. "Excuse me," I interrupted their mutual bash session, "I'd like to share an impression ... of course, I am not the Final Judge; the Lord will do that. But if the Judgment were held today and the Lord called me in as a witness ... I would say ... I think you have offended the Spirit of the Lord so badly by the way you treat each other that surely the heavens must weep at what they see. Though you have had the gospel all your lives, you have missed the major theme. You have become critical and devastating in your comments to each other ..."

"Paul," I said looking him straight in the eye, "I don't think you understand the majesty of the priesthood you hold. You have made a mockery of its beauty, influence, and power, especially as it relates to being a husband ..."

"Clara," I turned to her, "after all these years of living with Paul, you still have no idea what makes a man tick; how you can lift and inspire him to be a better companion to you."

"The two of you," I shifted back to both of them, "have used your marital years to destroy rather than strengthen each other ... as I see it, you have another twenty, maybe thirty, more years left to live with each other. Then one of you will die and that will be the end of your experience with marriage. Never again, through all eternity, will either of you live in a marriage relationship. I think [I paused, hoping this would sink in] you will look back at these years of being nasty with each other with sadness for what could have been different. I think you two will wish that you had made some different choices along the way. Of course, you have your agency; you may do as you please. God has given us that power [but] up until now you seem to want to use it to devastate each other."

"On the other hand," I said, in an effort to bring something positive out of the whole mess, "wouldn't it be great on Judgment Day to have the Lord say, 'You two had a rough thirty-five years, didn't you! And then you made some wonderful changes. You came to realize what mortal life, agency and my atonement were all about, and the past thirty years have been a complete reversal from those earlier ones. Thank you for making the necessary changes! Thank you for doing what needed to be done in order to qualify for the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Thank you for making my atonement worth my effort. I want to welcome you into a society of people who love their companions as you two now do, a society of couples who have conducted

their lives so that they are eligible to be together forever.'"

I waited, holding my breath, thinking that they might run out the door offended. Instead, they both bowed their heads and began to weep. To my surprise, Paul took Clara's hand and apologized—right there in front of me. She reached out to him and accepted his embrace. Both admitted that the Lord must be disappointed with them, that they had treated each other terribly, and that they had a long way to go—but that they could do better; indeed, they promised each other that they would do better. Their apologies were acknowledged and forgiveness extended. They committed to each other that they would make the necessary changes. They seemed determined to turn things around.

When I see them now, they are grateful. But all I did was to remind them of the Plan of Salvation and its grand purposes. It was up to them to make the gospel work for them in their marriage. (Brinley, 1994, pp. 1-3)

Now, you could not have that kind of success with very many people because selfishness and pride would prevent them taking responsibility to repent and apologize. But that is what the gospel teaches—and what it requires if we are going to be eternal sweethearts.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, after talking about a soft heart, I want you to think about what it is like when your heart is soft: do you feel like being charitable and compassionate, or are you frustrated and angry? I predict that the words of this song, "The Last Touch," by Carol Lynn Pearson and Lex De Azevedo (1987), will soften your heart, if only temporarily:

Their first touch at seventeen was in the park, and the moon was full.

She was beautiful to him.

And her hair was long and her eyes were blue and her skin was warm

and she turned to him.

And he thought that he knew what love was.

Another touch at twenty two, on their wedding night, and the stars were bright.

She was beautiful to him.

And her hair smelled sweet and her lips were full and her skin was warm and she turned to him.



And he thought that he knew what love was.  
 And then again at twenty-five, when the baby came and  
 the sun was high.  
 She was beautiful to him.  
 And her hair was damp and her fingers (trembled) and  
 her skin was warm and she (and the baby) turned to him.  
 And he thought that he knew what love was

Later on at fifty four, sitting on the porch  
 all the children gone. She was beautiful to him.  
 And her hair was gray and her fore-head lined and her  
 skin was warm  
 and she turned to him.  
 And he thought that he knew what love was.

Their last touch at eighty five—was by her bed  
 and the moon was full. She was beautiful to him.  
 And her hair was thin and her eyes were closed and her  
 skin was cold  
 and she turned to him —

And he knew that he knew—what love was.

After sixty-eight years of laughter and tears  
 He *knew* that he *knew* what love was.

In this, the greatest adventure of mortal life, we can indeed come to know what love is all about: we make marriage vows with a virtual stranger, and then we spend the rest of our lives trying to convince each other that we made a good decision. Then, a few kids are thrown in—seemingly just to test our souls. Indeed, children will make of us gods or devils, depending on how we react to them. When, finally, the kids grow up and leave, then we help each other across the bar—with a few massages along the way to smooth the physical pain—until we enter the great eternity awaiting us. Being faithful in our marriages and families for the few years we are here will lead to an eternity of appreciation and enjoyment for each other, and the blessings God designed for us in planning this Plan of Salvation. That this might be our success, in our ability to bless others, is my prayer.

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**AMCAP's mission** is to provide information and support for the LDS mental health professional in four areas:

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  3. *Networking and Outreach*
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- To celebrate 25 years of faith and fellowship, scholarship and professional service.
- To share the treasures AMCAP has acquired over this quarter-century with all our members, as well as with others including students, researchers, Church leaders, and Church members seeking gospel-based psychological information.

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Andrew Enat (AMCAP Journal online; searchable areas)  
Carrie Wrigley, AMCAP Governing Board (Website Coordinator; content writer & editor)  
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The Mission of The Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists is to provide information and support for the LDS mental health professional.

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What is the center upon which those arrows converge?  
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Christ whom we approach by our own spiritual strivings.





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*The Mission of the Association of Mormon Counselors  
and Psychotherapists is to provide information and support  
for the LDS mental health professional*

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## **THE ASSOCIATION OF MORMON COUNSELORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS**

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