

Learning and living

The Character of Christ

Robert Smith

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Continuously one with God through obedience to how we imagine him to be, as our belief yields to firsthand experience with him, until we become a perfected man, filled with the complete character of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:13, Author's Reflection)

I will incline my desires and actions devoutly towards my understanding of how you are as a heavenly king; ever-increasing in my perception of the holiness of your character and ever-growing towards you as you reveal more of yourself to me. Your truth and your loving kindness give us every reason to seek and emulate you. You have developed your character beyond anyone else and your instructions are the most effective path to become more like you. (Psalm 138:2, Author's Reflection)

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Introduction

The purpose of this book

The apostle Paul often spoke of knowledge of the Lord as a mystery.¹ Why is the character of God not widely known and so infrequently lived, even among Christians? Perhaps the answer to both questions lies in the true motives of many of those who practice Christianity. How many people seek Jesus in order to better learn and live his will, and how many are merely seeking for ways to inject his power and peace into what they want instead? How many people are seeking Jesus to find better ways of being, and how many are merely seeking for a way to feel better about how they already are? It is hard to find God when you are searching for something else.

The purpose of this book is to provide powerful truths that enable you to learn more about Jesus and become more like him than you otherwise could. There is no topic of greater importance in the gospel of Jesus Christ than the character of Christ. The content of the Lord's character defines the nature of God, the means of salvation, the quality of eternal life, the power of God, and the reasons why all people should seek to become as he is. The purpose of creation is to provide a means for each person to perceive, value, acquire, and share more of God's attributes. The acquisition of the attributes of God is the key to greater and longer-lasting joy in and after this life. You learn more about God as you live up to what you already know.

If you are already religious, the arguments and scriptures presented in this book will help you see the limits of your present beliefs and offer more effective alternatives in your quest to draw nearer to God. If you are not yet religious, you will find the description of the gospel as provided in this book to make a lot more sense than the versions you have heard before. In any case, this book will empower you to radically increase the progress you can make towards greater and longer-lasting joy in your life through augmenting your ability to learn about and live like Jesus.

Chapter summaries

Chapter One introduces the gospel as a process of learning about and becoming more like God, framing this process as living up to what you know about Jesus in order to learn more about him.

¹ Just some of those references: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began." (Romans 16:25) "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Corinthians 4:1)

Chapter Two makes the case that everything good comes from becoming more like God, and that the more like him you become, the greater your joy, peace, and power will be.

Chapter Three explains salvation and eternal life, showing that both are obtained through learning about and living like Jesus Christ.

Chapter Four presents the power of God as a function of learning about and living like Jesus, describing how God's power and authority come from his character and can't exist outside of his purpose.

Chapter Five describes how Jesus learned what the Father was like during his life and presents that process as the example we are to follow.

Chapter Six defines justification and sanctification, explaining justification as the decision to submit fully to God as you presently understand him, and sanctification as the process of learning more about Jesus while remaining reconciled to him.

Chapter Seven frames God's commandments as instructions for building a model of his character and following it in your own life.

Chapter Eight makes the case that you *can* actually live up to your understanding of how Jesus is, and that you *must* do so in order to receive forgiveness of your sins and enjoy freedom from guilt.

Chapter Nine presents the definition of submission to God, showing how rare it is to find a Christian who has actually fully adopted the purpose of God.

Chapter Ten delineates what you must do to be born again, what it consists of, and why it is desirable.

Chapter Eleven presents the qualifications for, purpose of, source of, and effects of baptism.

Chapter Twelve makes the case that you know less about God than you think, that you can know much more, and why you should strive to do so.

Chapter Thirteen describes a list of significant barriers that prevent you from learning more about God and what you can do to overcome them.

Chapter Fourteen explores the need to update, extend, and correct your model of the character of Jesus Christ as you learn more about him.

Chapter Fifteen analyzes the important distinction between commandments in the form of rules, principles, and character, making the case that you cannot really know the Lord until you know and live his character.

Chapter Sixteen shows the difference in conditions and outcomes between the different relationships God has with his servants, friends, and sons.

Chapter Seventeen explores the scriptural idioms of the face and presence of God as metaphors for teaching the importance and process of adopting his purpose.

Chapter Eighteen defines the scriptural idiom of “the words of eternal life” so as to show why they should be sought for, where they are found, and how they are obtained.

Chapter Nineteen elucidates how names and titles work in God’s kingdom, what the name of Christ is, how you take it upon yourself, and why you should.

Chapter Twenty extends application of the idea of the name of Christ by defining the scriptural idioms that use it, including “calling upon the name of God,” “swearing by the name of God,” and “believing on the name of God.”

Chapter Twenty One lists some of the many scriptural metaphors of justification and sanctification as horizontal and vertical objects, including the two pieces of the cross, the judgment bar of God, the rod of iron, and the carrying bars of the Ark of the Covenant.

Chapter Twenty Two explores the scriptural metaphor of clothing as an application of the themes of justification and sanctification.

On cited sources

Along with verses from the Bible, this book cites from other sources which are not universally accepted as scripture by all Christians. It is acknowledged that these verses will not be recognized as authoritative by most. It is hoped, however, that their use will support the fact that these ideas were not plucked out of thin air, and that the reader will open-mindedly consider their content even if they are unfamiliar with or unconvinced by their source.

For those curious about the sources cited, brief summaries are listed below.

The Book of Mormon is a record of several peoples led from the Old World to the Americas in ancient times. The book records God’s dealings with them from 2200 BC to 421 AD, at which time their record was buried by the commandment of God in order to protect it during an all-encompassing civil war destroying their society. In 1827, God directed a man named Joseph Smith to the record and inspired him to translate it into English. Though the Book of Mormon is considered scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other Mormon churches, those who find value in it are no more compelled to subscribe to a particular church than those who believe in the Bible are compelled to be Catholic.

The Doctrine and Covenants is a record of the dealings of God with Joseph Smith and his followers during his life. While much of the book consists of text of questionable value to those in different times

and circumstances than its authors, the book contains many valuable expositions of gospel principles in unrivaled clarity and content.

The Books of Moses and Abraham are accounts by each author reproduced through revelation to Joseph Smith.

Several books originally included in the King James and earlier Bibles but later removed by most Protestant denominations are cited here where the ideas therein are expressed more clearly than can be found elsewhere.

**The critical need to learn about
and live like Jesus**

1. You become more like God by living as you believe him to be

Character: The part of your identity that you choose

Character is a word used more frequently than it is understood. Your character is what you do, why you do it, and how you feel about it. Your character is the composite of qualities that describe how and why you will think, feel, and act, under what circumstances.

Your character consists of the aspects of yourself that are your choice. Your character can be thought of as what distinguishes you from someone else in all the ways you could choose to be the same.

To understand and, ultimately, improve your character, you'll have to be more careful and correct in the boundaries you place between what you can and can't control than many modern people are. Every attribute you could change through choice forms a part of your character. Very few attributes are completely beyond the reach of your choices.

In addition to conflating personal qualities that can and can't be changed, many people conflate who they are with what they have. Who you are is not defined by what you have.² Who you are is completely transferable to any situation, with or without any of your things.³ Your family, your looks, your health, your friends, your reputation, your money, your career, and your hobbies do not define your character. In fact, your character could be defined as what would remain if everything external in your life were taken away,⁴ or even if life itself was taken away.⁵ Under this consideration, few people have very much character at all, and what they do have isn't very good.

Character is built, destroyed, and changed through decisions

You get to choose what your character is. Your choices determine who you are. The choices you make determine your character, not the other way around. You can shape your character like a sculptor shapes clay. Your decisions from one moment to the next are what shape the trajectory of your character.

² And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. (Luke 12:15)

³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

⁴ ...he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:39)

⁵ Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. (D&C 130:18)

Character is cumulative and malleable. Character is built or destroyed through successive decisions. Every single thing you do matters. Your character is the summation of all the choices you have made in life to this point. Your character is the trend line of the quality of decisions you make in life. Good choices strengthen and improve your character. Character improvement takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of consistency. Poor choices weaken and degrade your character. Character degradation happens in an instant, is the easiest path, and takes only momentary weakness. Character is not something you can pick up when it is convenient and set down when it is not. Character takes a lifetime to build and a moment to destroy. While one good choice will not demonstrate good character, one terrible choice can demonstrate poor character. Even when you immediately repent, it takes time to demonstrate that you would not make the same poor choice if given another chance.

Whether you use this life to improve or degrade your character, and by how much, is up to you. Character is not something fixed from birth. No matter how your character is now, what it becomes is completely up to you. You can gain or remove anything you choose about what you do, why you do it, and how you feel about it. Who are you? Who do you want to be? What is the difference? No matter the size of the gap between who you are and who you want to be, it is just comprised of one thing: your own choices. As soon as you realize that your choices determine who you are, you can instantly shift who you are by making different decisions. You can design and adopt a completely different character by thinking about how you want to be and choosing according to how that person would.⁶

You become like God by making decisions as he would in your place, subject to your circumstance

Living according to the character of Jesus is not the same as reproducing his circumstances. When Jesus said that we should be as he is,⁷ he did not mean that we should time travel back 2,000 years, learn Aramaic, adopt ancient clothes, be raised as a Jew, or be crucified by them.

Character is not circumstantial. It is not defined by your surroundings, resources, advantages, or disadvantages, but rather by how you respond to what you can change. You can't accurately predict how Jesus would live in your place without separating what you can and can't change. The differences between you and God that lie outside of

⁶ I believed, therefore I spoke... (Psalm 116:10)

⁷ ...and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one; (3 Nephi 28:10) ...what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:27)

your control don't excuse you from changing what lies within your control. The differences between you and God that you can control are limited to the differences in the choices you make when facing the same situation.

How Jesus would live in your situation, subject to your circumstances, is not the same as how he would live in his own. You have a host of advantages he did not have, including internet, hot showers, antibiotics, flushing toilets, clean water, abundant food, cars, and advanced language. He also had a host of advantages you do not have, including greater knowledge, wisdom, and power. In order to know how Jesus would live in your place, you have to adapt his example to the different circumstances you live in.

Jesus knows all things, and you do not. But what would he think, feel, and do if all he knew was what you presently know? He would do the best he could with what he knew, including doing all he could to learn more. Go and live likewise.

Jesus has power to do mighty miracles, and you do not. But what would he think, feel, and do if he didn't have power to do mighty miracles? He would implement God's will to the full extent of the power he had. Go and live likewise.

Notice that true limitations are never questions of choice. Suppose you believe that Jesus would always tell the truth. You cannot excuse yourself for doing anything less, because while you can't decide to have perfect wisdom or miraculous power, you *can* decide to be honest.

Become more like Jesus, one decision at a time

Life presents an unending flow of situations which provide you opportunities to establish, develop, reinforce, or degrade your character. How you respond to life's endless stream of situational stimuli will show who you are and determine who you become. Over time, your decisions will always close or extend the gap between you and God.

In every moment, you are choosing what your character will become through the decisions you make: what you do, why you do it, and how you feel about it. Can you make your very next decision exactly as Jesus would in your place? If not, can you make your next decision exactly as you sincerely believe Jesus would in your place? If not, can you at least indicate how you sincerely believe Jesus would make that decision? If you don't know, could you find out?

The purpose of life is to provide all with the opportunity to make their character more like God's through learning more about what he is

like and living as he would.⁸ To know someone's character perfectly is to be able to perfectly predict how they will act, why, and how they feel about it in any situation. You don't know enough about God to accurately anticipate how he would act, why, and how he would feel in any situation. However, you do have an idea of these things and the ability to seek to learn more to increase the breadth, depth, and accuracy of that idea. As you make decisions as you believe Jesus would in your place, you will learn more about how he would actually live in your place.

Be ye perfect

No person can go in one step from how they are to how God is, and everyone seems to naturally know that well enough to balk at anyone who suggests that they can be perfect. You can't be exactly as God is right now. You do not know what God knows, desire what he desires, or desire it as much as he does. In fact, you are so far from how he actually is that you can't know how far you actually are.⁹ And yet, Jesus said very clearly: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) The key to this seeming contradiction lies in the idea that God's definition of perfect is very different from how we use the word. In the ancient languages, perfect was not the description of an outcome so much as a process; a process that maximally flows and grows to the intended end. To be perfect in Christ is to progress as quickly as possible in your understanding of how he is by living exactly as you believe he would in your place given how you presently understand him to be.

While it is not possible to become how God actually is in a single step, the path towards him is composed of a long series of steps, each of which requires us to be exactly like him, so far as we presently perceive him to be. To be perfectly aligned with your present understanding of God, you have to forsake all things you believe he wouldn't do in your place while unflinchingly doing all things you believe he would do in your place:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for

⁸ And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; (Abraham 3:24-25)

⁹ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

Many erroneously consider submission to God as the process. Getting to know God is a process, but obedience is not. The gospel consists of events and processes. It is important to correctly recognize which is which. While learning more about God is a process, obeying him is a choice. Learning more about him is a process, but deciding to submit to him is an event. This event is called repentance. It entails forsaking everything you know of that is contrary to God, and embracing all things that align with him, with the understanding that he will incrementally teach you more and different information than your present understanding of him.

Progress towards God is not all at once with regard to the perfection of God, but it must be all at once with regard to how you understand the perfection of God to be. Our progress towards how God actually is always incremental, but our progress towards how we presently perceive God to be never is. You can't give your whole soul to God in installments. You can't sacrifice yourself completely a little at a time. You can't work yourself up to loving God above all else. You either do or you don't, and until you do, you don't.

The gospel is meant to be a means to become more like Jesus

What is the intended outcome of Christianity? How are adherents to the faith meant to be different as a result of their faith? If the fruit of Christianity is to *sometimes* do something *marginally* better than you otherwise would, then it provides no benefit over what many non-Christians already enjoy. Christianity is meant to be so much more than this. Christianity, properly lived, provides the means for a person to continuously become more like Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a mechanism to learn what he does, why he does it, and how he does it. The word “gospel” comes from two Old English words meaning “good” and “story.” These two words brilliantly encapsulate what the gospel is: what is good, how to do good, and why to do good. The “good story” is how Jesus is, how and why he became how he is, and how and why we are to become like him.

Common Christianity has lost the fact that the gospel is a mechanism to effect change in us. The gospel enables us to become and remain reconciled to how God would act in our place as we continue increasing in our understanding of how he is. To be a real Christian is to be a disciple of Christ—to learn and live according to how Jesus would in your place.

For far too many, the gospel is a list of things you do or don't do. Most Christians place their focus on the presence or absence of specific outward actions. While such a low-information representation of the gospel may yield outcomes that are preferable to nothing at all, it is nonetheless woefully inadequate to yield anything near what God intends. The vast difference between the fruits of common Christianity and the historical gospel, as recorded in scripture, continually demonstrate this.

Christianity is not just about going to church. There will always be more Pharisees to fill the seats in church than there are disciples to fulfill the purpose of church. Church is meant to be a means to demonstrate how God is and persuade others to be like him.

Religious rites are not the gospel. They are invitations to become more like Christ, not magical spells that provide you with the blessings of being like him without requiring you to actually become that way. They are symbols demonstrating the requirements and the path to becoming as Christ is.

The gospel is not merely about studying the scriptures. God has enough scribes ready to recite his word, but very few disciples willing to live it. Christianity is not just about what you think about God, but principally how much you know about and act like him.

Disciples of Christ strive to become as much like Jesus as they can be, not as little like Jesus as they can get away with. While many professed Christians use their religion as an excuse for why they don't have to actually be like Jesus, real Christians find in their religion all the power needed to live as he would in their place and every necessary reason to desire to do so.

Becoming like God is the point and intent of the gospel. The gospel is about who you *are* and who you *become*, not just what you *do*. Jesus Christ is not just a static set of words, actions, or even ideas, and neither is his gospel. Rather, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a *process*—a process that increases your understanding of who, what, and why Jesus Christ is. We are meant to be like Jesus. The Lord plainly taught that it is his desire and intent that we be like him:¹⁰ to feel how he feels, to think how he thinks, and to do what he does.

The gospel is the solution to the otherwise impossible puzzle of conveying the character of God: What is God like, why should we be the same way, and how do we accomplish it? The breadth and depth of

¹⁰ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21). Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

differences between us and God¹¹ present myriad obstacles that inhibit him from more fully revealing himself to us. In our default state, we are not like God, we do not know what God is like, we would not like him very much if we did, we do not know how to get to know him, and we would not want to even if we did. It is only through the mercy and merits of Christ¹² that this can be accomplished.

The gospel consists of the instruction and persuasive reasons necessary to learn and live the character of God.¹³ The gospel of Jesus Christ conveys the content of his character and adequate reasons to adopt it. The gospel is a means of improving our beliefs, feelings, and actions through the incremental revelation of the character of Christ,¹⁴ which provides us a model of how he is and sufficient reasons to make the necessary changes to become that way ourselves.¹⁵ The gospel of Jesus Christ is the process by which God shows you more of how he is while providing you the opportunity, reasons, and capability to become the same way yourself. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a mechanism which yields greater access to, perception of, and acquisition of the character of God by his children. Every facet of the gospel yields greater understanding of how God is, facilitates our becoming more like him in some way, and enables us to help others do the same. By learning and living the gospel, we learn more about how he is and become that way ourselves.

Is it blasphemous to believe you can become like God?

The doctrine of completely emulating Jesus is very difficult for people to hear and believe. When Jesus had performed a cascade of public miracles, he accumulated many who were excited to hear his

¹¹ The differences between us and God are described in the scriptures as the “everlasting gulf of misery” (see Alma 26:20, Helaman 3:29-30, and 1 Nephi 15:28) that is crossed through learning what God is like and becoming like him.

¹² Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

¹³ For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. (D&C 18:11)

¹⁴ [I am] the light and the life of the world; a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not; The same which came in the meridian of time unto mine own, and mine own received me not; But to as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons. And verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me. And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom. (D&C 39:2-6)

¹⁵ The atonement of Christ is defined by others in terms of our ability to obtain forgiveness of sins through the mortal sacrifice of Christ. However, our forgiveness is only a part of the sacrifice of Christ and the benefit thereof. Without the revelation of Christ through his earthly advent, and the lifelong sacrifice this entailed, forgiveness of sins would not result in any eternal improvement for us, because we would have no example from which to learn more about how God is and be that way ourselves.

teachings. He quickly repelled them by teaching them that they must be like him in order to come to the Father:

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

36 But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.

38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? (John 6)

Modern readers assume that those who heard this sermon had difficulty with it because of the imagery of eating the Lord's flesh and drinking his blood, but it was actually because the Jews who heard him knew what he meant by this. Like many today, they believed that living their outward rules, showing up to religious events, and participating in religious rites entitled them to God's blessings, but Jesus taught that they actually had to become like God. Like most Christians today, they were not interested in changing their desires or giving up the wicked things outside of the defined rules of their faith that they knew were wrong.

Some erroneously think that believing that a person can become like God somehow degrades God. Those who contend that a man could never be like God think they are making a statement about the baseness of human nature, not realizing they are simultaneously minimizing the power of God, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the efficacy of his gospel. The assertion that God is mighty enough to enable man to become more like him is not blasphemous—it is quite the opposite. It doesn't demean God to believe that he has the power to make us more like he is. It actually glorifies him!¹⁶

Any increase in goodness in any person can only be from the Father through Christ. As such, any increase in goodness in any person

¹⁶ For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)

glorifies rather than blasphemes God. God does not lose goodness when more of his goodness is adopted by his children.¹⁷

To believe that God is mighty enough to make it possible for anyone to choose to be more like him than they are is to believe he is much more powerful than most Christians believe. Given the utter default depravity of mankind, the willingness and ability of God to provide all things necessary to lead any who will follow him to become like him is the greatest possible testament to his power and goodness. Belief in the divine potential of man is not a statement of the goodness of man, who is fallen, but a statement of the goodness of God, who in his endless mercy and tremendous power finds a way to make holy that which was once unclean.¹⁸ Do not repeat the mistake of Peter in calling unclean what God has cleaned in his own precious blood.¹⁹

It is not heresy to believe that we can become like God is. Those who deny that we can become like God directly contradict what Jesus taught and demonstrated. Remember, those who killed Jesus accused him of blasphemy for teaching that a person was capable of obtaining the character of the Father.²⁰

People fight the idea that we can grow towards God in order to gratify their pride, not because it denigrates God. Those who fight the idea that we can become like God pretend that they are protecting God's reputation, but they are actually motivated by a desire to protect their own. God being willing to exalt sinners magnifies his glory, but also removes the self-righteousness of those who refuse his gift. Those who continue to sin willfully even though they profess to believe in Jesus are indicted by the idea that their continued sin is due to their own rejection of God and not God's inability to make them holy.

¹⁷ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

¹⁸ Levitical priests who touched what was unclean became unclean themselves (see Leviticus 5:3). However, what Jesus touched became clean. For example, Jesus raised a dead girl back to life by touching her (Matthew 9:25), and healed the lepers by touching them (Matthew 8:2-3).

¹⁹ And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. (Acts 10:15)

²⁰ The Jews killed Jesus because of their hatred of the idea of men becoming like God: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." (John 5:17-19)

We glorify the Father by thinking, feeling, and acting like him

God's glory is not limited to God; it can be experienced by and obtained by those who know him, as far as they do. God's glory comes from what he does, why he does it, and how he does it. So does yours. The only way to gain more of God's glory is to learn more of what he does, why he does it, and how he does it, and to do the same.

All of God's creations can experience and possess some measure of his glory. Of all God's creations, only humankind possesses a form capable of coming up to the understanding and implementation of how he is. Man was not created to be a lesser example of something sort of like God, but to actually become like him. We are not types and shadows of God,²¹ but "made in his image,"²² or made in the likeness of God, with the same potential he has. To be made in the image of God means that a path from how we are to how he is exists. God is the demonstration of our ultimate divine potential.²³ Human potential is denominated in God's actuality.²⁴ Our potential is defined by how God is, not how we presently are. He cannot reveal anything about himself to us without simultaneously giving us power to believe, do, and become more than we would have before.

Every aspect of our being is susceptible to improvement toward how God is in that aspect. Improvement is the root mechanism of all miracles in the body, advancement in the mind, and accomplishment in the world. Everything about us tends toward God if we but believe it is possible.

As you learn more about and live more like Jesus, you will increasingly glorify him by demonstrating his goodness more fully to others. To glorify God is to make the divine qualities or their effects more apparent or to bestow them upon someone or something more fully. You cannot glorify God except through thinking, feeling, and acting more like him, or helping others to do the same. Nothing glorifies God more than a person who becomes like him.

²¹ The word *type* in Greek (*hupodeigma*, Strong's 5262) does not just mean an example of, but conveys a sense of being a lower-detail or less accurate version of the original. A *shadow*, in the Greek sense, is a lesser but lower intensity and more easily visible version of what is greater.

²² An image is not a low fidelity impression, but an exact copy. Consider Paul's juxtaposition of the two concepts: "For the law having a *shadow* of good things to come, and not the very *image* of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." (Hebrews 10:1)

²³ They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; And he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion. (D&C 76:94-95)

²⁴ He quite literally calls us to obtain the same end: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Here, the word translated "perfect" is *teleioi*, which means to completely fulfill the potential of something. It was to this end that the disciples were sent out: to immerse all people into the character of Christ, insofar as they were willing to receive it.

God's glory is demonstrated by men who rise up to become more like him. Jesus lived so fully in emulation of the Father that he said if people knew him, they knew the Father. He commanded us to live in the same way!²⁵ Jesus said that while he remained on earth, he was the light of the world, but after he was gone, his disciples would be the light of the world.²⁶ He charges us to be as he would be in our place, to demonstrate to others what he would do if he were here.²⁷ None of us are *interchangeable* with Jesus, but all of us can live so that we become *indistinguishable* from him to those who are less like him than us.²⁸

It is not sinful to strive to be like God—it is the very purpose of God, the reason for which he gave himself for us, and a necessary prerequisite for others to learn more about him than they presently know.

²⁵ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16)

²⁶ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:5) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. (Matthew 5:14)

²⁷ Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do.... (3 Nephi 18:24)

²⁸ If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. (John 14:7) But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. (John 5:17-20)

2. God's character maximizes enduring happiness

All good comes from and leads to God

Most people would agree that they desire joy, but few intentionally seek it, as demonstrated by the distance between what people say makes them happy and how they actually live. Those who honestly and diligently seek for joy will traverse a path where they actually live according to what they believe will produce it. As they do so, they will learn more accurate appraisals of what options are available in life, what they cost, and what benefit they provide. The path to greater joy begins broad and narrows as the limits of present beliefs are discovered and better ways of thinking, feeling, and acting are discovered and implemented.

All good things come from God,²⁹ and all good things lead to God.³⁰ All paths of improvement lead closer to God. Anyone who seeks to improve themselves will become more like God as they do so, even if they do not believe in God or understand what he is like.

Anyone who seeks improvement in life will find greater joy. However, there are barriers to how much joy can be found and how long it can be retained without learning and living correct beliefs about God.

There are limits to how much you can learn about God or live like him without believing that he exists and possessing correct ideas about his character. The more you improve your character, the more you will adopt the character of Christ, and the more you adopt the character of Christ, the more you will improve your character. The character of God does not exist outside of God, and the greatest joy does not exist outside of his character. Anyone who seeks improvement will eventually need to believe that God is real, learn what he is like, and begin to live like him in order to continue progressing.

The more you learn about reality and about the optimal path to obtain the greatest joy within it, the more you will learn about God, because he has already discovered this path and lives this way.

²⁹ For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. (Moroni 7:22)

³⁰ And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world. (Ether 4:12)

Conversely, the more you learn about God, the more you will learn about the optimal path to the greatest joy given reality.

God's measure of the worth of things is based on a complete and correct understanding of what other options exist and the true long-term costs and benefits of those options. God knows the value of all things, he knows everything that could happen, he knows every available option, and his character is the best possible way he could be in order to yield the greatest possible joy.

All things do not have the same potential to provide joy. As you reach for and obtain what has and provides greater joy, you will learn more about how God is and become more like him. All things in creation can be arranged in a hierarchical network according to the joy they possess and provide. Those things closest to and most like God provide the greatest potential for joy. The greatest joy is available in God himself: in being with him and being like him. From that apex flows all cascading intensities of joy.

You should choose to be like God if you want what is best for yourself, others, and the world. To turn towards God is to turn towards what is best. To turn towards what is best is to turn towards God. To turn away from God is to turn away from what is best.³¹ To turn away from what is best is to turn away from God. Anything that seems better than following God is a mirage that will evaporate over time, usually replaced by something much worse than expected. To be different from God in any way is to experience less joy than you otherwise could. All sin reduces to the lie that you can find greater happiness in thinking, feeling, or acting contrary to how God would in your place.³² To the extent that your path deviates from what God would think, feel, or do in your place, you will deviate from the good you could otherwise be, give, and receive, and the happiness you could experience in the process. The path to the greatest good, and therefore the greatest happiness, is to learn everything you can about God, and to live everything you learn.³³

³¹ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. (John 6:66-68)

³² "Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness." (Alma 41:10) Wickedness means deliberately acting against your sincere understanding of what is best.

³³ Therefore, remain ever-obedient to the summation of all you've ever learned about the Son until now. As you continue doing this, you will continue to learn more about and become more like the Son and the Father. This is the state he has called us to, eternal life itself. (1 John 2:24-25, Author's Reflection)

The more you live up to how you believe God to be, the more content, confident, and guilt-free you will be

Guilt comes through willingly doing less than what you believe is best.³⁴ If you feel guilty here and now, you will feel guilty forever.³⁵ You can enjoy deep peace from and confidence with God through maintaining “a clear conscience before God,” as many of his servants have (see Mosiah 2:27).

Contentment comes through living the best you know how.³⁶ If you reconcile your life to the best you know, you will feel freedom from guilt³⁷ and enjoy peace of conscience.³⁸ The more accurate your understanding of the ideal character, and the more fully you live up to the same, the more it will take to overcome your peace, and the more content³⁹ and confident⁴⁰ you will be.

The character of Christ is the ideal character. The fullness of the peace that is available in living as you believe the Lord would is beyond the ability of anything in this world to overcome.⁴¹ If you actively consider God’s character and will at all times,⁴² only doing what makes rational sense for the greatest long-term benefit, you will walk with a peace unknown by anyone who does anything less.⁴³

³⁴ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17) And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity. (Moroni 10:22)

³⁵ Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. (Mormon 9:3-4)

³⁶ “And by him all that believe are justified from all things...” (Acts 13:39) Scripturally speaking, to “believe” includes living up to what you believe, and to be “justified” is to attain blamelessness, or freedom from guilt.

³⁷ And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath...taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son. (Alma 24:10)

³⁸ And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them. (Mosiah 4:3)

³⁹ These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

⁴⁰ The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion. (Proverbs 28:1)

⁴¹ In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. (Isaiah 54:14) Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27) Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (3 Nephi 11:39)

⁴² Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. (D&C 6:36)

⁴³ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8)

The more like God you are, the happier you will be

The gospel is a process by which you receive more and better blessings from God by becoming more like him. Too many Christians seek the blessings of righteousness without seeking to be righteous.⁴⁴ The gospel is not a cheat code to get more than you deserve in or after this life. Rather, it is an instruction manual on how to become better so that you deserve better than you presently do.⁴⁵

God's blessings are often coveted without consideration of God's character. Goodness and enduring happiness are completely intertwined. The more like God you become, the more of his blessings you will enjoy.⁴⁶ The way to obtain God's blessings is to join him where he is.⁴⁷

You become one with God by becoming like he is, not by getting him to inject his blessings into a life nothing like what he would live. The angel of God's presence accompanied Israel because they were walking towards where *he* wanted them to be, not because he was going towards where *they* wanted to be. He was with them because they were following him, not because they had succeeded in getting him to follow them.

By nature, humans are miserable. The nature of God is the nature of happiness,⁴⁸ because God is happier than any person. Adopting his nature will lead to greater happiness than any other path.⁴⁹ The path to happiness is to learn and live the character of Christ.⁵⁰ You cannot have greater or longer-lasting joy without learning more than you presently know about God.

⁴⁴ "Men are anxious to improve their circumstances, but are unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound." (James Allen, "As A Man Thinketh")

⁴⁵ And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

⁴⁶ You will understand what this scripture says very differently after learning the lessons taught in this book: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake...He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great. The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children." (Psalm 115:1, 13-14)

⁴⁷ When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (Isaiah 43:2)

⁴⁸ And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness. (Alma 41:11)

⁴⁹ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

⁵⁰ And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness. (2 Nephi 5:27)

To obtain the most intense joy, we must discover and emulate how God is. Similitude to God and joy are inescapably coupled. Because similarity to God comes by degrees, joy does as well. The more like God you become, the more intense the joy you will experience.⁵¹

The path to experiencing more intense joy is the path of learning what God knows, doing what he does, and wanting what he wants. To the degree that you learn about and live like Jesus, you will find that the degree of happiness you find and keep in life will increase.⁵²

Obtaining and living God's character is not just a duty or debt, but the path to the greatest possible outcomes. The best outcomes available to you are found and obtained through living as Jesus would in your place. We obtain more of God's outcomes by learning and living more of God's character. To the extent we learn about and apply his character, we become like he is, both in quality and in outcome.⁵³ As you become more like God, you will encounter greater joy as what is less like God is replaced by what is more like God. As you think, feel, and act as you sincerely believe Jesus would in your place, you are on the path to becoming the greatest person you can be and experiencing the greatest joy you can ever have.

The purpose of life is to have greater eternal joy by becoming more like God.⁵⁴ The more you know about and live like Jesus, the more joy you will have, and the longer it will last.

The more like God you are, the longer your joy will last

A great deal of perceived happiness is fleeting, as it is based on an erroneous understanding of reality and limited experience with it.⁵⁵

⁵¹ ...he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy. (Mosiah 4:20)

⁵² If any man desires to do His will (God's pleasure), he will know (have the needed illumination to recognize, and can tell for himself) whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking from Myself and of My own accord and on My own authority. (John 7:17, AMP)

⁵³ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:48)

⁵⁴ ...these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves....Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth....That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:13, 17, 21-23)

⁵⁵ "Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly." (Proverbs 15:21) The path to God's happiness is most clearly demonstrated by those who have endured the greatest suffering. One who has joy in spite of great pain is much more likely to have an accurate and abundant understanding of God than one who has seemingly greater joy but who lacks as much experience with sorrow.

The breadth, depth, and intensity of reality is vast and virtually unknown to most.

Apparent happiness can rot the instant it is exposed to information that erodes the assumptions and presumptions it is based on. Apparent happiness can disappear in a moment when we:

- Learn of the existence of something better than what we have.⁵⁶
- Learn that the cost of what we seek or have is much greater than we thought.⁵⁷
- Learn that the benefit of what we seek or have is much less than we thought.⁵⁸
- Learn that the value of what we have or seek does not endure for as long as we had hoped.⁵⁹

This loss of perceived value is an unavoidable part of the purpose of life,⁶⁰ for how else would we gain the motivation necessary to seek something better or experience greater joy than we would otherwise have when we find it?⁶¹ God's intent is not that we endlessly churn over lost joy, but that we are able to increasingly approach greater joy that is longer lasting than what we had before, eventually obtaining maximal joy that can endure all circumstances here and hereafter.⁶²

God has the greatest enduring joy. If you desire greater lasting joy, you will find it by discovering and assimilating more of God's character.

⁵⁶ And the presence of God withdrew from Moses, that his glory was not upon Moses; and Moses was left unto himself. And as he was left unto himself, he fell unto the earth. And it came to pass that it was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed. (Moses 1:9-10)

⁵⁷ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? (Matthew 19:23-25)

⁵⁸ I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17, NIV)

⁵⁹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1:21)

⁶⁰ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2)

⁶¹ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:4-7)

⁶² These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.....that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain... (John 15:11, 16)

You will have greater enduring joy through doing what God would do in your place than anything else.⁶³

God's knowledge of all things past, present, and future⁶⁴ uniquely positions him to know what is of greatest lasting worth. God's happiness is not based on ignorance. God knows "things as they really are, and... things as they really will be." (Jacob 4:13) He lives according to his knowledge, which yields "a never-ending state of happiness." (Mosiah 2:41)

God's character is the optimized path to the greatest enduring happiness given reality. God's character is not just different, it is better.⁶⁵ In fact, it is the best.⁶⁶ God's knowledge, beliefs, and desires are all optimally tuned⁶⁷ to yield the greatest joy for himself and all others across the duration of eternity.⁶⁸ There is no other set of traits that will yield greater joy for longer across the duration of eternity.⁶⁹

What provides the greatest lasting joy is not obvious. Gaining a more correct idea of the options available and a more accurate estimate of the lasting value each provides is an important part of the purpose of life. God's character is optimal, tested, and proven. You will never devise a better way to be than how God already is. As you learn and live more like God, you will gain a more correct idea of the choices available to you in life⁷⁰ and which of them provide the greatest lasting worth.⁷¹

⁶³ Righteousness is what God would do in your place. Iniquity is anything else. Those who choose iniquity choose something other than the joy that is only available in God: "...ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head." (Helaman 13:38)

⁶⁴ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁶⁵ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9, Gileadi Translation)

⁶⁶ And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all. (Abraham 3:19)

⁶⁷ As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. (Psalm 18:30)

⁶⁸ Let them praise the character of the Lord: for his character alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:13, Author's Reflection)

⁶⁹ And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:21)

⁷⁰ For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Psalms 36:9) 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)

⁷¹ Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. (Moroni 7:19)

The greatest and most enduring joy comes from internal changes, which also make possible the greatest and most enduring external joy

Happiness is commonly denominated in circumstances beyond the control of the individual. As such, when those circumstances change unfavorably, the individual's happiness is vanquished.⁷² Any joy that comes through external circumstances can only endure as long as your external circumstances don't change.

Happiness that lies beyond external reduction comes from internal refinement. Enduring increases in happiness come through improvements to your character.⁷³ There is no way to obtain greater and longer-lasting joy except through improving your character. As you improve who you are, you increase the proportion of your happiness that comes internally from what you do for the world rather than the external portion that comes from what you receive from the world. While this doesn't mean you cease receiving good through and from external sources, it does mean that you increase your supply of joy that cannot be taken away by external changes because it is generated from within. Any person who can obtain and maintain a fullness of joy *in spite of* external circumstances will be immeasurably happier than anyone whose happiness comes *because of* external circumstances.

The happiness found in God cannot be diminished by what lies outside of the control of the individual, and as such, is the only kind that endures all things. There is no external circumstance that can generate the kind of joy that internal alignment with God can. Meanwhile, the greatest external sources of joy are only available to those who align their character with God, and to the extent they do.⁷⁴ For example, when Jesus appeared to his followers on the American continent after his resurrection, he described feeling a fullness of joy that could not have been experienced except through his having perfectly lived as the Father would have during his mortal life.⁷⁵

As one learns more about and lives more like Jesus, the depth of joy experienced and its independence from external circumstances

⁷² "The ordinary man places his life's happiness in things external to him, in property, rank, wife and children, friends, society, and the like, so that when he loses them or finds them disappointing, the foundation of his happiness is destroyed. In other words, his center of gravity is not in himself; it is constantly changing its place, with every wish and whim." —Arthur Schopenhauer

⁷³ The only way it gets better for you is if you get better. (Jim Rohn)

⁷⁴ Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness. (Alma 27:18)

⁷⁵ And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full. (3 Nephi 17:20) Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:10-11)

increases. The Lord has overcome all things. An important part of this accomplishment is that he has attained joy that is beyond the power of anyone else to remove without his consent. Although the poor choices of his children cause God tremendous sorrow, no one can overcome his joy.

Happiness is a subjective construct. It comes from your sense of perceived value in what you are, have, experience, and give. The enduring nature of the Lord's happiness comes from how he is and what he values. As you learn to value the character of God above all else, you will increasingly feel joy from your similarity to him, no matter the cost of achieving it, and no matter what others do or don't do because of it.

God's way provides joy here and now, not just hereafter

God intends for us to have joy here, not just hereafter.⁷⁶ This life is an opportunity for us to learn and live what is necessary to be happy forever.⁷⁷ Life features a myriad of challenges that are useful to help us see aspects of who we are that are inadequate to yield eternal happiness. Unfortunately, most people manage to cope with the parts of reality that they do not like or cannot handle by ignoring or escaping from them. This human tendency pervades common Christianity, where the desire to *avoid* reality dominates the willingness to *overcome* it. It is easy to ignore aspects of your life that rob you of joy through using synthetic sources of pleasure: drugs, entertainment, work, exercise, social activities, and relationships, but they will not help you become a better person or any happier hereafter. Whatever has power to make you miserable here will also have power to make you miserable hereafter;⁷⁸ and while you can make use of dishonest distractions here, none of them will work there. This life is given as an opportunity to learn and live principles that will bring you greater joy forever.⁷⁹ Any principles that have the power to bring you joy *after* this life will also bring you joy *in* this life.

⁷⁶ And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. (John 17:13)

⁷⁷ The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh. And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness. (Alma 41:5-6)

⁷⁸ And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. (Mormon 9:14)

⁷⁹ 28 Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God (Mormon 9:28)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a means or reason to ignore or avoid problems, but a means and reason to overcome them.⁸⁰ The Lord overcame all things, and it is only through learning and living his character that you can do the same. The mechanism for joy hereafter is learning and living the character of God while you are here.⁸¹ To the extent you seek happiness that can endure any circumstance in life, you seek the character of Christ, and to the extent you obtain the character of Christ, you will find happiness that can endure any circumstance in life.

As you learn and live the character of Christ, you will experience an increasing intensity and duration of joy here and now. You will find yourself overcoming more of the things that take away your joy and obtaining more of the things that provide it. Those who learn more about Jesus and live more like him will find that increasingly greater opposition is required to disrupt their joy and that they are able to hold onto greater joy for longer.

Growing more like Jesus does not mean that life's trials will stop flowing through your life, or that your life will be free from any unpleasantness, challenges, or sorrows. In fact, as you grow more like the Lord, who faced all possible mortal challenges, you will find that trials come with increased occurrence and intensity,⁸² but you will likewise learn and live what he did to overcome them.⁸³ All good things carry a price, and that price is typically required to be paid up front. The paths that yield the greatest lasting joy frequently begin with willful suffering—sometimes for a prolonged period—but they always pay dividends that far outweigh the cost. The key indication that you are on the Lord's path is progress. Those learning more about and living like Christ will grow in their ability to experience greater joy and hold onto it for longer, in the face of greater challenges than before.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33) Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

⁸¹ And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one; (3 Nephi 28:10)

⁸² The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. (Matthew 10:24)

⁸³ He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Revelation 21:7)

⁸⁴ That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. (D&C 50:24)

3. Salvation and eternal life through becoming like Christ

What is salvation?

Salvation refers to deliverance from death and hell. Death is the cessation of life, which can refer to mortal life or eternal life. Through being born, we inherit physical death. Through choosing to sin, we each suffer spiritual death, which is separation from the presence of God.⁸⁵ We are delivered from physical death through resurrection,⁸⁶ where our bodies and spirits will reunite in immortality. We are delivered from spiritual death through aligning ourselves with God to the extent that we understand him to be,⁸⁷ which reopens the living connection through which we receive eternal life. Hell is a condition of torment caused by exposure to ideas and circumstances that overwhelm one's ability and willingness to live joyfully aligned with God as far as you understand him to be in spite of opposition. You are saved from hell by learning and living the principles required to overcome what would otherwise overcome you while recognizing and using the protection God offers from situations beyond your capacity.⁸⁸

Most people who are saved from physical death will still suffer spiritual death, as resurrection does not free you from the penalty of the sins that you have not forsaken.⁸⁹ The one and only way to be saved

⁸⁵ Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death. (Alma 42:9)

⁸⁶ Yea, behold, [the death of Christ] bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. (Helaman 14:16)

⁸⁷ Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness. Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death. (Helaman 14:18-19)

⁸⁸ “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) These protections include commandments, warnings, and miraculous power from God or through his servants. For example, see the Lord's protective role over the apostles while he was with them, and what they were subjected to thereafter: “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.” (John 17:12)

⁸⁹ And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins. (2 Nephi 9:38) Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. (John 8:21)

from spiritual death is by reconciling to your understanding of how God is and faithfully following his example until you die.⁹⁰

Resurrection does not provide you with any extra capacity in death to overcome what overcame you in life. What causes you sorrow, grief, pain, and suffering here will cause you the same there,⁹¹ if not more, because you will not be able to lie to yourself or distract yourself there as you can here.⁹² Meanwhile, the conditions necessary to encounter the tools needed to conquer or qualify for shelter from what overcomes you here are not possible in the afterlife. The one and only way to be saved from hell is by seeking for, perceiving, believing, and living the principles needed to overcome what overcomes you. The Lord Jesus created the world to provide us with the opportunity to obtain and live these principles, having possessed them before the foundation of the world, and coming here to live in order to demonstrate them to us.⁹³

Salvation requires living up to how you understand Jesus to be

There is no other way you can be saved, except through learning more about Jesus and living all you learn.⁹⁴ You cannot be saved in spite

⁹⁰ I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you. (Mosiah 4:6-8)

⁹¹ And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. (Mormon 9:14)

⁹² O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect. Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness. (2 Nephi 9:13-14)

⁹³ For [God] is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him. (1 Nephi 10:18)

⁹⁴ And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:21)

of willful differences between you and God.⁹⁵ These differences must be reconciled through your choice to follow his example.⁹⁶ There are no backdoors or shortcuts to heaven—he is the gate and the way.⁹⁷

Too many find comfort in the fact that they are doing better than they used to or they are doing better than other people they know, when they should be asking whether they are living up to Jesus, as far as they understand him to be. You shouldn't judge yourself based simply on whether you are doing better than your worst. Your worst is not the standard you will be compared against—Jesus is.⁹⁸ You shouldn't judge yourself based on what others do.⁹⁹ Your capabilities are not the same as those of others. Your accountability before God is based on what you know¹⁰⁰ and could know,¹⁰¹ not what anyone else knows. God will hold you accountable for your own capacity and understanding,¹⁰² not that of others.¹⁰³ The degree of blessing you receive from God is determined by the degree to which you are like him.¹⁰⁴ Only judge

⁹⁵ I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you. (Mosiah 4:6-8)

⁹⁶ Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved. (Helaman 12:23)

⁹⁷ ...I am the door of the sheep....He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (John 10:7, 1-2)

⁹⁸ For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. (2 Corinthians 10:12-13)

⁹⁹ Don't conform yourself to the present world, but be transformed by completing the process by which you obtain the mind of God; improving your idea of what is good, from your present understanding of what aligns with him unto the fullness of who he is. Judge wisely. We all differ in our present state of understanding of God. Therefore, do not judge yourself based on comparing yourself to others, but judge yourself against God as far as he has revealed himself to you. (Romans 12:2-3, Author's Reflection)

¹⁰⁰ "For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation." (D&C 82:3)

¹⁰¹ And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. (3 Nephi 26:10)

¹⁰² ...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

¹⁰³ Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:4)

¹⁰⁴ And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. (D&C 88:34)

yourself against others if you want to limit yourself to the blessings they have received.¹⁰⁵

In the day of judgment, you will be judged for whether you lived up to your understanding of how Christ is.¹⁰⁶ Jesus Christ—his works, his character, his sinlessness—is the standard of salvation.¹⁰⁷ You will be judged by how well you live up to your present understanding of how God is.¹⁰⁸ Everything about you and your life plainly demonstrates how much like him you have become, and by this you can know your standing with God at all times.

Eternal life comes through similitude to Christ

Eternal life is the opportunity offered to all to learn about and live like Jesus Christ, both of which depend on the choices of the individual. If we desire eternal life, we must learn and live what Jesus would do in your place. The Lord came to show us how the Father is and provide us with the power to follow his example in all things. Jesus obtained eternal life before this world was, and by laying down his eternal life, he provided the opportunity for all men to advance toward the same. The life of Jesus Christ was a demonstration of the process and outcome of obtaining the character of the Father, which in combination define the outcome and process of eternal life. The Lord obtained eternal life through learning about and living like the Father.¹⁰⁹ We obtain eternal life through learning about and living like the Son.¹¹⁰ God, knowing all things, provided a way whereby any individual could come to understand the same. Through learning what

¹⁰⁵ Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (Psalms 45:7)

¹⁰⁶ And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you. (Mormon 6:21)

¹⁰⁷ And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement. (2 Nephi 2:10)

¹⁰⁸ Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. (3 Nephi 27:13-16)

¹⁰⁹ For just as the Father obtained life in himself, he gave the Son the ability to obtain life in himself. (John 5:26, Author's Reflection)

¹¹⁰ Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24, NIV)

he knows and acting and feeling how he does, an individual can come to possess all things that God possesses.

Immortality and eternal life are not the same thing.¹¹¹ Immortality comes because of *what Jesus did*, but eternal life comes because of *how Jesus is*. Eternal life is not about what you *get* after you die, but who you *become* here and now. Through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ,¹¹² all people will be resurrected,¹¹³ whether they believe in God or not, and irrespective of how well they know and obey him. Eternal life does not come from what you say you believe about Jesus, nor from him visiting you. You receive eternal life as you learn how Jesus is and live that way yourself.¹¹⁴ Only those who live as they sincerely believe Jesus would in their place will be saved from spiritual death.¹¹⁵

You become one with God through obtaining his attributes

The attributes of God are what yield eternal life. God is what he is because of *how* he is, not *who* he is. If his character were different than it is, he would not be God.¹¹⁶ The character of Christ is what makes him God; it is predefined¹¹⁷ and unalterable.¹¹⁸ The role of God is

¹¹¹ For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)

¹¹² Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

¹¹³ Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:44)

¹¹⁴ O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life. (Jacob 6:11)

¹¹⁵ Anyone who follows the example of the Lord will be saved, and only those who follow the example of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13, Author's Reflection)

¹¹⁶ But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:22)

¹¹⁷ For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round. (D&C 3:2)

¹¹⁸ For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing? And now, if ye have imagined up unto yourselves a god who doth vary, and in whom there is shadow of changing, then have ye imagined up unto yourselves a god who is not....the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. (Mormon 9:9-11)

defined by his character, and that set of qualities is the same from eternity to eternity.¹¹⁹

God is not God for any other reason than that he possesses the precise character of God. God's attributes, including his knowledge, beliefs, and desires, are precisely what define him. Knowing and living God's character is what makes God who and what he is. It is because of God's character that he possesses all things,¹²⁰ has overcome all things,¹²¹ is immortal, is happier than any person, has complete, untouchable peace,¹²² is able to endure all things that can happen without any anxiety or stress, and never wavers from his character qualities, no matter what situations he encounters.¹²³ Eternal life is the kind of life that God has, and to the degree that you have obtained and live by the same attributes as God, you will experience the same life that God does.¹²⁴ To the degree that your attributes vary from God's, you will experience a life less like that of God.

As you consecrate yourself to the will of God, you will find that who you used to be is sequentially replaced¹²⁵ with your evolving understanding of who God is.¹²⁶ The scriptures call this process "quickening,"¹²⁷ but modern people call it "improvement." You will recognize the effects of quickening as improvements to your actions,

¹¹⁹ For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity. (Moroni 8:18) His "...ways are righteousness forever." (1 Nephi 1:19)

¹²⁰ The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. (John 3:35)

¹²¹ These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

¹²² Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

¹²³ For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6)

¹²⁴ And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled. (3 Nephi 9:17)

¹²⁵ Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:2-8)

¹²⁶ So David waxed greater and greater: for the Lord of hosts was with him. (1 Chronicles 11:9) But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20) Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:20)

¹²⁷ For instance: "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness." (Psalm 119:158-159)

feelings, depth of desire, direction of desire, and understanding relative to the past. In every instance, whatever comes from God will be of greater worth and result in greater joy than anything that you had or were before.¹²⁸ It is through the acquisition of these attributes that we become one with God.¹²⁹

You become one with God by learning what he is like and doing what he would do in your place.¹³⁰ You become one with God by learning and living his character. The Lord Jesus is one with the Father because he has perfectly developed the character of the Father within himself by yielding to the words of the Father. Through him, we can do the same, and this is the purpose of life.¹³¹ Becoming one with God does not merely consist of obeying him, but of learning what he would do in your place, why he would do it, and using your brain to fill in the gaps. God is with you as you learn and adopt his character within yourself. You are one with the Son and the Father if, when, and as long as you perfectly align yourself with what you believe God would think, feel, and do.¹³² The Lord once said, “the kingdom of God is within you.”¹³³ You are one with the Father to the extent that the character of the Father is within you.

¹²⁸ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; (2 Corinthians 3:5)

¹²⁹ As soon as you live according to how I have shown you I am, you will know that I am in my Father, and that I am in you, and you are in me. He who has my commandments, and obeys them, loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and show more of how I am to him. And Judas (not Iscariot) asked him, Lord, how can you show us how you are without showing the world at the same time? Jesus answered him: Anyone who loves me will treasure up and obey everything he learns about me, and my Father will love him, and we increasingly reveal ourselves to him in character and presence, and he will increasingly be one with us as he becomes increasingly like us. (John 14:20-23, Author's Reflection)

¹³⁰ Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good. Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you. Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me. (Moses 6:32-34)

¹³¹ I have given them thy word....Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth....That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:14, 17, 21-23)

¹³² To be one with him is to live in perfect accord with your present understanding of how he would be in your place. Anyone who says they are one with him while willingly deviating from their understanding of what he would do in their place is a liar. They disobey that truth they already perceive; until they repent, they will not receive greater truth, and unless they repent, they will lose even that truth they have already obeyed. Those who keep the word of God will grow toward a full understanding and practice of the love of God, and they will have full confidence that they are one with God. Only those who remain reconciled to their understanding of what God would do in their place at all times can continue to grow in how much of him they see, understand, and become. (1 John 2:3-6, Author's Reflection)

¹³³ Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21)

You obtain eternal life by degrees

The purpose of life isn't just to live forever, but to live forever as a better person than you were before.¹³⁴ Eternal life is an outcome, but it is reached through the process of learning more about Jesus and living up to what you learn.¹³⁵

All people who obtain eternal life are saved from their sins, as you cannot enter into eternal life without sincerely living as you believe he would in your place.¹³⁶ However, while you can't enter into eternal life without fully reconciling to how you understand Jesus to be, doing so does not entitle you to a degree of eternal life beyond the limits of how well you know and live like God.

The measure of eternal life that you receive will equal the measure of the character of Christ you acquire and live in mortal life. The degree of eternal life you obtain is a function of how similar to Jesus you become. The more similar you are to Jesus, the more your eternal life resembles his. Eternal life is something that exists by degrees, corresponding to the accuracy, depth, and breadth of the individual's understanding of Jesus to which they are reconciled. The more you know about and live like God, the more of eternal life you will receive, because the more like him you are, the more your life will resemble his.¹³⁷

Everyone with eternal life is fully reconciled to everything they know about Jesus, but they differ in how much they know about him. Each will have a different portion of eternal life depending on how accurate and complete their understanding of Jesus is. The extent to which people learn about and live like Jesus will create severe distinctions between people, even among those who live like Jesus, as far as they understand him to be.

The fullest degree of eternal life is to be as God actually is and to live as God actually does. It is to act like God would in your situation at

¹³⁴ 10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10)

¹³⁵ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life. (Romans 2:6-7)

¹³⁶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

¹³⁷ For your sake I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, From whom every good thing flows through and to every family in heaven and on earth to the extent they know him and live as he would in their place, That he might give you according to the riches of his glory, with power, to be strengthened by his Spirit in your inner man, For this is the way through which Christ inhabits your hearts, and how you come to be founded upon and rooted in love, Until you can fully comprehend, with all the saints, the true breadth and length and height and depth, knowing the transcendent love of Christ, being filled with the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19, Author's Reflection)

all times and in all places; to do as he does and to feel as he does, all of the time; to see the world as he does, see yourself as he does, and see others as he does. You can't live like God does or have what God has beyond the extent to which you are actually as God is.¹³⁸ This is the only way possible to receive everything he has, which he only has because of how he is.

You cannot be saved through mercy alone

Eternal life does not come about through mercy alone. Salvation comes only through the mercy *and merits* of God,¹³⁹ but for some reason, people are much more apt to cling to his mercy than they are to adopt his merits! Mercy and justice are both components of salvation. Mercy makes a way for justice to result in reward rather than punishment,¹⁴⁰ but it doesn't replace justice.¹⁴¹

The Lord's sacrifice provides for forgiveness of your past sins, but not your present or future sins.¹⁴² While mercy forgives you of past sins, you can be saved only through justly ascribing to the standard of Christ.¹⁴³ You can be forgiven for deviating from your understanding of the Lord, but you can't be saved without becoming the person God teaches you to be.

Mercy provides space for a person to choose better outcomes through obtaining and living the conditions that produce them.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:14)

¹³⁹ Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

¹⁴⁰ But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world and eternal life in the world to come. (D&C 59:23)

¹⁴¹ For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:24-25)

¹⁴² By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. (D&C 58:43) And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins. (Alma 11:37)

¹⁴³ But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son; Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest. And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest. (Alma 12:33-35)

¹⁴⁴ Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds. If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God. (Alma 42:27-28)

Mercy does not impute better outcomes than a person deserves.¹⁴⁵ Mercy enables forgiveness of past sins and provides opportunity for you to learn what you didn't know, but it can't magically transform you into a better person without your choice to improve.¹⁴⁶

Salvation is a gift that you must choose

Many professed Christians embrace the pagan belief that salvation is an arbitrary gift that is obtained from courting the favor of a capricious God, and several denominations differ only in how they attempt to court his favor. Some even believe that because Jesus was righteous, they are too, even if they don't obey his teachings. Salvation is not the gift of an arbitrary God. If God could freely give salvation to *anyone*, he would give it to *everyone*.¹⁴⁷ He does not give you eternal life against your will. You cannot be treated by God *as if* you were righteous without *actually being* righteous, and there is no righteousness that exists outside of similarity to Jesus.¹⁴⁸

God can "give" you immortality through resurrection, but he cannot "give" you his character attributes.¹⁴⁹ You can receive immortality because of what Jesus did, but you can only obtain eternal

¹⁴⁵ Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness....Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all. (Alma 41:10, 14-15)

¹⁴⁶ And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption. (Alma 34:15-16)

¹⁴⁷ The idea that he can give salvation freely, but only to those who believe in him is inadequate to explain why it is that only some are saved. Since everyone will believe in him in the last day, when all knees will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Christ, how is it that he would ever have reason to say this to anyone? "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:23)

¹⁴⁸ Righteousness is similitude to God: "O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous...." (2 Nephi 9:41) And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. (Mark 10:18)

¹⁴⁹ Jesus said it "is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matthew 20:23) He said: "I will not give my glory unto another." (Isaiah 48:11)

life to the degree you become like he is.¹⁵⁰ God's characteristics can't be forced upon you. You must willingly take them upon yourself.¹⁵¹ He can't force us to know what he knows, to do what he does, or to share his motives. These are things he gives us, through the price he has paid, according to our choices to seek and obtain them.¹⁵²

The idea of meriting eternal life is a foreign concept to most Christians, in spite of many scriptures explaining it this way.¹⁵³ They correctly understand that there is no path to what the Father has except through what the Son offers, and that none of us will ever deserve the sacrifice he made for us in coming here and dying for our sins, but they incorrectly understand our obligations in that path.

Salvation *is* a gift in the sense that it is impossible without what Jesus has done and continues to do.¹⁵⁴ Jesus created this world which is necessary for the opportunity to learn more about and become more like God. He sacrificed the glory he had with the Father before the world was created¹⁵⁵ to come down from heaven¹⁵⁶ and demonstrate

¹⁵⁰ Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body? I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you? Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God? I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances? I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil? I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins. (Alma 5:15-21)

¹⁵¹ ... And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men... (2 Nephi 2:27)

¹⁵² And unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life. (D&C 133:62)

¹⁵³ The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight. (Psalm 18:20-24)

¹⁵⁴ And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; (2 Nephi 2:28)

¹⁵⁵ And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (John 17:5)

¹⁵⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

the example we are to follow.¹⁵⁷ He endured a life filled with trials,¹⁵⁸ sorrow,¹⁵⁹ and pain,¹⁶⁰ culminating with the sacrifice of his life in order to provide us with the opportunity to obtain forgiveness of our past sins¹⁶¹ and obtain greater eternal joy through learning about and living like him. The gift of Christ is *not* some way to receive the blessings of being like him while continuing to be unlike him. Rather, it is everything needed to know how he is, believe that you can be the same, have sufficient reasons to make the necessary changes, and be forgiven after choosing to follow his example.

Salvation is the greatest gift possible because of what it costs and what it enables.¹⁶² However, no gift, no matter how great, will increase the joy of those who refuse to receive it. We must receive and value it.¹⁶³ We receive that gift through completely reconciling to the full application of our sincere understanding of the character of Jesus Christ throughout every moment of our lives.¹⁶⁴ Through the gift he has given us, we can both conform ourselves perfectly to our present understanding of how he is, and receive incremental instruction and experience to advance the breadth and depth of our understanding of how he is.

Forgiveness doesn't make you holy

The justice of God dictates that your eternal wellbeing be exclusively determined by how virtuous you have become.¹⁶⁵ The sacrifice of Christ doesn't violate his justice, but rather gives you the opportunity to separate yourself from the moral indictment of your past sins, providing you with sufficient reasons and means to improve so that God's justice can result in your exaltation instead of abasement. In

¹⁵⁷ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. (3 Nephi 27:21)

¹⁵⁸ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

¹⁵⁹ He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3)

¹⁶⁰ And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:7)

¹⁶¹ For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)

¹⁶² ...eternal life...is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (D&C 14:7)

¹⁶³ And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift. (D&C 88:32-33)

¹⁶⁴ ...be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation. (2 Nephi 33:9)

¹⁶⁵ [God] will render to every man according to his deeds. (Romans 2:6)

order to obtain better outcomes than you have, you must become better than you are.

All people are forgiven of the differences between them and God which they are unable to discern. For example, children are forgiven for the law that they are too young to be able to learn¹⁶⁶ and understand.¹⁶⁷ However, there is a difference between being spared the penalty of disobedience to what you don't yet know and receiving the benefits of obeying what you don't yet know. Being spared from death and hell is not the same as receiving eternal life.

The atonement frees you from the punishment of failing to live up to how Christ is beyond the limits of your understanding, but it doesn't provide you with the blessings you would have if you were like Christ beyond the limits of how you understand him to be. Many Christians believe that God declares you righteous as long as you say you believe in Jesus, even if you don't actually follow his example. You can't be treated by God *as if* you were righteous without *actually being* righteous. This would be a lie.¹⁶⁸ The gospel doesn't magically transfer the blessings of Jesus' righteousness to sinners. Rather, through the gospel, Jesus provides you with the opportunity to choose to be more like him, making a way for you to be forgiven of past sin and providing sufficiently persuasive arguments for you to choose to be better, thus meriting those blessings in your own right¹⁶⁹

The Lord's sacrifice provides the opportunity for you to learn more about and live up to how he is, but it doesn't magically make you more like him than you choose to be.¹⁷⁰ The idea that God treats sinners as

¹⁶⁶ For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—(Moroni 8:22)

¹⁶⁷ But behold, I say unto you, that little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; Wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me; (D&C 29:46-47)

¹⁶⁸ And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie. (Ether 3:2)

¹⁶⁹ Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

¹⁷⁰ Those who remain of the earth do so by following the example of the first Adam, choosing to rebel against God. Those who will become the sons of God will do so by following the example of the second Adam, completely subjecting themselves to God. And as we have taken upon ourselves the image of the earthy through birth, we must also take upon ourselves the image of the heavenly through repentance and sanctification. For this flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can decay inherit immortality. Behold, I tell you a mystery: Not all will sleep in death, but all will be changed by death. Some will only die in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised into immortality, and we will all be changed. Therefore, it is essential for the perishable to take upon themselves what is imperishable, for this mortal will put on immortality. When what is mortal takes upon itself immortality, the perishable who have taken upon themselves what is imperishable will experience what is described in the word: death will be consumed by victory. (1 Corinthians 15:48-54, Author's Reflection)

saints simply because they say they believe in him, like him, or worship him, is an example of the extent to which Christians have replaced what Jesus taught with overtly pagan beliefs, in this case the idea that your affinity for an idol transposes its qualities upon you. Sheep gain the benefits of a shepherd by following his instructions, not by saying they like him. Believing that you become holy merely by expressing support for God is as ridiculous as believing that you will magically become a basketball star by wearing your favorite player's jersey. Forgiveness from God doesn't reward you with the blessings of obedience any more than it removes from you the temporal consequences of disobedience.

Moral forgiveness doesn't exempt someone from the temporal consequences of ignorance. Forgiveness from God is a moral absolution, not a material miracle; it absolves you of the divine punishment your past sins would otherwise require, not the temporal consequences that those choices still carry. While you aren't morally responsible for what you don't know, you are still subject to the consequences of the laws that apply to your situation, even if you don't know them.

God's forgiveness makes you blameless, not holy. Blamelessness is not holiness.¹⁷¹ Holiness is a measure of how similar you are to God.¹⁷² You become holy as you learn what Jesus is like and live that way yourself.¹⁷³ While an innocent person isn't bad, they are only good to the extent they have become better than neutral. Forgiveness takes away the bad, but it does not substitute the good in its place! To be *empty* on the inside is much better than to be *evil* on the inside, but emptiness is not the same as goodness. Emptiness is an indication of preparation for becoming good, but it is not the same as being good. A plowed, weed-free field is not the same as one full of crops ready to harvest. His forgiveness can erase your slate, but it can't refill it with better things—only you can do that by choosing better things over time. To become better requires learning and living better ideas than what were possessed or followed before.

This life is the time we are given to prepare for eternity

Your eternal state is determined by what you do while in this life.¹⁷⁴ This life is especially designed to provide the necessary and ideal

¹⁷¹ For example, little children are innocent, but they are not holy.

¹⁷² Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

¹⁷³ Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 20:7)

¹⁷⁴ For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. But if ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also. This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law. (D&C 132:22-24)

conditions for every individual to learn as much about Jesus as they are willing to live up to.¹⁷⁵ God created this world and gave everything necessary—including his life—to give you the opportunity to learn what is good and choose to desire it.¹⁷⁶ Everything in your life is designed with the end of providing every opportunity you are willing to receive to become as much like him as you will.¹⁷⁷

Your eternal happiness is determined by how fully you learned, desired, and chose as Jesus would during your life.¹⁷⁸ You cannot choose to become more like Jesus after you die,¹⁷⁹ because there is no progression after death.¹⁸⁰ Death does not change your desires,¹⁸¹ nor does it magically transform you into a holy person. You are not resurrected into a person that is more like Jesus than you chose to be during your life. God does not override the choices you made in this life, but rather rewards you eternal good or evil according to how you made them.¹⁸² You are resurrected to the same state in which you died.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. (Alma 12:24)

¹⁷⁶ Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state. (Alma 42:10) For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. (Alma 34:32)

¹⁷⁷ And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the days of his probation—that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe; (D&C 29:43)

¹⁷⁸ The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh. (Alma 41:5)

¹⁷⁹ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. (Revelation 22:11)

¹⁸⁰ And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:33)

¹⁸¹ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Revelation 22:11-12)

¹⁸² And it came to pass that I said unto them that it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation. (1 Nephi 15:32)

¹⁸³ And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one. For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey; and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth.... (Alma 3:26-27) And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the days of his probation—that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe; And they that believe not unto eternal damnation; for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not; For they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil, and they receive their wages of whom they list to obey. (D&C 29:43-45)

You lose your salvation the moment you rebel against what you believe the Lord would do in your place

While eternal life exists on a continuum, salvation is a binary condition—you are either saved or you are not. You either perfectly follow the example of Jesus Christ to the degree you are aware of it, or you do not.

Salvation is not a static state. In order to maintain your salvation, you have to remain “obedient unto the end of your lives.” (Mosiah 5:8) Life does not remain the same from the point you decide to reconcile to Jesus, but continues to ebb and flow, bringing new challenges and learning opportunities day by day. In order to remain saved, you have to remain fully aligned with Jesus until you die,¹⁸⁴ no matter what God may reveal about himself, what commandments he gives you,¹⁸⁵ what challenges he may expose you to, or what opposition arises.¹⁸⁶

The moment you deviate in any way from how you believe Jesus would live in your place,¹⁸⁷ you lose salvation,¹⁸⁸ and will remain in this state¹⁸⁹ until and unless you repent by changing whatever is out of alignment.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ ...But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation. (2 Nephi 33:9)

¹⁸⁵ For example: “And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22)

¹⁸⁶ And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (D&C 14:7) But blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life. (D&C 50:5) Continue in these things even unto the end, and you shall have a crown of eternal life at the right hand of my Father, who is full of grace and truth. (D&C 66:12)

¹⁸⁷ And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins. (Alma 11:37)

¹⁸⁸ Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. (Proverbs 28:18)

¹⁸⁹ But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Mosiah 3:12)

¹⁹⁰ But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God. (Mosiah 16:5)

The promise of eternal life

Two reliable aspects of human nature are the desire to get something for less than it costs and the desire to be done. Both desires are wrapped up in ideas held by some regarding the promise of eternal life, otherwise known as making your calling and election sure. There are people who believe that there are shortcuts to receiving eternal life that do not involve becoming more like Jesus, or that you can reach a point where you no longer have to labor to live as you believe he would in your place.

There is no shortcut to receiving eternal life. Eternal life isn't gained through rite or ritual. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the conditions, content, and outcomes of salvation.¹⁹¹ There is no way to receive eternal life except by becoming like Jesus.¹⁹² Anyone who is like him will have eternal life,¹⁹³ because to be like him is the very meaning of eternal life.¹⁹⁴ If you are reconciled to Jesus, you have eternal life, and will continue to until and unless you cease to remain reconciled with him.

Much confusion has resulted from the assumption that the promise of eternal life is unconditional. The promise of eternal life, like all of God's promises,¹⁹⁵ is conditional.¹⁹⁶ The conditions of eternal life have been set since the foundations of the world; they are to fully reconcile yourself to your understanding of Jesus and to maintain this reconciliation as you learn all you can about him until you die. There is no cessation to the labor salvation requires except for death. Until then,

¹⁹¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21)

¹⁹² Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6) And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:21)

¹⁹³ But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world and eternal life in the world to come. (D&C 59:23)

¹⁹⁴ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

¹⁹⁵ I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise. (D&C 82:10)

¹⁹⁶ ...if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:20) Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. (1 John 2:24-25)

your salvation is at risk.¹⁹⁷ The promise of eternal life demands the continuous sacrifice of everything required to remain true and faithful to the Lord's example in spite of every obstacle.¹⁹⁸

Rather than see the promise of eternal life as a special accomplishment of the privileged few, we should see it as an invitation unto all. When God mentions it to individuals, it isn't to grant them an unconditional outcome specific to them, but to remind all people of what is available for them, and inspire them to faithfully live by the conditions upon which it depends.¹⁹⁹ The promise of eternal life is extended to all people because of his impartiality. Anyone who fulfills its conditions will receive the promised result. As long as you do everything you can to learn more about Jesus, and live up to everything you learn, you qualify for eternal life. As long as you do anything less, you don't.

¹⁹⁷ Many who believe that God can irrevocably promise you eternal life will cite D&C 88:3-4: "Wherefore, I now send upon you another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples, as is recorded in the testimony of John. This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom;" They will omit the rest of the section, which clearly and repeatedly states that you cannot receive and keep the glory of the celestial kingdom unless you receive and keep that law throughout the duration of your life: And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom. For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory....That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still....And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions. All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. (D&C 88:21-22, 35, 38-39)

¹⁹⁸ Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me. (D&C 97:8)

¹⁹⁹ For example: "And again, verily I say unto you, it is wisdom and expedient in me, that my servant John Johnson whose offering I have accepted, and whose prayers I have heard, unto whom I give a promise of eternal life inasmuch as he keepeth my commandments from henceforth—" (D&C 96:6) "Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep." (Mosiah 26:20) "And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites." (Mosiah 28:7)

4. God's power and authority come from God's character

If Jesus promised power, why do so few Christians have it?

The pages of scripture are full of the miraculous power of God being poured out upon and through believers throughout history. How is it possible that there are so many professed Christians today with so little of God's power in their lives? God has not changed, but those who claim to believe in him have.²⁰⁰

God's power is based on belief, faith, and goodness. The corrupted versions of these principles as practiced by common Christians are insufficient to fulfill the conditions of God's promised power.

The power of God comes through belief. Belief in God is not a question of what you think about him, how you feel about him, or what you say about him. Your belief in God is a question of how closely your life actually aligns with how you believe he would live in your place. To believe in Jesus is to model and live according to his character. If you do not labor to learn more about Jesus and live up to what you learn, you do not believe in him. Jesus proclaimed that those who believe in him would do what he did.²⁰¹ Consequently, anyone who claims to believe in Jesus without doing what he did is using a definition of belief different than Jesus would.

The power of God comes through faith.²⁰² Whenever there is faith, God will send his power, including miracles.²⁰³ Consequently, a life without the power of God lacks faith as God defines it.²⁰⁴ Faith is a

²⁰⁰ ...God has not ceased to be a God of miracles....And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles. And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles. (Mormon 9:15, 18-19)

²⁰¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. (John 14:12)

²⁰² ...it is by faith that miracles are wrought... (Moroni 7:37)

²⁰³ For behold, I am God; and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith. (2 Nephi 27:23) And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever. (Moroni 10:7)

²⁰⁴ ...as surely as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you. (Moroni 7:26) ...And he knoweth their faith, for in his name could they remove mountains; and in his name could they cause the earth to shake; and by the power of his word did they cause prisons to tumble to the earth; yea, even the fiery furnace could not harm them, neither wild beasts nor poisonous serpents, because of the power of his word. (Mormon 8:24)

willingness to improve,²⁰⁵ quantified by your effort in searching for and living according to what is better than what you already have. If you aren't improving, you aren't exercising faith.²⁰⁶ God is the source and destination of all improvement. Faith yields outcomes beyond what would otherwise occur through new or better beliefs—new actions based on new or stronger desires, more accurate understanding, and superior reasoning. If you aren't living the best way you know how to, you do not have faith, and until you live up to the best way you know, you will not receive more power from God. The lack of faith in people who profess to be Christians is deeply troubling, because it is by the same faith that miracles are performed and salvation is obtained. The lack of the one indicates the lack of the other.²⁰⁷

The power of God comes through goodness. Because all good comes from and leads to God, the power of God that flows through his goodness comes according to one's similitude to God. Most Christians fail to acquire or experience much of God's power because they treat the gospel as a means to feel less guilty in doing less than their best rather than the way to become their best. Common Christians have replaced goodness with religion, losing sight of the fact that the gospel is about facilitating improvement, not recitation of scripture, religious rites, and celebratory worship.²⁰⁸ These things have no utility outside of the improvement they are intended to foster in practitioners. All power from God comes from and through God's goodness. Without exerting effort to learn about and live like he is, you cannot have his power, and if you do not have his power, it is because you aren't learning about and living like he is.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. (Moroni 7:25)

²⁰⁶ And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now. (D&C 84:49-53)

²⁰⁷ For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made. (Moroni 7:38)

²⁰⁸ And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances because of priestcrafts, all having corrupt minds. (D&C 33:4)

²⁰⁹ And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God. (Moroni 10:25)

What is power?

Power is the ability to achieve, obtain, and retain what you desire. God has all power because he achieves,²¹⁰ obtains,²¹¹ and retains²¹² what he desires.

Modern people misdefine the concept of power. They presume it means the ability to dictate the actions or seize the property of others through force and chicanery. Those who use such an evil definition of power can only seek more of it through violence and dishonesty, and will always see those with the ability to resist them as their enemies, erecting considerable barriers between themselves and God or any of his servants. Those who believe that power can only be gained and exercised through force or deceit can only grow in power through becoming more violent or dishonest than those more violent or dishonest than them.

Evil power spreads like a cancer throughout any society where it is permitted to be practiced.²¹³ Power through force catalyzes a race to destruction as contenders vie to exert the greatest tyranny, and as increasing numbers of those increasingly subjugated by it do the minimum required to avoid punishment rather than their best. The spiral downward continues until a critical mass is reached, where the problems presented overwhelm society's ability to overcome them.²¹⁴

Godly power differs from evil power in its essence and effects. Godly power leverages persuasion and merit rather than manipulation and force. Godly power functions through hard work, courage, and wisdom. Godly power can come through increases in any virtue that contributes to your ability to obtain what you seek,²¹⁵ that modifies what you seek, or changes the degree of desire with which you seek it. Those who seek godly power do not destroy people or things, but improve themselves and others.

Godly power is distinguished from the power of evil by its independence from the choices of others. The power of evil relies upon people to manipulate and subjugate, but godly power functions and

²¹⁰ I declare the outcome from the beginning; from of old, things yet to be. I say, "My plan will prevail, I will achieve all that I purpose. (Isaiah 46:10, Anchor)

²¹¹ But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. (Job 23:13) I know that thou canst do every thing... (Job 42:2)

²¹² And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:28) I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

²¹³ The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. (Genesis 6:11)

²¹⁴ And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Genesis 6:13)

²¹⁵ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue...(2 Peter 1:5)

grows whether others yield to it or not.²¹⁶ The dependence of the power of evil on those who yield to it is one reason why good always eventually triumphs over evil. Any power dependent on others is unavoidably transitory, as it can only endure for as long as they choose to fulfill your desires. A person can have the support of the majority only to find the majority turn against them, turn against itself, or face its demise at the hand of a greater superior force.²¹⁷

The Lord's life demonstrated the power of good. Jesus' perfect emulation of the character of the Father gave him power over death, in spite of the fact that the masses rejected and killed him. In resurrecting himself from death into immortality, he established himself as the unique possessor of what no other person could obtain without him. Jesus learned and lived the character of the Father independent of—and in spite of—the decisions of any other person. We can learn about and live the character of the Son independent of the decisions of others. Jesus obtained all power through maintaining adherence to the character of the Father, and we maximally acquire and access that power through maximal adherence to the character of the Son.

God's character is the source of God's power

God's power comes from his character. It is the embodiment of his characteristics of wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment that make him God. These attributes, coupled with his knowledge of all things, are what enables him to have all power.

The great power of God seems to be a significant difference between him and us. The Lord's ability to endure difficulty or perform miracles is not the *source* of our differences, but an *effect* stemming from them. The root of the differences between us and God lies in our character, as it is our character that is the source of strength and power in him and in us. There is an unbroken path of steps to attaining his character, no matter how different from him you are. God has more strength and power than you do because he:

- Knows more than you do.
- Understands better than you do.
- Has faith to pursue longer-term benefits and endure greater hardships than you.
- Is more honest than you are.
- Is more just than you are.
- Is more willing to suffer for others than you are.

²¹⁶ So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

²¹⁷ Such as a famine, war, or natural disaster.

As you acquire his intelligence, desires, and love, you will also grow in his strength and power.²¹⁸

The power of God comes through obtaining the character of God.²¹⁹ Before the world was created, Jesus Christ was with the Father,²²⁰ and had acquired his character.²²¹ The Lord made all things in accordance with the power and purpose of the Father,²²² both of which came through his knowledge of and adherence to the character of the Father.²²³ Just as the Son gained his power through obtaining the character of the Father,²²⁴ you can gain the power of the Son through obtaining the character of the Son.²²⁵

You have to actually become like God to have power like God. It is through learning and living the character of God that you increasingly obtain God's power. Power *from* God is a question of similitude *to* God. The "powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness." (D&C 121:36) Righteousness means similitude with God. Priesthood doesn't just *require* righteousness—it *is* righteousness. Those who desire to serve God must build and exercise faith, hope, charity, and love, uniquely focusing on learning and living God's purpose with all their heart, might, mind, and strength.²²⁶

To obtain the outcomes of Jesus, you have to adopt the character of Jesus. Only by possessing his attributes can you be more like he is, and only by being more like he is in *quality* can you be more like he is in *outcome*. All of the Lord's outcomes are tied to all of his attributes. The only ones who will obtain the fullness of God's outcomes are those who

²¹⁸ And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (Isaiah 11:5)

²¹⁹ ...the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. (D&C 121:36)

²²⁰ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

²²¹ And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (John 17:5)

²²² All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:3)

²²³ And I, God, called the light Day; and the darkness, I called Night; and this I did by the word of my power, and it was done as I spake; and the evening and the morning were the first day. (Moses 2:5)

²²⁴ Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. (John 14:10)

²²⁵ The seat of God's power is righteousness, and all in his kingdom will come through and take the place characterized by the righteousness they seek, find, and obey (Psalm 40:6, Author's Reflection) ...a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. (Hebrews 1:8)

²²⁶ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deuteronomy 6:5) Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul; And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. (D&C 4:2-5)

have become indistinguishable from Christ, and no one will receive any of God's outcomes except to the degree they have become like Christ.²²⁷

God does not act contrary to his character, and you will not enjoy his power while you act contrary to his character.²²⁸ Your ability to call down miracles from heaven is directly proportional to the completeness of your reconciliation to God.²²⁹ You can't work "...a miracle in the name of Jesus save [you are] cleansed every whit from [your] iniquity." (3 Nephi 8:1) "Every whit" means in totality. If elements of your life are contrary to his will, as you understand it, you will not have his power in your life, and you will suffer unnecessarily.

God's power is not a binary attribute. God's power is obtained and held by degrees, because God is known and obeyed by degrees. The more of his character you learn and live up to, the more of God's power you will have.²³⁰ The more accurately your desires, thoughts, and actions approximate God's, the more his power will flow²³¹ in and through you in every aspect of your life.²³²

God's power and authority are inseparable

A great deal of artificial distinction has been made between the words "power" and "authority" in the New Testament that does not exist among the Greek words they are translated from, all of which show that a person's ability to accomplish what they desire stems from their character qualities. The word *exousia* (Strong's Greek 1849), which means "that which arises out of being," is arbitrarily translated as "authority" or "power," while other mentions of "power" come from *dunamai* and *dunamis* (Strong's Greek 1410 and 1411), which mean the

²²⁷ And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. (D&C 84:38)

²²⁸ But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin. And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. (D&C 50:28-29)

²²⁹ ...It is indeed impossible for men, as long as they continue to think, feel, and act like men. But all things are possible for God, and everything God offers is available to all who think, feel, and act like him. No man can enter into the kingdom of God, except through forsaking everything in him that is not like God. (Matthew 19:26, Author's Reflection)

²³⁰ ...all power and advancement comes from God, and all who have progressed have done so only through obtaining and aligning themselves to aspects of how God is. (Romans 13:1, Author's Reflection)

²³¹ Now remain reconciled to and growing in me, that I may remain reconciled to you, and cause you to grow. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, if it does not abide in the vine, nor can you if you do not abide in me. I am the vine; you are branches. I will abide with him who remains reconciled to and growing in me, and he will bear abundant fruit. There is no power apart from me. (John 15:4-5, Author's Reflection)

²³² The seat of God's power is righteousness, and all in his kingdom will come through and take the place characterized by the righteousness they seek, find, and obey. (Psalm 45:6, Author's Reflection)

ability to achieve something due to how a person is or what they do. As with anyone else, then, God's power and authority are inseparable.

Modern churches conveniently claim that they somehow possess the authority of God without demonstrating the power of God.²³³ Devoid of God's power, modern churches rely on the same false tokens of authority that apostate churches always have, claiming that they perform no miracles because God doesn't do them anymore, and claiming that God doesn't speak because he expects you to listen to them instead.²³⁴

The ancient Jews also made the mistake of separating power and authority. Instead of interpreting Jesus' ability to do what none of them could as evidence that he had more of God's authority than they did, they constantly denied, explained away, or ignored his miracles. They asked the Lord: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:28) They did not understand that his ability to do what he did *was* the authority—because it could only come from God.

The authority Jesus wielded during his ministry should serve as the ideal. The authority of Jesus did not come from his titles, or even his parentage, but from what he did, how he did it, and why he did it. The outwardly demonstrated *bona fides* of Jesus were that he taught with wisdom that exceeded anyone else's and worked miracles beyond what anyone else could do. The Lord's statement that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18) was not a declaration of authority in the modern sense of the word. Instead, the Lord was saying that he had attained the ideal character by learning and living exactly as the Father would in his place, inheriting a fullness of the Father's capabilities through acquiring a fullness of his qualities.²³⁵

Valid authority is a question of what you can do and have done, not who you claim to be or what you claim to be able to do.²³⁶ Valid authority is a question of who you actually are, as demonstrated by your actual qualities and demonstrated abilities, not titles you claim for

²³³ Here is an example of a church leader claiming that God's authority can exist separate from God's power: "Priesthood authority, which is the authorization to act in God's name...is given by the laying on of hands. The power of the priesthood comes only when those who exercise it are worthy and acting in accordance with God's will." (M. Russell Ballard, "This Is My Work and Glory," Ensign, May 2013, 18-19).

²³⁴ And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men; Behold, hearken ye unto my precept; if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work. (2 Nephi 28:5-6)

²³⁵ Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Hebrews 1:3)

²³⁶ No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned. (D&C 121:41)

yourself or which others bestow upon you. The value of a person is in what they actually do,²³⁷ not in what they claim to be. A wise man with a proven track record is better than any number of self-proclaimed prophets with nothing to show for all their credentials.²³⁸ All of the preceding statements apply equally to institutions. A social club that provides recognizable value is greater than any church that claims unique authority yet fails to enable its members any better than they were before.

The greatest power is the hardest to see. Jesus had power to forgive sins and wielded greater wisdom than any man before or since, but few were able to perceive or willing to receive that power. He worked many miracles, but these did not compare to the much greater gifts he gave in the ideas he taught.²³⁹ Through the beliefs he held, Jesus possessed and imparted to others the ability to endure heavier burdens than they otherwise could, to love others more than they previously imagined possible, to overcome challenges that previously overcame them, and to know God better and become more like him than anyone they knew. Today's false teachers do the opposite of what Jesus did. They claim to have the greater power to save and condemn the souls of men while they lack the lesser power to achieve even the smallest physical miracles. They claim to be capable of leading you to eternal life when they can't even figure out daily life.²⁴⁰ They claim to understand the mysteries of heaven without even demonstrating basic common sense.

You cannot separate God's power and authority; where one is, the other always is: "...the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven..." (D&C 121:36) A person or organization that lacks God's power likewise lacks God's authority.

Authority and merit are inseparable

People are quick to claim the effects of being like Jesus, but slow to choose to live as he would in their place. It is dishonest to desire the effects of being like Jesus without first desiring to adopt the attributes that cause them.

²³⁷ And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. (Mark 1:27)

²³⁸ But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:24)

²³⁹ Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. (Mark 2:9-12)

²⁴⁰ Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. (Matthew 15:14)

The authority and power of Christ comes from his character attributes. While you refuse to take up his character attributes, he will refuse to give you his authority and power.²⁴¹

If you believe it is impossible to live as Jesus would in your place when it comes to preferring service over selfishness and obedience over indulgence, honesty compels you to similarly believe that it is impossible to perform miracles, receive revelation, and lead other disciples of Christ.

The Lord said that his authority over the world would be detectable through the improvements it provides over what the world offers.²⁴² What is from God is what is better than what you already have, and what is better than what you already have is from God. The world provides a different definition of authority—one where authority is intrinsic and detached from actual merit.

Modern religious, government, and research institutions have all committed the same cardinal mistake of separating authority from merit. In such institutions, actual merit has been replaced by institutional ranking. Authority does not *come from* titles. Though authority can *co-occur* with titles, it is increasingly the opposite of what you find in practice. Jesus was devoid of any earthly religious credentials. Bestowal of titles and honors independent of competence and contribution assures disaster when problems arise.

The idea that institutions have inherent value is, of course, tantalizing to institutions. Imagine how tempting it would be to receive all the proceeds due to a valid institution without the need of providing any value! There is no such thing as inherent value, nor any such thing as inherent authority. Authority is inseparable from merit. If an institution claims that its authority *is* its merit, it has neither.

Valid authority comes through and cannot be separated from actual merit. When authority is taken beyond the merit provided, we call it apostasy in religion,²⁴³ tyranny in government,²⁴⁴ and scientism in

²⁴¹ But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 10:33)

²⁴² Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (Matthew 7:16)

²⁴³ The practice of the forms of religion without the promised power is apostasy.

²⁴⁴ What portion of your taxes would you pay if there were no penalty for not paying, other than the loss of what they paid for?

research.²⁴⁵ In all cases, dominion is exercised beyond the limits of virtue, and the costs to the people exceed the benefit provided.

Authority does not come through shallow mimicry of those with the power.²⁴⁶ The Pharisees pretended to revere Moses, and claimed to hold authority from him, yet didn't obey the commandments he gave!²⁴⁷ Many Christians repeat this mistake, pretending to revere an individual they claim authority through without even bothering to become familiar with their teachings, let alone obeying them.²⁴⁸ Empty reverence for those who had power does not reproduce power²⁴⁹—replication of their works²⁵⁰ and motive²⁵¹ does.

God's authority is never present without evidence of it. Instead of working in concert with individuals' God-given ability to reason, providing logical arguments and visible evidence for their truth claims, false messengers simply say: "I have God's authority, listen to me." Instead of making the case for each idea they present, they pretend that the task is for you to figure out if they are "from God," so that you will automatically and unthinkingly accept everything they say. Beliefs should never be separated from the reasons for them. Claims of authority do not take the place of actual evidence. Self-claimed titles are not valid substitutes for actual evidence. It is through the accumulation of evidence via successive validation of ideas that a true messenger gains someone's confidence—not through feelings in response to prayer.

²⁴⁵ Jay Bhattacharya, head of the NIH, recently spoke of how scientists overextended their authority during the COVID response: "They trespassed the normal authority they had and did things far beyond what their scientific knowledge should have empowered them to do." He was one of a group of renown researchers whose dissenting views were silenced by their institutions because they were "a threat to their authority." He said trust could either be gained through suppressing dissenting views or by demonstrating value through reproducible experiments. These same patterns play out in religion and government. The full interview is available at <https://www.thefp.com/p/jay-bhattacharya-nih-fauci>

²⁴⁶ Mimicry of the practices of the righteous does not reproduce the righteousness of the righteous. "And also, after that they had heard him, they came up before him, saying: Behold, we are the sons of God; have we not taken unto ourselves the daughters of men? And are we not eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage? And our wives bear unto us children, and the same are mighty men, which are like unto men of old, men of great renown. And they hearkened not unto the words of Noah." (Moses 8:21)

²⁴⁷ Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? (John 7:19)

²⁴⁸ All Christian churches do this with Christ. Some without more recent founders do this with their founders as well. For example, consider that the LDS claim authority through Joseph Smith, but neither know his teachings nor obey them.

²⁴⁹ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. (Matthew 23:29-32)

²⁵⁰ They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. (John 8:39)

²⁵¹ But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. (John 8:40)

Tokens of true messengers are obvious,²⁵² but rare. They provide evidence that the putative messenger knows more about God and lives more like him than you do.²⁵³ True messengers have repented of all their sins. They live what they teach and they teach what they live.²⁵⁴ They help others become more like Jesus. They are able to answer questions and solve problems. They are efficacious.²⁵⁵ They are offensive to those who do not love improvement, because they say and do what needs to be said and done—what actually works, even if it is often perceived as uncomfortable or discouraging.²⁵⁶

Desirable proportions of God's power come from undesirable aspects of God's character

Common Christians imagine the qualities of Jesus as those the world considers to be good. They do not realize that the sensibilities of the natural man find actual righteousness repugnant. They ignore the many scripture accounts where Jesus demonstrates qualities they find offensive. Jesus wasn't crucified for being a nice guy, but for pointing out that a lot of what people thought was good was actually evil, and at least some of what people thought was evil was actually good. The problem is that God's character cannot be subdivided, and the undesirable portions are at least as necessary to obtain as the desirable portions. All of God's power is completely coupled to all of God's character. To obtain and exercise his power in ways that normal people find attractive, you must also obtain and exercise his power in ways that normal people find repulsive.

When God's power is spoken of, it is typically in the context of working miracles. The kinds of miracles you expect—healing, prophecy, and so on—are performed in conjunction with and as a result of the kind of miracles you probably wouldn't even count as such, let alone desire. The power of God includes the power to:

- Love those who hate you.

²⁵² For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

²⁵³ For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. (1 Corinthians 4:20)

²⁵⁴ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:15-21)

²⁵⁵ And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. (Luke 4:32)

²⁵⁶ And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (1 Corinthians 2:4)

- Rejoice in suffering for the benefit of others.
- Stare into the darkest abyss for as long as it takes to see the light
- Overcome evil with good.
- Forgive those who spitefully use you and persecute you
- Bless those who curse you.
- Limit yourself to actions that are God's will.
- Endure all intensities and duration of suffering
- Maintain the Lord's principles in spite of all opposition
- Overcome all things that would otherwise control you
- Do what you say.
- Say what you do.

If you aren't interested in developing the power to do these things, you will never develop the power to perform miracles such as healing the sick, commanding the elements, or raising the dead.

God's power is found in God's purpose, and those who only pursue the parts of his purpose that are pleasant will find very little of his power. Only those who are as willing to advance God's purpose when it hurts them as they are when it helps them will possess more than minimal power with God.²⁵⁷

God's power is found in his will, not yours

Most Christians make deals with God in prayer, begging for the worldly outcomes they desire with no thought of the eternal will or character of God.²⁵⁸ The purpose of living the gospel is to become more like God, not to bargain with God for goodies. God is not a pagan god. He is not arbitrary or fickle. He does not want token favors or pretended piety. He wants us to be like him. God's power is not a reward for what you *do*; it comes from who you *become*.

Power is the ability to achieve, obtain, and retain what you want. God's power is the ability to achieve, obtain, and retain what *he* wants. The connection between God's power and God's purpose is illustrated by the way the High Priest's ephod was tied to his breastplate with a symbolic blue cord.²⁵⁹ While the breastplate provided the wearer with

²⁵⁷ Because both my attainment and my attenuation are in subjection to the Lord's divine will, and I have power to do all things that are accordant with His character. (Philippians 4:13, Author's Reflection)

²⁵⁸ Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3) The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. (Proverbs 10:24) Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed. (Proverbs 16:3, NLT)

²⁵⁹ And they shall bind the breastplate by the rings thereof unto the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, that it may be above the curious girdle of the ephod, and that the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod (Exodus 28:28)

the ability to seek and receive revelation from God through the urim and thummim it held, the priest's access to it was determined by his willingness to bind himself to and maintain his connection with God.

If you want God's power, you need to learn what he wants and shift your own desires to align with his.²⁶⁰ When the crowds saw the miracles that Jesus did, they asked "what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28) Jesus responded: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:29) He explained that God's power comes to those who live as he would, and is exclusively for doing what he would in your place. Like most people, they were only interested in using God's power to pursue their own desires,²⁶¹ and "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:66) This was not the only occasion where Jesus explained that divine power comes only to those who seek God's will above their own.²⁶²

You may be surprised to learn how often your requests to God actually oppose his purpose. For example, many people seek miracles to reduce suffering, assuming that this is always good. God's blessings are not for the purpose of reducing suffering, but for increasing improvement. It is rarely the case that these two ends overlap.

The Lord's power is for advancing the Lord's purpose.²⁶³ The more you seek the will of God, the more often you will find the power to accomplish what you desire.²⁶⁴ God's purposes cannot be frustrated,²⁶⁵ and to the extent you make his purposes your own, neither can yours.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ This is the secret by which you can obtain all power in heaven and earth: Learn my Father's will, and do all things that lie in your power to bring everything into greater alignment with him, and the impact of your actions will endure eternally. (Matthew 13:19, Author's Reflection)

²⁶¹ ...seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts. (D&C 46:8-9)

²⁶² When his disciples asked him how they could have more divine power, he responded with this parable: "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:7-10)

²⁶³ And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. (Moroni 7:33) And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. (3 Nephi 18:20)

²⁶⁴ Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. (Psalms 37:4)

²⁶⁵ 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)

²⁶⁶ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)

God's power cannot be exercised by guesswork

What God would do in your place is not meant to be an educated guess.²⁶⁷ You need to know God's will in order to exercise God's power. You can't have faith when you ask for something that is contrary to God's will, but you also can't have faith if you aren't confident that your desire matches what God wants.

The secret to gaining more of God's power is not just in learning more of what he knows, but also in perfectly aligning your actions to what you have high confidence is his will. If you do not have extreme confidence in what you ask of God, you should focus your requests on learning more about the situation rather than asking him to intervene.

Those who receive great priesthood power learn how to restrict their requests to what they have high confidence is the will of God. When the Lord proclaimed that Nephi would be given whatever he asked, he said the reason was that Nephi would not ask anything contrary to his will.²⁶⁸ He did not mean that Nephi knew everything God did, but that Nephi would refrain from asking anything from God that was not perfectly in alignment with his sincere, best understanding of God's will. Nephi only desired what he had sufficient reason to believe was God's will.

God's will is always what is best, and his power is found in pursuing that

Learning God's will in a particular situation is the same as learning what is best in that situation. God's will is not arbitrary. His will is the best that can be done.²⁶⁹ You cannot find out what he wants in a particular situation without learning more about what is best. As you learn what is best, you learn what his will is.

God knows what is best because he knows what outcomes are available and the cost and benefit of each. In order to better ascertain his will, you will have to learn these things, too.

God's power can't be separated from God's knowledge of things as they are and could be. He knows all possible outcomes and the path to realize them. The universe operates according to certain inviolable

²⁶⁷ Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth. (Mormon 9:21)

²⁶⁸ Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. (Helaman 10:4-5)

²⁶⁹ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world.... (2 Nephi 26:24)

relationships of cause and effect.²⁷⁰ Every outcome has a cause, regardless of whether or not we yet know or understand it. God's power derives from his knowledge of and adherence to these relationships.²⁷¹ God is how he is because of the laws he lives.²⁷² The source of his power is knowing the relationship of cause and effect in all things to a greater extent than we do. God knows²⁷³ and understands²⁷⁴ all things. He sees what we are ignorant of, and he understands relationships we do not know.

A principle reason for creation is to provide each of us with the opportunity to obtain a greater measure of God's power through the acquisition of a greater portion of God's knowledge. To the extent that you lack the knowledge of God, you lack God's power. In order to encounter greater manifestations of God's power in your life, you must not only reconcile yourself to your present awareness of reality, but increase it. It is impossible to learn more about God's character without learning more about his creation, or more about his creation without learning more about his character.²⁷⁵

The more you learn about reality, and more effectively you use your knowledge to bring to pass better outcomes than would otherwise occur, the more of God's power you will experience. Those who possess a little of God's awareness will, when reconciled to it, experience a little of God's power. To have all power, you need to know all things.²⁷⁶

You gain power with God by using what you already have for his purposes

God's power is frequently seen as a mechanism to make you stronger than you would otherwise be. The truth is that obtaining God's

²⁷⁰ There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. (D&C 130:20-21)

²⁷¹ The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. (Proverbs 3:19-20)

²⁷² But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:22)

²⁷³ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

²⁷⁴ Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5)

²⁷⁵ And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63)

²⁷⁶ Therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven; the Comforter; the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment. (Moses 6:61)

power requires you to become stronger than you have ever been, and that the power you exercise and the power you obtain are much more symbiotic than they may otherwise seem. The acquisition of God's power is an incremental process where each step begins with doing all you presently can and ends when you obtain greater power than you had before.²⁷⁷ Your present power comes from living up to all you know about Jesus, and your future power comes from learning and living something more about him than you did before.

God's power comes from knowing God's will and being willing to do all you can to accomplish it.²⁷⁸ Many would claim that they can't do what God would do in their place because they don't have the power to do so, but the truth is that they don't have more of God's power because they don't do what God would do in their place with the power they already have. Why would you expect God to endow you with his power beyond your present capacity while you continue to use the power you already have to rebel against him by doing less or worse than you could? If you aren't doing all you can to advance God's purposes right now, why would he give you more power, when doing so would only increase your condemnation?²⁷⁹ How can he give you more power when you refuse the next incremental step toward it?

Don't ask God to do for you what you are unwilling to do yourself. You shouldn't seek God to miraculously intervene in situations where you have not yet done all you can. Before asking God to give you power to move mountains, buy yourself a shovel and start digging.²⁸⁰

God uses your imperfect understanding of how he is to promulgate blessings to the world

God does not want anyone to hesitate to act in his name when they confidently believe that their desires match his, even though they will frequently be wrong.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. (D&C 123:17) For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

²⁷⁸ For unto him that receiveth it shall be given more abundantly, even power. (D&C 71:6)

²⁷⁹ For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation (D&C 82:3)

²⁸⁰ Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God. Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you. Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion. Keep my commandments in all things. (D&C 14:4-6)

²⁸¹ ...whatsoever you give on earth, and to whomsoever you give any one on earth, by my word and according to my law, it shall be visited with blessings and not cursings, and with my power, saith the Lord, and shall be without condemnation on earth and in heaven. (D&C 132:48) Verily, if a man be called of my Father, as was Aaron, by mine own voice, and by the voice of him that sent me, and I have endowed him with the keys of the power of this priesthood, if he do anything in my name, and according to my law and by my word, he will not commit sin, and I will justify him. (D&C 132:59)

God's power flows to and through people by degrees, according to their similitude to him. While dissimilarity from God impedes the flow of his power,²⁸² it does not stop it. The presence of God's power indicates that the person wielding it is acting according to the sincere belief that their actions are accordant with the will of God, not that their actions perfectly match what God would do in their place. Any limitation in the person's understanding of God will cause differences.

It is precisely through our imperfection in understanding that God's perfect work is accomplished, forming a stepwise chain connecting everyone's sincere idea of what is best to what is actually best through men of increasingly more godly understanding.

What is priesthood?

When people think of priesthood, they think of either the authority of God, the power of God, or both. None of these definitions are adequate. The authority of God does not exist independent of his power. Meanwhile, the power of God is an inadequate definition of priesthood because it does not address where that power comes from or how it is to be used.

Priesthood is any information that extends one's understanding of how God is, how he would live in your situation, the benefits of doing so, and the consequences of failing to. The priesthood is therefore a conduit of information through which people who have adopted God's character are linked. This information conduit provides the power to do, feel, and think as God would in your place, as far as you choose to. This information provides the key to becoming more like God.²⁸³ Without learning about and living the character of God, there is no real priesthood, no matter how much authority or unseen power is claimed.

Priesthood doesn't exist outside of merit

Too many believe that God's power and authority can be conferred via ordination, independent of a person's similitude to Jesus. The idea that God magically bestows merit to previously unworthy individuals is false, as can be readily seen by the fact that no such individual claiming

²⁸² And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust. (Mormon 9:20)

²⁸³ The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth (D&C 65:2) 19And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. (D&C 84:19-22)

his authority has ever demonstrated power equal to their claims. Ordination is not a workaround to personal righteousness.

Priesthood is not a permission slip that entitles the holder to God's power or authority independent of their informed understanding of his will. Priesthood is not an alternative pipeline of power outside of learning about and adopting God's character. Ordination to the priesthood does not empower the recipient to use God's power in any way other than that which God has ordained. Ordination does not make you any more like God than you were before. Priesthood is not a dispensation of power to man independent of God.²⁸⁴ If you fail to live up to your understanding of how God would think, feel, or act in your place, you will decrease in the power of God you wield, no matter what authority someone has ordained you with.²⁸⁵

Ordination is not meant to be an invitation to achieve greater similitude to God, but the outward acknowledgment that such a change has already occurred.²⁸⁶ God does not look lightly on those who make priests out of people who are nothing like him.²⁸⁷ Only those who are *actually* after (or like) the Son of God are actually priests "after the order of the Son of God."²⁸⁸

Ordination is meant to be the continuation of the process of becoming more like God, not the beginning of it. Melchizedek performed mighty miracles in the Lord's name before his ordination, earned the approbation of God, and continued exercising greater measures of God's power as he continued learning more about him.²⁸⁹ As part of his progressive receipt of priesthood, Abraham received

²⁸⁴ And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Harken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men; (2 Nephi 28:5)

²⁸⁵ That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. (D&C 121:37)

²⁸⁶ ...none were consecrated except they were just men. (Mosiah 23:17)

²⁸⁷ So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. (2 Kings 17:32) After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. (1 Kings 13:33) And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. (1 Kings 12:31)

²⁸⁸ For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually. (Hebrews 7:3, JST)

²⁸⁹ And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch, It being after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God; And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name. (Genesis 14:27-29, JST)

greater peace, happiness, rest, knowledge, and righteousness.²⁹⁰ None of these attributes were new to him; rather, he received the next increment of each having consummately lived up to what God had already given him. He had dedicated his life to serving all as God would in his place as far as he already knew him to be, attracting, instructing, and retaining hundreds of people into his family.

Greater similitude to God can only come through a lengthy process of choosing to learn more about and continuously live like the Lord. Priesthood progression includes the receipt of additional power from heaven, but it comes through what you enact on earth. As you live up to what you understand God would think, feel, and do in your place, he will continue to reveal more about himself. Power from God comes from knowledge about God, which comes in response to your fidelity to and fulfillment of what he has already taught you about himself.

The mistake of assuming that God's power can only come as a gift

God has always provided the world with sufficient reasons to believe in him. A crucial element of such evidence consists of continuous demonstrations of his power throughout time. The most effective way God has to help his children to believe he exists, know what he is like, and persuade them to be like him is to send to earth those who are more like him than those they are sent to minister to. The more like God one of his messengers is, the more they will be able to demonstrate his character qualities to the people with sufficient demonstrations of his power to prove that they are his emissaries. Unfortunately, the more like God a person is, the more they are rejected and persecuted. God is extremely merciful, and in times of great wickedness,²⁹¹ he still makes his power known through giving his power not through merit but as a gift.²⁹² Because the righteous are so rare and the wicked so abundant, most examples of God's power are in the form of a gift.

Miracles performed through God's gifts are usually held up as the epitome of faith, when in actuality they are the result of a lack thereof. The gifts of God are so minuscule in the share of God's goodness, purpose, and power that it is not appropriate to speak about them in the same frame as God's power through merit.

²⁹⁰ ...desiring also to be...a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers. (Abraham 1:2)

²⁹¹ For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other; save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent. (Helaman 7:23)

²⁹² That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45)

God's power through gifts is a form of palliative care—a limited lesser blessing given to those who refuse the improvement necessary to continuously perceive, receive, and value greater blessings. While God is able to demonstrate more of his power to the wicked through gifts than he can through merit, this mechanism makes it more difficult for the people who witness the gift to understand his character and less likely that they will make the changes needed to become more like him. During his mortal life, the Lord ministered to a people primed to think of God's blessings as gifts detached from merit, whose promises came from the worthiness of distant ancestors. He continuously struggled to persuade them to seek their own righteousness rather than the rewards earned by others, but the Jews' desires for gifts from God far exceeded their desire to become like him.²⁹³

God's gifts are very limited in their ability to show how God is, because they can only show the outcome of his power, not its source. Because gifts come independent of the worthiness of the individual receiving them,²⁹⁴ they offer no evidence of the merit of the character of the person possessing them. The generative version of God's power not only shows that God exists and has power, but also certifies the virtue of the person wielding it, as generative power is an outward indication of how much the character of a person aligns with the character of God. The generative power of God cannot be shown without also showing how to obtain it via the demonstration of the character of the person who has it. For example, while the gift of healing can reduce suffering and may perhaps demonstrate something about God in the process, the generative power of God will provide all of these benefits along with a demonstration of God's character in the form of the person performing the miracle. The purpose of miracles isn't to reduce suffering; it is to increase godliness. Generative miracles do this much better than miracles by gift. While the gifts of God provide fruits of his power plucked from the vine, the generative power of God provides continuous access to the vine that produces them.

The most common reaction to demonstrations of God's power is to set up the demonstrated power as an idol—something sought after or worshiped apart from God who gave it. When people worship miracles instead of God, they tend to set up fake mechanisms for transmitting God's power. While this never works, it doesn't seem to stop it from happening. Institutions following this pattern respond to the lack of real miracles by inflating common occurrences to the status of miracles and

²⁹³ See, for example, John 6, where the crowds who thronged the Lord for miraculous food turned away from him en masse because he said the purpose of the miracle was to persuade them to live as he did.

²⁹⁴ God's gifts come "without repentance," or independent of the worthiness of the recipient: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Romans 11:29)

claiming that God's authority can be transmitted separate from God's power. God's gifts cannot be transmitted through those who possess them because they do not know and do not possess the character qualities that generate the power organically, including the power to give it as a gift. Someone who has generative power from God also knows something about his character, and can impart power to anyone who is willing to become as he is.

Gaining God's power through adopting his character

Why do common Christians fail to obtain and experience the power of God in their lives? Because they desire to receive the fruits of how he is without becoming that way themselves.²⁹⁵ All those who truly desire the power of God will also truly desire to be as he is. Those that truly desire the power of God will only desire to use it to pursue his purposes. Those that truly desire the power of God will desire to know what he knows and to live according to that knowledge no matter the cost.

The attainment of God's power is inseparable from the attainment of his character. Those that emulate and obtain his character, who do their best in all things, seeking to make all things as good as they can be, will have the power, authority, and priesthood of God in all that they endeavor to do to further his will and his work.²⁹⁶

Women and the priesthood

God's power is found in God's purpose. Too many members of both sexes incorrectly view extrinsic religious service as a way to attract attention, gain clout, accomplish their own desires, or otherwise serve one's own purposes.

The differences between men and women mean that each is best suited to advance the purpose of God in different ways. The primary way all people serve God is through learning what he is like and becoming like him. The secondary way all people serve God is through helping people do the same. The most effective way anyone can help others learn about and become more like God is through becoming a righteous father or mother.²⁹⁷ Service to those outside the home can be considered once you reach the point where you are doing everything that could possibly be done to assist your spouse, children, and grandchildren to learn about and live more like Christ, and still have

²⁹⁵ Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. (Isaiah 29:13)

²⁹⁶ ...Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:27)

²⁹⁷ Not all people have this opportunity, although most people who think they don't are simply not willing to pay the required price.

surplus resources. Because of differences between the roles and capacities of men and women, men will reach this point more often than women, although very few men do.

No one should fall for the trap of seeking supposed service to God outside of the home in order to avoid what they would rather not do in the home. No one should fall for the trap of believing that they will encounter God's power outside the home while neglecting their service to him within the home. A servant of God joyfully serves where assigned, and men and women each have assignments within the home.

5. The life of Christ demonstrated how to become like him

Jesus is the archetype of eternal life

Jesus is the example of both the end and the means of salvation,²⁹⁸ the archetype of eternal life. The role of the Lord as the archetype of eternal life is unnecessarily obscured by weak translations of the Greek word *archégos* (Strong's 747), which means "the first example."²⁹⁹ An *archégos* is the first person who demonstrates something by doing it, and by demonstrating it, makes a way for others to do the same. Consider how much clearer the following verses become when *archetype* is used in place of the parenthesized word that the translators chose instead:

And killed the *archetype* (Prince) of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. (Acts 3:15)

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a(n) *archetype* (Prince) and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31)

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the *archetype* (captain) of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)

Looking unto Jesus the *archetype* (author) and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus is not just the Prince of life, the captain of our salvation, or even the author and finisher of our faith, but the demonstration of the process and outcome of obtaining the character of the Father—the archetype and fulfillment of eternal life.

In who he is and how he became that way, the Lord shows us the process we must follow if we are to obtain eternal life. We must become the same way he is, and we must do it the same way he did it. The Lord

²⁹⁸ Looking unto Jesus, the example of the means and end of salvation, who inherited the right hand of the throne of God by enduring the shame of the cross through faith in the joy that would come. (Hebrews 12:2, Author's Reflection)

²⁹⁹ ...and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might become the one who is first in all things; (Colossians 1:18, NWT)

knows the process to become like he is because he went through it. Jesus is our “forerunner”³⁰⁰ because he has gone to where we can follow by doing what we must do to join him there. By embodying how the Father is through learning and living according to his character, Jesus made it possible for all who would live according to his demonstration to do the same.³⁰¹

The life of Jesus Christ was the representation of how the Father would live mortal life, the example of how we can become like him, and the demonstration of the potential of man.

The Lord’s life demonstrated what the Father’s character looks like embodied in a mortal man, here on earth.³⁰² In mortality, Jesus was the visible³⁰³ and apparent application of the divine model to mortal life,³⁰⁴ “the image of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1:15) The Lord explained that his life was meant to show us how the Father is³⁰⁵ in terms that we could understand.³⁰⁶

The life of Christ provided the example of how to come to know God through becoming like him.³⁰⁷ We are to follow this example.³⁰⁸

Jesus said that he sought, discovered, and did the will of the Father in all things:

I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

³⁰⁰ Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (Hebrews 6:20)

³⁰¹ In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:2-6)

³⁰² Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. (3 Nephi 27:13)

³⁰³ ...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.... (John 14:9) No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:18) No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. (John 6:46, NIV)

³⁰⁴ ...if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. (John 8:19)

³⁰⁵ Don’t you understand that my character is the same as the Father’s? Therefore, the works and words I show you are not mine, but his. (John 14:10, Author’s Reflection) By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (Hebrews 10:20)

³⁰⁶ I have manifested thy name... (John 17:6) The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men. I was in the world and received of my Father, and the works of him were plainly manifest. (D&C 93:4-5)

³⁰⁷ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

³⁰⁸ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21)

19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

20 For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth... (John 5)

Jesus taught that everyone who follows him would do the same:

...He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do. (2 Nephi 31:12)

True religion is to learn how God would be in every situation, and to become that way yourself. Jesus predicted that a time would come when all people would understand this, and all believers would practice it.³⁰⁹ Jesus instructed his disciples to obtain and live as God would in their place so effectively that others would learn more about God by seeing their actions.³¹⁰

It is possible to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus was special in that he was the first to acquire and live the character of the Father. He is not meant to be the only one.³¹¹ When his disciples protested that Jesus' standards were too exacting, and even impossible,

Jesus intently fixed his eyes upon them, spiritually discerning their hearts, and then said: It is indeed impossible for men, as long as they continue to think, feel,

³⁰⁹ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (John 4:21-23)

³¹⁰ Live the Father's light so thoroughly that those who see your good works will increase in their understanding of and belief in the Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16, Author's Reflection)

³¹¹ He was God, who provided the example to us of how to be raised up by the Father through learning from him and becoming one with his purpose, making himself the Savior, enabling himself to offer repentance to Israel through forgiveness of sins. And we are the living evidence of these things; not only in what we say, along with the Holy Ghost which he gives to all who obey him, but in having obtained and become the same as he was. (Acts 5:31-32, Author's Reflection) If we are willing to believe the testimonies of men, we ought to be much more willing to believe the testimony of God. God the Father provided a testimony of himself through the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. Any who learn about the life of Jesus Christ and lives according to his example will himself become an example of God to all. Any who refuse to learn and live the life of Jesus must believe God is a liar, because they reject the testimony God provided through the life of his Son. And his Son is the record that God has given to us: in the life of his Son—who had eternal life—he has shown us how to live to become one who has eternal life. (1 John 5:9-11, Author's Reflection)

and act like men. But everything God does is possible for God, and anything God does can be done by all who think, feel, and act like him. No man can enter into the kingdom of God, except through forsaking everything in him that is not like God. (Matthew 19:26, Author's Reflection)

Those who believe they can become like God behave differently than those who do not. It is rare to find a person who actually believes that they can become like God. One who thinks this will act and feel very differently than one who does not.³¹² They will purify themselves by following his example as far as they understand it.³¹³

The life of Jesus Christ showed the fulfillment of the potential of what man can become.³¹⁴ During his life, the Lord constantly called himself the “Son of Man” (Hebrew: “*ben Adam*”) as the heir of the role of Adam. Adam was the first son of God, created in his image, charged to fulfill the purpose of creation by stewarding creation as God would in his place. Instead, Adam fell, leaving a void for one of his descendants to fill. The Lord called himself “Son of Man” to demonstrate that he was fulfilling the potential that Adam had—and the potential of all mankind—by learning and living the character of the Father. In using the title, he was not making a difference between himself and others, but calling all people to reach toward their full potential: “I am living as all of you could and should.”³¹⁵

Obscuring the example of Christ with artificial distance

The life of Christ was meant to be irrefutable proof that the gospel “...works for you just as it did for Christ...” (1 John 2:8, The Living Bible) The example of Christ is obscured for those who do not understand that the bodily difference between the Lord and us is a result of his decision to remain sinless as he developed the mental

³¹² My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. (Job 23:11)

³¹³ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

³¹⁴ And fulfilling his potential, he became the example of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (Hebrews 5:9, Author's Reflection)

³¹⁵ And as it has been written that the first Adam came as a living soul, the last Adam will come as a life-giving spirit. The first Adam came by breathing God's spirit into himself, the last Adam will come breathing God's spirit into others. The first Adam came from an eternal life to receive a mortal life, the second Adam will come from a mortal life to lead all to an eternal life. The first man was brought down to earth, and though his soul came down from heaven, his body was made of the dust. The second man will ascend to heaven, and though his body be born in flesh as any other mortal, it will be quickened by a fullness of God's spirit. Those who remain of the earth do so by following the example of the first Adam, choosing to rebel against God. Those who will become the sons of God will do so by following the example of the second Adam, completely subjecting themselves to God. And as we have taken upon ourselves the image of the earthy through birth, we must also take upon ourselves the image of the heavenly through repentance and sanctification. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49, Author's Reflection)

capacity necessary to sin. Because he maintained sinlessness, he retained power over his own life and could therefore atone for the sins of the world by enduring pain beyond what would kill anyone else. Everything else he did was through power available to anyone willing to choose to live as he did.

What Jesus became, he became through the same faith we have access to. His ability to exercise faith was through the same power of choice available to us, not through some magic power the Father uniquely gave to Jesus. No matter how advanced his spirit was, he did not arrive with any special privileges compared to anyone else. Just like you, Jesus was born as a baby, and grew spiritually through time—just as he grew physically—until he attained the full stature of the Father, just as we can grow into the full stature of the Son.³¹⁶ His whole life is a testament to what is possible for you to achieve through faith, not an exposition of what can only be done through exclusive and unattainable gifts of God given to Jesus alone.

The value of the Lord's example is severely restricted when instead of seeing him as being made a little lower than angels,³¹⁷ we insist that His mortal sojourn was somehow free from everything that makes mortality a trial. As plainly attested to by those who would know the best, Jesus endured a life more difficult than any of ours, with fewer privileges than any of us enjoy, and still managed to learn and live the fullness of the character of the Father against greater opposition than any of us will face.

False traditions about how and when Jesus learned who he was, received knowledge and power from the Father, and suffered all he did place artificial distance between us and the example he demonstrated. Christians can pay lip-service to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith, but while they believe he was endowed with magic powers from birth, couldn't possibly sin, wasn't tempted to do so, and knew everything about himself and the Father from birth, his example provides no help to any of us in knowing how to follow it or believe that we can. By learning the truth about the progression of Jesus throughout his life, any person can grow closer to him no matter how far from him they may currently be through following the same exact patterns he did.

³¹⁶ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (Ephesians 4:13-15)

³¹⁷ Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. (Hebrews 2:7-8)

We should temper our assumptions about the life of Jesus by the fact that it was necessary for Jesus to face greater challenges than anyone else. Understand that any special privilege possessed by the Lord would render his sacrifice for our sins null and void. Of what worth is a sacrifice for sins by someone who is not tempted by sin?

The Lord was born sinless and chose to remain that way, just like you can

In order to see the life of Jesus as proof of our ability to live a sinless life, it is essential to understand more about sinlessness and what he faced than most people do.

To be sinless is not the same as being as God actually is, only how you understand him to be. There is a difference between fully knowing good and evil and choosing good over evil, based on what you presently know.

Jesus was born sinless, but he was not born flawless. Jesus was always perfectly reconciled to his understanding of the Father, but his understanding of the Father grew over his lifetime.³¹⁸ As his understanding of the Father increased, he immediately and consistently lived according to what he learned. Jesus was the only man who has ever lived his whole life without violating his conscience. He never acted contrary to what he thought the Father would do in his place. Jesus was perfectly obedient to his understanding of what was best from the beginning, and his understanding of what was best improved over time.³¹⁹

Some denominations teach that Jesus had to be miraculously conceived to be free from original sin. Our ability to sin comes from the moral judgment that we gain as our bodies grow from infancy,³²⁰ not the inheritance of judgment passed upon Adam.³²¹ Sin is a question of whether we choose against our capacity to judge what is best. Jesus did not inherit sinlessness as an invariable quality of his godhood. Jesus had the choice to sin, just as we all do. Jesus wasn't sinless because he had to

³¹⁸ And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

³¹⁹ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. (Isaiah 7:14-16)

³²⁰ And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. (Moses 6:55)

³²¹ Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. (D&C 93:38) ...little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them... (Moroni 8:8) Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:54)

be, and none of us are sinful except because we want to be. Jesus was sinless because he did what no one else was *willing* to do, not what no one else was *able* to do. While all of us have chosen to sin in the past, we can adopt the example of Jesus from this point,³²² choosing to be sinless in the present and future.³²³

Some erroneously think that Jesus was born free from any temptation to sin as evidence that we cannot follow his example of being sinless. If this were true, it would mean the scriptures are lying when they speak of how he was tempted by Satan,³²⁴ the pain he endured,³²⁵ the loneliness he suffered,³²⁶ the disappointments he endured,³²⁷ and by Peter's suggestion that he did not have to seal his sacrifice with his life.³²⁸

Jesus did not have magic power to avoid temptation. Instead, he faced and conquered a lifelong series of temptations,³²⁹ proving that we could do the same and showing us how by doing so.³³⁰ He was subject to all the temptations that we are, but he yielded to none of them.³³¹ The difference was not how difficult it was for him, but that, unlike all of us, he actually "suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning." (3 Nephi 11:11) He wasn't immune from temptation, he simply chose to follow the Father instead.

Too many disregard Jesus' life as proof that they can live without sin by claiming that he somehow had it easier than we do. None of the

³²² Make my burden your own, and in me you will find freedom from the burdens of this world. As I seek and do the Father's will in all things, he teaches me more of how he is, and in him, I overcome the world; Live as you understand me to be, I will teach you more about myself, and the truth will make you free. Dedicate yourself completely to my service, for everything I ask of you is for your greatest benefit, and there is no easier way to overcome every challenge you face than by living according to my will. (Matthew 11:29-30, Author's Reflection)

³²³ The definition of righteousness is recognizing, desiring, and emulating the superiority of Jehovah; it is through seeking and becoming like him that the righteous find the strength to overcome all that presently overcomes them. (Psalm 37:39, Author's Reflection)

³²⁴ And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. (Mark 1:13)

³²⁵ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

³²⁶ Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. (John 16:32)

³²⁷ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me (Matthew 27:46)

³²⁸ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Luke 4:8)

³²⁹ It was fitting for him—for whom are all things and by whom are all things—to make himself perfect through suffering—to bring many sons to glory as the archetype of their salvation, having all things, yet condescending to suffer all things that he might show the greatest example, and illustrate the way by which others can likewise become as he is. (Hebrews 2:10, Author's Reflection)

³³⁰ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

³³¹ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

temptations we face are worse than what Jesus experienced.³³² Jesus didn't operate under greater privileges than us. Rather, he operated under *harder* conditions than anyone.³³³ Even in comparison to the two thieves who were crucified with him, he faced substantially worse conditions, being innocent of any crime and having been beaten nigh unto death. God only allows us to be subjected to temptations for which he has provided us the power to conquer or flee.³³⁴ The Lord inherited this promise from the Father, just as we do.³³⁵ The Father protected Jesus from temptations beyond what he could bear, just as he does for you and me.³³⁶ His tribulations were present from the beginning and escalated in intensity³³⁷ throughout his life.³³⁸

Jesus was sinless because he loved the Father more than sin. When presented with the option of continuing in the Father's love or preferring sin, he always chose to love the Father. Whenever you sin, it is because your love for sin is stronger than your love for God. From this point forward, you can choose to follow the example of Jesus by loving God more than sin.

The Lord learned more about who he was little by little, just like you can

Life provides each person with time and experience to discover their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to develop beyond the identity they inherited from their parents, ideally toward the potential that God sees in them. The Lord's life is the ideal example of how to discover and develop your potential, but this lesson is lost when we assume that Jesus knew exactly who he was from the moment of his birth.

³³² For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

³³³ And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:7)

³³⁴ 13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13)

³³⁵ Why else would Satan only challenge Jesus directly once he was around 30 years old? Why didn't he take him to the temple as a baby and throw him off the pinnacle?

³³⁶ ...the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7)

³³⁷ But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:50)

³³⁸ And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11-12)

Christians assume that Jesus had greater certainty about his identity earlier than he did. The truth is that the Lord did not fully resolve who he was until the moment he said: “it is finished” and died.³³⁹ Until he completed everything the Messiah was meant to do, he could not with perfect certainty know that he was the one who would do it. The uncertainty stretching across his entire life formed a significant part of the difficulty of it. Every trial he faced, from the loneliness of his daily existence to the brutal crucible he endured in the end was salted by the ever-present possibility that he was not the Christ. Even as his confidence in his identity increased, Jesus understood, from the end to the beginning, that his being the Messiah was not guaranteed by anything but his willingness to actually do the things the Messiah would do. A review of the evidence provided for who he was helps temper the assumption that he would have had high confidence in who he was.

Joseph was reported as having had three dreams about Jesus. The first pronounced that Jesus had been “conceived...of the Holy Ghost” with the purpose of “sav[ing] his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21) The subsequent dreams concerned the danger posed by Herod, who would attempt to kill their son, warned him to flee with his family, and announced when it was safe to return (see Matthew 2:13, 19-21). The weight of the content of these dreams and their implications would have been considerable evidence of the importance of the baby concerned. However, these need to be weighed against the fact that they came through the low-confidence channel of dreams, and hardly contained enough information to substantiate the common assumption of how Joseph and Mary saw their son, let alone how he saw himself.

Mary had additional witnesses of who Jesus was. She was visited by Gabriel, who told her she would miraculously become pregnant and that her son would be the promised Messiah.³⁴⁰ Her cousin Elizabeth provided an additional witness when she proclaimed by the Holy Ghost:

42 ...Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

³³⁹ When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30)

³⁴⁰ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (Luke 1)

Shortly after the child's birth, Mary was visited by shepherds who told her that an angel had appeared to them and announced that "a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" had been born (Luke 2:11). Foreign wise men visited the child, "fell down, and worshipped him," and gave him expensive gifts. (Matthew 2:11) When Joseph and Mary presented the infant in the temple, they were met by a pair of holy individuals who were inspired to prophesy over the baby. Anna, a prophetess, "gave thanks...unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (Luke 2:38) Simeon, a man whom God had promised would not die before seeing the Christ (see Luke 2:26), proclaimed:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. (Luke 2)

As impressive as these events were, they did not reveal anything close to the scope of what we know in retrospect about the mission and works of the Lord, but rather echoed the limited expectations held by the Jews for the Messiah to be a temporal deliverer in the style of King David.³⁴¹

It is easy for us to interpret Mary's experiences through a lens of historical certainty and clarity that she did not possess.³⁴² She knew that her son was meant to be the Messiah, but she did not understand what

³⁴¹ The Jews expected that Christ would be an earthly king like David, leading them in battle to deliver them from the Romans. For example, Zechariah prophesied that his son John the Baptist would be a prophet to Christ, "an horn of salvation...that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." (Luke 1:69, 71)

³⁴² But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

that entailed,³⁴³ and we do not know how confident she was in her expectations. Her life would have featured changes to her interpretation of her revelations about and observations of her son, along with ebbs and flows of confidence in it. Far from a view that incrementally increased in detail and confidence, her doubt in his identity probably crescendoed at his death, where the bitterness of losing her only³⁴⁴ son would have been mixed with the possibility that they had both been incredibly incorrect about who he was.

Jesus had many exceptional experiences, but were any of them sufficient to remove all doubt from his mind about who he was, what he had to do, and what it would be like?

Satan's temptation of the Lord in the wilderness centered around one question: "*if* thou be the son of God..." (see Matthew 4:3 and Matthew 4:6). If he knew beyond doubt that he was the son of God at this point, why would this be any kind of temptation? Interestingly, the question would be posed again at the end of his life as mockers at the cross jeered: "*If* thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matthew 27:40)

None of us will face a life as difficult or a mission as exceptional as the Lord's, but all of us will face situations where we are unsure of what the Lord has planned for us and whether we will be able to measure up to it. A more accurate understanding of the Lord's own process of incrementally discovering his identity and mission can provide us with context, strength, and an example of how to operate in full trust in God, even when we don't yet know the full picture.

The Lord received revelation line upon line, just like you can

The life of Jesus Christ provides a powerful lesson in how to incrementally increase in knowledge from God, and how to boldly act with confidence in spite of limited information. This lesson is lost when we assume that Jesus knew all things from the moment of his birth.

There are many mentions in the New Testament of Jesus knowing something about what he was meant to do before he did it or what would happen to him before it happened. For example, he knew when

³⁴³ Mary's reaction to Elizabeth's testimony of her son indicated that while she was extremely well-versed in the scriptures, particularly for a young woman, she had no idea what the Lord's mission was. "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." (Luke 1:46-55)

³⁴⁴ The fact that Jesus entrusted his mother to John's care instead of the brothers he is referred to as having suggests that they were the children of Joseph through another woman.

his end had come, that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he would return to him,³⁴⁵ that he would be betrayed, that his disciples would flee for their lives, and that he would be crucified. The question is: when did he learn these things, and how?

Jesus did not know everything the Father did, especially not from the beginning. There were certainly things that happened that he was not expecting. He continued to be surprised throughout his ministry, such as in Gethsemane when he marveled at the burden of each of the three successive waves of increased suffering required to take upon himself the sins of the world, or on the cross when his expectation that the Father would always be with him was violated.³⁴⁶ We know that there are things he learned along the way. John the apostle reported that Jesus progressed in his similitude to the Father over the course of his life.³⁴⁷ In Luke, we read that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” (Luke 2:52) We also know that there were things he didn’t know, even at the very end of his life. For example, he proclaimed that no man knew when he will return except the Father.³⁴⁸

In conjunction, these facts can only mean that Jesus operated under the same process of revelation that we all do, subject to the same rules, possibilities, and limitations. He was led by the Father, line upon line, through a mix of information of various levels of detail and certainty, and against the backdrop of ignorance, just like all of us are.³⁴⁹ His understanding, like all of ours, was like a dark city at night, with great clarity in certain areas because of the light received on them, no information on many other spots, and interpolation of all things in between.

Jesus was required to exercise the same kind of faith amidst uncertainty that all of us do as we receive less content or confidence in

³⁴⁵ Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; (John 13:1-3)

³⁴⁶ Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. (John 16:32) 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

³⁴⁷ And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first. And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son. And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; (D&C 93:12-16)

³⁴⁸ 36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only (Matthew 24:36)

³⁴⁹ And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do (1 Nephi 4:6)

revelation than we wish. If Jesus was able to accomplish his mission in spite of limited information, you can too. If Jesus was able to move forward in faith in spite of imperfect information, you can too. If Jesus was able to obtain greater revelation through living up to his present understanding, you can too.

The Lord learned about his potential from the scriptures, just like you can

How did Jesus manage to memorize, process, live, and extrapolate the scriptures beyond those around him? Some would say that he had some special power that made it easier for him, but any special advantage Jesus possessed would void the example he provided and the sacrifice he made. Instead, he used the tools available to everyone then and now, but with greater heed and diligence than they chose to exercise.

The fact that Jesus was incredibly familiar with the scriptures is shown by his frequent quotation and intentional fulfillment of their contents.³⁵⁰ In the Lord's time, copies of the scriptures were handwritten, expensive, and rare. Most people would only have access to the scriptures through memorization and recitation of the copy held at the local synagogue. Those with much greater access to the scriptures marveled that Jesus could have known them as well as he did in spite of not having been formally trained in their contents.³⁵¹ The increased familiarity Jesus had with the scriptures over his peers—in spite of equally limited access to them—indicates how much more effort he exerted over the same experiences they had with them.

His example in developing proficiency in scripture is perfectly applicable to the modern world. How often do you think Jesus thought about the scriptures he heard each Sabbath? Do you think he only thought about them while they were being read, or do you think he frequently thought about them throughout the week? Do you think he listened with an academic perspective, as the scribes did, or did he actively think about his daily life and how he could improve based on what he heard? Do you think he relied on his religious leaders to teach him what the scriptures meant, or do you think he actively questioned the *status quo*? Do you think he limited what he learned to whatever the synagogue leader chose to teach about, or did he search out his own questions? Do you think he passively listened to what was taught, or do you think he extended the lesson with prayer and direct revelation?

³⁵⁰ For example: "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. (John 19:28-29)

³⁵¹ Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? (John 7:14-15)

The example of Christ in learning and applying the scriptures has special significance to learning about his character. After all, the Old Testament he had access to was full of prophecies about who and how he would be.³⁵² You not only have greater access to most of the material that Jesus had, you also have access to many other subsequent scriptures that even more thoroughly describe his character. Just like Jesus, you can use those scriptures to learn more about the character of Christ and gain stronger reasons to live that way yourself.

The Lord grew in power with God incrementally, just like you can

It is widely assumed that Jesus had greater power than he did, earlier than he did. If Jesus had a fullness of power from birth, how could any of us follow his example?

If Jesus was born with all the power of the Father, why aren't earlier miracles recorded in the New Testament?³⁵³ The simplest possibility for why there are no stories of Jesus performing miracles in his childhood is that there were none. Several aspects of his story support this probability.

As soon as Jesus began working public miracles, he was followed everywhere by a mob. If he had worked miracles before, how could they pass by the attention of the small village in which he lived, where the people reacted to the start of his public ministry by asserting that there was nothing special about him.³⁵⁴ One possibility is that he worked miracles, but kept them to his family. It is not likely that such privacy could exist in such a small town, but if it could, why were his brothers among those who disbelieved in him after the start of his public ministry?³⁵⁵ While Mary's behavior at the wedding of Cana suggests that it wasn't the first time she had seen Jesus perform a miracle, it is not improbable that she was merely hoping for a temporal solution. After all, by that time Jesus had cared for her for many years, she would have had countless examples of his ability to solve problems, and he was exactly the one she would ask for help if she needed it.

Regardless as to when Jesus began performing miracles, there is no reason to believe that he began life with any special powers. Everything he did and everything he received was done and received according to

³⁵² And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

³⁵³ Some may say: "He had the power, but it wasn't the Father's will for him to perform them yet." We know that Jesus declined certain proposed actions from time to time with the response that it was not yet time. However, miracles require faith, which requires understanding, which requires a certain level of maturity. The suggestion that Jesus performed miracles as a baby reduces Jesus to a magic object.

³⁵⁴ And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? (John 6:42)

³⁵⁵ For neither did his brethren believe in him. (John 7:5)

the same laws of cause and effect that we are all subject to, all of which require choices on our part, and all of which develop as we grow into the ability to make moral judgments for ourselves.

The Lord had incremental interactions with heaven, just like you can

Some discount the difficulty of the Lord's life, the power he wielded, or what he accomplished by believing that he had frequent interaction with heaven that made this easier than it would be for anyone else. Many Christians assume that the Lord's interactions with heaven came only because he was the Christ, and that they were far more numerous than those described in the gospels. Under such assumptions, the value of the Lord's life as an example to follow in seeking and obtaining interactions with heaven is lost. The truth is that the Lord's life provided an example of incremental interactions with heavenly visitors at significant and appropriate times during his life, and serves as a template for all others to follow.

If Jesus received so many angelic visitations, why are only three recorded? The first recorded instance of Jesus being visited by angels was after his long fast and temptation in the wilderness. The only other two stories of Jesus interacting with angels was his interaction with Moses and Elijah on the mount and an unnamed angel in Gethsemane. What if these were the only visits by angels he experienced? There are many people who have entertained angels more than three times. Some of them are alive today.

Many assume that Jesus must have had many angelic visitations because he was the most righteous man who ever lived. While righteousness is a criterion for angelic visitation, it is not the only one. The more righteous you are, the fewer the angels you need to visit you, and the fewer there are who have anything to offer you. What, exactly, could any angel do to help Jesus? The angels who ministered to him after his fast could have brought him food. Moses and Elijah did not minister to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, but rather the reverse. The angel in the Garden provided information to him that he did not have, which helped him decide to finish taking upon himself the sins of the world and sacrificing his life.

Jesus did not have greater access to angels than you or I. If anything, the conditions under which they could visit him were more constrained, not less. Angels are limited in their ability to visit those for whom their visit would deprive the opportunity to exercise additional faith, making them less likely to visit Jesus for at least two reasons. First, he had grown incrementally to have greater power than anyone else and, second, any angel who visited him would have given him additional witnesses of his identity and mission, if only in their

obedience to him. On both counts, angelic visitations would have prevented his expression of faith. Angels don't come to make hard things easy for you. They come to make the impossible possible. Angels will not come to do for you what you could do yourself. This is why angels did not minister to Jesus during his trial with Satan, only after.

Jesus did not have special access to angels. He obtained interactions with angels the same way anyone else does. Because the same laws are in play for all, you can receive angelic ministrations if you follow the example of Jesus. Exert yourself to your full capability. When you exhaust your resources, God will provide more, and he will use heavenly angels to do so whenever no earthly angels are available with sufficient capabilities and willingness.

Jesus heard the voice of the Father infrequently, and only after passing the same trials we all face

While Jesus described that he felt as if the Father had forsaken him while on the cross, many people assume that, until then, he had a constant, unbroken, instant, verbal line of communication with the Father. It's impossible to approach an accurate understanding of the suffering the Lord endured while holding to the incorrect idea that he had access to the Father that extended beyond what anyone has who is equally obedient to him.

There are exactly three times when the Father is recorded as speaking in an audible voice to Jesus.

At his baptism, a voice from heaven was heard to say: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Christians assume that this voice came only for the sake of John, whose mission was to testify of the identity of the Messiah, and that Jesus had heard the voice of the Father many times before, potentially even having regular and more involved interactions with him. But what if this was the first time Jesus heard the voice of the Father? What if, just like everyone else, the Lord had to strive to learn and live more like the Father for years before he heard his voice?

The next time the Lord is described as hearing the voice of the Father is at the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:4-5). Just as at his baptism, the voice is directed towards a special audience—in this case, Peter, James, and John—further stressing the point that it was no light thing for anyone—including Jesus—to hear the audible voice of the Father.

The final time the voice of the Father is recorded is six days before the last passover, when Jesus explicitly says the voice did not come for

him, but for those with him.³⁵⁶ What if part of the Lord's trial wasn't getting to the point where he would hear the Father's voice, but getting to the point where he would do the Father's will without needing to? This theory is supported by the trial from Gethsemane to the cross, where Jesus "cried with a loud voice...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

Any special privilege that made his life easier than ours would void his purpose of demonstrating the example of how each of us must live. As far as we know, Jesus never received the voice of the Father when he was lonely, when he was tired, when he was sad, when he was unmotivated, or when he struggled to believe in himself. He heard the voice of the Father when John needed to know who he was, when Peter, James, and Andrew needed to know who he was, and when his disciples needed to know who he was. If we want to follow the example of Jesus, we will not seek the voice of the Father—or any other manifestation of his power—to rob ourselves of the trial of faith, but only to increase the faith of others. God's power does not exist for our convenience, but to further his own purpose.

³⁵⁶ Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. (John 12:27-30)

6. Justification and sanctification through learning about and living like Jesus

Reconciliation to Jesus is an event and a process

Living the gospel of Jesus Christ consists of an initiatory *event* of justification followed by the lifelong *process* of sanctification. You are justified by reconciling yourself to what you already know about God. You are sanctified as you learn more about God while remaining reconciled to him.

Justification is an event, but sanctification is a process. The Lord described justification and sanctification using himself as a metaphor. He called himself the gate, explaining how walking through him was an event, and he explained himself as a path, the traversal of which was a process.³⁵⁷ By reconciling your life to your present understanding of how Jesus is, you enter the gospel gate. As you continue along the strait and narrow way, you progress in the gospel process.

Justification

Justification is the decision to submit to God.³⁵⁸ Those who perfectly follow the example of Jesus as they understand him to be are called *justified*.³⁵⁹ Justification is a condition of perfectly replicating your understanding of how Jesus would be in your place. We are justified if we continuously live according to how we believe God would live in our situation. Justification through Christ means living in a state where you completely and constantly reconcile your desires, thoughts, and actions to your current, sincere idea of what is best, and as such, is a synonym for blamelessness. Justification occurs when you scrutinize your life, admit where your desires, thoughts, and actions deviate from the example of Christ, and improve to reconcile yourself to his example.

Justification is an event. It occurs in the moment you decide to follow God, and is maintained as long as you continue to follow him. When you determine to choose God's purpose as your own, and subdue all other interests to his, you are justified.

³⁵⁷ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

³⁵⁸ To justify (Strong's 1344 *dikaioō*) means to achieve the state described by Strong's 1342 (*dikaios*), which means righteous, innocent, correct, conforming to God's standard.

³⁵⁹ For all have sinned in falling short of the glory of God. But all can be rendered innocent from past disobedience to God and present limits of his fullness through the gracious act of redemption in and through Jesus Christ, Whom God prepared before the world as the atoning sacrifice for sin, to demonstrate his righteousness to the world, that through learning how he is and living how he would, man might be justified. (Romans 3:23-26, Author's Reflection)

Justification is a gospel doctrine that has been significantly distorted by common Christians. An unfortunate number of Christians believe righteousness is a question of God's decree upon a person in response to their statement of belief in him, rather than a description of how they actually are compared to their belief about how Jesus is. God can't and won't bestow upon you the rewards of righteousness while you continue to willingly sin against him. Justification is a property, not a decree. God does not lie,³⁶⁰ and because righteousness is a measure of similarity to God, he cannot declare anyone righteous except through their conformity to their understanding of how God is, or how he actually is. There isn't a third option that magically transforms a sinner into a saint. Even when God forgives you, he cannot make you holy except through your choice to follow how he demonstrates himself to be.

Your whole body is full of light when you are justified

There are special blessings available only to those who live in full alignment with God.³⁶¹ Sanctification increases the quality and quantity of blessings to which you have access. All good comes from and leads to God, and the concentration of its value increases as you draw nearer to him. The bandwidth of wisdom, blessings, and power from God available to you is determined not just by whether you are aligned, but by the level of knowledge about God that you are aligned to. As you learn more about him while remaining aligned with him, the amount of good he can send into your life increases.³⁶² It is through people who align with God and increase the bandwidth of their connection to him that God establishes his kingdom on earth.³⁶³ Most of the blessings we read about in the scriptures are among those reserved for those who live in full alignment with God. It is because very few Christians live in alignment with God that so few scriptural blessings are available in the lives of many Christians.

When you are aligned with God, or justified, you open the maximal conduit of wisdom, blessings, and power from God available to you.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; (Titus 1:2)

³⁶¹ 22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light (Matthew 6:22) Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. (Psalms 119:1)

³⁶² The Lord loves righteousness and justice; when these are in place, God's love flows unimpeded to fill the earth. (Psalm 33:5, Author's Reflection)

³⁶³ Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:7) The Lord is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. (Isaiah 33:5)

³⁶⁴ The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light (Matthew 6:22)

You enjoy unparalleled peace.³⁶⁵ You can stand in the presence of God.³⁶⁶ You are sustained by God without any impedance.³⁶⁷ Nothing good is withheld from you.³⁶⁸

Falling out of alignment with what you understand God to be like disqualifies you from further revelation of how he is,³⁶⁹ and will also result in the loss of the grace you have received until now.³⁷⁰ Each way in which you think, feel, or act less than the best you know creates impedance between you and God.³⁷¹ Every difference between how you are and how you believe God to be creates an obstruction in the flow of God's goodness to and through you.

Sanctification

Sanctification is the process of becoming holier through learning more about God while continuing to live all we know. To be sanctified is to gain more of the joy, knowledge, beliefs, power, and glory of God. Sanctification requires learning more about Jesus than you knew before. Justification requires sacrificing what cannot remain, but sanctification requires becoming better than you were before.

³⁶⁵ Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace. (Psalms 37:37) Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

³⁶⁶ Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. (Psalm 15:1-2) Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven (D&C 121:45)

³⁶⁷ Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved, But he who is perverse in his ways will suddenly fall. (Proverbs 28:18, NKJV) The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. (Isaiah 33:14-16)

³⁶⁸ For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalms 84:11)

³⁶⁹ For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

³⁷⁰ ...But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; (D&C 20:31-32) And now, verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, will not lay any sin to your charge; go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God (D&C 82:7)

³⁷¹ For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; (D&C 1:31)

Sanctification is the process of iteratively obtaining a better understanding of God while applying that understanding to your life. This is a cyclic process that consists of:³⁷²

1. Learning more about God's character.
2. Consummately applying what you understand about God's character in your life.
3. Repeating this process as God teaches you more about himself.

Sanctification is the process of learning more while remaining reconciled to what you learn. Sanctification occurs as you maintain complete conformance to the will of God in thoughts, words, deeds, desires, and character as you are exposed to greater challenges in life. There will always be more to know about God, and each increment of learning brings an opportunity to live what you have learned or turn away from it. You choose whether to remain reconciled to God or not. Those who choose to remain reconciled to God as they learn more about him remain justified and become more sanctified.

Justification can happen through the intervention of another, but sanctification requires you to improve

Sanctification cannot occur outside of the choice and capacity³⁷³ of the individual. Little children are involuntarily *justified* through the atonement of Jesus Christ,³⁷⁴ but like everyone else, they cannot be *sanctified* except through learning³⁷⁵ and choosing to live a greater law.³⁷⁶

³⁷² For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 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. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world. And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now. (D&C 84:44-53)

³⁷³ Behold, ye are little children and ye cannot bear all things now; ye must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. (D&C 50:40)

³⁷⁴ The following scripture contains an understandable but mistaken conflation of justification and sanctification by Joseph Smith: "But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ; and this is what the scriptures mean." (D&C 74:7) A more correct rendering would be: "But little children are innocent, being justified through the atonement of Jesus Christ."

³⁷⁵ For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:5)

³⁷⁶ And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. (D&C 88:34)

If children were sanctified against their will, it would be preferable to die as an infant. The truth is that this life provides a unique opportunity for sanctification,³⁷⁷ which is why the earth was created in the first place.³⁷⁸

While we are forgiven or punished according to what we *believe* is good, we can only be blessed inasmuch as we have learned and lived up to what is *actually* good.

Greater knowledge brings greater accountability, but you can't obtain greater blessings without greater knowledge. Those faithful to a little knowledge receive the blessings of having a little knowledge. Those faithful to a lot of knowledge receive the blessings of having a lot of knowledge.

We are still subject to the temporal consequences of our ignorance, even if we are forgiven of the moral consequences of our ignorance. A baby is subject to the same gravity as an average adult or engineer, and while the adult can better avoid falling off a cliff than the baby, only the engineer will be able to design a plane to fly off of it.

When you follow Jesus as far as you understand him, he reveals more about himself to you

Justification is a binary state—you are either justified or you are not—but sanctification is by degrees. You are justified all at once, but you are sanctified line upon line. Justification is a question of whether you are reconciled to all you know. Sanctification is a question of how much you know. You must be justified to be sanctified to any degree.

Sanctification is the process of obtaining greater degrees of eternal life³⁷⁹ by learning more about³⁸⁰ and becoming more like God.³⁸¹ We grow proportional to the degree of heed and diligence we exercise in

³⁷⁷ And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. (D&C 130:19)

³⁷⁸ And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. (Abraham 3:24-26)

³⁷⁹ Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism. And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me. (Alma 7:15-16)

³⁸⁰ ...press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:20)

³⁸¹ And unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life. (D&C 133:62)

obtaining more information³⁸² about God while living up to everything we already know.³⁸³ As you make every reasonable attempt to learn more about the character of God and as you are completely obedient to your present understanding, God will teach you more about himself.³⁸⁴ You draw nearer to Christ incrementally as you follow his incrementally revealed example.³⁸⁵

Finding out more about how Jesus is begins by living as you believe he would given what you already understand about him.³⁸⁶ If you live according to your present understanding of how Jesus is,³⁸⁷ he will teach you more about himself.³⁸⁸ As you consistently live up to what you believe Jesus would think, feel, and do in your place, he will reveal to you more about how he is.³⁸⁹ As long as you remain consistent in fully following his example, you will continue in the process of refinement, incrementally increasing in your similitude to Jesus.³⁹⁰

³⁸² ...It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. (Alma 12:9-10)

³⁸³ And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come (D&C 130:19)

³⁸⁴ For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. (D&C 93:20) And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. (John 1:16) Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. (2 Nephi 10:24) And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness. (1 Nephi 17:3) Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

³⁸⁵ For these reasons I implore you, brethren, that you continuously offer yourselves as an evermore holy sacrifice to God, increasingly reconciled to God's increasingly revealed word, by the mercies of God. And be not changed to be more like this world, but be changed to be more like God, through improved reason and understanding, through searching and learning what is of the greatest worth and benefit, towards the complete stature of God. (2 Thessalonians 12:1-2, Author's Reflection)

³⁸⁶ The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant. (Psalms 25:14)

³⁸⁷ Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)

³⁸⁸ Continuously one with God through obedience to how we imagine him to be, as our belief yields to firsthand experience with him, until we become a perfected man, filled with the complete character of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13, Author's Reflection)

³⁸⁹ But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Proverbs 4:18)

³⁹⁰ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

You will learn more about God line upon line as you live up to what you already know.³⁹¹ The path to God is a path of correction. In each step, you learn that God would think, feel, or act differently than you if he were in your place. You implement the suggested improvement, and the cycle repeats with some new lesson. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved, Jesus responded by telling him what he would do differently if he were in his place.³⁹² The next step in the gospel is always the next thing you know but do not do. How fast and far you progress in the development of your character will depend solely on your ability to focus fully on the changes he has already suggested to you: ways you think, feel, or act that don't match your current understanding of what is best. As you fill your life with the light God has already revealed to you, greater knowledge about God will come to you daily like dew on the morning grass.³⁹³

Maintaining your relationship with God requires more than just maintaining your obedience to what he has already revealed to you. Your relationship with God is always either growing or decaying. It will never be the case that one living up to their beliefs will remain stagnant over time.³⁹⁴ God always sends the next increment of truth to those who live up to what they have.³⁹⁵

To abide with God, you have to instantly change when corrected

Jesus said our work is to “believe on him whom [God] has sent.”³⁹⁶ Believing in Jesus means learning more about how he is and

³⁹¹ And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:27-28)

³⁹² And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (Matthew 19:16-22)

³⁹³ Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. (D&C 121:45)

³⁹⁴ ...there are many who observe not to keep my commandments. But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:22-23) Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you. (1 Nephi 15:11)

³⁹⁵ And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given (Mark 4:24)

³⁹⁶ Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. (John 6:28-29)

implementing his example in your own life. When you reconcile yourself to God, you enter into a state of alignment with him. When you are aligned with God, there is no part of you that lies outside of how he would be, up to the limits of your capacity, opportunity, and understanding.³⁹⁷ You align with God by seeking and pursuing his will in all things, all of the time.³⁹⁸ To be fully aligned with God requires you to be an integrated, honest person whose central, transcendent purpose is to learn and accomplish the will of God.

Maintaining alignment with God requires your continual reconciliation with God. We are innocent of the transgressions we unknowingly commit.³⁹⁹ However, we are accountable for every time we fall short of the best we know.⁴⁰⁰ Increased knowledge of God brings with it the opportunity to become more like him and receive more of his blessings, but also the accountability for living up to a higher standard.⁴⁰¹ When you disconnect yourself from Jesus in *anything*, you distance yourself from him in *everything*. In order to continue receiving God's grace for what you do not know, you must continue living up to everything you do know.⁴⁰²

To remain aligned with God requires constant improvement. How willing are you to change your mind about how you believe Jesus to be? Greater knowledge about God does not just consist of additional ideas that stand apart from or build upon what you already believe about him. A great deal of what remains for you to learn about God will include ideas that directly contradict what you already believe about him.

³⁹⁷ And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. (Exodus 33:17)

³⁹⁸ Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 37:37)

³⁹⁹ Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. (2 Nephi 9:25)

⁴⁰⁰ As it is written, "You will justify all those who live up to their knowledge of your character, and will vindicate all who so do." And all who say otherwise are wrong. If, however, our unrighteousness continues in spite of the revelation of God's righteousness, we have no defense. God would be unrighteous to withhold his wrath from such. And for this very thing, the judgment of the world will come. Those who continue faithful to the best they know while their unknown imperfections are revealed through the continuation of the truth of God are free from sin. But those who knowingly do less than the best they know are neither innocent of unknown imperfections nor forgiven of past sins. (Romans 3:4-8, Author's Reflection)

⁴⁰¹ For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation. Ye call upon my name for revelations, and I give them unto you; and inasmuch as ye keep not my sayings, which I give unto you, ye become transgressors; and justice and judgment are the penalty which is affixed unto my law. (D&C 82:3-4)

⁴⁰² For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

How would you discover limits in your beliefs about Jesus? Discovery of limitations in belief can only come through so many sources; you must be willing to listen to the arguments of others, willing to experiment with their beliefs, and willing to fully live up to their beliefs while honestly assessing if they deliver the promised outcomes. There is no other way of discovering limits in belief, but for most Christians, all three vectors of learning are heretical, and they therefore never discover or correct the limits in their beliefs about Jesus.

Meanwhile, many non-Christians do an excellent job at becoming more like Jesus and gaining reasons for why to do so, at least as far as they can without actually knowing about or believing in Jesus. They do so in the name of improvement—all of which is inseparable from God, whether they realize it or not.⁴⁰³ Just as modern Christians cannot progress to better outcomes until they recognize and progress in attention to how to become more like Jesus and why to do so, non-Christians who are oriented toward improvement will only continue to find it by learning that Jesus is real, that everything good they have found in life is from him, and that everything better that remains is found through explicit belief in him.

Maintaining a growing relationship with God requires you to constantly learn more about him than you knew before and to remain aligned with all he reveals to you.⁴⁰⁴ To abide with Jesus, you must reach for anything in him that is better than you and let go of anything in you that is less than him.⁴⁰⁵ If you want to abide with God, you have to constantly seek and do his will,⁴⁰⁶ instantly changing any time you realize that your present path deviates from what he would think, feel,

⁴⁰³ For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I 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. (Moroni 7:16)

⁴⁰⁴ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. (John 15:1-4)

⁴⁰⁵ And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life....And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits. (Helaman 14:8, 13)

⁴⁰⁶ The Father will remove from me anyone who ceases to continue to bear fruit, even if they did in the past; He will purge every branch that bears fruit, so that it continues bear more and better fruit. I have purged you through the word that I have spoken to you. Now remain reconciled to and growing in me, that I may remain reconciled to you, and cause you to grow. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, if it does not abide in the vine, nor can you if you do not abide in me. I am the vine; you are branches. I will abide with him who remains reconciled to and growing in me, and he will bear abundant fruit. There is no power apart from me. Anyone who deviates from me is removed as an unwelcome shoot; they dry out and are thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain reconciled to me in every way as I teach you more of my words, you will seek everything you desire, and you will find everything you seek. (John 15:2-7, Author's Reflection)

or do in your place. Correction can come at any moment.⁴⁰⁷ Disciples of Christ stand ready to receive them, watching and ready to hear and obey⁴⁰⁸ anything he might say.⁴⁰⁹ From the moment you rise until you retire, proactively pursue his purpose and be prepared to receive further instructions.

It is possible to live in constant reconciliation with God. Perfection is dismissed by many as an unattainable goal, in spite of Jesus commanding us to be perfect.⁴¹⁰ In the scriptures, perfect is a synonym for blameless. It means a person who is living the best that they know. This is not meant to be an exceptional situation.⁴¹¹ Several well-known people attained this state as described in scripture.⁴¹² It is meant to be the state in which Christians continuously live. All disciples of Christ are commanded to be perfect.⁴¹³

It is possible to be in a state where you can't identify anything in your life that God would handle differently than you do.⁴¹⁴ To achieve this state is not the same as being exactly as Jesus is, but to be precisely as you understand him to be.

⁴⁰⁷ My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom. (D&C 136:31)

⁴⁰⁸ But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me.... (D&C 46:7)

⁴⁰⁹ But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. (Isaiah 64:8)

⁴¹⁰ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48)

⁴¹¹ And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received. (Alma 7:22) Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day. (1 Kings 8:61) I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. (Psalms 101:2)

⁴¹² For example, "These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." (Genesis 6:9) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. (Genesis 17:1, NKJV)

⁴¹³ Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 18:13) Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48) Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect. (3 Nephi 12:48)

⁴¹⁴ In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: (Colossians 1:22) Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: (Colossians 1:28)

**Enter the gate by reconciling to
your present understanding of
Jesus**

7. God's commandments are a means of learning about and living like him

The astonishing human ability to accurately model character

Your character is what you do, why you do it, and how you feel about it. A model of someone's character is an estimate of the qualities that predict what they will think, feel, and do in a given situation.

Human beings are astonishingly adept at modeling other people. Artificial intelligence models are used to apply past observations to future decisions and actions, just as we model the character of other people to be able to predict or replicate what they do. AI model creation and usage requires many complex calculations and extremely advanced equipment. Amazingly, humans seem to have the ability to model the character of other humans with far less.

If you know an average person at least marginally, you will be able to predict their actions and desires to an astonishing degree of accuracy even if your knowledge of their lives is limited. For example, you could probably predict whether someone you knew even slightly would enjoy a particular movie or book.

Without ever thinking about it, you have probably managed to build a predictive model of the character of every person you know, and you use these models every single day to inform how you interact with others in order to obtain what you want.

On the one hand, your ability to model others is a skill so deeply ingrained that you can use it without even thinking about it. On the other, because the majority of supposedly Christian churches teach that the gospel exists in order to excuse us from being more like Jesus instead of enabling us to be more like him, you've probably never used these abilities to build or apply a model of Christ.

God's commandments help us build a model of his character

God's commandments are not a static and synthetic list of rules that take the place of actual holiness. They aren't what we do to avoid being punished for being unlike God. God's commandments are successive descriptions of his character that show us how and why to live more like he is.

God's commandments are a way to learn more about and become more like Jesus, not a substitute for doing neither. God's Commandments are not some alternative means to receive more of his blessings without becoming more like him. God's commandments are not a way to curry arbitrary favor with God, but a pathway to become

more like him. The defining characteristic of heathen religions is their belief that divine favor can be curried through arbitrary sacrifices meant to bribe the fickle favor of selfish deities. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not benefit from our sacrifices,⁴¹⁵ but we do. God's commandments are not designed for what he gets out of them, but for what we become through them. His benefit from us is limited to how much we become like him.

God's commandments are instructions that help you better understand how God would live in your place and why.⁴¹⁶ To keep God's commandments is to follow his example as far as you understand it. God's commandments are given to teach us more about him, prepare to learn more about him, and increase in the desire we have to do so.

God's commandments can come in different forms

Various words are used in the scriptures in connection with God's commandments, including but not limited to his laws, precepts, statutes, and judgments. While some benefit may come from attempting to impose specific definitions upon these obviously ambiguous terms, it is much more useful and correct to see all of these as overlapping variations on the same general theme.

Commandments can come in the form of precept, example, argument, or experience, all of which provide information to the end of helping you to better perceive or to persuade you to more fully follow how God would live in your place.

Precepts are prescriptive declarations of what you should or should not do, how you should or should not do it, or why you should or should not do it. An example of a preceptive commandment is: "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Examples are demonstrations of better behavior. Jesus demonstrated an example when he was baptized by John.⁴¹⁷

Arguments are reasons shared with the intent of persuading a person to change how they think, feel, or act. The New Testament is replete with arguments from Jesus. For example, when he was attempting to persuade the Jews that he had authority from the Father

⁴¹⁵ If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. (Psalm 50:12-15)

⁴¹⁶ "...all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him." (2 Nephi 11:4)

⁴¹⁷ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. (Matthew 3:13-15)

to forgive sins, he healed a man, saying: “[is it easier] to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?” (Matthew 9:5)

Experiences show what is better or worse than thought by further unfolding the consequences of choice. Jesus provided countless miracles of healing to demonstrate the value of his teachings, while pronouncing judgment upon Jerusalem, foretelling its destruction to help illustrate the mistake the Jews had made in rejecting him.⁴¹⁸

When the Lord gives us commandments, it is with the intent that we better understand and more fully acquire the aspect of his character that generates the commandment. You should do what you can to use every precept, example, argument, and experience you encounter to increase the breadth, depth, and accuracy of your understanding of how Jesus would live in your place. Try to formulate and verbalize the aspect of God’s character that would result in the commandments you observe. Enumerate hypotheses and test them. Ask questions, and seek their answers.

Applying the Lord’s example to every facet of your life

A person’s character is a queryable store of information about the thoughts, feelings, and actions of another person. The better you know someone’s character, the more situations in which you can accurately predict what they would do, why they would do it, and how they would feel before, during, and after. If you truly knew the Lord, you would have a confident idea of what he would do in every situation of your life.

God’s commandments help you more accurately estimate how God would think, desire, and act, and delineate differences between how you are and how he is. Commandments reveal how you differ from God while giving you direction on how to close that gap. Your response to God’s commandments demonstrates who you really are⁴¹⁹ by providing you with an opportunity to be better.⁴²⁰ God’s commandments reveal

⁴¹⁸ And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Luke 19:41-44) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:37-39)

⁴¹⁹ Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. (Exodus 16:4)

⁴²⁰ The Lord created this earth to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

desires,⁴²¹ flaws,⁴²² and strengths that might otherwise remain hidden from you.

When sculpting a large work, artists sometimes first make scale models. Using a crane-mounted plumb line, measurements from the finished work can be scaled to the work in progress, indicating where material must be added or removed in order to yield a high fidelity replica of the scale model.

Do you reconcile your life in every way to what you believe God would do in your place? Before you do anything, ask if that is what Jesus would do in your place.⁴²³ If you aren't sure what he would do, find out. If you don't have time, think about what would produce the greatest long term outcomes for all without regard for self.⁴²⁴

What aspects of your thoughts, feelings, and actions are different from what they would be if you were God? It is impossible to list all possible modifications,⁴²⁵ but here are a few to get you thinking. Would you be more reliable, humble, courageous, honest, hard-working, or reasonable? Would you be more intense? Would you be less selfish, or short-sighted? Would you be more grateful for the good things and people in your life? Would you be more resilient, less fearful, and more trusting in the midst of challenges? Would you be more amenable to opportunities to improve and those who precipitate them? Would you be more willing to adopt different ideas when given sufficient reasons to? Would you find better reasons for what you believe? Would you live your beliefs more consistently? Would you prioritize what you find to have the greatest worth? Would you minimize what you find to have little to no value? Would you be more patient with a person you currently dismiss? Would you swap out hobbies for something more productive? Would you sleep less, sleep more, go to sleep earlier, or wake up earlier? Would you eat better? Would you enjoy food more? Enjoy food less? Would you work harder? Would you speak up more often? Would you speak up less often?

God's shaping radically removes what is less than him, but amply adds what is greater than us. Sometimes, large portions of how we feel,

⁴²¹ The rich young ruler "went away sorrowful" when Jesus' commandment to him revealed that he didn't want to follow God as much as he thought (see Matthew 19:16-22).

⁴²² God's commandments describe a standard that exceeds what others would otherwise be comfortable with: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

⁴²³ But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 32:9)

⁴²⁴ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him.... (2 Nephi 26:24)

⁴²⁵ And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. (Mosiah 4:29)

act, or think must be removed in order to make room for what God will add.⁴²⁶ Those who refuse to submit to the full removal will have to settle for the best approximation God can make from what remains. Given the grand differences, what he can make from what we provide is paltry compared to what he could give us if we allowed him to make room to receive it.⁴²⁷

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Whether intentionally or not, too many Christians exercise gross hypocrisy by using a different definition for the word “follow” when it applies to following Jesus than they would in other aspects of their lives. For instance, no one would think they could follow another car to an intended destination by taking different turns than they do, yet many Christians pretend they can follow Jesus while picking and choosing when to live as he would in their place.⁴²⁸ How silly it is to think you will go to the same place he is by traveling a different path than he did!⁴²⁹

To follow Jesus is to walk on the way of life. The Lord said “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) As you walk with God, you will abound in all the blessings he enjoys.⁴³⁰ To walk *with* God requires you to walk *as* God would, as far as you understand him to be. To walk with God is to live in complete reconciliation to one’s understanding of the character of Jesus. Anyone who does anything else does not know or believe Jesus, and the truth is not in them.⁴³¹

To follow Jesus means to live as you sincerely believe he would, at all times and in all places.⁴³² It means to conform to whatever he reveals to you about himself,⁴³³ to follow every instruction he provides to guide

⁴²⁶ And now, behold, according to their faith in their prayers will I bring this part of my gospel to the knowledge of my people. Behold, I do not bring it to destroy that which they have received, but to build it up. (D&C 10:52)

⁴²⁷ And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. (D&C 88:32)

⁴²⁸ And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? (2 Nephi 31:10)

⁴²⁹ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:4-6)

⁴³⁰ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8)

⁴³¹ And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him...He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (1 John 2:3-4, 6)

⁴³² ...to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life— (Mosiah 18:9)

⁴³³ Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

you,⁴³⁴ and to prioritize him⁴³⁵ and his purpose above all else.⁴³⁶ To follow Jesus means to learn and live his character. It is to do, think, and feel what he would in your place for the same reasons.

If you don't follow Jesus, you don't believe in Jesus

Christianity is not defined by a set of rules, a set of behaviors, or even a set of beliefs. Rather, it is defined as those who follow the example of Christ. While Christians may disagree with their ideas of how the Lord would live in their place, no Christian should dispute the optimality or necessity of doing so. True Christians are disciples of Christ—they conform their thoughts, words, and actions to their belief of how he would live in their place.⁴³⁷

You cannot be saved without believing in Jesus Christ,⁴³⁸ but what does it mean to believe in him? It is possible to profess belief in God without obeying him, but professing belief is not the same as actually believing.

You can't believe in Jesus without following his example.⁴³⁹ When you actually believe Jesus, you always follow his example.⁴⁴⁰ What you really believe isn't demonstrated by what you say you believe, but by how you actually think, feel, and act.⁴⁴¹

To believe in Jesus is to pursue the purpose of God as your own by following the example of Jesus. It is to adopt and maintain his character at all times and in all places. Anything that doesn't fit the pattern of God does not belong in the life of a disciple.

⁴³⁴ And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? (2 Nephi 32:10)

⁴³⁵ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts. (Jacob 6:5)

⁴³⁶ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light....No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon....But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:21-22, 24, 33)

⁴³⁷ And he called the crowd to become his disciples: Anyone wishing to follow me must adopt my thoughts, actions, and desires in preference to his own, being lifted up by and to my standard, and actually feel, think, and do as I would in their place. (Mark 8:34, Author's Reflection)

⁴³⁸ Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. (D&C 45:5)

⁴³⁹ Then Jesus said to all of his disciples: Anyone wishing to follow me must adopt my thoughts, actions, and desires in preference to his own, being lifted up by and to my standard, and actually feel, think, and do as I would in their place. (Matthew 16:24, Author's Reflection)

⁴⁴⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12, ESV) If you really believe in Jesus, you will "receive his testimony," or adopt his example in all things: "And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." (John 3:32-33)

⁴⁴¹ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

It isn't difficult to find a professed Christian who views their belief in God as independent of whether they actually obey him or not. Paul spoke of these types of people:

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. (Titus 1:16)

The so-called belief of those who do not obey God is different from the belief of the devils who oppose him only in that the devils actually fear him.⁴⁴²

People who consider themselves Christians yet do not follow the example of Christ are deceiving themselves.⁴⁴³ How can you claim to believe in God if you think you know better than what he commands? When you really believe Jesus, you actually do what he says.⁴⁴⁴ Jesus taught that you do not become a Christian until and unless you reconcile to his example.⁴⁴⁵

Until you reconcile your life to God's instructions, you can't truthfully say you believe in him.⁴⁴⁶ Until you actually obey Jesus, claiming to believe in him simply adds to your condemnation before God.⁴⁴⁷

Adopt the actions of the Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus intended for us to follow his example. He said:

Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:27)

...Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you. (3 Nephi 18:16)

⁴⁴² Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (James 2:19)

⁴⁴³ But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:22)

⁴⁴⁴ So Jesus was saying to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word [continually obeying My teachings and living in accordance with them, then] you are truly My disciples. (John 8:31, AMP)

⁴⁴⁵ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10:9) And again, it sheweth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. (2 Nephi 31:9)

⁴⁴⁶ ...Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:19) And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits. (Helaman 14:13)

⁴⁴⁷ He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him. (John 3:36, RSV)

Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do... (3 Nephi 18:24)

...Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:16)

We are meant to live in the same manner he did.

One challenge in doing so is knowing what he would do in our place. While scriptural accounts provide stories from his life, those stories don't directly map to every situation in our own lives. Missionary work is different than daily life, and modern life is quite different than ancient life.

The missing key in beginning to better understand what Jesus would do in your place is transcending from specifics to general principles. The stories from the life of Jesus are directly applicable in the unlikely event you find yourself in the same exact situation, but the principles they demonstrate are applicable in every situation.

The need to extract principles from particular stories is an essential task. Jesus said that what he had taught and done provided enough examples from which the character of the Father could be fully derived. In fact, he said they were so ample that anyone who knew them had seen the Father!⁴⁴⁸ It was the Father's principles—not specific actions—that Jesus was referring to when he spoke of how the Father had shown him his character.⁴⁴⁹

The most important principles the Lord learned from the Father are:

⁴⁴⁸ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. (John 14:4-12)

⁴⁴⁹ I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. (John 8:26) For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth.... (John 5:20) I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. (John 8:38) Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. (John 5:19) For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. (John 12:49) But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. (John 14:31)

- Love God with all of your heart, might, mind, and strength.⁴⁵⁰
- Love others as God loves you.⁴⁵¹

There are two challenges in living these principles. The first and most obvious is that they require a consummate dedication. The second and most practical is that they require a level of understanding that very few possess. What love means and how it is applied, how God is, what a totality of heart, might, mind, and strength requires, and how God loves you are all mysteries that require a great deal of faith to uncover. However, it is possible to describe the implementation of these principles in exceedingly plain language: Be the best person you can be and help others become the best people they can be. This is done by seeking, developing, obtaining, and giving what has the greatest long-term net benefit. This plain statement does not instantly confer a perfect understanding of how to live these principles, but it does instantly provide a perfectly successive path towards that perfect understanding, as well as instantly provide the next step in that direction, and it does so more than an entire lifetime of typical religious teaching would. A paradigm of improvement will vastly accelerate your efforts in learning what Jesus would do in your place.

Adopt the thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ

One of the most important aspects of thinking like Jesus is just to think in the first place. Most people are extremely passive about their lives and do their best to avoid the thought necessary to be intentional.

Passive people may hide behind the excuse that they trust in God. Submission to God and passivity toward life are not the same. The Lord is both the most submissive and the least passive individual there is. He is absolutely submissive to the Father, as we must be if we are to follow his example. In his life, he was constantly confronted with changes he had to make to better live as the Father would in his place. He immediately implemented every improvement and rejoiced in the opportunity to do so.

How do you respond to correction? Unfortunately, human nature opposes learning. Once they learn *something*, most people think they know *everything*. Paul said, “Be not wise in your own conceits.” (Romans 12:16) God can’t teach you anything when you think you know everything.

Submissive people, like Jesus, are teachable. They are willing—and even eager—to learn how they can improve; they want to know what

⁴⁵⁰ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. (Mark 12:29-30)

⁴⁵¹ This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

they are wrong about and what they are ignorant of.⁴⁵² They hunger and thirst after righteousness. Jesus said we ought to become like little children.⁴⁵³ We, like children, should question everything, assume there is far more than what we know, and seek after frequent paradigm shifts. We should test all new ideas and hold to those that are better than whatever we had before.⁴⁵⁴ How do you react when you are confronted with ideas that conflict with your preconceived notions? Are you as willing as he was to instantly leave behind what you thought you knew when presented with something better? As you do, like Jesus, you will "...increas[e] in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke 2:52) No matter what you think you know, there may be more that God has for you to learn. We know from the account of his ordeal in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross that Jesus was still being confronted with ideas he did not expect until the final moments of his mortal life.⁴⁵⁵ Do you expect to figure it out faster?

While it is not possible to be more submissive to the Father or the truth than Jesus was, it is also not possible to be more courageous and tenacious to what he knew was better. Submission to the Father and the truth requires uncommon boldness in the face of challenges to either. You cannot serve God and anything else.⁴⁵⁶ Loving him above all else leaves no room for anything that conflicts with his character in your life.⁴⁵⁷ How do you respond to ideas that contradict the truth in God? Do you call out bad ideas, even when offered by those with seemingly good intent, and even when they are friends or family?⁴⁵⁸ Do you do your best to persuade others toward what is better?⁴⁵⁹

If you want to think like Jesus, you'll have to get better at perceiving and correctly assessing the long-term net benefit of potential actions for

⁴⁵² For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:20-21)

⁴⁵³ At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. (Matthew 18:1-5)

⁴⁵⁴ No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; (D&C 121:41)

⁴⁵⁵ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

⁴⁵⁶ No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:13)

⁴⁵⁷ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

⁴⁵⁸ But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. (Mark 8:33)

⁴⁵⁹ No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; (D&C 121:41)

yourself and others. You cannot do what is best without considering your options. You can't do what is best beyond the limits of the options you perceive or the accuracy of your estimate of the cost and benefit of each. To do what is best, you have to pay attention to how your plans are turning out and make changes as soon as you learn they are necessary.

Adopt the feelings of the Lord Jesus Christ

The gospel isn't just a means of changing our actions to align with Jesus; it also enables us to align with the Lord in how we feel. It isn't possible to follow the Lord's example only in outward actions. While some outward changes always occur downstream of inward changes, it is from within, in our hearts and minds, that we grow in the measure to which we have obtained and instantiated the character of Christ. The Lord repeatedly taught that good and evil cannot be assessed solely by outward actions, because your understanding and desire are necessary determinants of whether what you do is good or evil.⁴⁶⁰ It is primarily the corrupt default state of our mind and heart—our beliefs and feelings (including desires and motives)—that makes us natural enemies of God.⁴⁶¹

Jesus feels good about what is actually good, and he feels bad about what is actually bad. His desires focus on what has the greatest value, according to his perfect understanding of what everything is actually worth, and his emotional reactions are perfectly aligned with how things really were, are, and will be.⁴⁶² As you learn more about the Lord, you will find in him every reason to yield to his feelings, even when yours differ, and through doing so, increasingly understand and agree with why he feels that way.⁴⁶³

An abundant life is not obtained or defined by pleasant feelings, but by what we are willing to do in spite of the lack thereof. Those willing to do the greatest good even when it feels the worst are the ones who end up feeling the best.

⁴⁶⁰ And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. (Mark 7:20-23)

⁴⁶¹ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

⁴⁶² And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come. (D&C 93:24)

⁴⁶³ If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

A surprising number of professed Christians will only submit to God when doing so feels good. Many people truly believe that submission to God always feels better than the alternative. Why would you believe that submission to the Father will feel dramatically different for you than it did for Jesus, whose relentless suffering was so intense that it would have killed any other person?⁴⁶⁴ In just one episode of the Lord's lifelong suffering, he asked the Father three times if there was any other way than what he had been told, as he sweat blood due to the intensity of the pain he felt (see Luke 22).

While the maximal suffering you face in life will be less than what Jesus faced, every true disciple of Christ will face suffering beyond what they expect would kill them—beyond anything they imagined possible. Will you prove faithful, as Jesus did, or will you turn away, as almost everyone will long before the pinnacle of suffering is reached? The answer is not determined by a burst of courage, but through your willingness to participate in the process that prepares you.

The Lord's entire life was a series of trials of cascading intensity, as yours is meant to be. Life's trials help you build strength, increase your trust in God, and, very importantly, adjust your understanding of worth. Each of these virtues increases incrementally as you recognize and overcome the trials presently before you. The more you actively compare your life to how you believe God would live it, and the more fully you make all necessary changes to align the two, the stronger your ability to continue doing so will become, even in the face of greater obstacles.⁴⁶⁵

Some feelings seem to just happen to us, but our understanding of reality and the choices we make play a significant role in how we feel, especially in the long-term. Living the gospel requires improvement in your beliefs. Your initial beliefs about reality tend to be adopted from your surrounding environment, but like the Lord, you have the ability and responsibility to test, reject, seek, and adopt beliefs that exceed the limits of those around you.⁴⁶⁶ The more honestly you live your beliefs, and the more diligently you search for better ones, the more accurately you will see the world, the better the choices you will make, and the better you will feel.

⁴⁶⁴ And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:7)

⁴⁶⁵ Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Helaman 3:35)

⁴⁶⁶ Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. (Isaiah 7:15)

God's ability to reveal his commandments to you depends on how much like him you have become

God's character does not change, but our perception of it absolutely will as we draw nearer to him.⁴⁶⁷ The commandments you presently know are not an end, but a gateway to greater understanding and assimilation of God's character. Commandments are not issued as final truths that fully and accurately describe the depth and breadth of God's character. Instead, they are progressive instructions that give us increasingly more accurate estimations of his character. They do not reveal all there is to know, but merely the very next increment of understanding. They are given as stepping stones toward the fullness of how he is. The purpose of stepping stones is not to yield the end, but to make it easier to take the next step toward the end. Those who reject the next provided stepping stone fail to reach the intended end.⁴⁶⁸

Different people have different commandments. Commandments are instructions that delineate the next step from wherever a person is to the next increment of God they are capable of perceiving, receiving, and valuing. As such, while God does not change, his commandments will vary between and among individuals due to limits in and changes to their capacity or situation. As you walk in the way of life, you should expect God to continue to bless you with new, greater, and updated commandments.⁴⁶⁹

The more like God you become, the more extensively God can show you more about himself, leading to better outcomes for you and those who know you here and hereafter. The ability of any person to perceive, receive, value, and live God's commandments is limited by the differences between their character and God's. Their intelligence, diligence, courage, strength, and direction of desire, and a host of other character qualities will all facilitate God's ability to teach them to the degree they are similar to his, and impede his ability to teach them to the degree they are dissimilar to his.

⁴⁶⁷ John wrote: "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." (1 John 2:7) John gives no new commandment because the vehicle of instruction—the "word"—has not changed, even if the particular contents of that vehicle change according to the individual's understanding of how God is.

⁴⁶⁸ And to you he will be a sanctuary, but to the two houses of Israel a stumbling block or obstructing rock, and a snare, catching unawares the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble into them, and when they fall shall be broken, and when they become ensnared shall be taken captive. (Isaiah 8:14-15, Gileadi Translation) Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. (Ezekiel 3:20)

⁴⁶⁹ And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time—they that are faithful and diligent before me. (D&C 59:4)

Commandments are a means of drawing nearer to Christ by learning more about what he is like and living what we learn.⁴⁷⁰ The purpose of any commandment is to instruct you in the very next step from where you are towards how God is. God reveals new or expanded commandments at every stage of similarity to himself.⁴⁷¹ The relationship between commandments and similitude to God is like the foundation to the height of the building. A foundationless building is very limited in height. The stronger the foundation, the higher you can build the building. Whenever anyone attains a greater level of similitude to God, he gives them new or expanded commandments.

Keeping God's commandments as you presently understand them causes God to give you new and better commandments

Commandments come in incrementally more robust, informative, and effective instructions toward a fuller and more accurate understanding of God's character. As you keep God's commandments, you will learn more about his character and become more like him.⁴⁷²

God's commandments are incremental, revealing more and more about him in greater breadth, depth, and accuracy as the recipient advances.⁴⁷³ Yielding to incremental commandments will open your access to the continuous supply of new information about God's character.⁴⁷⁴ Your obedience to the incremental commandments that you have received from God so far will enable you to see more of his character than you could see previously.⁴⁷⁵

If you are progressing with God, you will receive commandments that expand or replace your previous understanding of his will in your life.⁴⁷⁶ You should expect God's commandments to you to change with every step you take closer to him.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁰ He that keepeth the law of the Lord getteth the understanding thereof: and the perfection of the fear of the Lord is wisdom. (Sirach 21:11)

⁴⁷¹ ...feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do....the Holy Ghost...will show unto you all things what ye should do....Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ... (2 Nephi 32:3,4,6)

⁴⁷² He that keepeth the law of the Lord getteth the understanding thereof: and the perfection of the fear of the Lord is wisdom. (Sirach 21:11)

⁴⁷³ Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved. (Alma 41:8) This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law. (D&C 132:24)

⁴⁷⁴ But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23)

⁴⁷⁵ For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

⁴⁷⁶ That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. (D&C 50:24)

⁴⁷⁷ Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14)

The pattern and purpose of God giving new or expanded commandments is found throughout the scriptures and in the lives of every person who seeks God. Like scriptural personalities, every time you live up to how you presently understand God to be, he will teach you more about himself and you will find yourself with new or expanded commandments.

A lack of new commandments indicates that you still haven't obeyed what he has already taught you. We must remain obedient to God as he increases the breadth, depth, and accuracy of our understanding of how he is,⁴⁷⁸ always possessing a willingness to change in our understanding of what is best.

God can and does command people to do what they formerly believed to be sinful. For example, the man Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda was commanded to take up his bed and walk,⁴⁷⁹ which he believed to be a violation of the Sabbath law. As another example, God commanded Ezekiel to bake bread on human dung, which he believed was a violation of the law of Moses.⁴⁸⁰ It is more important to listen to what God is telling you *now* than it is to cling to what you think he told you to do *before*.⁴⁸¹

God's new commandments can contradict God's former commandments

When God shows you something of himself, it is immensely foolish to judge the goodness of what he shows based only on your present understanding of how he is. This kind of thinking has led to the persecution of countless servants of God, whose greater similarity to God was judged as wickedness by people less righteous than they, and even resulted in the murder of Jesus Christ himself. Imagine judging the Lord as immoral based on an incorrect understanding of the

⁴⁷⁸ And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved. (2 Nephi 31:16)

⁴⁷⁹ Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. (John 5:8-11)

⁴⁸⁰ And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight....Then said I, Ah Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth.(Ezekiel 4:12, 14)

⁴⁸¹ Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

commandments he himself gave!⁴⁸² We should formulate and reformulate our understanding of him (and his rules) based on what he tells us about himself, not on what we already believe.

The scriptures encourage us to seek and do good,⁴⁸³ but also indicate that the evaluation of good and evil cannot be reduced to a comparison to a set of rules.⁴⁸⁴ Commandments are tools to help us learn to discern good and evil, not a replacement for that discernment.⁴⁸⁵ New commandments reveal the good in things not previously thought of as good, and reveal the evil in things not previously thought of as evil. If you already shared God's discernment of good and evil, desire for good, and hatred of evil, there would be no need for commandments, as you would live as God would in your place. As long as you remain different from God in any way, you should expect that there are aspects of your understanding of good and evil that differ from God's.

God can and does issue personal and general commandments that contradict his former commandments. On multiple occasions, he commanded men who lived the law of Moses to kill others—something expressly forbidden by the law of Moses. The Lord commanded people to eat his flesh and drink his blood,⁴⁸⁶ when the law of Moses forbade

⁴⁸² Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end. Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled. And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come. For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life. (3 Nephi 15:5-9)

⁴⁸³ For example: "But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I 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 ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil...." (Moroni 7:13,15-17)

⁴⁸⁴ And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. (Mosiah 4:29)

⁴⁸⁵ Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. (Moroni 7:19)

⁴⁸⁶ I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. (John 6:51-56)

eating man's flesh or drinking the blood of any creature.⁴⁸⁷ Jesus also taught that nothing a man consumes can defile him,⁴⁸⁸ when the law provided a lengthy list of things that defiled a man to eat (see Leviticus 11).

As God provides justification for his commandments, do not make the mistake of presuming the benefit from the former commandment precludes greater blessing for the newer commandment. God routinely asks us to trade something good for something better. In doing so, he frequently leans on our understanding of his goodness to justify what we cannot presently see as better than what he asks us to sacrifice.

God's commandments are potentially different for every person

Your understanding of what Jesus would think, feel, or do in your place is the set of God's commandments to you. Your idea of how Jesus would live in your place will differ from that of others in significant ways. Yours is the task of finding out what others believe about the Lord, why they believe it, and whether their beliefs are more supported than yours.

Every person's understanding of God's commandments will differ as much as their understanding and emulation of how God is. Those who invest more heed and diligence in learning more about and living like Jesus will be more like him and know more about him than those who invest less. Those who live as they sincerely believe Jesus would in their place will receive a greater understanding of his life through additional personal revelation.

With every commandment, God provides sufficient reasons for the recipient to believe that his contrary instructions are for a greater purpose than the original commandment.⁴⁸⁹ The improvement that comes from God's commandments should be so obvious and dramatic that it becomes difficult to doubt where they came from.⁴⁹⁰ You should

⁴⁸⁷ And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off. (Leviticus 17:10-14)

⁴⁸⁸ Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. (Matthew 15:11)

⁴⁸⁹ Often, the explanation comes in the form of revealing a principle in place of a rule. For example, when the Lord commanded Nephi to kill Laban, the Spirit said: "Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief." (1 Nephi 4:13)

⁴⁹⁰ For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God.... (Alma 5:40)

be learning, changing, and growing. You should find yourself with greater trust in God. You should find your character is more like his, and less like yours used to be.⁴⁹¹ You should find yourself able to conquer things that previously challenged you⁴⁹² and understand things that previously perplexed you.

As you follow God's commandments to you, your understanding of how he is will merge to more closely resemble that of those who know him better than you.

God's commandments illuminate the path to happiness

Conformance to God's instructions seems like a restriction to many because few understand that they are for their benefit, not God's. The commandments are not a gift *to* God, but a gift *from* God. God's desire is for you to obtain all the joy you are willing to receive. Lasting happiness is a question of how similar to God you've become.⁴⁹³ God's commandments are provided to orient us toward greater joy by leading us to better understand how he would think, feel, and act in our place and providing us with sufficient reasons to follow his example.

God's blessings flow through obedience to his commandments.⁴⁹⁴ The blessings that flow from keeping God's commandments aren't limited to the external outcomes that they bring,⁴⁹⁵ but the internal benefits of greater peace, meaning, intelligence, and joy.

⁴⁹¹ For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 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. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. (D&C 84:44-52)

⁴⁹² And again, verily I say unto you, and I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you. (D&C 50:25) And by hearkening to observe all the words which I, the Lord their God, shall speak unto them, they shall never cease to prevail until the kingdoms of the world are subdued under my feet, and the earth is given unto the saints, to possess it forever and ever. But inasmuch as they keep not my commandments, and hearken not to observe all my words, the kingdoms of the world shall prevail against them. (D&C 103:7-8)

⁴⁹³ ...the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness.... (Alma 44:5)

⁴⁹⁴ And he hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence. (2 Nephi 1:20)

⁴⁹⁵ Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. (1 Chronicles 28:7)

God's commandments demonstrate the path to the greatest possible happiness.⁴⁹⁶ If you desire greater joy, learn all you can about how Jesus would live in your place. Live as you sincerely believe Jesus would in all things, at all times, and in all situations. Do not yield to any ideas or actions that divert you in any way from this path. Following your model will lead to greater and longer-lasting joy than anything else. Nothing will yield a more direct path to greater happiness than God's commandments.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

⁴⁹⁷ ...the word of Christ...will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss.... (Alma 37:44)

8. Forgiveness requires reconciliation to the example of Jesus

All have sinned, but no one is forced to continue

Sin can be defined as any difference between you and God. To sin is to “come short of the glory of God” by thinking, feeling, or acting differently than how God would in your place, as far as you understand.⁴⁹⁸

People become susceptible to temptation to sin by misjudging the cost and benefit of what they could think, feel, or do. Temptation comes through understating the cost and overstating the benefit of anything that is actually less than the best. Consequently, the most powerful way to stop sinning is through exercising greater faith and honesty in choosing what you perceive to be best and learning more about the actual cost and benefit of the choices available to you. By definition, each sin carries a benefit less than its cost, and every sin shares the consequences of all disobedience. The penalties of sin are physical death, which results in the end of your mortal life, spiritual death, which results in your alienation from God here and hereafter, and hell, which consists of your eternal misery.

We begin our lives involuntarily forgiven from so-called original sin through the sacrifice of Christ,⁴⁹⁹ having not yet developed the capacity to make moral judgments. All able-minded children reach the point where they have enough discernment to choose,⁵⁰⁰ and, unfortunately, all but Jesus choose to disobey God.⁵⁰¹

While “all have sinned” (Romans 5:12), there is a difference between having sinned in the past and choosing to sin in the future. Although your past sins make it impossible for you to replicate Jesus’ sinlessness from birth, no matter who you are or what you have done until now, you can begin to replicate his example from this point on.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁸ Sin is to “come short of the glory of God;” (Romans 3:23) Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

⁴⁹⁹ Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. (D&C 93:38)

⁵⁰⁰ Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men...being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good— (Alma 12:31)

⁵⁰¹ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:23)

⁵⁰² For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him. (1 Nephi 10:18) Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48) And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27)

All people have the opportunity to choose to obey God and, through doing so, receive forgiveness of their past sins.⁵⁰³ There isn't a person so wicked that they are beyond God's ability to lead them to something better. *Anyone* who turns to him with all their might, mind, and strength will be led by God toward eternal life.

It is possible to obey God all the time

Many Christians will plainly deny the possibility of actually obeying God at all times and in all places. They dismiss the Lord's ability to obey the Father at all times as being a function of his godhood, but there are others who also obeyed him at all times. We read that Noah "was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God," (Genesis 6:9) that "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days," (1 Kings 15:14) and that "there was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." (Job 1:1) The Psalmist wrote:

22 Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. (Psalms 119)

If these people obeyed God at all times, why can't you? You may be tempted to dismiss these and other examples of people who managed to stop sinning by claiming that they could only do so because they were exceptional, and that it was easier for them than it would be for you. You would be wrong on both counts. Even the most righteous people have to overcome the same struggles we all face.⁵⁰⁴ The Lord himself was "...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

What makes a person exceptional is not what they begin with, but how much they are willing to receive from God through submission to him. Submission to God isn't a question of the greatness of the one who does it, but recognition of the greatness of God. You would not have heard of any of the aforementioned people if it weren't for their submission to God. It is your realization of your nothingness that

⁵⁰³ Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:27-30)

⁵⁰⁴ Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are... (James 5:17)

enables you to receive more from God, not the presence of your greatness. When Jeremiah was overwhelmed by what God asked him to do, the Lord reassured him by pointing out that all he had to do was do what he was told.⁵⁰⁵ Obedience to God does not require exceptional strength or virtue, just a willing heart and all the strength and virtue you currently possess. A willing heart is a choice with a willing mind⁵⁰⁶—a choice we already have every reason to make.

Modern Christians treat obedience to God as requiring some mythical level of sacrifice. The truth is that any sacrifice we could make pales in comparison to the sacrifice that God has *already* made—not just in the life and death of Jesus Christ, but in the continued gift he gives of our lives and every good thing within them.⁵⁰⁷ All good things we have, will have, and could have come from God. Every person already has every sufficient reason to willingly and gratefully sacrifice all things—up to and including their very lives—in order to obey God.⁵⁰⁸

It is fully within your ability to permanently and completely forsake sin. God has promised that we will never be commanded beyond our capacity to obey.⁵⁰⁹ You have the power to overcome any temptation you face.⁵¹⁰ You have the power not to sin.⁵¹¹ The test of mortality is whether you will begin to obey God all of the time or not.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁵ Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. (Jeremiah 1:6-7)

⁵⁰⁶ Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days. (D&C 64:34)

⁵⁰⁷ I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you. And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. (Mosiah 2:21-23)

⁵⁰⁸ Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not my disciple. (D&C 103:27-28)

⁵⁰⁹ And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7)

⁵¹⁰ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

⁵¹¹ He hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man license to sin. (Sirach 15:20)

⁵¹² And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; (Abraham 3:25)

Forgiveness requires you to fully align with God, as far as you understand him to be

Forgiveness of sins comes through repentance.⁵¹³ Repentance doesn't just mean apologizing for or feeling sorry for your sin; it requires forsaking your past sins.⁵¹⁴ Repentance means to bring your life into complete alignment with Christ, as far as you understand him to be.

You can't turn toward God in just *some* ways.⁵¹⁵ God requires us to keep *all* of his commandments.⁵¹⁶ To turn toward God requires turning away from all sin.⁵¹⁷ He directs us to "cleave to him" with "full purpose of heart," which denotes totality of dedication and primacy of priority.⁵¹⁸ If you want to obey him, you must do it in totality,⁵¹⁹ not just for his sake, but for yours.⁵²⁰ Those who do not fully obey God do not qualify for forgiveness of their sins.⁵²¹ God does not excuse the least bit of continuing sin.⁵²² While the level of understanding of God is variable between people, the level of obedience required to what each understands is not.⁵²³

⁵¹³ ...he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance. (Alma 12:15) And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls. (Helaman 5:11)

⁵¹⁴ By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. (D&C 58:43)

⁵¹⁵ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

⁵¹⁶ Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me. (D&C 97:8)

⁵¹⁷ But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son; Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest. And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest. (Alma 12:33-35)

⁵¹⁸ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts. (Jacob 6:5)

⁵¹⁹ Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

⁵²⁰ God's commandments are not arbitrary. What he requires he only requires because it is the only way to bring about the best outcomes for us.

⁵²¹ Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. (D&C 58:42) And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them. (Mosiah 4:10)

⁵²² ...the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. (Alma 45:16)

⁵²³ Who am I that made man, saith the Lord, that will hold him guiltless that obeys not my commandments? (D&C 58:30)

You will not receive God's forgiveness or mercy if you continue sinning

Forgiveness from sin requires forsaking of sin.⁵²⁴ The sacrifice of Jesus Christ provides a way for you to be forgiven of past sins and to begin to follow his example by keeping the Father's commandment to live according to everything you know about him, all the time.⁵²⁵ While you continue to sin knowingly, you are ineligible for salvation.⁵²⁶

The merciful sacrifice of Christ makes possible forgiveness for your past transgressions while you learn a better way to live.⁵²⁷ Mercy provides extra opportunity to obey God,⁵²⁸ but it does not void his requirement for obedience to him.⁵²⁹

The blessing of God's mercy is to be forgiven of past sins that you have forsaken⁵³⁰ and to be forgiven for the differences from him that you do not know about.⁵³¹ God's mercy will not forgive you for sins you continue to willingly commit.⁵³² Because God's mercy only absolves you for your past sins after you forsake them,⁵³³ you can't experience a remission of sins while still sinning any more than you can experience

⁵²⁴ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

⁵²⁵ [He who has] repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness. These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil. Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved. (Alma 42:6-8)

⁵²⁶ And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins. (Helaman 5:10, italics added)

⁵²⁷ Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; (D&C 19:15-17)

⁵²⁸ He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

⁵²⁹ But blessed are they who have kept the covenant and observed the commandment, for they shall obtain mercy. (D&C 54:6)

⁵³⁰ And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works. (Helaman 12:24)

⁵³¹ Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. (Psalm 19:12)

⁵³² Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin: And say not His mercy is great; he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins: for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners. (Sirach 5:5-6)

⁵³³ And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls. (Helaman 5:11) Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:13)

remission of cancer while there are still tumors in your body. In both cases, all offending parts must be cut out to save the host.⁵³⁴ It isn't enough to cut out some of it.⁵³⁵

Mercy is not some alternate path to heaven⁵³⁶ or an exception to justice.⁵³⁷ Even after God has forgiven you, his justice will still exact the penalty of doing less than your best in the future.⁵³⁸ The sacrifice of Jesus Christ does not atone for those who continue to sin against what they know.⁵³⁹ The price of receiving mercy from God for the past is to fully submit to him in the future.⁵⁴⁰ You will not remain forgiven of any past sins if you continue in any present sin.⁵⁴¹ The penalties of sin return with the repeat of sin, and they return worse than before.⁵⁴²

You can't disobey God and have faith in God

You can claim to have faith in God without obeying him, but professed faith without obedience to God is powerless:

Fool! When will you ever learn that “believing” is useless without doing what God wants you to? Faith that does not

⁵³⁴ And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Matthew 5:30)

⁵³⁵ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

⁵³⁶ I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate... (2 Nephi 33:9)

⁵³⁷ What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:25)

⁵³⁸ Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil...for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God. (Alma 12:32)

⁵³⁹ Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved. (Helaman 12:23) And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins. And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else. Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works. (Alma 11:37-41)

⁵⁴⁰ And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls. (Helaman 5:11)

⁵⁴¹ ...unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God. (D&C 82:7)

⁵⁴² When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:43-45)

result in good deeds is not real faith. (James 2:20, Living Bible)

The positive effects of the gospel are preconditioned on obedience to the laws that provide them.⁵⁴³ To expect the blessings of heaven without obtaining and living the laws of heaven is foolish and vain:

6 You should not expect Christ to lift you into heaven while your heart remains in the manner of and fixed on the things of this world—this isn't how faith or righteousness work.

17 Faith consists of witnessing the demonstration of Christ in another and reproducing it within yourself. (Romans 10, Author's Reflection)

We are saved through faith in Jesus. You can't have faith in Jesus without choosing to live as he would in your place.

You can't disobey God and believe in God

You can't say you believe *in* God without living what you say you believe *about* God. When you choose to think, feel, or act outside of how you believe Jesus would in your place, you are showing that you worship something other than God. This is a violation of what Jesus said was the most important commandment,⁵⁴⁴ as well as the first of the Ten Commandments.⁵⁴⁵

You can't disobey God without believing that you know better than he does what would bring about your greatest long-term happiness. God is consummately focused on the greatest benefit each of us is prepared and willing to receive, and as such, anything contrary to his commandments is less than what is best for us. Nothing that lies contrary to God's commandments can possibly be worth the cost. Can a person believe that God knows all things,⁵⁴⁶ loves us enough to prioritize our benefit above all else,⁵⁴⁷ and yet believe they know better than him what brings about our greatest long-term happiness? If you

⁵⁴³ For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:5)

⁵⁴⁴ Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. (Matthew 22:36-38)

⁵⁴⁵ Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)

⁵⁴⁶ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁵⁴⁷ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

believe in God, why would you ever willingly live differently than you believe he would in your place? If you turn from how you believe God would be in your place in any way, you demonstrate that you do not actually believe in God.

God requires obedience, not alternative sacrifice

Too many modern churches erroneously teach that you can be forgiven for your sins while you continue to sin. They teach that the Lord's atonement makes it possible to fulfill the required sacrifice of your heart, might, mind, and strength with something much easier, much less consistent, and much less enduring.⁵⁴⁸ They teach that as long as you go to church, keep a list of rules, pay tithes,⁵⁴⁹ receive a list of religious rites,⁵⁵⁰ or simply profess that you believe that Jesus exists,⁵⁵¹ God will forgive you of the ways in which you choose to think, feel, and act differently than you believe he would in your place.

These churches ignore the sacrifice and purpose of the Lord, preaching a watered down version of the law of Moses, where continued proxy sacrifices absolve believers for failing to come up to and become like God. The law of Moses wasn't provided as a substitute for full obedience to God, nor given because the people *couldn't* obey more. The law of Moses was given as a remedial measure,⁵⁵² because the people *wouldn't* obey more.⁵⁵³ Instead of repeating what the

⁵⁴⁸ 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) Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. (Mormon 8:31)

⁵⁴⁹ Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins. (Mormon 8:32)

⁵⁵⁰ The performance of ordinances without the cessation of sin does not save sinners. Performing ordinances without first repenting from one's sins "is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works." (Moroni 8:23) These ordinances are meant to come through "faith unto the fulfilling of the commandments," as it is "the fulfilling [of] the commandments [that] bringeth remission of sins." (Moroni 8:25)

⁵⁵¹ Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (James 2:19)

⁵⁵² Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses. (Mosiah 3:14) Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24) For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Galatians 3:10)

⁵⁵³ And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (Exodus 20:18-19)

Israelites did to foment the wrath of God,⁵⁵⁴ we ought to reach for the better way of what they were first offered the opportunity of doing—serving him with their whole souls.

You can't disobey God and love God

You can't disobey God without loving something more than him. Can a person love God with all their heart, might, mind, and strength and still choose to do something other than what he wants, as far as they understand? To love someone is to prioritize them above everything and everyone. The Lord said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) If you don't keep Jesus' commandments, you don't love him. Whatever you prioritize above obedience to God is what you prioritize above God.⁵⁵⁵

You can't disobey God and dwell in his presence

Christians believe that they will one day live with God in heaven. Unfortunately, they believe this irrespective of the measure to which they have reconciled themselves to how they believe God to be. Those who do not live as God would in their place are cut off from the presence of God.⁵⁵⁶ No one who willingly deviates from the example of God in how they live can dwell in the presence of God.⁵⁵⁷ To do so would overwhelm you with guilt beyond anything you can even imagine in this life.⁵⁵⁸ The only way⁵⁵⁹ to access God's presence is through

⁵⁵⁴ Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory. (D&C 84:23-24)

⁵⁵⁵ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple....So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26, 33)

⁵⁵⁶ ...Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. (Alma 9:13)

⁵⁵⁷ Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever. (1 Nephi 10:21)

⁵⁵⁸ Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever. (Mosiah 2:38) Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery. (2 Nephi 9:46) Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God (Alma 5:18)

⁵⁵⁹ Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come. (D&C 25:15)

following the example of God, as far as you understand him to be, in your own life.⁵⁶⁰

The longer you wait to repent and more you regress, the harder it gets

Every choice you make brings you closer or further from God. Each time you choose to follow the example of what you believe Jesus would feel, think, or do in your place, you become a better person, and will more easily perceive and choose subsequent decisions that more closely align with his example. Rebellion from God begins to affect you the moment you engage in it. Every time you turn away from God, you make future and larger rebellion easier. Each time you choose to deviate from his example, you become a worse person, and will more easily perceive and choose worse things in the future. You can repent of sins you slip back into,⁵⁶¹ but it becomes more difficult and carries a greater penalty with each repeated transgression.

The Lord does not continuously extend mercy to those who refuse to obey him.⁵⁶² The consequences of sin come to you if you do not repent, and they can be eternal.⁵⁶³ To turn away from God after obeying him is a terrible offense that carries penalties so severe that it is better not to be born.⁵⁶⁴

If you die before forsaking your sins, you will go to hell

Christians tend to think of rebellion against God as something difficult, requiring an overt act or a substantial decision. None of these perceptions are correct. At all times, you are either in a state of forgiveness through total submission to God, or a state of servitude

⁵⁶⁰ Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (3 Nephi 12:20)

⁵⁶¹ Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me. (Mosiah 26:30)

⁵⁶² Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. (Romans 11:22)

⁵⁶³ And it shall come to pass, because of the wickedness of the world, that I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full; for behold, my blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not. (D&C 29:17)

⁵⁶⁴ For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:20-22)

toward Satan⁵⁶⁵ through rebellion against God,⁵⁶⁶ with full exposure to the consequences of your sins.⁵⁶⁷

Denying the Christ starts when you deny anything you have reason to believe is true. Denying the Christ begins whenever you deviate in the least degree from what you sincerely believe the Lord would feel, think, or do. You deny the Christ every time you deviate from his example. When you do less than your best, you deny the Christ. When you ignore potential improvement, you deny the Christ. When you refuse to state or support the truth in spite of what it will cost you, you are denying the Christ. When you opt not to support someone who would be improved by your intervention, you are denying the Christ. When you opt not to consider the needs of those about whom you know, you deny the Christ.

36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

37 I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

39 And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment. (Mosiah 2)

⁵⁶⁵ ...they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell. (2 Nephi 26:10)

⁵⁶⁶ But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Mosiah 3:12)

⁵⁶⁷ And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption. (Alma 34:16)

Mercy does not last forever.⁵⁶⁸ Death brings the expiration of God's mercy.⁵⁶⁹ Death changes your body, and it changes your awareness, but it does not change your character.⁵⁷⁰ Anyone who ever willfully disobeys God will go to hell unless they cease sinning before they die.⁵⁷¹

If you have not reconciled your life to the commandments God has provided to you in this life, you will not be reconciled to God when you are resurrected. Those who die in their sins are not prepared to meet God.⁵⁷² They will be resurrected and judged,⁵⁷³ but will retain their sins.⁵⁷⁴ If you die while still in willful rebellion against God, you will go to hell.⁵⁷⁵

While you remain an enemy to God, you cannot enter into his kingdom.⁵⁷⁶ Those who die in their sins will not be forgiven of them

⁵⁶⁸ And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face; therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them. They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. (Hosea 5:5-6)

⁵⁶⁹ And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls. (Mosiah 3:25)

⁵⁷⁰ Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked. (Alma 34:34-35)

⁵⁷¹ For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge. (Mosiah 2:33)

⁵⁷² And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins. (2 Nephi 9:38)

⁵⁷³ Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works. (Alma 11:41)

⁵⁷⁴ ...the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness. (Alma 7:21)

⁵⁷⁵ But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection. (Mosiah 15:26)

⁵⁷⁶ Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (3 Nephi 12:20) And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God.... (Alma 7:21)

through the sacrifice of Christ.⁵⁷⁷ You can only enter into God's kingdom by reconciling to him in every way.⁵⁷⁸

You are automatically forgiven of what lies beyond your limits

When you act in accordance with your sincere idea of what is best, God forgives you of any errors in understanding, limits in capacity, or lack of resources. You are not accountable for circumstances beyond your control.⁵⁷⁹ Incapacity is innocence. It was by this law that Christ was sinless in spite of not beginning with perfect knowledge. Jesus was sinless in the sense that he lived up to what he understood, he did the best he had the capacity to do, and used the resources he had to the greatest long-term benefit. He did this while he had an incomplete understanding, limited capacity, and finite resources. You can, too.

You are accountable for your best, but your best will fluctuate based on circumstances beyond your control. Your best is subject to your circumstances, including the choices of others. When others don't do all that they can, you will not be able to do what you could if they did. God forgives you of the shortcomings that result from the action or inaction of others.⁵⁸⁰

Given all of this, it is vital to understand that "your best" is not a euphemism for any partial effort you arbitrarily decide to put forth. Remember that God's standard requires your whole soul—*all* of your heart, might, mind, and strength. You are only forgiven by God from what you *do not* know as long as you live according to what you *do* know.

Remember, to be perfect in Christ is to obey all you know, seek all you can, and instantly obey all you receive.⁵⁸¹ As long as you live the

⁵⁷⁷ But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God. (Mosiah 16:5)

⁵⁷⁸ And wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God; and I speak it according to the words of Christ; and I lie not. (Moroni 10:26)

⁵⁷⁹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings. And the iniquity and transgression of my holy laws and commandments I will visit upon the heads of those who hindered my work, unto the third and fourth generation, so long as they repent not, and hate me, saith the Lord God. (D&C 124:49-50)

⁵⁸⁰ Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings. (D&C 124:49)

⁵⁸¹ See Moroni 10:32, previously cited.

best you know, all of the time, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will atone for your prior willful sins and your present and future unknown sin.⁵⁸²

Freedom from guilt comes through similitude to Jesus

God constantly barrages us with signs that we need to adopt better ways of being. Guilt is a consequence of sin,⁵⁸³ appointed as such before the foundation of the world as a universal signal to point all people toward Christ,⁵⁸⁴ independent of their opportunity to learn about him.

Sin is transgression against yourself.⁵⁸⁵ When you turn away from what you believe is best, you turn towards your own harm.⁵⁸⁶ Sin is doing less than what you understand as best.⁵⁸⁷ Why would you willingly do what would lead to less than the best outcomes? Any rationalization for sin is a lie, and will make you feel just as guilty as the sin you attempt to justify. Only through freely admitting even the worst parts of oneself can one draw nearer to God and be healed.⁵⁸⁸ Hiding creates a downward spiral of decay and blindness.⁵⁸⁹

Too many people seek escape from guilt through means that do not include improvement. Absolution for guilt cannot be separated from improvement from flaws. Any escape from guilt that doesn't include improvement won't last. If you feel guilty about something, you should interpret your guilt as God's voice to you, inviting you to improve.⁵⁹⁰

What is right begins with what is real. The path to greatest joy is the one most aligned with reality. You can fight reality all you want, but

⁵⁸² For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.... (Hebrews 10:26)

⁵⁸³ And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity. (Moroni 10:22)

⁵⁸⁴ Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man. (Alma 42:18)

⁵⁸⁵ But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death. (Proverbs 8:36)

⁵⁸⁶ He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die. (Proverbs 19:16) A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; and if thou art faithful and walk in the paths of virtue before me, I will preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion. (D&C 25:2) The knowledge of the commandments of the Lord is the doctrine of life: and they that do things that please him shall receive the fruit of the tree of immortality. (Sirach 19:19)

⁵⁸⁷ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

⁵⁸⁸ And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness. (Ether 12:27-28)

⁵⁸⁹ And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth. (John 9:40-41)

⁵⁹⁰ Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. (Alma 29:5)

you will never win. Jonah tried to run away from God's will. Finding himself in the hellish outcome of his foolishness, he prayed to God in plain humility. He admitted, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." (Jonah 2:8) In order to make the best of any situation, you must first decide to get honest about what is really going on.

Guilt for sin in this life does not disappear after we die. In fact, the removal of the barrier between us and God at judgment vastly expands the guilt we will feel there for any deviation from the best we know here.⁵⁹¹

Justification and freedom from guilt are inescapably coupled. Justification can only occur as you live up to what you understand is best.⁵⁹² Those who become free from guilt through repentance can dwell in the presence of God in eternal peace.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness. (2 Nephi 9:14)

⁵⁹² Nevertheless, I give commandments, and many have turned away from my commandments and have not kept them. And now behold, I, the Lord, say unto you that ye are not justified, because these things are among you. (D&C 63:13, 19)

⁵⁹³ ...he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom... (Mormon 7:7)

9. Submit to God by learning and living his purpose

Submission to God requires knowing his purpose

Submission means to actively and singularly adopt the purpose of the person you submit to. You can't submit to someone whose purpose you do not know, whose purpose you do not actively adopt, or whose purpose you do not singularly prefer to anything else.

Very few people can describe their purpose. An inability to describe your purpose guarantees that you are living far below your privilege. Optimizing your desired outcome requires knowing at what you are aiming. Without a fixed target, how can you prioritize the decisions you make and actions you take? How can you weigh the relative cost and benefit of different options?

If you do not know what your overarching purpose is, you can be sure that it differs from God's. He knows exactly what he is aiming for, and it cannot be achieved by anyone with energy dedicated to anything else.

What is God's purpose?

God's purpose, plainly put, is maximal joy for all. Everything God is and does is dedicated to enabling all people to obtain and retain the greatest joy they are willing to receive. The Lord will do all he can to foster and promote our happiness. The most direct and effective way for God to help us advance our happiness, to the greatest possible ends, is through his assisting us in learning more about and becoming more like him.

The Lord's purpose is to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man.⁵⁹⁴ This is his overarching motive in all things. He has the desire and means to offer the path to eternal life to all who will walk it.⁵⁹⁵ In order to more fully appreciate immortality and obtain eternal life as fully as possible, it is necessary to understand what immortality and eternal life are, how they are different, and how they are both achieved.

Immortality is to live forever. However, having a state of immortality does not imply the quality of that life. Eternal life is the quality of someone's immortality. Eternal life is by degrees. It is to learn

⁵⁹⁴ For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)

⁵⁹⁵ Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life. (3 Nephi 15:9)

more about and live more of the character of Jesus Christ for the purpose of obtaining more of his joy. The more someone obtains the character of Jesus, the greater portion of his joy they also obtain and the higher the quality of their eternal life.

Just like God and creation, you also have a purpose—whether you’ve thought about it intentionally or not. Creation’s purpose is to provide the opportunity and means for all to increase in joy through enabling people to become as similar to Jesus as they are willing to.⁵⁹⁶ Your purpose is shown in how you actually live, not how you wish you lived or how you say you live. Your purpose is demonstrated by your character. Your character is who and how you actually are, not who and how you think you are or pretend to be in front of others. Your purpose is powered by your motive. Your motive is why you actually think, feel, and act as you do,⁵⁹⁷ not what you wish were the case, or wished others thought was the case. If you want to experience the blessings of God’s purpose, you have to actually think, feel, and act as he would in your place,⁵⁹⁸ not just wish you did.⁵⁹⁹ His purpose needs to become your purpose in so far as you understand it. The process of aligning your purpose with God’s is called submission.

Very few Christians have actually submitted to God

Extremely few professed Christians have actually submitted to God. All Christians say they believe in God, but those who submit to him don’t just say they believe in him⁶⁰⁰—they actually do his will.⁶⁰¹

God’s purpose is aligned with God’s will. Most Christians will seek God’s will when they want something from him, but to really submit to

⁵⁹⁶ Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (2 Nephi 2:25)

⁵⁹⁷ A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts To you priests who despise My name.... (Malachi 1:6, NKJV)

⁵⁹⁸ For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart? (Mosiah 5:13)

⁵⁹⁹ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:46-49)

⁶⁰⁰ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

⁶⁰¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

God means to seek his will above your own⁶⁰² and prefer to do his will even when—and especially if—it differs from your own.⁶⁰³

Some will only obey God when compelled by guilt, public shame, or dire consequences. If you only seek to do God's will when he forcefully corrects you, you have not submitted to him.⁶⁰⁴ Those who fear God will actively seek his will in all things, not just to do the minimum required to avoid his punishment.

You can find Christians who say they keep God's commandments, but you can superficially keep the rules you think God has given you without submitting to him in heart.⁶⁰⁵ You can go through the motions of obedience without adopting and submitting to the purpose. You can keep the letter of the law without thinking whatsoever about the spirit of it. Submission to God requires seeking, learning, and doing his will in *all* situations,⁶⁰⁶ not just those for which you have rules.⁶⁰⁷ Submission is an inward, consummate aligning of one's will with God's. Outward obedience to rules is superficial and lacking in motive, coverage, and direction.

Obedience to superficial practices is not the same as submission to God. You can pay lip service to God through the practice of outward commandments without ever paying the deeper, inward sacrifice⁶⁰⁸ of turning your desires towards him.⁶⁰⁹ What only *looks* holy on the outside will never make you *actually* holy on the inside.⁶¹⁰

All inward character improvements will also lead to outward, visible improvements. However, the same is not true in reverse. Surface-level

⁶⁰² But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? (Luke 17:7-8)

⁶⁰³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

⁶⁰⁴ Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools. (Proverbs 19:29) A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. (Proverbs 26:3)

⁶⁰⁵ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Matthew 23:23)

⁶⁰⁶ But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 32:9)

⁶⁰⁷ For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. (D&C 58:26)

⁶⁰⁸ The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalms 34:18)

⁶⁰⁹ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. (Matthew 15:8)

⁶¹⁰ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. (Matthew 23:25-26)

improvements based on specific instructions don't need to and typically won't change underlying character.

No amount of outward change can upgrade someone's motive.⁶¹¹ While obeying God's outward commandments can serve to teach you more about his motive and increase the reasons you have to trust him, no amount of outward obedience will change your heart. Only you can change what you desire, and you can't do that in indirect ways. Changing your desires requires your intentional choice.

Why should you submit to God?

God's blessings come through seeking his purpose.⁶¹² The Lord's purpose is the transcendent commandment, binding together one's conscience, one's understanding of his law, and the examples he has given⁶¹³ under a desire uniquely focused on him.⁶¹⁴

The more you serve God, the more you will come to know him. It is impossible to serve God without submitting to him.⁶¹⁵ It is through diligent service to God that we become his friends,⁶¹⁶ and eventually, his sons. The closer we become to God, the more he will reveal to us about ourselves, others, himself, and the rest of creation. Every increment of knowledge empowers us to serve him more effectively, as all power comes through faith in God.

⁶¹¹ For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing. (Moroni 7:6)

⁶¹² Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. (Proverbs 27:18)

⁶¹³ The Lord's examples include all of creation, but certainly his life and teachings, as well as the teachings of his servants.

⁶¹⁴ Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. (Psalm 119:1-3)

⁶¹⁵ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

⁶¹⁶ Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:15)

God's power is found in his purpose. Those who adopt the purpose of the Lord will encounter the power of the Lord⁶¹⁷ to the extent that they accurately seek, understand, and execute his will.⁶¹⁸

The more accurate your understanding of God's will⁶¹⁹ and the more fully you submit to it,⁶²⁰ the more of his blessings you will encounter. God's blessings are not arbitrary, and they don't come from an arbitrary set of actions. The blessings that God enjoys are the natural consequence of how he is. The blessings he enjoys come from his character, and we receive them to the extent that we become like him.⁶²¹ The more like Jesus we become, the more we will inherit every good thing that Jesus possesses.

The more we seek and submit to God's will in all things, the closer we draw to him.⁶²² He promises that the faithful will abide in and with him, entailing a host of blessings ranging from his literal presence to the qualities that attend it (peace,⁶²³ power, understanding,⁶²⁴ joy). Those who adopt the Lord's purpose will join him in progressing towards the greatest outcomes. Anyone doing anything different will necessarily experience something lesser—often significantly so.

⁶¹⁷ 4-5 He who makes the righteous king's purpose his own will encounters the blessings of a king, no matter his station. Power is found in the words, actions, and nature of a righteous king.... (Ecclesiastes 8, Author's Reflection)

⁶¹⁸ Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. Behold, I give unto you power; that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people. (Helaman 10:4-7)

⁶¹⁹ ...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. (John 16:23)

⁶²⁰ Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. (Luke 12:37)

⁶²¹ The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son told his faithful son: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." (Luke 15:31)

⁶²² If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. (John 12:26) Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:48)

⁶²³ We know that God arranges all things to work in synergy for the benefit of those who love him, which are those who align themselves to his purpose by following his example in all things. (Romans 8:28, Author's Reflection)

⁶²⁴ They that put their trust in him shall understand the truth: and such as be faithful in love shall abide with him: for grace and mercy is to his saints, and he hath care for his elect. (Wisdom of Solomon 3:9)

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the path to find, adopt, obtain, and fulfill the optimal purpose. God, knowing all things, has already discovered and adopted the purpose that optimizes for the greatest eternal outcomes. There is no other way than the Lord's way. There is no alternative path with the same or better outcomes .

The Lord's purpose is the only one that endures eternally. It is a unique solution to the puzzle of eternal meaning. Christ is the triumph over the tragedy of life. Unconditional preference for the Lord's desires in your life will establish you on a sure foundation⁶²⁵ strong enough to weather the unwelcome and inevitable disappointments that will overwhelm any lesser aim in life.⁶²⁶ Only in the purpose of Jesus can you find meaning that overcomes the torment of life.

Submit to the Lord by seeking what he wants instead of what you want

By nature, humans pursue motives, desire ends, and employ means that differ from what God would in their place.⁶²⁷ This is seen in the common approach to religious practices. Instead of viewing religion as an open-minded search for counsel from God, seeking for what they should change about what they think or feel or do, too many people view religion as the search for what they *already* think, feel, and do.⁶²⁸

All who approach God will be taught better things to seek, along with why to do so and how to do so. Your desires will only match the Lord's to the extent that you have become like him in all other ways. Until then, the quality of your relationship with God can be measured by how often he asks you to do what you do not want to, and how intensely you do not want to do it. What you really think about the Lord is best demonstrated in your response to what you least want to hear from him. The greatest love *to* God is shown in the moments when it is most difficult to feel love *from* God. Those who truly submit to God relish moments that prove that they will obey when it is hardest.

⁶²⁵ And now, my sons, remember; remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. (Helaman 5:12)

⁶²⁶ Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works. (Jacob 4:10)

⁶²⁷ ... for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. (Mark 8:33)

⁶²⁸ And now behold, [the devil] had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites; yea, insomuch that they had become exceedingly wicked; yea, the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness, and did trample under their feet the commandments of God, and did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver. (Helaman 6:31)

While most professed Christians primarily seek God for help in obtaining their own desires,⁶²⁹ those who submit to God instead seek his direction and assistance in achieving his desires. God knows the path to all blessings, but those who only seek God for what they already desire are barely scratching the surface of the blessings that the Lord desires for his children. God knows of blessings better than what man can contrive,⁶³⁰ and these can only be obtained by those who seek God without preconceived notions of what his blessings might be.

Each person has the power to choose to follow Christ by willingly and fully pursuing and submitting to his purpose.⁶³¹ Those who live the gospel actively seek the will of God.⁶³² They ask what he wants early and often, consistently and diligently study the scriptures, and frequently reflect on their lives seeking feedback on how they can improve. They do not draw arbitrary distinctions between spiritual and temporal things in their lives, knowing that the will of God is for every moment of every day to be as good and purpose driven as it can be.

Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works. (Jacob 4:10)

How frequently do you seek God's will, independent of your own? How do you feel on occasions when you realize that God's will differs from your own? How do you respond to suggestions of how you could improve?

Those who serve God prefer God's will to their own.⁶³³ Disciples of Christ dedicate themselves to his purpose.⁶³⁴ They follow the Lamb's example without exception or reservation (see Revelation 14:4). While we are indeed commanded to ask God for those things which we

⁶²⁹ They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall. (D&C 1:16)

⁶³⁰ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (2 Corinthians 2:9)

⁶³¹ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:11-13)

⁶³² Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. (Proverbs 23:19)

⁶³³ The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. (Luke 6:40)

⁶³⁴ ...it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them. (D&C 98:4)

need⁶³⁵ or desire,⁶³⁶ our requests are only effectual inasmuch as they align with the will and character of the Father and the Son.⁶³⁷

Do you mostly pray only when you want something? The gospel is not just a tool you deploy when convenient to you, but the demonstration of how to live and what to become in order to obtain the greatest joy. The way of life is a master, not a servant. God doesn't exist to beckon to your requests like a genie, but to guide you in how and why to become like he is so that you can obtain what he has and enjoy what he does. Those who live the gospel fully do not just call on God to help them get what they want, or to help them when they are in distress, but seek and follow his will at all times and in all places.

Those who fully adopt and submit to the purpose of the Lord will enter into and abide in his rest⁶³⁸ and overcome the world.⁶³⁹ Those who insist on seeking their own desires will have to settle for far less.⁶⁴⁰

Submission to purpose transcends obedience to rules

Many fool themselves into thinking they have submitted to God when they have only submitted to a limited list of what they believe to be his rules. Religions offer you a short list of what is prohibited and prescribed. Unfortunately, this mindset creates an underdeveloped ability to actively seek out God's will, having replaced the sophisticated question of what God's will is with a simple yes or no match to a fixed list of rules. Submission to God doesn't consist of adopting a few rules and doing whatever you feel like in all other things. The gospel of Jesus is the way of life, and life doesn't pause, stop, or take breaks.

Submission to God doesn't just consist of obedience to instructions, but entails subordination to his purpose in all things and at all times. While specific instructions describe minimum standards, one's purpose defines the ideal under all possible circumstances. Submission advances a person's aim from minimalism to maximalism. A life directed by a

⁶³⁵ O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him. (Mormon 9:27)

⁶³⁶ ...O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires. (Ether 3:2)

⁶³⁷ And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. (3 Nephi 18:20)

⁶³⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29)

⁶³⁹ Make my burden your own, and in me you will find freedom from the burdens of this world. I seek and do the Father's will in all things, he teaches me more of how he is, and in him, I overcome the world; Live as you understand me to be, I will teach you more about myself, and the truth will make you free. (Matthew 11:29, Author's Reflection)

⁶⁴⁰ And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. (D&C 88:32)

finite list of rules will only advance as much as *necessary*, but one subordinated to God's purpose will advance as much as *possible*.

Submission is a question of adopting God's purpose, not just obeying his instructions. The idea of obedience implies the existence of instructions that can be obeyed. However, adopting God's purpose requires you to realize that his purpose is higher than the instructions given to help you fulfill it. By definition, a specific instruction can only prescribe behavior under specific circumstances.

In order to adopt God's purpose, you'll need to better understand his purpose, which is to achieve the greatest benefit of the world, actively assessing and doing what is of greatest long-term worth all of the time. As you do, you'll find that the "little" decisions you make from moment to moment have incredible effect on both your short and long term well-being. You may also be surprised to find that what is best at least sometimes violates the rules you have lived by so far!

It is possible to think you are keeping God's commandments when you are actually fighting his purpose.⁶⁴¹ In the same way that activity does not imply progress, religious activity does not imply that you are serving God's purpose.⁶⁴² Many common religious activities fail to advance God's goals, and some even actively work against them.⁶⁴³ The religious in Jesus' time predominantly opposed him and were the perpetrators of his murder, and too many Christians believe that they would never do such a thing when Jesus expressly warned that many of them would fight him while thinking they are worshipping him.⁶⁴⁴

Learning and living God's purpose, for the same reasons he does, is greater than all the rules-based commandments. The Ten

⁶⁴¹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9)

⁶⁴² I bear witness that they have the requisite fervor for God, but lack the required depth of application. Being ignorant of the form and function of God's righteousness, they seek to build their righteousness externally while remaining internally unchanged....You should not expect Christ to lift you into heaven while your heart remains in the manner of the world and fixed on the things of this world—this isn't how faith or righteousness work. Nor should you expect Christ to raise you from the dead while you still do and desire what only leads to death. But, as it is written, the word is not just something you say or do, but also something you sincerely and deeply feel. This is the word of faith, which we proclaim: Even if you proclaim by your external works that Jesus is the Lord, and that God raised him from the dead, you will only be saved if you have also fully conformed your internal desire and decisions to him, just as he conformed his internal desire and decisions to the Father. For while profession of belief comes from what you say and do, righteousness unto salvation can only come from what you desire and why. (Romans 10:2-3, 6-10, Author's Reflection)

⁶⁴³ They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

⁶⁴⁴ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46) Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

Commandments are the capstone of the law of Moses. Notably, all of them are rules. Two of the commandments greater than these, according to Jesus, are to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39) The Lord said that “all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40) hang on these two commandments, which are both principles, not rules.

Submit to God by loving him

God is worthy of your submission, as proven by his unlimited love towards the children of men. We can have confidence in loving him and submitting to him because he “loved us first.” (John 4:19)

The love of God enables God’s purpose. God’s purpose is to maximize joy, which he accomplishes by maximizing improvement. Love edifies.⁶⁴⁵ Love improves. Love serves God’s purpose by making things better.⁶⁴⁶ What does not edify doesn’t come from⁶⁴⁷ or lead to God,⁶⁴⁸ because God is love.⁶⁴⁹ It is through the love of God that this world was created and through the love of God that Jesus came here to live and die to enable us to grow in similarity to him in life and to be resurrected into immortality after death.⁶⁵⁰

God’s love is much more than a feeling. God’s love is a measure of how much you are willing to suffer for the benefit of another. While many people would describe love as a feeling, the only feeling the Lord demonstrated in his example of love was suffering. His demonstration consisted of caring completely for the welfare of others without any special consideration for himself. It was this example he explicitly commanded his disciples to emulate. We love God by submitting to him.

It is hard to find a Christian who takes offense at the several scriptures where God commands us to love him with all our heart, might, mind, and strength.⁶⁵¹ It is equally hard to find a Christian who submits to God and actually does so, and increasingly difficult to find

⁶⁴⁵Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. (1 Corinthians 8:1, NKJV)

⁶⁴⁶ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

⁶⁴⁷ And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. (D&C 50:23)

⁶⁴⁸ ...they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing.... (Moroni 7:28)

⁶⁴⁹ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8)

⁶⁵⁰ Ancient prophets were shown a tree of life in vision that “was a representation of the love of God.” (1 Nephi 11:25) “[It’s] fruit was desirable to make one happy,” (1 Nephi 8:10) and “most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God....” (1 Nephi 15:36) Eternal life “is the greatest of all the gifts of God.” (D&C 14:7)

⁶⁵¹ For example: “Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him.” (D&C 59:5)

one who thinks it is even *possible* to do so. Who do you know that loves him with all their heart, might, mind, and strength?

Instances of sin are always situational, but the cause of sin never is. Rebellion against God is never about the situation that reveals it, but about a lack of love for God. All sin is betrayal of the love of God, showing you what you prefer to his love. When you sin, you show what you love more than God. While you love something more than him, you are not submitted to him.

Every Christian says that they love God, but what do they say through the choices they make?⁶⁵² Love is a measure of what you are willing to sacrifice for another. You won't find a professed Christian who doesn't think they love God, but how much are they willing to sacrifice for him? Every sin is an example of something you are not willing to sacrifice to God.⁶⁵³ How many do you know who sacrifice everything they have or could have, and all that they are or could be for the benefit of God? How many bring about that benefit by "doing it unto one of the least of these" and therefore doing it unto him? (Matthew 25:40)

Submit to God by serving others

It is the tendency of mankind to seek self-benefit. The only remedy for the deep-seated selfishness of mankind is to willingly submit to God.⁶⁵⁴ In opposition to man's natural motive—which is to get everything he can, irrespective of what it costs others—God's motive is to maximize the joy of all, irrespective of what it costs him.⁶⁵⁵

The transition from one's natural state into a servant of God occurs as one learns and lives to maximize the purpose of God, which is to provide everything necessary so that all people progress as far as they are willing to into greater and longer-lasting happiness.⁶⁵⁶

You cannot serve God without serving others.⁶⁵⁷ The consideration of others above self is a nonnegotiable quality of conversion.⁶⁵⁸ The

⁶⁵² This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. (Matthew 15:8)

⁶⁵³ If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments. (D&C 42:29)

⁶⁵⁴ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

⁶⁵⁵ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

⁶⁵⁶ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

⁶⁵⁷ And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. (Mosiah 2:17)

⁶⁵⁸ But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:32)

converted do not seek their own benefit before the benefit of others.⁶⁵⁹ In doing this they walk in the example and after the order of God.

The Lord directly explained that he expects us to emulate his love for all people, commanding us to practice it in the same form it was demonstrated.⁶⁶⁰ God's purpose is for you to love him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength,⁶⁶¹ and to love others⁶⁶² as God loves you.⁶⁶³ Our happiness here and hereafter is maximized to the extent that we take advantage of God's love by becoming more like him⁶⁶⁴ and demonstrate God's love by helping others to do the same.⁶⁶⁵

Submit in all things

Your degree of submission to God will always be limited to your expectation of what he might ask of you, including the circumstances under which he may ask it. Even when you submit to God with all of your heart, your agreement of service to him will include tacit limitations in your expectation of the scope or difficulty of what God will ask of you.

Almost all professed Christians have various limits in their submission to God. Their surrender to God is based on their assumption that he would never subject them to pain, suffering, or sacrifice beyond limits of their own invention. They are willing to submit to God, but only as long as he only asks what they are already willing to give, and as long as it doesn't hurt more than they are willing to suffer.

⁶⁵⁹ So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-16)

⁶⁶⁰ This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

⁶⁶¹ Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him. (D&C 59:5)

⁶⁶² Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God. (D&C 82:19) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

⁶⁶³ This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

⁶⁶⁴ And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

⁶⁶⁵ As you allow the love of God to fill you and flow out to others, you will experience more and longer lasting joy than is available in any other way. "And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul." (1 Nephi 11:21-23)

Some people overlook their lack of faith in God by persuading themselves that there are things he would never ask of them. For example, many assume that God will always provide them with food, shelter, and clothing. Like all other things, the necessities of life align with God's purpose as long as they are not displaced by anything more important. You are not here to earn your daily bread,⁶⁶⁶ but to glorify God⁶⁶⁷ by learning and demonstrating what he would think, feel, and do in your place.⁶⁶⁸ The latter should govern the former.

Contrary to popular belief, God never promises to provide what you will eat, drink, or wear.⁶⁶⁹ The scriptures are replete with examples of holy men that God commanded to go without food and water,⁶⁷⁰ to go naked,⁶⁷¹ to give their own lives,⁶⁷² and to experience the violent loss of their loved ones.⁶⁷³ Instead of promising them continuous carnal security, God promises that what he provides the faithful will always be

⁶⁶⁶ And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:2-4)

⁶⁶⁷ Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

⁶⁶⁸ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

⁶⁶⁹ "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:25-26) This passage does not say that God will bless his faithful with the same blessings he affords to the fowls, but rather that he cares more about them than he does the birds. The fact that the most beloved Son suffered more than anyone else disproves the idea that the more God loves someone, the less they will suffer. If anything, the opposite is true. While the Lord punctuates this passage in verse 33 with the promise to "add unto" the righteous every needful thing they were deprived of, he obviously does not always do this in life, as many righteous people face terrible deprivation at great costs up to and including their lives. Justice is always eventually paid out, but not always during this life.

⁶⁷⁰ See the example of Elijah, who had to suffer the effects of the famine he exercised the power of God to cause (see 1 Kings 17), or Jeremiah, who suffered hunger and thirst in the siege of Jerusalem that he had prophesied would come.

⁶⁷¹ And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; (Isaiah 20:3)

⁶⁷² Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. (D&C 98:14)

⁶⁷³ God killed Ezekiel's wife as a sign to Israel, Job's children were killed because of his righteousness, and Abraham was commanded to kill Isaac.

at least as good as what it costs them.⁶⁷⁴ God can provide opportunities for you to secure sufficient for your needs by the sweat of your brow, provide you with those who can if for some reason you cannot,⁶⁷⁵ enlist wildlife to help if people are in short supply,⁶⁷⁶ send angels with food,⁶⁷⁷ or even rain down bread from heaven. But even if he doesn't,⁶⁷⁸ it is wiser to seek his purposes anyway, even if it costs you everything else.⁶⁷⁹

All possible constraints on what you are willing to sacrifice are too numerous to list, but here is a small sample:

- I will submit to God as long as I have enough food to eat.
- I will submit to God as long as I get enough sleep.
- I will submit to God as long as I have a nice place to live.
- I will submit to God as long as I get to keep my job.
- I will submit to God as long as my family is taken care of.
- I will submit to God as long as I am comfortable.
- I will submit to God as long as I don't look crazy.
- I will submit to God as long as people like me.
- I will submit to God as long as I am not alone.

The best way to test your submission to God is to think of the thing you would least want to do and ask yourself if you would do it if God

⁶⁷⁴ "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." (Matthew 19:29) "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30) "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." (Luke 18:29-30) Note how, in the foregoing scriptures, the Lord does not indicate that those who sacrifice for him will receive back what was lost, but more and better than what was lost. There are very few examples of those who were repaid in the same currency they paid (such as Job), and many more examples of those who were not.

⁶⁷⁵ During his ministry, Jesus was supported by "Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." (Luke 8:3)

⁶⁷⁶ And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. (1 Kings 17:4)

⁶⁷⁷ And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. (1 Kings 19:5-7)

⁶⁷⁸ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to break God's commandment by order of king Nebuchadnezzar, even at penalty of death: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (Daniel 3:17-18)

⁶⁷⁹ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)

asked you. You can't claim that you prioritize God over all else while you still believe there are things he wouldn't ask you to do. Not only has Jesus *not* promised you limits on what he will ask, he has also explicitly told you that following him will cost you everything less than he is.⁶⁸⁰

Submission to God includes an unconditional agreement with all things he could ask of you, and an admission that all things really means *all things*. The sacrifice of all things is required to become like the Lord—he who has sacrificed all things for us. Those who are unwilling to sacrifice all things—even their lives⁶⁸¹—for the Lord's purpose are unworthy of him and the blessings he provides.⁶⁸² The Lord's servants seek above all else to make his goodness more apparent to all, whether in life or death.⁶⁸³ Paul counted “all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8) because to obtain the faith by which he could enjoy the knowledge of the Lord, he had to suffer the loss of all lesser things. Until you do the same, you cannot confidently assert that you fully trust God, because you lack the currency necessary to quantify it.

God expects you to serve him at all hazards, up to and including your life.⁶⁸⁴ Always live as you sincerely believe the Lord would in your place, even if it kills you.⁶⁸⁵ Those who love God more than their lives will be loved by God unto eternal life.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁰ And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:25-26, 33)

⁶⁸¹ Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. (D&C 103:27) By the same principle, don't preoccupy yourself with the preservation of your life, what you eat and drink in the body, or how you will clothe it. What truly sustains your life is greater than what you eat and drink, and the garment God has to give you is greater than your body itself. (Matthew 6:25, Author's Reflection)

⁶⁸² Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. (D&C 98:14-15)

⁶⁸³ According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. (Philippians 1:20)

⁶⁸⁴ And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name's sake, shall find it again, even life eternal. Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. (D&C 98:13-15)

⁶⁸⁵ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. (John 12:24-26)

⁶⁸⁶ Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life... (John 10:17)

Adopting God's purpose as your own is a consummate sacrifice. God's purpose requires all of your heart, soul, and mind.⁶⁸⁷ When you are fully submitted to his purpose, there is nothing remaining in you for anything else.⁶⁸⁸

Conditional submission reveals a lack of trust in God

Conditional submission merely reveals what you love more than God. Any supposed submission to God that is subject to conditions is not submission at all. As long as there are limits in what you are willing to sacrifice for God, your actual submission is to what you are unwilling to sacrifice.

The sacrifices God requires you to be precisely designed for your greatest possible benefit. As such, there are no alternative or replacement sacrifices you can offer instead. God's requested sacrifices reveal to us the limits of our trust in and desire for him, enabling us to address flaws we would otherwise not even know about. As everything God asks of you is in your personal best interest, the existence of anything he could ask you to do that you would not do indicates a limit of your trust in him, his love for you, and his purpose.

The decision to adopt the Lord's purpose is a one-time decision, not something you re-evaluate on a case-by-case basis. When you find yourself hesitating in your eagerness to adopt God's purpose, you have discovered the next limit of your trust in him.

Incrementally achieving unconditional submission to God through constant submission to all you currently know

Submission to God is not complete, even when a person sincerely commits to following God in whatever way he reveals in the future. Submission to what you know and expect isn't the same as unconditional submission. You can believe that you would obey anything that God says and still find yourself disobeying something he says that you did not anticipate.

True submission to God occurs when your decision to submit to God transcends all conditions, constraints, and exclusions.⁶⁸⁹ When you achieve unconditional submission to God, you believe sufficiently in his love, knowledge, and other character qualities that you unfailingly

⁶⁸⁷ Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. (Matthew 22:36-38)

⁶⁸⁸ Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. (D&C 4:2)

⁶⁸⁹ And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God. (Mosiah 5:5)

assume that anything he asks of you is worth instantly and joyfully pursuing with your whole soul. You know and trust his character enough that no possible information would ever be rejected, resented, disobeyed, or ignored by you. The brother of Jared reached such a state with God, which is why God revealed greater things to him than he had to anyone prior.⁶⁹⁰ The Lord promised to reveal the same things to any who exercise the same faith as the brother of Jared.⁶⁹¹ What milestone did the brother of Jared reach in his faith? He believed anything God could say before he said it. He had attained unconditional submission to God.⁶⁹²

You grow towards true unconditional submission to God through achieving and maintaining submission to God in all things that you can presently imagine. Initial submission to God consists of correcting any differences you know about between how you are and how you understand him to be. Thereafter, every change you make will consist of differences that you did not and could not have seen before. God is infinite and eternal, and unless you are precisely as he is, you cannot know ahead of time what he might ask of you, or how hard it may be. You achieve unconditional submission to God through repeatedly promoting God's will and character above your own in all things, submitting to everything you currently know and continuing to submit as he reveals more of himself to you until you trust him under all circumstances possible in life.

Your submission to God grows through the maintenance of your reconciliation to him in spite of greater opposition.⁶⁹³ As you proceed through life, God will incrementally expose you to greater degrees of sacrifice than you previously expected in order to give you opportunities to advance in your reconciliation to and trust in him. The passage of time will bring additional information about God and new life circumstances, and in each moment you will face the decision of whether to remain reconciled to God or not. Submission to God becomes more difficult to maintain as God exposes you to more of life's difficulties and asks of you greater sacrifices. Life's circumstances magnify the details of your desires, articulating and revealing the

⁶⁹⁰ ...never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared. (Ether 4:4)

⁶⁹¹ And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are. (Ether 4:7)

⁶⁹² See Ether 3:11-13, cited previously.

⁶⁹³ And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. (Abraham 3:25)

inclination of your heart beyond what you would otherwise see.⁶⁹⁴ Each situation you face in life can be used to illustrate the limits of your submission and give you the opportunity to submit more completely.

As in all things, the Lord set the example of increasing and unfettered submission to God. The Lord's entire life was a pattern of learning more about the Father and bringing himself into submission to what he learned. Jesus never quit in spite of the fact that his mortal life was an unbroken chain of new requests from the Father that were harder than he had expected. He did not say it was finished until he died.

Submission gets harder, but also easier

When you first decide to continuously submit to God, you will feel as if your life has become a never-ending queue of seemingly impossible sacrifices. If you find yourself feeling this way, lean on your trust in God and soldier on. As you continuously submit to God, you will find that sacrifices of similar difficulty as those you have made before become easier and easier, until you don't even notice them. While God will continue providing you with new challenges that stretch you and give you an opportunity to grow, the pace will slow as you increase in your capacity and your trust in God.

Submit at all times

Your desires must be uniquely focused on the purpose and priorities of God at all times. A part-time purpose is no purpose at all. Submission to God is a full-time endeavor. Being a disciple⁶⁹⁵ and friend⁶⁹⁶ of God is a full-time job.⁶⁹⁷ There are no breaks, exceptions, or time off. When it comes to submission, sometimes isn't good enough. Those who submit sometimes might feel like they know the Lord, but he will tell them he doesn't know them.⁶⁹⁸ In place of the

⁶⁹⁴ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21)

⁶⁹⁵ And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

⁶⁹⁶ A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

⁶⁹⁷ Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times; (D&C 59:11) Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. (Psalms 106:3)

⁶⁹⁸ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

commendations they expect, they will receive terrible punishments.⁶⁹⁹ Those who are inconsistent in their submission to God have not actually submitted to him, and cannot receive or retain the blessings of those who have.⁷⁰⁰

Submission to God is without time limit.⁷⁰¹ Disciples of Christ work at his purpose for as long as it takes.⁷⁰² When the Lord hung on the cross, he did not impose time limits, but was willing to remain for as long as it took to accomplish the Father's will. Those submitted to the Lord follow his example, living their lives in complete devotion to his purpose until they are taken.

The Lord gives us daily opportunities to take up his purpose. He teaches us how he is, so that we can choose to be the same way. He gives us uncountable opportunities, day after day, to choose the eternal joy of all mankind over our own immediate comfort and pleasure. He gives us daily experiences to fill out and expand our understanding of how godliness looks and feels at every scope of existence under the guidance of his Holy Spirit.

The daily sacrifice

In more than one scripture, we are challenged to "choose ye this day whom ye will serve."⁷⁰³ You must renew your commitment to follow Jesus each day.⁷⁰⁴

⁶⁹⁹ Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:42-51)

⁷⁰⁰ And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:59-62)

⁷⁰¹ I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end. (Psalms 119:112)

⁷⁰² And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:27-32)

⁷⁰³ See Moses 6:33, Joshua 24:15, and Alma 30:8

⁷⁰⁴ ...as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. (Romans 6:19)

Every moment of every day provides you with the opportunity to submit to the Lord's purpose by prioritizing what is best for everyone and everything above all else. During the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness, the Lord explained that the tests that they faced even included how much manna they collected for food.⁷⁰⁵ Under the law of Moses, certain sacrifices were prescribed to be made on a daily and continual basis.⁷⁰⁶

You shouldn't expect God to reveal his purpose to you in big things until and unless you consistently seek his purpose in the little things.⁷⁰⁷ Expecting God to use you in accomplishing his purpose in future tasks is folly unless you are seeking his purpose in the tasks before you in your present daily life.⁷⁰⁸ In both cases, you should learn that obtaining and effecting what lies beyond your present situation can only be reached by fulfilling the ideal in your present situation.⁷⁰⁹

Noticing and shifting priorities that can displace God's purpose

It is typical to have priorities that compete with following Jesus, even if you don't realize it. Sometimes, these priorities are things you know are not related to following Jesus but don't realize you are placing ahead of Jesus. At other times, these competitors are things that you think are the same as following Jesus, such as your sacrifices for family, church, or service to others. It is important to scrutinize your priorities in order to prepare yourself for any adjustments God may ask you to make, particularly if those adjustments infringe upon what you presently believe to be his will.

In order to carry out God's will in your life, you have to map his transcendent purpose down to your routine tasks. However, the danger in any routine is losing sight of its intended purpose. Even things as valuable as family, church, and service can become idols if they take such an unquestionable priority in your life that you cease consideration of long-term benefit, or would be unwilling to adjust them if God showed you the need to.

⁷⁰⁵ Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. (Exodus 16:4)

⁷⁰⁶ After this manner ye shall offer daily, throughout the seven days, the meat of the sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord: it shall be offered beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering. (Numbers 28:24)

⁷⁰⁷ Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise. (Alma 37:6)

⁷⁰⁸ Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. (D&C 64:33)

⁷⁰⁹ Let no man count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things. (D&C 123:15)

At all times, all priorities in the life of a disciple of Christ must remain subordinate to Christ himself. Conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ consists of total abandonment of prior motives and purposes in preference to the motive and purpose of Jesus Christ. You “come into the fold of God” by covenanting to do, think, and feel as you understand he would “at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death...” (Mosiah 18:7, 9)

To promote God to the highest priority requires you to revisit and restructure every other priority in your life. To submit to God requires you to sever your priorities and reattach them only if and when they fit into what Jesus would do in your place. Anything that does not serve as a means to God’s purpose must be removed from your life, and anything that does must be added in order of priority from greatest to least importance, impact and benefit.

There are two ways we can violate God’s prioritization in our lives. First, we can include in our priorities things that do not matter to him. This certainly includes what most regard as sin, but also includes a surprising number of potential activities or desires that few regard as immoral. Too many Christians believe that if they practice what their sect dictates is most important in the relevant areas of their lives, God will bless, approve, or at least allow whatever they choose to do in the rest.⁷¹⁰ We also violate God’s prioritization in our lives whenever we rank things at a higher or lower priority than he would. Human nature tends to value things more or less than God does, typically to a great degree, and most people do not live a consistent and intentional prioritization in life. The Lord reveals to us more accurate measures of value through his gospel which establishes and modifies the hierarchy of importance in the understanding of those who surrender to him.

While adjusting your priorities to place God above all else may seem like a radical change, most people will find that there is still room for everything good to remain in their lives. Sooner or later, however, God will test your priorities, as he has for every one of his faithful servants. God will test whether he comes first in your life by asking you to sacrifice what is most important to you. God’s tests can be as drastic and obvious as they were with Abraham and Job, or as subtle and subconscious as they were with many others.⁷¹¹ The subtle and

⁷¹⁰ This is expressly contradicted by the following passage: “But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?” (Luke 17:7-8)

⁷¹¹ One such example is found in the test Nicodemus faced when he had to choose how to respond to the fact that Jesus obviously had greater wisdom and knowledge than any of the elders of Israel. While appropriately responding by seeking him out to ask him the religious questions he had failed to answer himself, he failed the test by approaching Jesus in disguise at night out of fear of being seen doing so.

subconscious tests tend to reveal as much or more about your deepest desires as do the drastic and obvious ones. Always be on the lookout for these tests.⁷¹²

The worth of prioritizing God isn't about gaining some arbitrary favor with him. The favor of God comes in proportional relationship to those that become like him through adopting his purpose.⁷¹³ The only things that will endure eternally are those which accord with the Lord's purpose. If you choose in the time of trial to cling to anything that ought to be subordinate to God, you guarantee that you will not have it eternally.

This life is designed as an opportunity to choose to what extent you will submit to God,⁷¹⁴ and it is effective in its aims. All people will be tested to see where their limit lies. Those who serve God above all else will receive greater eternal joy than those who do not.

Submission may require confrontation or silence, but in both cases, it results in peace

The pursuit of God's purpose will require you to increasingly engage others in an attempt to persuade them to do their best.⁷¹⁵ Paradoxically, as you grow in your desire and capacity to make the world a better place, you will also find yourself increasingly submitting to the actions and desires of others. The more effort you exert in pursuit of God's purposes, the more often you will discover the limits of how willing others are to do the same. In all outcomes that require the participation of others, you will be limited by the choices they make.

Respecting the choices of others is an important form of submission to God, and a critical one to master in order to receive the peace he promises to give those who serve him fully. While you can't receive God's peace without proactively seeking out all potential opportunities to help others improve, you likewise can't receive God's peace without learning to recognize when you have done everything you can under the present circumstances.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or in the morning; Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. (Mark 13:34-36)

⁷¹³ Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God...(1 Nephi 17:35)

⁷¹⁴ And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; (Abraham 3:25)

⁷¹⁵ ...he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance. (2 Nephi 26:27) Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. (Jeremiah 20:9)

⁷¹⁶ Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed (D&C 123:17)

The Lord is the ultimate example of learning how to do all you can to help others, recognizing when you have done all you can, and feeling peace in doing all you can. Despite the fact that the Lord Jesus enjoyed more supernatural power and advanced knowledge than any man who had ever lived, his life portrays a seemingly unlimited allowance for the agency of those around him.⁷¹⁷ He did everything he could to help persuade everyone he could to improve as much as he could, but he did not force anyone to do anything. How was he able to be so yielding to the agency of others in spite of his awareness of the benefits that they could obtain if they would simply yield to his view?

God is in ultimate control of the world he created.⁷¹⁸ We ought to assume that the situations in which we find ourselves are ordained by a perfectly knowing, loving, and capable deity for our own benefit until and unless we have good reasons to believe otherwise. He provides us with the opportunity to do all things that lie in our power to bring about the greatest outcomes, but he also asks us to recognize and honor the choice of others to reject our best effort. As Jesus submitted to Herod,⁷¹⁹ Pilate,⁷²⁰ and the crowds wanting him killed, we too should recognize situations when there is nothing more we can do to help the situation.

Part of submission to God is being able to recognize and willing to admit when there are others who control what we cannot.⁷²¹ No power held by man exists outside of what God has given.⁷²² Our attitude towards those who exercise authority over us reflects the level of trust we have in God.⁷²³ When the Lord was imprisoned, he told Pilate that all his perceived power was actually just from God.⁷²⁴ One way that the Lord showed obedience to his Father was by submitting to the people that the Father had ordained to cause him strife.⁷²⁵ Just as doing all you can to advance God's purpose requires faith in God, so does submitting

⁷¹⁷ ...God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. (Romans 9:22)

⁷¹⁸ But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. (2 Nephi 2:24)

⁷¹⁹ Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. (Luke 23:9)

⁷²⁰ And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. (Matthew 27:14)

⁷²¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Romans 13:1-2)

⁷²² Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (Titus 3:1-2)

⁷²³ Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. (1 Peter 2:18)

⁷²⁴ Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. (John 19:11)

⁷²⁵ Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

to those who continue to oppose God's purpose in spite of all you can do.

Beyond developing and proving our faith in God, our patience in the situations God has ordained can also provide a witness to others of God's goodness.⁷²⁶ Calmness can offer a louder argument in favor of your cause than any reasons you might provide.⁷²⁷ Peter taught this principle in the specific context of wives married to husbands that do not believe.⁷²⁸ Furthermore, being able to formulate and deliver convincing arguments requires you to be in a rational—not emotional—state. Defaulting to an emotional state will rob you of your ability to think clearly, make good arguments, and will cause you to make consequential mistakes. If you can't remain in a rational, impartial state, you are better off remaining silent.

In issues of submission, it is important to avoid allowing the good desire to respect others' agency to mask the evil desire to avoid confrontation. Submission becomes a righteous option only after you've done all you can to make your best argument in favor of what you see as best. It is abominable to God when people who pretend to believe in him hide their cowardice in a cloak of pretended godly patience or false submission.

Christlike courage comes from Christlike purpose

As you learn more and more about Jesus' purpose, and as you adopt Jesus' purpose in all things as far as you understand it, you will find yourself experiencing many of the blessings of being in his presence while still being here in mortality. One such blessing is the courage imparted to the righteous in the presence of God, a trait exemplified by Stephen, who courageously continued to preach the gospel of Christ to those who were in the very act of murdering him, seeing the glory of God as he was stoned by those he attempted to help.⁷²⁹ As you dedicate yourself to the Lord's purpose, you will find unshakeable confidence in all you do, as if you were standing in God's presence in the protection of his heavenly host.

A striking difference in strength, endurance, and confidence exists between those who have adopted the purpose of Christ and those who

⁷²⁶ Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake....For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: (1 Peter 2:13, 15)

⁷²⁷ Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. (Phillipians 4:5)

⁷²⁸ Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; (1 Peter 3:1)

⁷²⁹ When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him.... (Acts 7:54-58)

have not. There is an absence of fear in those who love what is best, and an abundance of fear in those who love anything less.⁷³⁰ Cowards do not do great things because they lack the clear conscience and faith required to do them. Courage stems from an integral heart and strong confidence in the justice of God.

Many battles come down to the simple question of who has the worthiest purpose. A strong purpose can overcome many differences in resources, skill, and capacity.⁷³¹ So few people adopt a purpose worth dying for that most people can't even imagine the unstoppable force such a person becomes.⁷³²

Live as if you are under the complete care and control of Jesus, because as long as you are on his errand, you are. If you are acting in full alignment with the Lord's purpose, as you sincerely understand it, you can expect and will receive his full support.⁷³³ Your courage will not wane, no matter the magnitude of afflictions you might face, because you will have deep confidence that whatever you face is precisely the best situation for you according to God's perfect wisdom and infinite

⁷³⁰ The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion. (Proverbs 28:1)

⁷³¹ Now in this case the Lamanites did fight exceedingly; yea, never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceedingly great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning. And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger. Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church. And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion. And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage. And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage. And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon. (Alma 43:43-50)

⁷³² And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had come up, that the people of Limhi began to fall upon them from their waiting places, and began to slay them. And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey. And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them; yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight. (Mosiah 20:9-11)

⁷³³ For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. (D&C 76:5)

love.⁷³⁴ This does not mean your task will be easy or your victory obvious. It does mean that those unconditionally submitted to God will find that God will provide every needful thing so that, whether in pleasure or pain, victory or defeat, or death or life, they will demonstrate his goodness to those with and against them, according to his purposes, will, and wisdom.

⁷³⁴ This was the attitude Jesus had when he told Peter not to fight for him at his arrest: "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matthew 26:52-54) Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. (D&C 121:45-46)

10. Choosing to be born again through choosing to submit to God

What does it mean to be born again?

It is quite common in Christianity to discuss the necessity of being “born again.” After all, the Lord himself instructed that it was impossible to even see the kingdom of God “except a man be born again...” (John 3:3). What does it really mean to be born again and what are its effects?

To be born again refers to the combination of a choice you make to submit completely to God and the gift of the Holy Ghost that God gives you as a result.

The gift of the Holy Ghost is access to a greater breadth, depth, quantity, and quality of information from God beyond what all people have access to through the Light of Christ.⁷³⁵ The Light of Christ is a source of information possessed by all people through physical birth.⁷³⁶ The Light of Christ actuates our understanding,⁷³⁷ enabling moral judgment and critical thinking.⁷³⁸ Factors before birth dictate the quantity of the Light of Christ an individual has to start, and their decisions according to or against that influence determine whether it waxes or wanes during life. The channel of the Light of Christ is limited in bandwidth and content. These limitations are demonstrated when you experience unanswered prayers and unmet requests to God. Each barrier you experience in the information you request from God indicates a limit in the window of what you are willing and able to receive from him.

By fully surrendering how you feel, think, and act in preference to how Jesus would in your place, you gain access to the gift of the Holy

⁷³⁵ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. (1 Corinthians 12:7) For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I 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. (Moroni 7:16)

⁷³⁶ And that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (D&C 93:2) That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:9)

⁷³⁷ Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (D&C 9:7-9)

⁷³⁸ And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. (Moroni 7:18)

Ghost, which makes more information available to you about God, yourself, and the word.

The combination of your complete submission to God and the additional information you receive from him cause you to perceive the world through a different lens than before, providing you with the opportunity to choose to act differently than before. The scriptures describe this change as becoming a “new creature.”⁷³⁹

Discussions of spiritual rebirth tend to interchangeably refer to the gift of the Holy Ghost and the choice that precedes it. The choice made by an individual to turn toward God catalyzes what God does in response to that choice. The remainder of this chapter will focus on what a person must do to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, rather than what occurs thereafter.

You are born again when you stop sinning

There are billions of professed Christians on earth today. How many can say that they no longer willingly disobey God—ever? How many people do you know who can say that they are without sin? How many can truly say they no longer desire to do evil? And yet, this is what it means to fully submit to God. This is what it means to be born again.

Sin is the choice to do less than you know is best.⁷⁴⁰ Sin requires that you know what is better⁷⁴¹ and that you have the power to choose it.⁷⁴² Therefore, sin is always a choice.⁷⁴³ Repentance is not a question of willpower. It is a question of value, honesty, and trust in God. Anytime you improve these things, you will move towards repentance.

You will choose to stop sinning when you believe that following God’s example is preferable to anything else. Whenever you are tempted to sin, stop and ask yourself if you really believe in Jesus. Do you really believe that everything he tells you is for your greatest benefit? Do you really believe that he loves you and knows better than you what will lead to the greatest possible joy? If so, how can you desire

⁷³⁹ And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 2:25-26)

⁷⁴⁰ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

⁷⁴¹ ...where there is no law given there is no punishment....For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them.... (2 Nephi 9:25-26)

⁷⁴² And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free. (Helaman 14:30)

⁷⁴³ Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. (2 Nephi 10:23)

to do anything contrary to what you believe he would do in your place? The Lord will provide you with a stream of sufficient evidence that his way is preferable to all others. As you continue to live up to what he has already shown you, he will continue to confirm the wisdom of doing so.⁷⁴⁴

This change of heart is fundamental. Why should anyone expect to draw nearer to the Lord while in active rebellion against him?⁷⁴⁵ Should those who have not been born again call themselves Christians?⁷⁴⁶ After all, while they continue to willfully disobey God, they do not actually believe in Jesus,⁷⁴⁷ have not been converted,⁷⁴⁸ and have not been saved.⁷⁴⁹

Those who are born again do not sin.⁷⁵⁰ They do not knowingly deviate from their understanding of how Jesus would live in their place.⁷⁵¹ They always think, feel, and do the best they know.⁷⁵²

You are born again when you decide based on long-term expected benefit, not present feelings

By nature, you make choices based on what feels good right now rather than what benefits the most long-term. This shortcoming affects every choice you make across every domain, distorting the true value of the options of choice available to you, subconsciously filtering out options, and ensuring that the choices that you make will lead to less than the greatest long-term happiness possible.

⁷⁴⁴ If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

⁷⁴⁵ The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

⁷⁴⁶ And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:38-39)

⁷⁴⁷ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21)

⁷⁴⁸ And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)

⁷⁴⁹ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. (2 Nephi 10:24)

⁷⁵⁰ He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:8-9)

⁷⁵¹ And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. (1 John 3:5-6)

⁷⁵² If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. (1 John 2:29)

God's preference is for what yields the greatest long-term benefit.⁷⁵³ To think, feel, and act based on the long-term net benefit of the options available to you is the same as governing your life based on your understanding of how Jesus would live in your place.⁷⁵⁴ Optimizing for long-term value is the only path to the greatest happiness.

Spiritual rebirth occurs when you choose to desire maximizing long-term benefit instead of the default aim of maximizing present pleasure.⁷⁵⁵ This shift occurs when you abandon⁷⁵⁶ a guidance system based primarily on the emotional direction of carnal impulses and present pleasure-seeking in favor of the rational direction of choosing to think, feel, and act based on the long-term net benefit of the options available to you.

While the natural way of deciding can be practiced without much thought, optimizing for long-term value is always intentional. It requires actively choosing to be governed by reason instead of feelings. Reason gives us the ability to subject our emotions to objective reality, choosing what we expect will be best long-term instead of what feels good right now.⁷⁵⁷

Reason is meant to reveal the course of action that transcends your emotional impulses—to guide you in how you should feel and act based on how things really are over time, not based merely on how you feel right now. The shift from emotional to rational direction is so fundamental that it is like becoming a new person, because you become aware of and begin developing a completely new way of interacting with the world.

To become born again is to intentionally reason instead of emotionally react. Reason is the guidance system of the spirit, and by submitting to it,⁷⁵⁸ you become a child of God.⁷⁵⁹ As you rationally consider the cost and benefit of options before you, you can identify

⁷⁵³ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation (2 Nephi 26:24)

⁷⁵⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)

⁷⁵⁵ I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. (Psalms 119:59)

⁷⁵⁶ Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: (1 Corinthians 15:36)

⁷⁵⁷ Don't conform yourself to the present world, but be transformed by changing your mind, by proving the will of God through searching and learning what is of the greatest worth and benefit. Not to think or feel independent of your reasoning, but to reconcile your thoughts and feelings through sound judgment to the reasons God has graciously provided you through me and my presence. (Romans 12:2-3, Author's Reflection)

⁷⁵⁸ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

⁷⁵⁹ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

what option carries the greatest net benefit and, in so doing, decide what God would do in your place.

Your desires change through yielding to the information God provides

The “mighty change of heart” is a scriptural phrase referring to the change that occurs in what you desire. The scriptural meaning of the word “heart” is a combination of what we would call our thoughts and our desires. Change of heart would be better expressed as change of mind and change of desire.

Your desires come from your beliefs,⁷⁶⁰ what you value, and by how much you value it.⁷⁶¹ Though few realize it, every desire is actually just the preferred outcome from a list of possibilities. That list might include impossible outcomes, or it might be missing possible outcomes. For each imaginable outcome, including the one you presently desire, you may have an incorrect idea of the cost or benefit.

Your desires are subject to change. When your beliefs and value appraisals change, so do your desires. Changes to your desires come completely from information about what you desire, what alternatives exist, the cost and benefit of each, and your response to it.⁷⁶² As you live up to all you presently know, and seek for more, God will:

- 1) Provide you with more information⁷⁶³ to persuade you to improve,
- 2) Delineate new options that you do not yet know about,
- 3) Remove options you think you have but don’t, and
- 4) Suggest more accurate cost⁷⁶⁴ and benefit in options of which you are aware.

⁷⁶⁰ For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he... (Proverbs 23:7)

⁷⁶¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:21)

⁷⁶² Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Helaman 3:35)

⁷⁶³ No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost.... (D&C 121:41-43)

⁷⁶⁴ Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them. (Alma 5:7)

From this information, those who seek him will find sufficient means and motivation to become more like he is.⁷⁶⁵ As you diligently learn and honestly respond to this information, your desires will change to align more closely with God's.⁷⁶⁶

You can change what you want and by how much you want it without being spiritually reborn. A shift in desire occurs any time an honest person learns something different about the options available to them, the cost they incur, or benefit they provide. The *mighty* change of heart transcends changes to your specific desires, taking place when you decide to value **all things** as God does, appraising their value based on the long-term net benefit rather than how they make you feel right now.

Following God requires you to act against your feelings. The path of growing toward God consists of choosing what is best, even when it feels worse than alternatives. What feels good to you will only match what the Lord would do in your place to the extent that you have become like him. You come to want what God desires through submitting to what he desires, even when it doesn't feel good in the moment. As you yield to your sincere understanding of what he would do in all ways, all the time, he will teach you more about himself, and as you continuously remain reconciled to him, you will find greater and greater joy in doing so.

The mighty change of heart is something you choose, not something that happens to you

God doesn't take away temptation. He gives us sufficient reasons not to sin,⁷⁶⁷ and leaves us free to choose. While God is the source of the information that can catalyze the change to your desires, he does not cause that change,⁷⁶⁸ except in the power he gives you to make the choice yourself.⁷⁶⁹ Even God's punishment serves as a source of

⁷⁶⁵ Don't conform yourself to the present world, but be transformed by completing the process by which you obtain the mind of God; improving your idea of what is good, from your present understanding of what aligns with him unto the fullness of who he is. Judge wisely... (Romans 11:2-3, Author's Reflection)

⁷⁶⁶ Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. (Psalms 119:34)

⁷⁶⁷ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

⁷⁶⁸ Even in cases where credit is given to God for the change of desire, the context always includes a description of it being the choice of the people in response to information from God rather than a direct action by God. For example, in Ezekiel 36:26 God figuratively explains that he will give "a new heart" and "a new spirit" to Israel, having previously described in greater detail that it is the individual who makes a new heart and a new spirit through choosing to forsake their sins in response to information from God: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 18:31)

⁷⁶⁹ See Helaman 14:30, previously cited.

information.⁷⁷⁰ Suffering can be a powerful source of information to persuade us to agree with God,⁷⁷¹ and though it requires far less faith to notice and heed than other forms, there are still many who choose to ignore it.⁷⁷² No matter what information he makes available to you, you still have to choose to perceive, receive, and act upon it.⁷⁷³ It is your response to this information that causes a change of heart.⁷⁷⁴

Many expect God to take away their desire for sin simply because they have asked him to. While some scriptures seem to describe God directly causing the mighty change of heart, they can only be interpreted this way by ignoring their context.⁷⁷⁵

Asking God to make you not want to sin anymore is asking him to take your agency from you, because he has already given you power to make that decision for yourself, and you're not choosing to do it. It's no different than asking him to help you stand and walk when you already have the ability to do so. God will not force you to find or recognize better ideas, to honestly consider them and compare them to alternatives, or to implement them.

A request for God to take away your desire for sin is a confession that you desire sin more than you desire him. Not only are you asking him to reward your ongoing rebellion against him with better outcomes than you deserve, you are also proving to him that you don't really want

⁷⁷⁰ For example, Alma's choice to submit to God came in response to tremendous pain: "And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry unto the Lord, Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul." (Alma 38:8)

⁷⁷¹ Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; (Hebrews 5:8)

⁷⁷² Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him. (Proverbs 27:22) A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool. (Proverbs 17:10)

⁷⁷³ You should not expect Christ to lift you into heaven while your heart remains in the manner of and fixed on the things of this world—this isn't how faith or righteousness work. Nor should you expect Christ to raise you from the dead while you still do and desire what only leads to death. But, as it is written, the word is not just something you say or do, but also something you sincerely and deeply feel. This is the word of faith, which we proclaim: Even if you proclaim by your external works that Jesus is the Lord, and that God raised him from the dead, you will only be saved if you have also fully conformed your internal desire and decisions to him, just as he conformed his internal desire and decisions to the Father. (Romans 10:6-9, Author's Reflection)

⁷⁷⁴ And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them— (Helaman 15:7)

⁷⁷⁵ For example, Paul wrote that the Lord said that he would "put [his] laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10) after seven prior chapters of explaining that the manner of doing so was to send Jesus Christ to live, preach, and die among them. In another example, the Lord tells Israel: "...After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33) Here, "those days" refer to prolonged, intense suffering described at length by Jeremiah, through which any of the recipients of this promise must remain faithful in order to receive. These examples, like all others, support rather than refute the doctrine that God changes your heart through providing information that you still must choose of your own free will to believe and live up to.

what you are asking for, as you continue to choose contrary to it when you have the ability to do otherwise. God has never given anyone a reason to believe that he would answer such prayers.⁷⁷⁶

Even if God could magically change your heart to no longer desire evil, why would he not do so for everyone? If the requirement for God to magically free you from the desire to do evil is simply to ask for it, why are there so many who have asked and yet not received, and why are there so many who have chosen to sin again after being born again?

If God could magically change your desires, of what worth would it be to use the desire of our hearts as a criterion for eternal judgment, as God does?⁷⁷⁷ Why did God pay so high a price to gift us with agency if all he expects us to do with it is beg him to take it away by forcing us to desire what is good? Instead, we are told repeatedly that he has given us moral knowledge and left us free to choose.⁷⁷⁸

The atonement is not a magic trick where you get something for nothing. It's a system where he has made a way for you to be forgiven—something you could not do yourself—while giving you the power to choose to live up to what you know about him.

No one who is waiting for God to “give” them a “mighty change of heart” will ever find what they seek. Full submission to God is a choice.⁷⁷⁹ God doesn't forcefully change what you think or how you feel about anything. Doing so would be counter to his purpose in maximizing the joy of all people. Joy can only be found in what you desire and choose of your own free will. Removing your power of choice removes your potential for joy.

Spiritual rebirth does not magically remove your desire to sin; rather, your desire to sin abates through a conscious choice to fully reconcile your ideas, desires, and actions with your understanding of how God is, based on the reasons he provides. It is faith and repentance that bring the change of heart.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁶ And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such. (Moroni 7:9)

⁷⁷⁷ The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh. (Alma 41:5)

⁷⁷⁸ And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free. (Helaman 14:30)

⁷⁷⁹ Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds. (Alma 42:27)

⁷⁸⁰ See Helaman 15:7, previously cited.

You are born again when you surrender unconditionally to God

In order to be born again, you must completely and constantly prefer the desires of God above your own and completely submit to him in all things and at all times. You can't enter the kingdom of God until you are born again,⁷⁸¹ as you can't be the subject of a king to whom you do not subject yourself.

You can't ignore sections of your life or specific areas of improvement and still experience spiritual rebirth. Often, people fool themselves into thinking they have submitted to God by sacrificing more than is appropriate in some aspect of their lives, hoping to compensate for other aspects of their lives where they have not given what God has asked.⁷⁸² Any limits in what you are willing to do for God, or when you are willing to do it, or how long you are willing to do it, show you that your submission to God is still conditional.

Unconditional submission to God is sometimes referred to in the scriptures as having a "broken heart and contrite spirit."⁷⁸³ You have a broken heart and contrite spirit when you decide to fully obey God and desire his will exclusively above all other things, adopting the purpose of God as your own. To achieve a broken heart and contrite spirit is to make your life a sacrifice to God through living in the same way Jesus would at all times and in all places.⁷⁸⁴

You cannot be saved without a broken heart and a contrite spirit.⁷⁸⁵ Just as you cannot gather grapes from thistles,⁷⁸⁶ your works cannot be

⁷⁸¹ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

⁷⁸² Saul famously committed this error in offering sacrifices after disobeying God's instructions for battle: "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22)

⁷⁸³ Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me. (D&C 97:8)

⁷⁸⁴ Beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

⁷⁸⁵ Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. (2 Nephi 2:6-7)

⁷⁸⁶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:15-21)

holy⁷⁸⁷ while your heart is still unholy.⁷⁸⁸ If you are not fully submitted to God, you will not draw any nearer to him with substitute religious activity.⁷⁸⁹ The sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit is what makes religious activity effective instead of vain. Without it, all worship is an abomination to God,⁷⁹⁰ an affront to his purpose, and a mockery of his sacrifice.

You can and should be born again before being baptized

You don't need to be baptized to be born again. You can and should fully submit to God before baptism, and if you do, you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, whether you are baptized or not. The gift of the Holy Ghost comes to those who are as aligned with God as they know how to be, whether they have had the opportunity to be baptized or not. Full submission to God is required in order for your baptism to be valid, and your spiritual rebirth is evidence of whether it is or isn't.

There are multiple examples of people in the scriptures who were spiritually reborn independent of baptism. The Lamanite king was born again in the instant he proclaimed his willingness to give away all his sins to know Jesus.⁷⁹¹ Alma was "redeemed of the Lord" and "born of the Spirit" after he "repented of [his] sins." (Mosiah 27:24) King Benjamin's people were born again as they responded to his sermon,

⁷⁸⁷ But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. (Isaiah 59:2-3)

⁷⁸⁸ And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. (Mark 7:20-23)

⁷⁸⁹ For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17) And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (1 Samuel 15:14-23)

⁷⁹⁰ ...I have regard for those who are of a humble and contrite spirit and who are vigilant for my word. But whoever slaughters an ox is as one who kills a man, and whoever sacrifices a lamb, as one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever presents a grain offering is as one who offers swine's blood, and whoever burns incense, as one who venerates idols. Just as they have preferred to go their own ways, their souls delighting in their abominations, so will I prescribe intrigues for them and bring upon them the thing they dread. For when I called, no one responded; when I spoke, none gave heed. They did what was evil in my eyes; they chose to do what was not my will. (Isaiah 66:2-4, Gileadi Translation)

⁷⁹¹ O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead. (Alma 22:18)

independent of baptism.⁷⁹² The Lamanite prisoners who witnessed angels ministering to Lehi and Nephi were born again as they cried to Jesus to save them.⁷⁹³ The disciples of the Lord in Jerusalem received the gift of the Holy Ghost after his resurrection when they repented, long after they were baptized.

Spiritual rebirth happens instantaneously in the moment you fully submit to God. If you have not experienced it, the only reason is that you have not yet fully submitted to God.

Born again and again through extended awareness

One of the qualities of being born again is that you prefer submission to God over sin, scripturally described as “having no desire to do evil.” It is important to realize that having no desire to do evil at your present level of understanding does not imply that you will have no desire to do evil at a greater level of understanding.

Total submission to God is a binary condition—you either are or aren’t—with differences in degree, depending on how well you know Jesus and what kind of opposition you have faced. When one submits to God, it is a one-time choice meant to be forever binding and unconditional. However, getting to know God is a never-ending process. While deciding to submit to God is meant to be a one-time event, you can’t be sure of your commitment to God beyond the limits of your understanding of him. Similarly, it is not possible to know against what level of opposition you would remain faithful to God beyond the maximum opposition you have experienced.

It is not infrequent that a person who has been born again will decide, after exposure to new challenges, to once again prefer sin to God.⁷⁹⁴ Remember, being born again is not an effect, but a description. The sinlessness of one who is born again is what defines their state,⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹² And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them. (Mosiah 4:1-3)

⁷⁹³ And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words. (Helaman 5:45)

⁷⁹⁴ But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; (D&C 20:32)

⁷⁹⁵ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9, NASB)

and when they choose to change through sin, they relinquish their state. Being born again does not suspend your ability to sin, but it does increase the consequences for doing so.⁷⁹⁶

You can be born again as many times as you dedicate yourself to God while in this life, though it will be harder to achieve the level of repentance required each time you willingly disobey God. One who has surrendered to God will do more damage to their conscience and find it harder to return to God after sinning again than one who has not. In any case, becoming reborn again is the same process as becoming born again in the first place, through forsaking sin and unconditional future submission to God.

⁷⁹⁶ For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:20-22)

11. Baptism for the remission of sins

Qualifications for baptism

In all of Christianity, few tenets are as argued over as baptism. Baptism is meant as an outward affirmation of an inward shift in your desire to align with God as far as you understand him to be and adopt his purpose with your whole heart.

Baptism is only available to those who show themselves worthy of it. Worthiness is not a question of desire, tradition, or expectation. It is a matter of choosing to submit fully to God. In order to be worthy to be baptized, a person must live as they believe God would in their place and commit to continuing to do so as God continues to teach them more about himself.⁷⁹⁷

Baptism is called the first *fruit* (or result) of repentance because it is meant to come *after* one decides to fully submit to and serve God.⁷⁹⁸ Baptism is only valid for those who have changed their thoughts, feelings, and actions to align with how they believe Jesus would live in their place.⁷⁹⁹ Thus, one should be born again before being baptized.

What is the remission of sins, and how is it obtained?

Baptism and the remission of sins are often linked in the scriptures. The remission of sins means the forgiveness of past sins and the cessation of future sins. In the scriptural framework, this is synonymous with justification, a state where an individual is freed from the guilt and eternal penalty of their past choices through continuously making the best choices they now know of. This occurs when one is born again.

Remission of sins is something you choose,⁸⁰⁰ not something that happens to you. You obtain the remission of sins through forsaking all sin.⁸⁰¹ To have a remission of sins is to be in a state where you continuously follow the example of Jesus, as far as you understand him

⁷⁹⁷ And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God. (Mosiah 5:5)

⁷⁹⁸ ...and they were not baptized save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it. Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. (Moroni 6:1-2)

⁷⁹⁹ And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end. (Moroni 6:3)

⁸⁰⁰ Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest. (Alma 12:34)

⁸⁰¹ And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits. (Helaman 14:13)

to be.⁸⁰² In this state, you cease to sin as far as you know. It is called remission of sins and not just cessation of sins—which it includes—because a person who has stopped sinning has fulfilled the conditions given by Christ to be forgiven of their past sins.⁸⁰³

Sometimes, baptism and remission of sins are mentioned together because baptism and the remission of sins share the same requirement: keeping all God's commandments as far as you know them.⁸⁰⁴ Baptism is a commandment,⁸⁰⁵ and all who keep God's commandments will seek to be baptized. However, it is the keeping of all God's commandments—not just baptism—that brings forgiveness of past sins.⁸⁰⁶

Baptism does not change you. Rather, it is a commandment that you follow and a symbol acknowledging the change you have already made. The distinction between baptism and the remission of sins is made clear in the case of people who have forsaken their past sins, yet do not have access to someone who can baptize them. They still have remission of their sins, because they are living how Jesus would in their place,⁸⁰⁷ even if they have not yet been baptized due to conditions beyond their own control. Likewise, there are many people who have been baptized, but who do not have a remission of their sins because they continue to think, feel, or act contrary to how they believe Jesus would in their place.

A remission of sins is a perishable state. If an individual willfully sins after having been forgiven, their former sins return to them,⁸⁰⁸ and they become even worse off than they were before.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰² To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. (Acts 10:43)

⁸⁰³ And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:27-28)

⁸⁰⁴ And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; (Moroni 8:25)

⁸⁰⁵ And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 9:23)

⁸⁰⁶ They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; (D&C 76:51-52)

⁸⁰⁷ And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:33)

⁸⁰⁸ And now, verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, will not lay any sin to your charge; go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God. (D&C 82:7)

⁸⁰⁹ But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath not remission into without end, but he shall be guilty of everlasting trespass. (Mark 3:29, Wycliff Bible)

Degrees of baptism

Most people who are baptized know they are participating in a sacred ritual. Some few among them further understand that they are agreeing to attempt to follow Jesus in some way. Baptism is intended to consist of a much more detailed and intense commitment.

To receive the most from baptism, the participant must understand it as a symbol of reconciliation to what they already know about God and a promise to continue to reconcile to all they learn about God in the future. Until a person makes and maintains this sacrifice by consistently thinking, feeling, and doing as they sincerely believe Jesus would in their place, authoritative baptism would be of no benefit to them. Anything less will cause the recipient to believe they are better off than they actually are and less willing to repent than they would otherwise be.

The level of understanding you have of the character of Jesus Christ at baptism will vary based on the quantity and quality of instruction you have received before baptism. Consequently, each person who is baptized will be baptized to a potentially different standard, even if all are equal in their perfect obedience to their understanding of Christ.⁸¹⁰

All people who are baptized after receiving and living up to an improved understanding of the character of Christ will receive the blessing of forgiveness of sins, but the blessings that come from living and learning the character of Christ will only flow to the extent that what is learned and lived accurately reflects how he actually is.

Authority to baptize

As explained in a prior chapter, priesthood authority comes through obtaining and living information about and from God. The qualification for authority to baptize is knowing about and living more like Jesus than those you baptize. The authority to baptize consists of a willingness to live up to the character of Christ beyond those you baptize.

The stark contrast between this assertion and what is taught by today's churches is acknowledged. To help bridge the gap, consider the following question: What is being offered through baptism? When performed validly, the baptizing priest is certifying to God that the candidate is true and faithful to everything they could presently know about the character of Christ. That witness requires someone who a) knows at least as much about the Lord as the baptismal candidate, and

⁸¹⁰ Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

b) lives what he knows about him. To seek baptism is essentially to persuade *someone* that you are living up to everything you mutually believe about God. Optionally and ideally, that person will know more about God than you. Not optionally, they live those beliefs themselves.

What about ordination? John the Baptist was purportedly ordained at eight days old with the authority to baptize.⁸¹¹ By lineage, he also possessed the right to baptize, as his father was the High Priest. However, he would have had all the rights and privileges he exercised without these factors based solely on the fact that while all of his contemporaries knew the gospel, he actually lived it. Thus, he was more like Jesus Christ than his contemporaries.

While there are scriptural examples of people being given authority to baptize, there are also examples of people who conducted valid baptisms without ever being ordained. For example, the Lord not only commended Alma Sr.'s ministry, but made particular mention of those he had baptized, a ministry he had embarked upon based solely on his hearing the sermon delivered by Abinadi.⁸¹² Paul was as much an apostle as any other in his time, and yet there is no record of his ordination by Peter, James, and John. Instead, he cited as his authority his personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, who had called him directly.⁸¹³

This teaching presents a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the Lord's ending invitation in the gospel of Matthew:

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28)

The Lord's instruction wasn't just to his eleven apostles—or his several hundred remaining disciples—but to anyone who knows anything about him to go and teach others to live the same, in whatever scope of life they occupy, conveying upon them the authority to baptize based on the information they have received about Jesus and their willingness to live it.

⁸¹¹ 28 For he was baptized while he was yet in his childhood, and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power, to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power (Doctrine & Covenants 84:28)

⁸¹² Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi (Mosiah 26:15)

⁸¹³ Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) (Galatians 1:1)

If the authority to baptize is based only on having learned and lived some dispensation of information about the Lord, why were there instances where Jesus gave particular authority to particular people? The primary purpose was to provide a mechanism to resolve disagreements. The Lord identified a hierarchy for the purpose of indicating whose perspective was to be accepted as his own in the event of a disagreement.⁸¹⁴ It is sad to reflect upon how much the idea of religious authority has been abused while simultaneously ignoring the purpose for which it was given.

The role of the baptizing priest

Priests are meant to teach people how Jesus is and baptize those who choose to become like him.⁸¹⁵ The baptizing priest has a duty to teach the candidate what the priest knows and lives about the character of Jesus, subject to the limits of capacity—but not effort—in the candidate.

As a symbol of submission to God, a baptismal candidate must conform to what they understand about God. To be worthy of baptism, you have to make any changes necessary to live as you understand God would in your place. The priest you apply to for baptism decides whether you are worthy of it. By performing the ordinance, a baptizing priest is certifying to God that the candidate has been true and faithful to everything he has taught them about God.⁸¹⁶

Once the priest is satisfied with the candidate's repentance, he leads the recipient into the water,

24 ...calling them by name, saying:

25 Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. (3 Nephi 11)

⁸¹⁴ And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven. And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. (3 Nephi 11:21-22)

⁸¹⁵ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. (Mark 1:3-5) Therefore, there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 7:25)

⁸¹⁶ And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. (3 Nephi 11:22-23)

It is very difficult for a baptizing priest to adequately ascertain the worthiness of a candidate he does not know well. The greater the proximity of the priest to the candidate, the more effectively he can teach the candidate, and the more accurately he can assess whether they are fully living the gospel in the details of their lives. Ideally, the baptizing priest will be the husband or father of the applying candidate.

While a priest may baptize a candidate with less instruction,⁸¹⁷ interaction, and verification,⁸¹⁸ such baptisms provide far less of an opportunity to the candidate to learn about and live like Jesus before the baptism and a much lower likelihood that they will continue to do so after baptism. The gospel is designed so that, where possible, adherents can remain with the person teaching them more about Jesus until they have exhausted what the priest has to teach them. In ancient times, technological and geographical limitations forced gospel interactions to incidental contact on one extreme and leaving everything to accompany a gospel teacher on another.⁸¹⁹ In the modern era, the internet provides opportunities for much greater contact without the need to uproot one's life to follow a preacher.

What to do when you are not aware of someone capable of baptizing you

You may not presently know of anyone with the ability to baptize you. God can lead you to such a person, and your effort to find one is part of the process of coming into submission to God. For example, Limhi and his people experienced an increase in preparatory humility as they sought someone to baptize them, finally coming under the authority of Alma, who they had previously rejected, persecuted, and chased out of their kingdom.

In the meantime, remember that baptism is a part of repentance, not the other way around. You can fully reconcile your life to your understanding of Jesus before you meet someone capable of baptizing you, and doing so is the best way to prepare to recognize and receive

⁸¹⁷ And ye shall go forth baptizing with water, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (D&C 42:7)

⁸¹⁸ Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (Acts 8:35-38)

⁸¹⁹ The schools of the prophets and extended "households" accomplished this purpose. For example, the household of Abraham consisted of more than three hundred men (see Genesis 14:14), besides women and children, of varying levels of aptitude and interest in the gospel he believed, but all of whom were willing to adopt his purpose in their scope sufficiently to abide with him in his sojourn through the land.

them when you do. For example, as the aforementioned people of Limhi searched for someone to baptize them, they were able to make the sacrifice of deciding to follow the Lord's example at all costs:

They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts... (Mosiah 21:35)

...for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments. (Mosiah 21:31)

The fact that the blessings of a broken heart and contrite spirit are available to those who have no available way to be baptized does not mean that baptism is of no effect, or that its outcomes are available to those who have not received it. Every commandment from God has a blessing associated with it,⁸²⁰ and baptism is no exception. The blessings of baptism consist of the blessing of living up to your understanding of God's commandments, as well as blessings that come through the interactions between the person being baptized and the priest who baptizes them. Water baptism matters beyond the general blessings of obeying all commandments because it requires you to find and reconcile to the teachings of a person who knows more about God than you do and therefore can provide you with invitations to improve beyond where you could otherwise.⁸²¹

Baptism is how people join the Lord's church

Some correctly understand that baptism is the form in which God has designated people to join his church,⁸²² but most do not realize that cessation of known sin is required *before* anyone can be baptized into the church in a way that God will acknowledge.

Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. (Moroni 6:2)

⁸²⁰ For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:5)

⁸²¹ This point is not elaborated here because it is outside of the scope of this book, but will be extensively treated in another.

⁸²² For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive. (Mosiah 26:22)

And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church. (D&C 20:37)

Churches that do not require baptismal candidates to conform to the commandments of God as they teach are not practicing the form of baptism prescribed by the Lord.

That being said, to think of the church of Christ as an entity that controls access to the ability to repent and come unto him is to reverse roles. The Lord's church is composed of those who align with their understanding of how he is:

67 Behold, this is my doctrine—whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church.

68 Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me; therefore he is not of my church.

69 And now, behold, whosoever is of my church, and endureth of my church to the end, him will I establish upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (D&C 10)

The important takeaway here is that baptism isn't about joining *a* church, but becoming *the* church,⁸²³ and you don't do that by finding an institution, but by finding a person who knows him better than you.

Circumstances for rebaptism

There are two potential circumstances where one might consider rebaptism is in order. The first is when you break your baptismal covenant to always live as Jesus would in your place. The second is when something causes a disconnection between you and the priest who baptizes you. Neither of these are valid reasons to be rebaptized.

⁸²³ And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. (3 Nephi 26:21)

In baptism, you promise to God to keep all of his commandments, even unto death.⁸²⁴ If you knowingly break a commandment, you have broken the covenant of baptism through willful rebellion against God. You repent and renew your commitment to God through forsaking the sins of which you are aware and rededicating yourself to greater fidelity to God than you had before. Since this commitment is independent of baptism, there is no reason to get rebaptized in order to renew it. In other words, while there is such a thing as baptism for repentance, there is no such thing as *rebaptism* for repentance, as the only people that would need to be baptized in order to repent of their sins are those who have not yet been validly baptized.

The commandment of baptism is to receive it once. There is no commandment to maintain a valid baptismal connection to a worthy priest. For example, while Jesus went to lengths to receive baptism from John the Baptist, he had no continuing connection to John after his baptism. One of the blessings of baptism is the additional information about God or application of that information to your life that could come from a continued relationship with the man who baptizes you. However, such relationships are available outside of the context of baptism. Whether you have an ongoing relationship with the priest who baptized you or not, the blessings available from those who know God better than you are always available.

Considerations for children

In order for a person to enter the covenant of baptism, they must possess the ability to make moral judgments. Authoritative baptism requires a candidate to be capable of learning more about and living like Jesus. Like all phases of human development, this does not occur at a given age for everyone, but depends on their particular environment, capabilities, and choices. Those baptized as babies have never entered into the covenant of baptism, because the choice was made for them by others.⁸²⁵ Some baptized as children may feel the same way. In both cases, these individuals should seek to be rebaptized.

Those possessing moral judgment still possess it to varying degrees. A priest will be impeded in his ability to convey what he knows about God to someone with less understanding than he has. The certification of baptism is not “this person knows and lives what I do,” but “this

⁸²⁴ Baptism is a “covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.” (Mosiah 5:8)

⁸²⁵ For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works. Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law. (Moroni 8:22-23)

person has learned and lived everything they have the capacity to from me, given their capabilities.” The certification of baptismal worthiness isn’t a question of achieving equivalence in holiness to the person baptizing, but a question of demonstrating complete submission to God.

**Continue in the way by learning
more about Jesus**

12. You do not know what God is really like

You can know what God is like

Some Christians believe that God can't be known. Like Job's friend Elihu, they believe that God's greatness requires him to be unknowable,⁸²⁶ not realizing that his ability and desire to make himself known to such lowly creatures as ourselves⁸²⁷ ranks chief among what makes him the greatest of all.

God *can* be known. Coming to know him is a process. The Lord defined eternal life as knowing God,⁸²⁸ not just showing that it is possible to know him, but showing that the very process of coming to know him *is* eternal life. As you learn more about him and live everything you know, you will increasingly know him and increasingly obtain eternal life.⁸²⁹

What does it mean to know God?

Many Christians would be offended by the suggestion that they don't know God very well, if at all. Their offense is only possible if they use a completely different definition of what it means to "know" God than they do when referring to others. The differences between knowing God and knowing others consists only of how much there is to know—not the process of coming to know it. God is more complex and more intelligent than anyone.⁸³⁰ There is so much more to know about God than any human.⁸³¹

Knowing God consists of much more than knowing some things about him. Knowing *of* God or just knowing about him is not the same as knowing God. You would never say you knew a fellow human if you

⁸²⁶ Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out. (Job 36:26)

⁸²⁷ And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. (Mosiah 4:11)

⁸²⁸ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

⁸²⁹ And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)

⁸³⁰ And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all. (Abraham 3:19)

⁸³¹ Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. (Psalms 145:3)

knew as little about him or her as most Christians actually know about God. To know God requires *more* than what knowing another person does, not *less*.

Knowing that God exists isn't the same as knowing God. You could never say that you know another person simply because you know they exist; why would your criteria for knowing God—who is deeper than any person—consist of anything less? You can know very little about God and still believe in him.

Seeing God is not the same as knowing him. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two of his disciples along the road to Emmaus as an unrecognized man, walking and talking about the events of his ministry and the scriptures that pertained to it.⁸³² If you can see him and yet not recognize him, you can obviously see him without knowing him. To know God, you must learn more about him. You can learn more about God without seeing him, and you can see him without learning more about him.

To know someone is to know their character: what they do, why they do it, and how they feel in doing so. When you know someone's character, you can accurately predict how they will think, act, and feel in different situations. Knowing God is a question of knowing how he thinks, feels, and acts.⁸³³ The more accurately you can anticipate how God would think, feel, or act, and the more situations across which you can accurately do so, the better you know him.

God's character is the most complicated thing there is

Knowing someone's character is more difficult the more sophisticated they are. The more sophisticated a person is, the more variations and layers will exist in what they do, why they do it, and how they feel across varying situations. The more sophisticated a person's character, the more partial your understanding of their character will be, and the more your understanding can increase in breadth and accuracy as you observe and analyze them in different situations over time. The more knowledge they have, the more nuanced their beliefs, the more complex their desires, and the purer their motives, the more there is to learn and the more opportunities there are to make mistakes in predicting their experience in a specific situation.

⁸³² See Luke 24:13-32.

⁸³³ For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. But if ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also. This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law. Broad is the gate, and wide the way that leadeth to the deaths; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law. (D&C 132:22-25)

God's depth far exceeds the depth of the deepest person.⁸³⁴ A superficial understanding of God's character is insufficient to know his character well enough to even begin to replicate it in any recognizable way. The Psalms contain as much information about the character of God as any other book of scripture, and yet the Psalmist wrote:

5 O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

6 A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. (Psalm 92)

Common Christianity criminally oversimplifies God to great detriment. An illustrative example of this is the question, "what would Jesus do?" Some Christians don't seem to mind that they can't answer this question for the vast majority of the situations they face in life. Others answer it in nearly every case with something like "be nice," ignoring how often Jesus was far from nice in the gospel accounts or how much worse those situations would have been if he had been. Few stop to consider that an answer to this question in any degree of accuracy requires far more knowledge of God's character than they possess. One reason why so few bother to exert any significant effort in knowing Jesus is that they think there isn't much to know. To presume that knowing the Lord is quick or easy requires contradicting every verse of scripture and every ounce of common sense. And yet, Christians and atheists alike tend to believe exactly that.

The character of God takes serious time and effort to discover. Consider what you would need to know in order to fully know God's character.⁸³⁵ You would need to know what he does, why he does it, and how he does it. Because everything he does is for the benefit of the world,⁸³⁶ you would need to know everything necessary to calculate the best possible circumstances across all time, all situations, and all people. There is certainly more to God's character than can be learned in a lifetime.

To know the Lord is not only difficult—it is the most difficult thing you can do. It is also the most valuable thing you can do. It both requires the highest cost (everything you have) and provides the greatest benefit (everything God has, notably including the greatest joy that anyone can have).

⁸³⁴ O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. (Psalm 92:5-6)

⁸³⁵ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁸³⁶ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

The difficulty of learning more about God is shown by the magnitude of his efforts to reveal himself to us

The Lord is constantly attempting to reveal more of himself to us. He uses broad means, including: attempts to speak to us in our minds and hearts, the testimonies of angels and men who know him better than we do, our surroundings, and our life situations. All of creation is an attempt to convey this revelation. He even came to earth to live a mortal life in order to demonstrate to us how he is.⁸³⁷ Were it easy to know him, none of these interventions would be required, let alone all of them. In spite of all of these great efforts, there are still only very few who know him very much at all.

God created every able-minded person with the ability to make moral judgments, whether they believe in or have been taught about him or not. Your conscience provides a mechanism for learning more about how God is and how he would act in your place. That mechanism is guilt, which is a signal that you have done less than your best and different than God would have in your place. The way to minimize the guilt that you feel is to always do the very best that you can. As you consistently do your best, you will increase in the strength and accuracy of your assessment of what is best, learning more about how God would live in your place, and gaining greater reasons to live the same way.

Since the fall of Adam, God has sent angels and inspired men to “minister unto the children of men, to make manifest” the character of Christ; that all good things come from and lead to him.⁸³⁸ God carefully arranges to send specific people⁸³⁹ to the earth at specific times to

⁸³⁷ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

⁸³⁸ For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come. (Moroni 7:22-23)

⁸³⁹ [Angels] declar[e] the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts.... (Moroni 7:31-32)

demonstrate aspects of his character to his children throughout time⁸⁴⁰ and across geography.⁸⁴¹

The difficulty and complexity of communicating to us the content of God's character is evidenced by the complexity of creation. This creation is intricately designed to provide uncountable witnesses of who, how, and what God is.⁸⁴² God created everything we know of in order to provide a place where we would have the opportunity to learn more about him,⁸⁴³ implement what we learn into our own lives,⁸⁴⁴ and do what we can to help others to do the same.⁸⁴⁵

The difficulty and value of communicating to us the content of God's character is attested to by the high price that Jesus paid in order to demonstrate it. Jesus came to earth as a mortal man in order to make the Father known to us.⁸⁴⁶ It is in and through Jesus that we come to know and become like the Father.⁸⁴⁷ Consider how much Jesus suffered in leaving the glory of the Father's presence to come here,⁸⁴⁸ enduring bitter contradiction against his character for three decades,

⁸⁴⁰ And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people. And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption. And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such. (Alma 13:1-3)

⁸⁴¹ For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true. (Alma 29:8)

⁸⁴² And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63)

⁸⁴³ And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; (Abraham 3:24-25)

⁸⁴⁴ And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. (Alma 12:24)

⁸⁴⁵ Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. (Moroni 7:25)

⁸⁴⁶ I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. (John 17:6)

⁸⁴⁷ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

⁸⁴⁸ And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (John 17:5)

experiencing stiff persecution against his ministry for another three years, and receiving death at the hands of those he came to save.

Your present understanding of God is incomplete and, at least in some ways, incorrect

The historical examples of those who knew God best suggest that getting to know God's character is no easy thing. Throughout history, even those who knew God best found themselves surprised in their continued interactions with him. For example, even after spending three years with Jesus nearly every day, his disciples were constantly shocked by what he said and did. Given that those who spent so much time with God still found themselves surprised by him, your operating assumption ought to be that your idea of God is incomplete and, at least in some ways, incorrect.⁸⁴⁹

Each person's view of Jesus' character is determined by their heed of what they believe about him and their diligence in learning more.⁸⁵⁰ You may have an idea of what God is like, but that doesn't mean that it is correct or complete. Like everyone else, your knowledge of God is limited in breadth, depth, accuracy, and application. As long as you lack complete knowledge of God, you stand to be surprised frequently and significantly by his thoughts, feelings, and actions, including his directions to you.

Your present perspective of Jesus' character is not what he is really like. Your ability to perceive and replicate the character of Jesus is akin to a child's ability to replicate a great master's painting. Fine details are blurrily summarized, a broad color palette is mapped to a much smaller set, and many aspects are omitted completely. A child cannot reproduce a fine painting, and fallen man cannot instantly come to understand nor replicate the character of Christ.

Your understanding of God's character at any moment is like looking down at a dark city from an airplane at night. Some areas are well lit, some are partially lit, and some are totally dark. You can't see everything, so you have to make educated guesses about what you *can't* see (the totally dark and partially dark places) based on what you *can* see. Your sincere idea of how and what he is will change with every step you take towards him. Though your perception of Jesus may change significantly with each step, you will see over time that it is becoming more accurate as you close the distance towards him. As you learn

⁸⁴⁹ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

⁸⁵⁰ And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)

more about the Lord, you will marvel at his ability to guide you toward him given the abundance of your limitations and the magnitude of his perfection.⁸⁵¹

Knowing the scriptures isn't the same as knowing God

The scriptures are meant to teach us about the character of Christ, but few study them enough to learn very much about him at all. It's not difficult to find a professed Christian whose confidence in how they imagine Jesus to be far exceeds their familiarity with the scriptures that describe him. Most Christians nonchalantly claim that they know Jesus, when few are even familiar with the scriptures that describe him. A superficial study of the scriptures may be sufficient to yield a list of God's attributes—such as love, mercy, and justice—but not enough to surpass the superficial ideas of the meaning of these words, let alone their application to daily life.

It is nothing short of astounding that modern people believe you can know all there is to know about Jesus through vague familiarity with a few verses of scripture. Many of these same people have no problem spending at least four years and ever-increasing sums of money to study at college. No one should think that they know much about the author of all truth and the creator of everything known while their effort to study him dwarfs in comparison to the time required to gain a functional understanding of anything within his creation.

The best way to prove how little the average Christian knows the scriptures is to mark their surprise as you cite stories from the New Testament that illustrate a very different Jesus than they believe in. You may be surprised to hear that Jesus:

- Responded to a sincere Canaanite woman asking for help by calling her a dog on account of her ethnicity.⁸⁵²
- Used the profanity of his time to insult those with whom he disagreed.⁸⁵³
- Insulted religious leaders.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵¹ Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:104-105)

⁸⁵² For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. (Mark 7:25-27)

⁸⁵³ Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matthew 23:33) And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. (Luke 13:32)

⁸⁵⁴ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27) Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:31)

- Drank and ate enough to be credibly criticized as a drunk and glutton.⁸⁵⁵
- Denigrated the religious beliefs of a Samaritan woman who had honored him by calling him a prophet, while proclaiming the superiority of his own.⁸⁵⁶
- Disputed his friends' heartfelt proclamations of loyalty.⁸⁵⁷

The fewer the scriptures upon which you base your understanding of God, the more likely you will be surprised by how he actually is. Anyone surprised by scriptural accounts of what God said, did, commanded to be done, or allowed to happen should diminish their confidence in their understanding of his character and wherever they obtained it. If you don't even know the aspects of the Lord's character demonstrated in the scriptures, how can you possibly imagine that you know him?

It is one thing to be overconfident in your expectation of how well you know God given a lack of familiarity with scripture, but there are many who manage to avoid learning how he is in spite of spending a great deal of time in the scriptures. Instead of searching the scriptures for improvements they can make to themselves, they make scripture study an end in itself.⁸⁵⁸ Rather than searching for differences they can reconcile between them and God, they ignore the differences and memorize the behavioral matches or irrelevant factoids, building up tall barriers of verse-enforced false traditions that make it all the less likely they will receive the truth when confronted with it.⁸⁵⁹

The scriptures are not meant to be the product—you are. They are an instruction manual for the work, not the work itself. You can't correctly understand how God is through only studying his word. You must also live it!

⁸⁵⁵ "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children." (Matthew 11:19) Note that this was a capital crime in Israel: "...he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die..." (Deuteronomy 21:20-21)

⁸⁵⁶ The woman saith...Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman...Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. (John 4:19-22)

⁸⁵⁷ Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. (John 16:30-32) Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. (Matthew 26:33-34)

⁸⁵⁸ Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:7)

⁸⁵⁹ "Doctrine unto fools is as fetters on the feet, and like manacles on the right hand." (Sirach 21:19) For examples, see the Pharisees' and Scribes' many scriptural arguments against Jesus.

Those who study the word of God without living it tend to subconsciously skip over the parts that suggest needed change.⁸⁶⁰ Christians ought to know, explain, venerate, and emulate Jesus' behavior on all occasions, not just when it matches their church's arbitrary standards or their favorite feel-good activity. Instead of ignoring the parts of the scriptures that don't align with your religion, you ought to ignore the parts of your religion that don't align with your scriptures.

Even in the rare case that a person knows the scriptures well and applies them honestly, they should not mistake being familiar with that limited account for being familiar with the unlimited being. It is always difficult to convey an accurate model of someone's character from one person to another in a way that the other person can accurately predict the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the person you are describing across many situations. If true for a normal person, imagine how much more difficult this would be if you were describing the Lord. The apostle John spent three years with the Lord, and yet he lamented how difficult it was to write adequately about him.⁸⁶¹ If you were to somehow hear about what transpired during the remainder of the three year ministry of Christ beyond the few weeks covered in the New Testament, or the contents of his thirty years of life prior to that, how confident can you be that you would not be surprised in what you learned?

God's history as a test of how well you know his character

If you know someone's character, you can accurately explain what they did in the past and why. A powerful test to assess the breadth of your knowledge of God's character is to consider how well you can explain what God did in the scriptures. The first and most obvious question is: how familiar are you with the stories themselves? If you are not familiar with what he did in the past, it is unlikely you have any idea what he will do in the future.

For each story, ask whether you can explain what he said or did. Why didn't he say or do anything else? Can you explain the differences between occasions when he was proactive, when he waited to respond to someone else, or when he remained silent or aloof? Can you explain why he healed people when he did and how he did? Can you explain why and when he didn't heal people? Can you explain why he

⁸⁶⁰ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:9-10) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)

⁸⁶¹ And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. (John 21:25)

sometimes received violence, sometimes resisted it, and other times inflicted it? Can you explain why he sometimes endured persecution and sometimes fled from it? Can you explain his behavior in the Old Testament, and seamlessly link it to the consistent character of what he demonstrated in the New? If your model of God's character can't explain why destroying whole cities and nations is the epitome of righteousness, your model is significantly limited.

Any of God's recorded behavior that conflicts with your present understanding of him provides you with opportunities to get to know him better. If you can't explain why Jesus did things in the past, how can you hope to predict what he will do in the future?

God's future as a test of how well you know God's character

If you know someone's character, you can accurately predict what they will do in the future and why. The easiest way to predict what God will do in the future is by getting to know what he did in the past and applying those examples to similar present and future situations. If you observe what someone does in a particular situation, you can reasonably assume that they will do the same thing under the same circumstances at another time. There is no one for whom this is more true than God.⁸⁶²

What about situations where you have not yet seen what they will do? If you understand someone's character, you can not only accurately predict how they will act in previously observed situations, but also how they will act in *any* situation. This is because you not only know *what* they do, but you also know *why* they do it. If you know why he does what he does, you can more accurately predict more of what he will do across a broader range of situations.

If you know God's character, you will be able to precisely predict what he will do and not do in the future. If you can't perfectly predict the future, you must admit that there is still more for you to know about God.

Someone who knew God's character could clearly and accurately unfold the cryptic descriptions of the End Times from scripture. After all, it should be easier to fill in the blanks on extensive predictions than it is to generate them from nothing.

If you know God's character, your ability to predict his actions will not apply uniquely to the End Times, but also to the present time. If you know God's character, you should be able to accurately predict his will in the small-scale situations of daily life as well as in the big picture over time.

⁸⁶² For I am the Lord, I change not.... (Malachi 3:6)

Answers to requests as a test of how well you know God's character

God's responses to your request provide a proxy to measure how well you know him. The less often God grants your requests, the more evidence you have of distance between how you believe God is and how he actually is. The more you learn about God and the more you restrict your requests to what best advances his purposes, the more often he will grant your requests.⁸⁶³ The Lord promised that:

...whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. (3 Nephi 18:20)

The more unanswered questions you have for God, the more evidence you have of distance between how you believe God is and how he actually is.

The Lord's responses to our questions are subject to what we are willing to receive. The more you know and live God's character, the more directly and immediately he can answer the questions you ask him. The more you know him, the more building blocks you have from which he can construct the answer to your questions. The less about him you know, the more he will have to lay out to you in order to answer your questions, and the more likely limits in your cognitive abilities, diligence, or trust in him are to form a barrier between you and the answer to your question.

God's knowledge as a test of how well you know God's character

Do you know what God knows? God knows all things.⁸⁶⁴ Do you?⁸⁶⁵ He knows how everything came to be,⁸⁶⁶ and how everything

⁸⁶³ Blessed art thou, Nephi [for thou] hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such unweariness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people. And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done. And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done. And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass. (Helaman 10:4-10)

⁸⁶⁴ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁸⁶⁵ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither fainths nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (Isaiah 40:28, NKJV)

⁸⁶⁶ Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. (Job 38:4)

comes to an end.⁸⁶⁷ He knows the relationship between all things and how everything affects everything else. He knows the true worth of all things. He knows all possible actions, their long-term cost, and their long-term benefit.

Most will readily admit that their knowledge is far less than God's knowledge, but few realize that this means that they also do not know his character. God's knowledge is a fundamental part of his character. How can you know what God would do, why he would do it, or how he would feel in doing so if you don't know what he knows? If there remains anything that he knows that you do not yet know, then even if you know him somewhat, you do not know him fully. To fully know how he is, you would also have to fully know what he knows.

God's wisdom as a test of how well you know God's character

God's wisdom is inseparable from his character. What God understands informs how he is, and how he is informs what he understands. Can you understand what he understands?⁸⁶⁸ Can you reason as well as he does?⁸⁶⁹ To the extent that you can't think like God would in your place,⁸⁷⁰ you will be unable to predict what he would do in your place or how he would feel in your situation. To the extent that your ability to reason falls short of God's, you will see different options for thought, feeling, and action than he does, and you will see them differently than he does.

God's power as a test of how well you know God's character

God's power co-exists with his character; it only exists in those who share his character, and to the extent they do. Can you do what God does? If you find yourself unable to do what you sincerely believe the Lord would in your place, you are either incorrect in what he would do, or too different from him in character to accomplish it. Either way, you should assume that your understanding of what is good is equally different from God's as your power is from his.

⁸⁶⁷ And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away; (3 Nephi 26:3)

⁸⁶⁸ ...believe that [God] has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. (Mosiah 4:9)

⁸⁶⁹ Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. (Job 40:2)

⁸⁷⁰ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Your level of obedience to God as a test of how well you know his character

As the Lord prepared for his death, he told his disciples that they were not yet ready to join him where he was going.⁸⁷¹ They had not yet dedicated themselves fully to following his example. He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) They all claimed they would remain faithful to him even unto death.⁸⁷² And yet, all of them abandoned Jesus in his time of greatest trial.

Like the disciples at the time of his death, it is likely that you still haven’t decided to follow him above all else, even if you think you have. Until you have faced and passed the test of the sacrifice of all things, up to and including your life, how can you be confident that you know his character?

Interactions with God as a test of how well you know God’s character

Your association with God is determined by how much you know about him and whether you fully live all you know about him. A complete understanding of God’s character is not required to abide with him, but complete reconciliation to his character as far as you know it is. You become innocent before God, prepared⁸⁷³ and worthy to dwell in his presence through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as soon as you begin and continue to live according to everything you know about him. This is what salvation is.⁸⁷⁴

If you always live in a way that pleases him,⁸⁷⁵ he will always accompany you. The Lord said: “...If a man love me, he will keep my

⁸⁷¹ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. (John 13:33)

⁸⁷² But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. (Matthew 26:32-35)

⁸⁷³ Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:3-5)

⁸⁷⁴ And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins. (Alma 11:37)

⁸⁷⁵ And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. (John 8:29)

words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” (John 14:23) Has the Lord “made his abode” with you? If not, can you confidently say that you’ve kept his words? Do you even know his words?

God will not abide with those who willfully rebel against him.⁸⁷⁶ The spirit of God actuates a person’s ability to perceive and evaluate the net benefit of available options. To approach the presence of God requires you to adopt reason as your guidance system,⁸⁷⁷ always thinking about and doing what leads to the greatest long-term outcomes rather than what feels good in the moment. While God welcomes into his presence those who always do their best,⁸⁷⁸ those who are dishonest remove themselves from him.⁸⁷⁹

The love of God as a test of how well you know his character

The love of God is the central quality of his character.⁸⁸⁰ But what does it mean to love others as God loves you? As with other aspects of his character, people are too quick to reduce God’s love to their present understanding of what it might mean. God’s love is not just difficult to attain—it is difficult to perceive and learn.

How can you know that your understanding of love differs from God’s?

- Do you keep all of God’s commandments all of the time?⁸⁸¹
- Do you follow God’s example completely, all of the time, as far as you understand him to be?⁸⁸²

⁸⁷⁶ And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God. But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples. (D&C 97:15-17)

⁸⁷⁷ For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind. (D&C 67:11-12)

⁸⁷⁸ For the devious are an abomination to the Lord; But He is intimate with the upright. (Proverbs 3:32, NASB)

⁸⁷⁹ And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God...And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Revelation 21:10-11, 27)

⁸⁸⁰ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8)

⁸⁸¹ By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. (1 John 5:2) But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (1 John 2:5)

⁸⁸² And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. (2 John 1:6)

- Do you find it difficult or onerous to keep God's commandments?⁸⁸³
- Do you treat the needs of other people as equally important to your own?⁸⁸⁴
- Would you die for a family member,⁸⁸⁵ friend,⁸⁸⁶ stranger,⁸⁸⁷ or enemy?⁸⁸⁸
- How do you respond to correction? Those who invite you to improve are inviting you to draw nearer to God,⁸⁸⁹ and your response to them indicates the love you have for God.⁸⁹⁰

Those who know God love one another as God loves them.⁸⁹¹ If you fall short in any of the above-mentioned qualities, you should consider it as evidence that there is more about God's character that you need to learn and live in order to obtain eternal life.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

⁸⁸⁴ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16) But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (1 John 3:17)

⁸⁸⁵ For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. (Mark 3:35)

⁸⁸⁶ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

⁸⁸⁷ But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:29)

⁸⁸⁸ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (Matthew 5:44)

⁸⁸⁹ And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit. (D&C 11:12)

⁸⁹⁰ He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. (Luke 10:16) We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

⁸⁹¹ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (1 John 4:7) And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. (1 John 3:23)

⁸⁹² We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. (1 John 3:14)

13. Barriers that impede learning more about God

Our limitations present barriers to God revealing himself to us

Many have asked why God does not do more to reveal himself to his children. The fact is that he has always done absolutely everything that can be done. There is no limitation in willingness or activity on his part.

God desires to reveal himself to his children,⁸⁹³ but he can only do so in certain ways. We can think, feel, or act in ways that narrow or close off the ways in which God can reveal himself to us. Wherever a limit exists in our understanding of and experience with God, it is completely due to our choices, not his.

The barrier of insufficient desire to learn more about God

God invites all people to come to know him better, all of the time.⁸⁹⁴ While knowledge about God is a limitless feast,⁸⁹⁵ individuals differ significantly in how much of it they obtain and live. Different people desire to know more about God with different intensities. How much you learn about him is determined by the effort you exert in searching for more⁸⁹⁶ and the obedience you exercise in applying what you know.⁸⁹⁷

God's knowledge is an unending resource that we are meant to continue seeking after indefinitely.⁸⁹⁸ Only those who continually search for more of God's knowledge obtain eternal life.⁸⁹⁹ Those who stop searching after God's knowledge will experience the loss of some of the

⁸⁹³ ...I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh; For I am no respecter of persons.... (D&C 1:34-35)

⁸⁹⁴ ...he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him.... (2 Nephi 26:33)

⁸⁹⁵ Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; (Alma 5:34)

⁸⁹⁶ Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds. (Alma 42:27)

⁸⁹⁷ For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. (Matthew 13:12)

⁸⁹⁸ O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever. (Jacob 3:2)

⁸⁹⁹ Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:20)

knowledge they have obtained,⁹⁰⁰ although their diminished awareness will make this more difficult to notice.⁹⁰¹

If you believe that God knows all things⁹⁰² and that he cares more about your eternal joy than you do,⁹⁰³ it should be extremely easy to constantly seek his guidance on all things in your life.⁹⁰⁴ You will constantly seek and joyfully feast on any knowledge he is willing to give.⁹⁰⁵ The blessing of desiring more knowledge about and from God is obtaining and living according to it.⁹⁰⁶ Those who do not seek greater knowledge about and from God turn away from his offered gift to help them become better and achieve more than they ever could in and of themselves.⁹⁰⁷

The barrier of busyness

A significant cause of satiation in seeking knowledge from God is the busyness of modern life. The pursuits of modern people prioritize what has no eternal worth over what does.⁹⁰⁸ Few understand that their misprioritization isn't a matter of church versus the rest of life, but the failure to apply God's character to the daily tasks in life. God didn't give us the requirement to earn our daily bread and raise children simply as

⁹⁰⁰ Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:29-30)

⁹⁰¹ And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:11)

⁹⁰² O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁹⁰³ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him.... (2 Nephi 26:24)

⁹⁰⁴ But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 32:9) Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 37:37)

⁹⁰⁵ Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. (2 Nephi 32:3)

⁹⁰⁶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

⁹⁰⁷ Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide. (Helaman 12:6)

⁹⁰⁸ Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. (2 Nephi 9:51)

a constant overhead cost to compete with church. Instead, our temporal lives are meant to be a learning lab where we consistently discover and apply the will of God in practical ways. The problem isn't just that people don't think about God in their daily lives,⁹⁰⁹ but that they don't bother thinking at all. They fill their lives⁹¹⁰ with activities that fail to advance their eternal purpose as much as other things would—or, in some cases, fail to advance their eternal purpose at all. In fact, many intentionally overburden themselves in order to have an excuse not to think about their lives or feel guilty about doing less than the best they could. These are problems with dire consequences that the Lord expressly warned against.⁹¹¹ It is vital that you think intentionally about how you spend your resources, prioritize what has the greatest long-term effect, and delete from your life anything that does not provide greater benefit than cost.⁹¹²

The barrier of limits in similitude to God

You are limited in what Jesus can reveal about himself by how much like him you have become. The more like God you are, the more he can teach you about himself. The fact that Jesus reveals more of himself to those who already know more about and live more like him⁹¹³ is no accident. Without living what you know about Jesus, you will be quite limited in what more you can learn about him. Endlessly talking about or even studying about Jesus will do you very little good unless you are identifying and making the changes necessary to live what you learn.

Perception and becoming are inseparably intertwined. Your understanding of God can only slightly exceed how much like God you have become.⁹¹⁴ You can't comprehend God much farther than you've become like him.⁹¹⁵ What you notice, understand, and value are all progressive and sequential. You can only progress one step at a time in what you notice, understand, and value, and the next step is always limited by your present position. While you will always have access to the next step in the path, you cannot perceive, understand, or value what lies very far from who you presently are.

⁹⁰⁹ Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. (D&C 6:36)

⁹¹⁰ Seek not to be cumbered. Forsake all unrighteousness.... (D&C 66:10)

⁹¹¹ And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. (Luke 21:34)

⁹¹² Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. (Isaiah 55:2)

⁹¹³ For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. (Matthew 13:12)

⁹¹⁴ For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding.... (2 Nephi 31:3)

⁹¹⁵ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

The more like God you become, the more you will notice, understand, and value additional demonstrations of his character.⁹¹⁶ As you become more like God, you increase the breadth and accuracy which you can perceive,⁹¹⁷ understand,⁹¹⁸ and value⁹¹⁹ his goodness. You become more like God iteratively, living up to what you already know while learning more about him.⁹²⁰ New knowledge about God incrementally ratchets you closer and closer to him as you live up to it,⁹²¹ which allows you to see more and more of what he is really like.

The barrier of thinking you know more than you do

Your idea of God's character is far less than his actual character, no matter how lofty your idea of his character may be.⁹²² Anyone who is not God still has a great deal to learn about him.⁹²³ You must avoid the temptation of believing that all you know is all—or even most—of what there is to know. You can't receive greater joy from God without learning more about God. As long as you remain satisfied with your current beliefs about God, you will never learn more about him.

True disciples of Christ readily recognize the limitations of their understanding, firmly believing that even their most supported beliefs are incomplete, if not incorrect. They constantly test their beliefs against their observations of reality, and stand ready to open-mindedly listen to the ideas of others. They gratefully acknowledge when someone offers them constructive criticism. They emulate the humility

⁹¹⁶ And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. (Matthew 13:10-13)

⁹¹⁷ For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Psalms 36:9)

⁹¹⁸ And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; (D&C 88:11)

⁹¹⁹ The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; nevertheless, the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him. (D&C 88:49)

⁹²⁰ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9)

⁹²¹ And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours. And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more. (D&C 78:18-19)

⁹²² For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. (Isaiah 64:4)

⁹²³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

of the Lord by yielding to any idea that is shown to be better than what they already believe, and adopting it as their own.

While few would admit that they believe that they know everything there is to know about God, many act this way by spending little to no effort searching for new or better ideas about him and by ignoring or persecuting those who present them. Even those who have spent a lifetime diligently searching for and rigorously testing the beliefs they hold should be willing to search out and listen to the ideas of others. If this is the case, how much more humility should be exercised by those whose religious beliefs are so simple and unsupported that they can be adequately conveyed within a few sessions of a child's Sunday School class? Even with such shallow exposure to scripture, these professed Christians ought to realize how little resemblance they bear to the believers described there, either in their discipleship or the fruits that always follow,⁹²⁴ but they don't seem to notice or care because they are taught that God's most valuable blessings are already theirs but will only show up after they die.

Remembering that there is always much more to learn and become⁹²⁵ will help you be as prepared as possible to learn more from God no matter who or what he uses to teach you. You will continue learning more about God the same way you learned what you already

⁹²⁴ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:20) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35) And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:17-18)

⁹²⁵ And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily.... (Mosiah 4:11)

know: through searching for more information about him and by living everything that you learn.⁹²⁶

The barrier of seeing yourself differently than God sees you

The more God shows you about himself, the more you will see yourself as he sees you.⁹²⁷ It is not possible for God to reveal more of *himself* to you without revealing more of *yourself* to you. He is the Spirit of truth,⁹²⁸ he knows all things,⁹²⁹ and the more about him you learn, the more you will learn about everything, including yourself.⁹³⁰

As God reveals more of himself to you, you will see yourself differently than you did before. Whether these differences indicate aspects of yourself that are better or worse than you thought, their revelation will result in a greater burden to you than your prior understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, placing upon you the duty to do more and better than you did before.

You may come to see some aspects of yourself as better than you thought.⁹³¹ The revelation of greater capabilities, whether realized or potential, will require increased performance in order for you to retain a conscience free from guilt.⁹³²

⁹²⁶ And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved. Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive. And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:16-21)

⁹²⁷ They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; (D&C 76:94)

⁹²⁸ The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth; (Doctrine & Covenants 93:26)

⁹²⁹ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁹³⁰ For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Psalm 36:9)

⁹³¹ He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. (Luke 1:52) Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. (James 1:9)

⁹³² But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

The things that God reveals to you will, in many cases, show that you are not as good as you thought,⁹³³ and do not deserve as much as you expected.⁹³⁴ You will see that some of your merits are less valuable than you think,⁹³⁵ at least some of your faults are worse than you think, and that you probably have more faults than you knew. This revelation is necessary for you to find the motive and means to become better than you are and deserve more than you presently do.⁹³⁶ It is only through seeing more of the differences between you and God that you can know the way to become more like him and muster the willingness to do so. However, human nature interprets all such downward revisions of self-worth as negative, and those who have not yet learned the value of correction will tend to avoid and resent them. Take courage and be humble. God only corrects those who have the power to implement his corrections.⁹³⁷

What God reveals to you will change the value you perceive in who you are and who you aren't. As a result, you will see character qualities that must be added, modified, or removed in order to reconcile to your new understanding of God.

When God reveals anything more to you about how he is, it is always as an invitation for you to choose to be more like him in that way. You have to make any changes required to reconcile yourself with the new information he shows you about himself in order for him to continue to show you more. The more you learn about God, the more you will learn about yourself, and the more you respond appropriately to what you learn about yourself, the more you will continue to learn about God.⁹³⁸

⁹³³ "...the knowledge of the goodness of God...awaken[s] you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state." (Mosiah 4:5)

⁹³⁴ And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 14:7-11)

⁹³⁵ When Daniel was shown more of God's glory, it so dramatically advanced his idea of goodness that what he previously felt were his best attributes now seemed like utter filth: "[My] comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." (Daniel 10:8)

⁹³⁶ And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

⁹³⁷ And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3: 7)

⁹³⁸ Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:6)

The barrier of your rate of change

It takes time to find, test, and adopt new ideas.⁹³⁹ The faster you can accurately perform each of these steps, the more quickly God can teach you, and the more light and truth you will acquire compared to others.

The physiological strain of the pace and content of information about God is significant. It is not difficult to overwhelm most people, as few are interested in or accustomed to considering, reconsidering, or changing foundational beliefs.

Capacity for truth must be developed just like physical strength: through regularly exercising to the edge of your limits. Unlike physical strength, spiritual strength can be developed to the point where growth no longer requires regular rest. Train yourself to change faster by changing as fast as you can. Make a prioritized list of the potential improvements of which you are aware, and begin today to implement them.⁹⁴⁰ Train yourself to rely less on breaks by relying less on breaks. Learn that the value of rest is limited to helping you advance your purpose more than you otherwise could.

It's rare to find people who are willing to change, but it is even more rare to find people willing to change their rate of change. Through intentional effort, you can increase both, and the more you do, the more reasons you will have to continue to do so.

The barrier of seeking and receiving correction: Knowing the Lord and being known by him

The way you interact with opportunities to improve is the way you interact with God. God knocks on your door by showing you the possibility, necessity, and value of improvement across every aspect of your life and character.⁹⁴¹ You knock on God's door by searching for how you can improve yourself, others, or the world.⁹⁴² Those who do not perceive or correctly respond to God's invitations to improve cannot abide with him.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁹ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

⁹⁴⁰ The author's book *Joy on Purpose* presents an effective framework for systematically implementing intentional improvement without overwhelm.

⁹⁴¹ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20)

⁹⁴² As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

⁹⁴³ And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me. And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed. And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day. (Mosiah 26:25-28)

“Knowing the Lord” and “being known by the Lord” are phrases that depict the removal of the barrier between you and God. They measure the frequency and content of corrective interactions between you and him, not just the amount of knowledge that has been transmitted through that barrier. Knowing and being known by the Lord are a question of how valiantly you search out and respond to him.

The word “know” does not convey a specific sense of intimacy as used in modern speech. When a person is said to know another in the colloquial sense, a wide range of intimacy levels is possible. You could say that you know your spouse, children, parents, and in-laws—all of whom share different levels of intimacy in spite of being family. You can say that you know your work colleague and neighbor, even if you know them far less well than your family. You could even accurately claim that you know a person you sat next to in school decades ago but have not spoken with since. The scriptural sense of the word “know” is vastly different. To know someone in the scriptural sense of the word requires much more than simply having knowledge about them.

Knowing *of* God is not the same as knowing him or being known by him. To be known by the Lord is not a question of what God knows about you. God knows all about you, but that doesn’t mean he knows you. If the Lord says he never knew you, he doesn’t mean he doesn’t know who or how you are. He knows everything,⁹⁴⁴ including everything about you.⁹⁴⁵

A knowing relationship is uniquely intimate,⁹⁴⁶ beyond what is found with friends, occasional acquaintances, or the general public. It is not coincidental that the Lord employs the same language for our interactions with him as he does for the relationship between a husband and wife. The interactions between husband and wife are meant to join them together in the most complete way possible given their individual and separate physical bodies.

Though the fulfillment operates differently given the differences in particulars, the spirit of the intended unity we have with God is meant to be at least as broad, deep, and enduring as the ideal relationship

⁹⁴⁴ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it (2 Nephi 9:20)

⁹⁴⁵ For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. (Proverbs 5:21)

⁹⁴⁶ For the devious are an abomination to the Lord; But He is intimate with the upright. (Proverbs 3:32, NASB)

between a husband and a wife.⁹⁴⁷ The unity intended between a husband and a wife is meant to span mental, emotional, and spiritual domains, with physical connections being an important yet fairly limited means to that end.

To be known of God is a question of the frequency of contact and depth of familiarity that you have with him. It is not a binary measure, but one of degrees. A person's relationship with God can vary immensely compared to others in terms of what is exchanged, and with what level of familiarity. With obvious connections to marital relations,⁹⁴⁸ to know the Lord is to receive⁹⁴⁹ his influence within you, becoming alive and bearing fruit because of it. To know the Lord requires you to receive new instruction from him often, and to live differently than you otherwise would because of it. To receive his influence once changes you forever, and to receive it continually changes you continually. Scripturally knowing someone requires an ongoing relationship with them—growing, not static, and certainly not receding. Through knowing him,⁹⁵⁰ he is in you (through your receipt of what he gives you), and you are in him (through his love for you).⁹⁵¹

To know the Lord and be known by him requires that you intentionally pursue his purpose. It isn't enough to merely search out and do his will as far as you can discover it,⁹⁵² nor is it enough to only do what he preemptively asks you to do.⁹⁵³ Just as a good wife knows and is known by her husband as she does her best to pursue his purpose as she sees it *and* responds to his specific corrections and requests, to know God and be known of him requires that you search out and

⁹⁴⁷ "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30) Yoke here is to bind together with Jesus, as two married people are bound together. The same word is translated as *joined* elsewhere: What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mark 10:9) Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Matthew 19:6)

⁹⁴⁸ And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived.... (Genesis 4:1)

⁹⁴⁹ For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. (D&C 132:22)

⁹⁵⁰ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (John 10:27) I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. (John 10:14)These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.... (Revelation 14:4)

⁹⁵¹ Some might be surprised that we are not in the Lord through our response to him. Though few realize it, we tend to grossly overestimate the benefit we provide to God. Everything of value comes from him, and there is nothing we can ever do to reciprocate. What he asks us to do instead is to love others as he has loved us.

⁹⁵² Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

⁹⁵³ For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward (D&C 58:26)

follow his purpose *and also* that you respond when he sends you specific opportunities or invitations to improve.⁹⁵⁴

The Lord asks for the dedication of our heart, might, mind, and strength in service to his purpose.⁹⁵⁵ Those who limit their relationship with him to some subset of all they have to give will experience far less with him than what is possible and what he intends. It is not enough to mindlessly reduce your service to the Lord to a routine or checklist of tasks.⁹⁵⁶ Maximizing your religious activity is not the same as maximally advancing the purpose of God.⁹⁵⁷ Knowing the Lord requires a relationship that exceeds what can occur only at or through a church or within strictly religious bounds. No amount of overindulgence in a limited domain of interaction with God will compensate for neglect in another.⁹⁵⁸ A busy servant is not the same as a good servant.⁹⁵⁹ Service to God is always about what he thinks is good, not what you think is good.⁹⁶⁰ You can be fully occupied in what you suppose is service to

⁹⁵⁴ 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)

⁹⁵⁵ And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength.... (D&C 20:31-32)

⁹⁵⁶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

⁹⁵⁷ Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. (Luke 13:24-27)

⁹⁵⁸ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Matthew 23:23)

⁹⁵⁹ Note how the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan refused to interrupt his priestly duties to help the injured man encountered in his path. So, likewise, will mindless busyness blind a person to the unexpected but more important opportunities to serve Jesus along the way.

⁹⁶⁰ And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:6-10)

God and yet have a heart,⁹⁶¹ mind, or even actions⁹⁶² very far from what he is actually asking of you.⁹⁶³

Being known of God yields similarity to him, because the process of coming to know God consists of yielding to correction from him that shows you how to be more like him. As you are known of God, you will gain a greater understanding of what is best in yourself,⁹⁶⁴ in others, and in the world.

Walking with God requires making changes as you are shown ways in which you can improve. To abide with God requires you to be open to being corrected, and to implement corrections as they are made known to you.⁹⁶⁵ The slower you are to implement the changes suggested by what he teaches you, the slower he will be to provide subsequent increments of further information about himself.

The pain of knowing of better than what you have

As you learn to value the additional aspects of God that he reveals to you, you will come to recognize him and everything he provides as being increasingly more valuable than any alternative.⁹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, because so few people strive to learn and live all they can from God, the more you learn about him, the less often you will find others who have done the same. While it is comforting to think that God himself can make up for the loss of human relationships capable of the depth and quality you will increasingly crave, there are impassable barriers to experiencing a fullness of God's glory and joy while in the flesh.⁹⁶⁷ The combination of increased distance from your peers and increasing

⁹⁶¹ He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. (Mark 7:6)

⁹⁶² They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

⁹⁶³ Recall what Samuel told Saul when Saul sacrificed the spoils of war instead of destroying them as commanded: "...Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22)

⁹⁶⁴ They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; (D&C 76:94)

⁹⁶⁵ I Am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:1-8)

⁹⁶⁶ And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God (D&C 14:7)

⁹⁶⁷ Wherefore, no man can behold all my works, except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth (Moses 1:5) For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy. (D&C 93:33-34)

desire for glory and joy that only exists outside of this world creates an increasingly strong unanswered longing that must be carried while in this life.

The more you learn about and value God, the more overwhelming your desire becomes to be with him instead of remaining here.⁹⁶⁸ Increasingly, the only force that counters your desire to leave this world is whatever desire you have to remain here in order to demonstrate his goodness to others.⁹⁶⁹ Imagine what it would be like to have the value you previously found in all things and people suddenly stripped away in comparison to the divine value of what cannot be found in this world.⁹⁷⁰ To the extent that you lack altruism,⁹⁷¹ greater revelations of the goodness of God and the blessings he can provide hereafter increase misery here and now beyond the limits of what anyone who knows less about him can know is possible. The goodness and glory of God are such that increasing your knowledge of them by necessity shows everything else to be increasingly worse by comparison.

Only those of indescribably great faith would be able to continue mortal life in any normal way after gaining an appreciation of what is possible, bearing the extreme contradiction between the toil of mortal life and a knowledge of the greatness of God's love. Pain is not the greatest form of suffering. Knowing what good is possible without being able to obtain it is far greater. Those carrying the burden of knowing something of God's goodness must bear the disparity between what they know could be and what actually is in each task, every day. You need immense trust in God and faith in him in order to bear such a burden.

You increase your ability to bear the burden of knowing what is better than what you have through increasing your trust in God. Increase the trust you have in God through remembering all the reasons he has given you to trust him. Enumerate the times in your life when things were much better than they could have been. Recognize his hand in all things and be grateful for every good thing in your life. Learn

⁹⁶⁸ Because of how God's revelation of himself works, if you are worthy to know of him, you are worthy to be with him. Those who know him well have a right to rejoin him in heaven. Any who know him well here must fight the tremendous pull to leave this world, which is the Lord's offer to them. Their continuation here comes only by the love of God in them towards their fellowman, in opposition to the love from God to them, which they know they can only experience fully in heaven.

⁹⁶⁹ And the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee. And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people. (D&C 7:1-3)

⁹⁷⁰ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

⁹⁷¹ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail— (Moroni 7:46)

more about God's justice, and learn to lean into it by living up to the blessings you desire. Ultimately, increasing your trust in God is a matter of choice. As you repeatedly recognize all the ways in which God has blessed you and others in the past, you will have more than enough reasons to choose to trust in him.

The barrier of limited moral judgment

God's judgment is among his most important qualities. To judge correctly means to have an accurate idea of what is possible and what it is worth, which is necessary to ascertain what brings the greatest joy for the longest duration. Your value appraisal differs from God's in many ways. In every instance, differences between what options you see and what options God sees, and how you value something and how God values it present a situation where you would judge God as less than ideal were he to show you that difference.⁹⁷²

Every time God reveals more of himself to you, he will reveal differences between how you thought he was and how he actually is. Each revelation of God provides you with the opportunity to either upgrade your own idea of righteousness by replacing it with what God shows you, or insist that somehow your preconceived notion of righteousness is more righteous than God.

Your ability to judge others correctly is bounded by the limits of your own righteousness.⁹⁷³ Human detectors of moral judgment are limited to discerning the next increment of their progress towards God. The more like God someone is than you, the more likely you are to misjudge them and what they do as evil. This is why it is so crucial to judge others by comparing your weaknesses to their strengths (how are they better than you?), and not your strengths to their weaknesses (how are you better than them?).

God reveals himself incrementally to prevent your condemnation.⁹⁷⁴ As hard as it may be to believe, his character is so far from how you are that to show us it entirely all at once would guarantee your rejection of him. You would not presently value the aspects of God that you do not presently know. God will not reveal to you more about himself than what you can recognize as righteous. He won't

⁹⁷² Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil (Moroni 7:14)

⁹⁷³ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

⁹⁷⁴ But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water; and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me. (2 Nephi 31:14)

reveal himself so sufficiently that you will hate him. If he revealed himself fully, you would assuredly reject him, and rebellion against such great demonstration of his goodness would so significantly damage your ability to make moral judgments that it would be very difficult for you to obtain forgiveness.⁹⁷⁵

The natural man does not value what God values. Many Jews in Jesus' day misjudged him as unrighteous in response to his teachings and works. Some were being dishonest, but many genuinely believed he was wicked. For some, limits in their intelligence prevented their ability to correctly judge him. For others, closed-mindedness prevented them from detaching from their prior beliefs of what was right when he contradicted them.

Different approaches exist for moral judgment. A common method is to use static rules that define what is good. While rules can describe what is good in a specific situation, they can be misapplied and will not likely continue to indicate what is good under different situations. A much better way—God's way—is to calculate what is good based on the calculation of net benefit across available choices.

Those who operate on a rules-based morality are assured to see morality differently than God does, as his morality is based on the calculation of net benefit,⁹⁷⁶ and rules cannot accurately replicate what principles describe. Those whose morality is based on net benefit across available options will deviate from God's morality only when there are limits in their understanding of the set of available options or the cost and benefit of each.

Holy means that which is different and better. You can't correctly judge what is better beyond the limits of your appraisal of value. In order to recognize God's holiness, you need to correctly perceive available options and the long-term net benefit of each. The less you know about reality and the less correctly you assess value, the less prepared you are to recognize the holiness of God.

You mitigate the barrier of misjudging God by developing your intrinsic trust in him and learning more about reality. If you truly believe he is wiser and more knowledgeable than you, and you truly believe that he loves you more than you love yourself, you must assume that anything he shows you about himself is more righteous than anything else. In this manner, you can turn revelations from God from an opportunity to be offended⁹⁷⁷ into an opportunity to learn more

⁹⁷⁵ And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? (Alma 32:19)

⁹⁷⁶ He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation (2 Nephi 26:24)

⁹⁷⁷ And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. (Matthew 11:6)

about reality. The more you know about God and live as you believe God would in your place, the more you will see and value what is from, by, or like God.

The barrier of limits in knowledge of God

Your understanding of who and how God is increases gradually and incrementally.⁹⁷⁸ You can't know God completely all at once; you can only come to know him a little more than you presently do, over and over again.

Knowledge about God is sequential.⁹⁷⁹ In the path to God, each subsequent step builds on what came before. What God can teach us about himself depends on how much we already know about him. In the same way that new vocabulary words can only be defined by using words you already know, new knowledge about God builds on previously understood ideas about him.

Each step in the path towards God expands our view of what lies ahead.⁹⁸⁰ One reason that so many people think there is so little to know about God is because they have done so little to live up to what they claim to believe about him. Those who live as they believe Jesus would have found an unbroken pattern: each step reveals that there is much more to be learned than they had ever before supposed.⁹⁸¹

Getting to know anyone is a process because it takes time and interactions to learn someone's character. With God, the process isn't just limited by time or interactions, but also your ability to perceive. In order to correctly see more of God, your awareness has to increase beyond its present limits.

God will reveal more about himself to you as you learn more about him and live what you learn. Because he reveals himself to people commensurate with their heed and diligence in seeking him, this happens iteratively over time. To maximize your progress with God, fully and instantly implement anything he shows you about himself in your life, and tenaciously seek to learn more about him in all available

⁹⁷⁸ And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God. For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith. (D&C 98:11-12)

⁹⁷⁹ That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. (D&C 50:24)

⁹⁸⁰ But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Proverbs 4:18)

⁹⁸¹ Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

ways. While every step in the path must be taken sequentially, there is no limit to how quickly you can take them.

The barrier of your willingness to obey

There is a limit to how much God can reveal about himself to someone who doesn't fully live up to all they already know about him.⁹⁸² You have to forsake your sins in order to come to know God.⁹⁸³ While you continue to sin, or do anything that is contrary to his character so far as you understand it, you will remain ignorant of the aspects of his character that lie beyond your present understanding.⁹⁸⁴ A person cannot know God much better than they already do if they do not first obey what they already know about him. Why would you expect God to reveal more of himself to you if you still ignore or rebel against anything he has already shown you,⁹⁸⁵ when doing so would only increase the negative consequences that must follow willful rebellion against God?⁹⁸⁶ It is both dishonest and ineffectual to seek to know more about him before deciding to live up to what you already understand about him. Jesus frequently appealed to what his listeners already knew, but were failing to live. He knew that in order to progress closer to him, they first had to live according to what they already knew. In one particularly poignant exchange,⁹⁸⁷ he pointed out that the group of Jews to whom he spoke thought they had eternal life because of what the scriptures said, though they did not live what they said, particularly about him. He said their lack of belief in him was because they claimed to believe in Moses, yet didn't do what he said.

When you reconcile to what you know, you receive more.⁹⁸⁸ When you ignore, resist, or reject what you know, you lose even what you

⁹⁸² And there are none that doeth good except those who are ready to receive the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth unto this generation (D&C 35:12)

⁹⁸³ O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead. (Alma 22:18)

⁹⁸⁴ Only those who live in accordance with what they already know about the Father can perceive or recognize more about the Father. (John 6:46, Author's Reflection)

⁹⁸⁵ And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. (3 Nephi 26:10)

⁹⁸⁶ For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation. (D&C 82:3)

⁹⁸⁷ Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:39-47)

⁹⁸⁸ For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. (Matthew 13:12)

have.⁹⁸⁹ Anytime you do less than the best you know, you make any additional revelation from him less likely⁹⁹⁰ until and unless you turn back to the invitation to improve that you refused before.⁹⁹¹

Deciding to live as you sincerely believe he would in your place best orients you to the experiences that will teach you more about how he is.⁹⁹² If God was willing to reveal as much about himself as he already has while you were still estranged from him, how much more will he reveal to you after you align your life with how you understand him to be?⁹⁹³

Light and truth are taken away through disobedience.⁹⁹⁴ If you are disobedient to your present understanding of what is best or how God is, your understanding of both will deteriorate,⁹⁹⁵ often without your recognition of the reduction. Every time you do less than your best, you reduce your ability to do what is best in the future.⁹⁹⁶ The greater the knowledge you sin against, the more difficult it is for you to see and correct your faults in order to obtain forgiveness.⁹⁹⁷

⁹⁸⁹ But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:13)

⁹⁹⁰ Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2) They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble. In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me. Verily I say unto you, notwithstanding their sins, my bowels are filled with compassion towards them. I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy. (D&C 101:7-9)

⁹⁹¹ And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:20-21)

⁹⁹² ...feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do....if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do. (2 Nephi 32:3, 5)

⁹⁹³ For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)

⁹⁹⁴ "And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience..." (D&C 93:39)

⁹⁹⁵ And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received. (D&C 1:33)

⁹⁹⁶ And it shall come to pass, if they are not more faithful unto me, it shall be taken away, even that which they have. (D&C 60:3) Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. (Luke 8:18)

⁹⁹⁷ For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness. (Alma 39:6) Nevertheless, he has sinned; but verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death. (D&C 64:7) Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. (D&C 58:42-43)

Sanctification begins and continues⁹⁹⁸ as long as you are fully submitted to God. Sanctification requires continued obedience to all you know.⁹⁹⁹ Just one sin takes you out of the way.¹⁰⁰⁰ Those who turn away from new truth stand condemned by God¹⁰⁰¹ until and unless they repent and return to him. Those previously blessed by God will be punished for new disobedience against him.¹⁰⁰²

Eternal life requires diligently seeking to learn more about God¹⁰⁰³ and living everything you know as soon as it is revealed.¹⁰⁰⁴ In plain terms, you diligently search for more truth, and continue reconciling yourself to everything you learn.¹⁰⁰⁵ In order to remain in the stream of full blessings from God, you must continuously exercise full diligence¹⁰⁰⁶ in learning more about him and full obedience to all you learn.¹⁰⁰⁷

Jesus reveals more of himself based upon an individual's diligence in seeking to learn more and obedience to what they are taught.¹⁰⁰⁸ A

⁹⁹⁸ And ye must practise virtue and holiness before me continually, Even so. Amen. (D&C 46:33)

⁹⁹⁹ But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not. (Mosiah 4:30) For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him. (D&C 3:4)

¹⁰⁰⁰ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

¹⁰⁰¹ Ye call upon my name for revelations, and I give them unto you; and inasmuch as ye keep not my sayings, which I give unto you, ye become transgressors; and justice and judgment are the penalty which is affixed unto my law. (D&C 10:4)

¹⁰⁰² But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath transgressed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. (Ezekiel 18:24) I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:5-7)

¹⁰⁰³ And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

¹⁰⁰⁴ And again, I would that ye should learn that he only is saved who endureth unto the end. Even so. Amen. (D&C 53:7)

¹⁰⁰⁵ ...press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:20)

¹⁰⁰⁶ And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (D&C 14:7)

¹⁰⁰⁷ But blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life....Wherefore, let every man beware lest he do that which is not in truth and righteousness before me. (D&C 50:5,9)

¹⁰⁰⁸ And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)

person's willingness to integrate present knowledge into their character and actions actually increases their capacity to receive greater truth. The Lord said that perception of his light is controlled by how well we live what we already know about him.¹⁰⁰⁹ In order for him to reveal more about himself to you, you first need to live up to what he has already shown you.¹⁰¹⁰ God reveals more of himself to those who live up to what they already understand about him.

To walk with God, you must first stand with God. You begin walking with God by fully applying your understanding of his example to your life.¹⁰¹¹ As you increase in your understanding of God, you continue to walk with him by identifying new ways in which you differ from him and making the changes needed to remain reconciled to him.¹⁰¹² Until you are willing to reconcile yourself to how you believe God to be, you are not ready to learn more about how he actually is.

If you want to learn more about God, live up to what you already know about him. As you apply everything you know about God so far, he will teach you more about himself, enabling you to advance. You must be fully obedient to everything you know in order to obtain more knowledge from God. As you heed God's influence within you and fully emulate it in your thoughts, feelings, and actions, he will expand his influence within you.

The barrier of your ability to obey

Too many Christians believe that they can endlessly learn more about God without actually living up to what they know. Gospel study is meant to be a battle plan, not a pastime. You are judged according to the law you *live*, not the law you *like*.

God will not reveal to us more about himself than we are able to obey. God has promised that he will not give us commandments beyond our ability to obey.¹⁰¹³ This requires that he withhold from us any demonstration of himself that exceeds our present ability to emulate.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰⁰⁹ I will not show...my strength...save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words.... (Helaman 7:23)

¹⁰¹⁰ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

¹⁰¹¹ And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. (Leviticus 26:12) Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. (Psalm 119:1-3)

¹⁰¹² Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

¹⁰¹³ And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7)

¹⁰¹⁴ I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (John 16:12)

Greater truth is harder to perceive as true and harder to obey than lesser truth. There is no greater truth than how God is. You should expect greater revelations of the character of Christ to constantly test the limits of your capacity. Each individual has a different capacity,¹⁰¹⁵ and God will only reveal himself to each individual up to their capability.¹⁰¹⁶ The Lord has to step down truths to the magnitude and pace that you can bear.¹⁰¹⁷ His willingness and ability to do this is a great blessing that allows you to receive as many blessings as possible as early as possible, but it does not create a way to receive a higher blessing while living a lower law. While many truths can be reduced in a way where at least some benefit can be enjoyed before you are ready to receive a fuller version, there are many things that cannot be revealed in an easier or partial way.¹⁰¹⁸ God cannot reveal himself to us beyond our ability to fully implement what he shows us about himself in our own lives.

Your ability to obey is something that you can increase. Discipline is a muscle. The more discipline you exercise, the more capable you will become. You will find yourself with the strength to go and do¹⁰¹⁹ whatever God will command by going and doing what God has already commanded.

The barrier of your willingness to do what is best

God graciously reveals how he is to all people up to the absolute greatest quantity they can perceive and understand without becoming more like him than they already are. God can reveal a great deal about himself, even to those who do not know him at all or believe in him at all, because everything in life testifies of how he is, whether the individual recognizes it or not.

We are all endowed by our Creator with a great deal of internal light, including the ability to assess the relative value of different actions we can take in decisions big and small. Like a seedling sprouting of its own accord, we can progress a great deal in our character through feeding off our internal resources. A great deal of progress is possible even in an individual that does not know or believe anything about God

¹⁰¹⁵ I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. (1 Corinthians 3:2)

¹⁰¹⁶ For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:22)

¹⁰¹⁷ Therefore, be ye as wise as serpents and yet without sin; and I will order all things for your good, as fast as ye are able to receive them. Amen. (D&C 111:11)

¹⁰¹⁸ I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (John 16:12-15)

¹⁰¹⁹ See 1 Nephi 3:7, quoted previously.

if they choose the best they know of, according to their understanding of what is good. This includes doing their best in every aspect of their life from the seemingly mundane to the explicitly religious and everything in between. Unfortunately, even among the religious, few people apply this latent capability with enough fervor to reach the end of its utility. Instead, they are content doing less than the best they imagine, at least in some situations, cutting themselves off from anything still better.

The barrier of preference for temporal comfort and security

The Lord is how he is because being that way is the best for all, but often what is best for all carries a terrible price for him.¹⁰²⁰ The Lord's mortal life was full of suffering that dwarfed any positive experiences he enjoyed while here. He lived so as to maximize what he gave to all rather than what he received in return.¹⁰²¹ His life was aimed at the greatest eternal joy, not the greatest present pleasure, and these two aims tend to point in very different directions.¹⁰²² Human nature seeks to maximize temporal comfort and security. While neither of these things are evil in and of themselves, seeking them often works contrary to God's purposes.¹⁰²³

If you want to avoid hindering what God could teach you about himself, you'll have to let go of the idea of temporal comfort and security. There is a limit to how much you can follow Jesus while insisting on a certain level of temporal comfort and security. When a certain man came to Jesus professing his desire to follow him wherever he went, Jesus replied by saying: "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20) All value derived from possessions is subject to loss while in this life. In order to gain eternal security, learning about and living more like Jesus must be a higher priority than maintaining temporal security, as in many cases, any preference for the latter will absolutely limit the former.

¹⁰²⁰ For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)

¹⁰²¹ I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

¹⁰²² O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal. (2 Nephi 9:39) Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7)

¹⁰²³ But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God. (Mosiah 16:5)

In any moment, what you learn or already know about Jesus may direct you to think, feel, or act in a way that causes you to lose temporal comfort and security. Each such moment is a critical test in which few people consistently choose well.¹⁰²⁴ Desires not specifically aimed at Jesus above all else¹⁰²⁵ will invariably fail to notice these tests and choose incorrectly even in the situations that are noticed.¹⁰²⁶

The barrier of reputation with others

True disciples of Christ will seem so differently motivated to others that they could be accurately described as blind or deaf compared to normal people.¹⁰²⁷ Though they are exposed to the same information as normal people, they do not respond to it in the same ways. They think, feel, and act differently—according to how they sincerely believe Jesus would in their place, according to their intentional calculation of what benefits all people the most for the longest time, and not according to what feels best for them right now.

One who operates this way will not just seem different to one who does not—they will seem *worse*. Those who consummately serve God are viewed as marred by those who do not.¹⁰²⁸ They are not typically seen as nice, loving, wise, just, or selfless. Because greater truth is difficult to see as good, they are instead seen by most as unkind,¹⁰²⁹ judgmental,¹⁰³⁰ callous,¹⁰³¹ foolish,¹⁰³² and cruel.¹⁰³³

Those who see more of the truth because they are willing to submit to it will do things that other people can't understand.¹⁰³⁴ They will seem to overreact to what others see as minor or non-existent issues.

¹⁰²⁴ And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately (Luke 12:36)

¹⁰²⁵ But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? (Luke 17:7-8)

¹⁰²⁶ And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. (Luke 21:34)

¹⁰²⁷ Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant (Isaiah 42:19)

¹⁰²⁸ As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men (Isaiah 52:14)

¹⁰²⁹ Jesus told a Samaritan: "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews." (John 4:22)

¹⁰³⁰ See Matthew 23.

¹⁰³¹ In John 11, we read that Jesus intentionally remained away while he knew his dear friend Lazarus was incredibly sick, letting him die in order to demonstrate God's power in bringing him back to life.

¹⁰³² For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)

¹⁰³³ But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs (Mark 7:27)

¹⁰³⁴ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

They will turn over tables and whip people who are conducting what others regard as normal living. They will disrespect unfounded or harmful social norms that others regard as sacrosanct.¹⁰³⁵

What the Lord reveals about himself enables you to become more like him. As you become more like him, you will not only enjoy more of the blessings he enjoys, you will also carry more of the cost he pays. The more you learn about and live like Jesus, the more the world will treat you as it would treat the Lord.¹⁰³⁶ The more like Jesus you are, the more you will be persecuted by those who are not like him.¹⁰³⁷

The barrier of limits in your ability to manage chaos

Everyone has a limit in the degree of awareness they are willing and able to manage, and this limit determines how much God can reveal himself to you. You cannot learn more about God without learning more about everything else.¹⁰³⁸ All things are known to¹⁰³⁹ and present before God,¹⁰⁴⁰ and to the extent that you become like him, all things will be known to¹⁰⁴¹ and present before you.¹⁰⁴²

The bandwidth of revelation from God grows or diminishes as a whole, depending on whether you notice and live up to it or not. Greater understanding can be sought on specific topics and at specific times, but every increase in wisdom expands the bandwidth of general awareness. General awareness does not limit itself to the topics you explicitly ask about or the times when you are asking. It “bloweth where it listeth”¹⁰⁴³ at all times and in all places. If you fail to notice, process,

¹⁰³⁵ The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire; thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 7:25) ...that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

¹⁰³⁶ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.... (John 15:18-19)

¹⁰³⁷ But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake (Luke 21:12)

¹⁰³⁸ For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light.... (D&C 88:40)

¹⁰³⁹ O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. (2 Nephi 9:20)

¹⁰⁴⁰ He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever. (D&C 88:41)

¹⁰⁴¹ He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:28)

¹⁰⁴² But they reside in the presence of God, on a globe like a sea of glass and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord. (D&C 130:7)

¹⁰⁴³ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:8)

and put into practice new information you have access to, you become less like God than you were before. Every new increment of information about and from God makes you accountable for being better than you were before. God's light is an inexhaustible stream of information.¹⁰⁴⁴ God is always ready to show you what lies beyond what you presently see, feel, think, and do. At all times, in all places, and in every circumstance, God highlights what is best, explains why it is so, suggests what is better, and provides sufficient reasons to make it so.¹⁰⁴⁵

Knowledge about God does not exist outside of a relationship with God, and relationships with God are living, not static. The longer you maintain a relationship with God, the more that relationship will grow.¹⁰⁴⁶ The closer to God you become, the greater the flow¹⁰⁴⁷ of information into your mind. If you learn to manage the information God provides to you, he will give you more.¹⁰⁴⁸ If you fail to manage the information God provides to you, he will give you less.¹⁰⁴⁹ God will hold you accountable for noticing and integrating everything he makes available to you as you strive to make everything as good as you can imagine it to be.¹⁰⁵⁰

Managing information well requires you to seek, notice, and respond to it. This almost always includes recording and reviewing it. Do you seek more information? Those who are overwhelmed by what they involuntarily notice will not seek more. How intense or prolonged does new information need to be in order for you to notice it? Can you notice new information even in situations that are familiar? How often do you intentionally diminish the information around you through social media, headphones, or dulling substances? How well do you triage information, parsing it into prioritized plans of action? Do you make changes to improve based on constantly asking how things can be better, or do you train yourself to ignore what is less than ideal? The

¹⁰⁴⁴ And, behold, thou art my son; wherefore look, and I will show thee the workmanship of mine hands; but not all, for my works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease. (Moses 1:4)

¹⁰⁴⁵ And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit. (D&C 11:12)

¹⁰⁴⁶ That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. (D&C 50:24)

¹⁰⁴⁷ But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14)

¹⁰⁴⁸ For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. (Matthew 13:12)

¹⁰⁴⁹ And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries.... (Alma 12:11)

¹⁰⁵⁰ Harken, O ye people who profess my name, saith the Lord your God; for behold, mine anger is kindled against the rebellious, and they shall know mine arm and mine indignation, in the day of visitation and of wrath upon the nations. And he that will not take up his cross and follow me, and keep my commandments, the same shall not be saved. Behold, I, the Lord, command; and he that will not obey shall be cut off in mine own due time, after I have commanded and the commandment is broken. (D&C 56:1-3)

more you seek, notice, and implement the changes suggested by the information that God makes available to you, you will gain access to more.

14. Discovering and correcting the limits of your model of Christ

Live up to what you presently know to discover what lies beyond it

You don't know how the Father would actually live in your place, but your estimate of how he would grow in breadth, depth, and accuracy as you live up to your best present belief.

While you cannot receive the blessings of being like Jesus beyond the extent to which you are like him, you can be free from the moral punishment of sin by living up to how you currently believe him to be. The gospel provides a way for you to be forgiven for the inadequacies and errors of your model of how God is as long as you live according to how you understand him to be, try your hardest to learn more about him, and respond correctly to invitations to improve it.

Those who know something about God cannot sin by following their idea of what he would do in their place. Doing what you sincerely believe is right will always bring you closer to God, no matter how wrong you actually are.¹⁰⁵¹

You can and should confidently live as you believe Jesus would in your place. However, the confidence you have in what you presently understand does not excuse you for ignoring the evidence that something better is needed or rejecting potentially better ideas or actions when they are presented to you.

You should desire to know more about God all of the time,¹⁰⁵² but you should never be worried about what you can't yet see or understand.¹⁰⁵³ God precisely orders reality to provide the ideal circumstances to all people at all times in order to provide the greatest opportunity for all to come to him as much as they are willing to.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁵¹ Verily, if a man be called of my Father, as was Aaron, by mine own voice, and by the voice of him that sent me, and I have endowed him with the keys of the power of this priesthood, if he do anything in my name, and according to my law and by my word, he will not commit sin, and I will justify him. (D&C 132:59) For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil. (Moroni 7:11)

¹⁰⁵² Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)

¹⁰⁵³ Don't preoccupy yourself with what you can't yet understand nor long for what you don't yet have. Those things will fulfill their purposes in their sphere as you must in yours. What you already see, understand, and experience provides everything you need to accomplish the Father's purposes each day. (Matthew 6:34, Author's Reflection)

¹⁰⁵⁴ Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. (Exodus 16:4)

A detailed model of Christ is needed to more fully understand and address the differences between you and him

By arranging your present understanding of Jesus into a model of his character, you will more readily recognize opportunities to do what Jesus would in your place and notice areas where you need to learn more in order to know what he would do in your place.

While most people are simple enough that a lightweight model can accurately represent most of what there is to know about them, the Lord is the most sophisticated and deep individual who ever lived. Simple people can be accurately represented with simple rules like “Karen likes flowers” or “Bob doesn’t eat pork.” God is not simple. In order to adequately describe God, a much more sophisticated model is required.

The book *Joy on Purpose* provides a framework called the Life Plan that can be used to describe a person’s character in any level of detail desired. That framework consists of purpose, qualities, values, beliefs, goals, and tasks. Your purpose describes why you are. Your qualities describe how you are. Your values define what is important. Your beliefs provide a mapping between your purpose, qualities, and values to how you apply them to your actions. Your goals describe what you want. Your tasks describe what you do to accomplish those goals. If you knew someone well enough to write a specific enough Life Plan to adequately describe their purpose, qualities, values, beliefs, goals, and tasks, you could accurately predict what they would do and why they would do it in any situation.

The Lord’s goals and tasks are, ultimately, what you are after. These represent the application of his character to the choices you make in how you spend your time each day and why you do so. As you more fully and accurately ascertain the other portions of the Lord’s Life Plan, your idea of his goals and tasks will become more complete and correct.

Because there is more to know about God than any other person, his Life Plan is longer and more detailed than anyone else’s. While his purpose is discussed in part in this book, more can and will be said

about it, and his qualities,¹⁰⁵⁵ values,¹⁰⁵⁶ and beliefs¹⁰⁵⁷ require their own volumes to even begin to address. However, even an initial attempt at formulating his Life Plan will result in substantial progress in understanding what he is like and becoming like him versus the unintentional and disorganized effort made by most Christians. For now, all of these categories in your version of the Lord's Life Plan can be initially populated with what you presently know.

Train your model by learning about and explaining the past

You have to know and be like the Lord in order to have greater experiences with him. This means that much of the initial design of your model will rely on observations of God made by those who know him better than you. While you can use third party observations about God to formulate your initial ideas about God, you will have to test and refine them through your own experiences. You have to search out, collate, and think about the stories about God that you've read or heard from others. You have to make hypotheses about the character of God, test them, and pay attention to the results. Building a model of God's character through observations of others is like reverse engineering a computer program. Everything you know about what the program does is based on your interactions with the effects of the code, and not the code itself. To learn everything needed to recode your own version of the program, you'd have to use the program a lot—not just for a long time, but also in many situations, including in uncommon situations, and so it is with building your model of God.

The bulk of your model of God will at first be based on what you can learn about him from the scriptures. Over time, your own personal experiences with him will grow to be significant and frequent enough that they will amplify the content and value of what you can extract from the scriptures while also providing a rich data source of their own.

Your first objective in modeling how the Lord would live in your place is figuring out how to explain how he lived in his own time and place. It's quite difficult to accurately estimate what Jesus would do in your place if you aren't even aware of what he did in his time.¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁵ The Lord's qualities include love, justice, faith, wisdom, and knowledge, each of which is substantial enough that it deserves at least its own book.

¹⁰⁵⁶ If you want to be like God, you have to know both what God does and why he does it. It is one thing to describe what God does. It is another to know why he does it. To comprehend God's qualities, you have to have ample examples of what he does *and why he does it*. What the Lord values and by how much he values it is so far beyond what we imagine that an entire book is required to begin to explain it.

¹⁰⁵⁷ The Lord's beliefs are the laws of cause and effect that explain and govern all of reality. Reality is complex enough that it cannot be expressed in more compressed terms than all of creation itself, but your model of it is something that is well worth building, updating, and applying as far as you can in life, and this will be the subject of a future book.

¹⁰⁵⁸ [God] doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number. (Job 5:9)

A sample of the Lord's thoughts, feelings, and actions across a variety of situations and through time is provided in the scriptures. Every story about God provides a data point that you can include in training your model. Because God does not change, we can build an estimation of his character through producing a model that fits all of the examples provided.¹⁰⁵⁹

The scriptures are a raw material, and while some verses have immense stand-alone application, the best results only occur through significant, intentional processing over time. For best results, the principles present in the scriptures need to be extracted and applied to the specific situations in which you find yourself.¹⁰⁶⁰ It is not easy to extract lessons about the character of Christ from the scriptures, but it is the most valuable way they can be used and the reason for which they were provided. You will extract a greater volume of information at higher accuracy from the scriptures over time as you do your best to understand and apply what they teach you about the Lord while remaining open-minded.

The process of improving your model of Christ

Discovering someone's character requires more time and effort as their sophistication increases. As the most sophisticated being, God's character is significantly more difficult to comprehend than anyone else's. One way of measuring how well you know someone is counting how often you have to ask them what they think about something. The better you know someone, the more accurately you can anticipate their thoughts, feelings, and actions in and about any given situation. The more you know God's character, the more clearly you will know his will without the need for immediate and new revelation. The more you do not know God's will, the more depth or breadth you need in your model of Jesus. Your model of Christ will not be complete until it includes, explains, and predicts all observations possible in life—all of creation and every circumstance.

Improving your model of Christ is described in the scriptures as "proving what is good" or "laying hold of every good thing."¹⁰⁶¹ It is a process of learning everything you can, applying it every way you know, and assessing the results. It is a never-ending search for improvement.

¹⁰⁵⁹ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

¹⁰⁶⁰ ...I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. (1 Nephi 19:23)

¹⁰⁶¹ And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2) Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. (Moroni 7:19)

The completeness and correctness of your model of the Lord's character will increase line upon line through the following cycle:¹⁰⁶²

- You apply observations of God to your model by hypothesizing about or adjusting descriptions of his character.
- You test the model and gain new observations about God by living it.
- You repeat the process.

Incrementally, you better understand what God would do in your place, why he would do it, what he would not do, and why he would not do it. Over time and through experience, you can increase the coherence, sharpen the accuracy, widen the breadth, and deepen the depth of your model.

Increasing the coherence of your model of Christ

The coherence of your model is a question of how consistent and complete it is. Increasing the coherence of your model will require behavior that directly contradicts the training of most religious people. Religious people tend to develop a strong tendency to turn away from any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions they might find in scripture. This tendency is so strong that, for many, they don't even notice themselves doing it. They are taught that questioning their current beliefs is a sign of a lack of faith, when the reality is quite the opposite.

Apparent inconsistencies or contradictions are invitations to discover and correct limits in your beliefs. A considerable portion of the length and significance of the Lord's teaching in the gospels was given in response to clarifying questions asked to him. And yet, on so many occasions, Jesus' contemporaries failed to ask him about things he said or did that they were unsure about or perplexed by.¹⁰⁶³ It's sad to think of how much more we might have if they had the faith to ask him.

You ought to vigorously pester God with sincere questions whenever you encounter anything in scripture or life that:

¹⁰⁶² And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:19-20)

¹⁰⁶³ And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. (John 13:27-29)

- You do not understand.
- You could not explain to another, including those with very different intellectual capabilities or experiential backgrounds.
- Seems like something God would not do.
- Seems to be anything but the greatest possible expression of perfect love.

For example, most Christians struggle to reconcile God's qualities of justice and mercy. Can you explain how he resolves the conflict between them? As another related example, the Christian world struggles to reconcile the God of the Old Testament and God of the New; can you reconcile the two without violating the principle that God doesn't change?¹⁰⁶⁴

Instead of avoiding apparent inconsistencies and contradictions, you should seek them out! Not only will you vastly improve the accuracy and extent of your beliefs, you will also increase your confidence in them and your ability to convincingly explain them to those who do not have the faith that you have exercised by searching out and addressing apparent inconsistencies and contradictions.

Increasing the accuracy of your model of Christ

The accuracy of your model of God is a measure of the similarity between what you believe he would think, feel, and do, and how he would actually think, feel, and do.

The accuracy of your model of God is measured by how frequently you are proven incorrect in your beliefs about God, and by how much it matters. Error in more important things will matter more than equal error in less important things.¹⁰⁶⁵ Error in your model can be revealed by new things you learn about God, negative outcomes you face as a result of following your present ideas about him,¹⁰⁶⁶ and sufficient arguments about him provided by those who know him better than you.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (Hebrews 13:8)

¹⁰⁶⁵ "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (Matthew 23:23) On several occasions, the apostles' estimates of the Lord's will were so dramatically incorrect that he rebuked them sharply: "But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Matthew 16:23) "And when his disciples James and John saw [the Samaritans reject him], they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village." (Luke 9:54-56)

¹⁰⁶⁶ Experiences that violate God's promises to the faithful indicate insufficient beliefs about God. For example, while unpleasant, difficult, or downright painful experiences do not indicate insufficient beliefs about God, lack of sufficiency in mental, emotional, or spiritual well-being do. When life overcomes you, it shows that your beliefs about God are insufficient.

Every time you are surprised by someone you thought you knew, you reveal the limits of your model of their character. Each time someone surprises you in what they do, why they do it, and how they feel in doing so, it indicates a new way you can increase your familiarity with them. Even when you know a person very well, and even when that person isn't very deep, you can still be surprised when their behavior in some new or even familiar situation strongly deviates from your well-informed expectation. You can accurately predict the thoughts, feelings, and actions of normal people after getting to know them very little. Accurately predicting God requires knowing him very well. Until then, he will continuously surprise you. The apostles spent three years with the Lord, and yet they were frequently surprised by his behavior.¹⁰⁶⁷

God corrects our errors by precept and experience. He exposes us to people who know better than we do as long as such people exist, and when we refuse them or surpass them, sends us experiences that expose us to the consequences of our inadequate beliefs in order to motivate us to search for and empower us to identify them.

Your understanding of God's character is not static. It can and should improve over time. You must come to believe the being, no matter the particulars. All disciples of Christ believe that God is the epitome of good, that all he does is the best that can be done, that he knows everything, that he loves you more than you love yourself, and that every aspect of your life is precisely oriented toward your greatest benefit. However, your belief of how these qualities translate into specific actions can and should change in significant ways over time. Don't be surprised when your previously held beliefs are proven to be false. Constraining improvements of your model of Christ's character to what you already believe about him will significantly limit what the Lord can teach you about himself. The more tenaciously you cling to contradicted beliefs, the more your future mistakes will resemble those you've made in the past.

Some are driven in their unwillingness to change their beliefs by the misguided idea that clinging to refuted beliefs about God is a measure of your fidelity to him. True trust in God lies in how he actually is, not in the limited particulars of your estimate of how you thought he was. The key goal in this process is to develop you to the point where you achieve maximal teachability while preserving maximal trust in God. A willingness to let go of what you previously believed about him is not

¹⁰⁶⁷ For example, they were surprised both by his death and his resurrection: "And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." (Luke 24:11) "But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet." (Luke 24:37-40)

just a part of exercising trust in God, but a non-negotiable piece of building greater trust in him. Those who trust God the most are the most willing to change their minds when he corrects them.¹⁰⁶⁸ You have arrived at this goal when you reach the point where God can easily and instantly modify your views of reality, good, evil, and himself without negatively affecting your absolute reliance upon and trust in him.

The need to remain pliable in response to God's ongoing instruction is not an excuse for irregular obedience to how you believe God to be. You have to develop a model of God's character and steadfastly follow it, even while being completely pliable to correction of that model at all times and in all places. When you fail to advance your model, or fail to update your life in response to those updates, you deviate from the ideal given your present understanding; you cease to optimally advance towards God, as far as you know him; you fail to precisely reflect your sincere understanding of how he is given your present understanding, you fail to walk in the experiences he has ordained to render to you the greatest blessing and fullest future improvement, and you fail to demonstrate him to others as far as you are able.

Increasing the depth of your model of Christ

The depth of your knowledge of God is a measure of how much of what there is to know about him is known to you. How detailed is your knowledge of God? Can you describe him with the same level of detail as your earthly father?

It is fairly straightforward to draw a list of God's character qualities from the scriptures. However, as long as your understanding of the application and interaction of these qualities remains simplistic, being able to list them won't help you predict how God thinks, feels, or acts. A deeper understanding of what God's qualities mean is needed to predict his behavior, particularly in how they are practically applied. God is the deepest of all beings.¹⁰⁶⁹ A complex being like God cannot be accurately described in simple terms. The simpler your model of God is, the more frequently it will be incorrect.

In order to add detail to your model of God, you have to observe and think about life in higher detail. Low awareness people can be accurately predicted without much consideration of their circumstance because very little of what they do depends on the details of their

¹⁰⁶⁸ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:9-12)

¹⁰⁶⁹ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33)

situation. God's behavior is optimized across all of reality. He is aware of everything, and accurately predicting what he thinks, feels, and does in a given situation requires knowing a lot about the situation.

The more details with which you fit your model, the more correct that model will be. When thinking, studying, and asking about how God would behave in a given situation, use as much detail as you can. You need to know not just what he would do, think, or feel in general, but in a given situation. You need to know not just what he would do, think, or feel, but what he would *not* do, think, or feel, and why. For example, when you read that he did a certain thing in the scriptures, ask what about that specific situation made his action the best it could be. Enumerate other options he had and figure out why their long-term net benefit was less than what he chose. Every additional detail you learn in seeking God's will provides you with a clue to improve your model.

Increasing the breadth of your model of Christ

The breadth of your knowledge of God is a measure of how many situations in which you have an idea of how he would be. Most Christians incorrectly think that the Lord only cares about certain portions of their lives. Do you think that the Father only cared about what Jesus did in certain portions of *his* life? Or, as Jesus said, did he *always* do what pleased the Father?¹⁰⁷⁰ Though the segment a Christian thinks God cares about varies according to their denomination, nearly every Christian thinks the gospel is a list of rules, beyond which God has no opinion whatsoever. The truth is that every second of your life effects your situation here and hereafter. The example of Jesus wasn't given just so you knew how to act at church. You should know how the Lord would think, feel, and act in every situation. Learn what God would do when your tire goes flat on your way to work, or you get Lyme's disease, or your young child is scared. The problem is that nearly all Christians either don't understand how to model Jesus' character, don't care to do the work required to do so or—unfortunately—quite enjoy the off-books areas of life given to them through their limited application of the Lord's example.

To know God requires knowing how Jesus would think, feel, and act at all times and in all places, not just in the circumstances described by the rules taught by your church,¹⁰⁷¹ and not just in situations described in the scriptures. God is bigger than any box into which man tries to

¹⁰⁷⁰ And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. (John 8:29)

¹⁰⁷¹ For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. (D&C 58:26) And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. (Mosiah 4:29)

stuff him. He cannot be contained in any building, day of the week, volume of books, or list of topics. Those who seek to limit the domain of God or who only look for him at certain times or certain places will forever limit how much of him they find. He is in and through all things, and you must look for him in and through all things if you ever hope to see more of him than you have while only looking for him in specific places or at specific times.

God's wisdom touches every possible circumstance.¹⁰⁷² There isn't anything that God can't improve. There is no thing, no circumstance, no time or place where more information about or from God would not make it immeasurably better.¹⁰⁷³ All things different from God are less and worse than God and therefore would be greater and better by becoming more like him. God not only has something to say about all things at all times,¹⁰⁷⁴ but he has something *better* to say about all things at all times.¹⁰⁷⁵ The will of God is to make all things in earth just as they are in heaven.¹⁰⁷⁶ Jesus Christ is the great high priest,¹⁰⁷⁷ and he stands ready to improve everything¹⁰⁷⁸ that can be contemplated, done, or experienced up to and including making it just like it is in heaven.¹⁰⁷⁹

When properly understood and lived, the gospel of Jesus Christ effectively brings divine joy and meaning into even the most mundane elements of life. You don't walk with God by avoiding normal life, but by bringing his glory into normal life through learning and living as he would in each aspect of it. Learning and living as Jesus would even in the most mundane-seeming situations provide you with the blessings of being in God's presence even amidst the most temporal of situations and demonstrate his glory to those who would not observe it in a religious setting.

¹⁰⁷² I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad. (Psalms 119:96)

¹⁰⁷³ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:17)

¹⁰⁷⁴ And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come, and there is no end to my works, neither to my words. (Moses 1:38)

¹⁰⁷⁵ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. And as the rains and snows descend from the sky, and return not to it without watering the earth, to render it fertile and fruitful—providing seed for the sower and food for the eater—so is the word that leaves my mouth: it does not return to me empty; it accomplishes what I desire, achieves the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:8-11, Gileadi Translation)

¹⁰⁷⁶ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

¹⁰⁷⁷ Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. (Hebrews 4:14)

¹⁰⁷⁸ You are to offer them before the Lord, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the Lord (Ezekiel 43:24, NIV)

¹⁰⁷⁹ For by the power of my Spirit created I them; yea, all things both spiritual and temporal—First spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work. (D&C 29:31-32) And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

Limits in your breadth of knowledge of God become apparent whenever you find yourself in a situation where you don't know what Jesus would think, feel, or do. The disciples showed the limit in the breadth of their knowledge of Jesus when he slept through a storm at sea so violent that they expected it would kill them.¹⁰⁸⁰ When he raised a dead girl back to life, "...they were astonished with a great astonishment." (Mark 5:42) When Jesus walked on the water, "...they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered." (Mark 6:51)

In order to expand the breadth of your model of Christ, identify situations where your current model does not provide sufficient information to know God's will. "Search in the light of Christ" (see Moroni 7:19) by thinking,¹⁰⁸¹ studying the scriptures,¹⁰⁸² praying,¹⁰⁸³ and asking those whom you have reason to believe might know God better than you. Each observation you make through seeking God's will in a new situation provides you with a clue to improve your model. The more examples across which you fit your model, the more correct that model will be.

Measuring and increasing the confidence of your model

Do you have an idea of the confidence in each of your ideas about Jesus? You need confidence in your model of how Jesus is in order to follow his example in spite of any opposition. The confidence you have in your model of Jesus will affect the power you have with God.¹⁰⁸⁴ God's power comes through faith,¹⁰⁸⁵ and your faith in him increases with your confidence in your beliefs about him. You can only have as much faith as you have confidence in your idea of what God would do in your place. In order to have greater power with God and learn more

¹⁰⁸⁰ And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? (Mark 4:38)

¹⁰⁸¹ Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. (D&C 8:2-3)

¹⁰⁸² ...I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. (1 Nephi 19:23)

¹⁰⁸³ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1:5) Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. (Alma 34:24-25) And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive. (Alma 7:23)

¹⁰⁸⁴ Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth (Mormon 9:21) And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. (Moroni 7:33)

¹⁰⁸⁵ ...Without faith you can do nothing.... (D&C 8:10)

about him, you will have to develop a greater sense of your confidence levels in your beliefs about him, yourself, others, and the world.

What is the confidence threshold required for faith? It isn't certainty, but it takes much more than a guess. For any idea, how thoroughly have you sought out more information?¹⁰⁸⁶ What are your reasons to believe, and what are your reasons to doubt? You should hold and act on any belief for which your reasons to believe are greater than your reasons to doubt.

How would you measure confidence? Belief and doubt should both be based on reason, not feelings. Strong belief in something without strong reasons is not faith; it is delusion. Strong doubt in something without strong reasons is not skepticism, it is unbelief.

How would you increase confidence? You gain confidence through observation, reasoning, and experimentation, and the greatest confidence cannot exist without all three. You can't have confidence beyond your willingness to test your ideas, evaluate alternatives, and go with what works the best.

Recognize situations where you have more or less confidence than your evidence suggests is reasonable. In situations where you are overconfident, adopt more humility by arguing less often or intensely with and listening more honestly to those with whom you disagree, and spend more time searching for better ideas or evidence. In situations where you are underconfident, adopt more courage and consistency in acting and speaking according to what you believe.¹⁰⁸⁷

¹⁰⁸⁶ Faith requires reasonable use of all resources at your disposal. These include the scriptures, as well as all good books and people you have access to. Do not expect God to bring to your attention information you already have access to but did not make use of.

¹⁰⁸⁷ I believed, therefore I spoke... (Psalm 116:10)

15. Rules, principles, character

Rules, principles, and character are commandments at different scopes

God's commandments are instructions that help you better understand how God would live in your place and why. God's commandments can be expressed as rules, principles, or character qualities, each expressing how God would live in your place with higher fidelity. Rules are extractions from principles, which are extractions from character. All principles are emitted from character qualities, and all rules are emitted from principles.

A rule is a fixed description of how to act in a certain situation. Rules provide a way to transmit the greatest possible blessing to people unwilling to learn and live more like God than rules provide for. Rules are easiest for people to perceive, receive, and obey, but they are the most limited in how much of God's character they can describe.

A principle is a generalized description of a higher order purpose. Principles are emitted extractions from character qualities, just as rules are extractions of principles. Principles are more difficult for people to perceive, receive, and obey than rules, but they are capable of describing much more of God's character than rules. Principles prescribe behavior in terms of motives, transcending the limitations of rules, which are only applicable in specific situations. Principles are a blessing because they provide greater access to better behavior for those who are not yet willing or able to adopt God's character.

Character is the composite of a person's purpose, qualities, values, and beliefs.¹⁰⁸⁸ Character qualities describe God in the greatest accuracy, depth, and breadth, but provide a standard beyond what almost anyone is willing to perceive and live. Character provides the only way to merge principles that overlap or define a priority order between principles that conflict. The fullest description that of God comes in the form of living examples of his character,¹⁰⁸⁹ but these examples are the most difficult for people to perceive, receive, and obey. Those few who manage to understand, obtain, and live the character of God become most like him and can act as he does with great fidelity and extremely fine resolution in all situations in which they are placed.

¹⁰⁸⁸ These aspects of character are defined and mapped out in the author's book *Joy on Purpose*.

¹⁰⁸⁹ A rule can be misapplied, and a principle can be misunderstood, but a person possessing a character quality can give you feedback to help you see what you need to change to obtain the same.

Since the dawn of time, it has always been the case that almost everyone¹⁰⁹⁰ knew of another person who was more like God than they were. From Adam until now, God has painstakingly arranged for almost everyone to know of some other living person who had some character quality that was superior to the corresponding quality in themselves. While God's character is most often demonstrated through someone more like him than you are, it is least perceived, received, or valued this way, due to the limitations of human nature. While the greatest demonstrations of God's character leads to the greatest and longest lasting joy, they are also the hardest to see, as holiness is almost always far different than what people expect.

Much more of God's character is learned from principles rather than examples of it in other humans. While it is easier to learn God's character from principles than from human demonstration, it is much more difficult to learn as much in this way, as principles are a lower resolution channel than character. Principles are easier to perceive, receive, and value than character, but doing so still requires unusual virtue. While character is learned from the top down, through examples of those who already possess it, principles are typically learned from the bottom up, through abstraction from the rules that are emitted from them. People learn principles from observing common patterns across rules and formulating generalized representations of them. In order to extract God's rules into principles, a person must be more intentional, honest, and alert than most people are. It is because so few are willing or able to receive commandments by character or principle that most people are most familiar with commandments given as rules. While rules reveal the least content about the character of God, they are the easiest to perceive, receive, and value.

You keep different tiers of commandments differently. Rules are obeyed, principles are fulfilled, and character is embodied and lived. Rules are the letter of the law. You obey a rule by following it exactly. Principles are the spirit of the law. You *fulfill* a rule by learning the principle from which it was derived. You keep a commandment of character by becoming like the one who gave it. Those that keep commandments of character think, feel, and act as the one who demonstrated the example to them at all times and in all things.

Rules provide an initial idea of the character of God, but cannot fully describe it

A rule is a description of behavior under a specified circumstance, an instance of an applied principle. Rules are meant to assist us in initiating our understanding of God's character. Rules are waypoints on

¹⁰⁹⁰ At all times, there is one person on earth who knows God more than anyone else.

the path to similarity to Christ.¹⁰⁹¹ Rules provide a *beginning* of a description of Christ's character,¹⁰⁹² but they can't completely describe it. The objective of the gospel is to produce people who are actually more like Jesus, not just people who follow a list of rules.¹⁰⁹³ The point of rule-based commandments is to bring us to principles and on to the actual character of Christ.

The more you rely on rules for your understanding of God's character, the less accurate your understanding of his character will be. God's character cannot be described only by rules, because he lives by character qualities and principles. Each of God's rules provides a low resolution encapsulation of some aspect of his character. While they provide greater specifics than principles, rules do not cover all situations, nor do they provide the necessary hierarchy of importance required to sufficiently allow for modeling what God would do when two rules conflict. A person who only has rules cannot accurately describe God, know what he would do in all situations, or why he would do it.

There are many blessings available from God that are not obtainable by those whose morality is based on rules.¹⁰⁹⁴ As all good stems from the character of God, each lapse in fidelity to the character of God created by the shortcomings of rules corresponds to a lack of blessings from being like him in that way. As long as your knowledge of him is limited to rules, you cannot say you know him. Because eternal life is to know him, rules-based morality or religion cannot provide you with eternal life.

Rules don't apply outside of the specific situation they describe

A rule is a specific instruction for a specific situation. Unfortunately, rules do not usually come with a description of the situation under which they apply or exclusions to indicate when they do not. God's pattern is to provide universal rules with personal exemptions or exclusions. For example, the commandment "thou shall not kill" did not specify the difference between human, animal, and plant life, nor did it

¹⁰⁹¹ "God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with Himself, so that they might have one glory upon another; and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 354).

¹⁰⁹² The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. (Psalm 119:130)

¹⁰⁹³ Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. (James 3:3)

¹⁰⁹⁴ We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (Hebrews 13:10)

differentiate between self-defense, the application of justice, or murder. It did not come with a description of times when it did or did not apply, but when God told Moses to kill whole nations, he did not argue.

Rules cannot describe how to live like Jesus outside of the limits of their scope. A rule applied outside of the situation it is designed for will describe and lead to behavior different than how Jesus would live under those circumstances. In any case where the limits of rules apply, the purpose of the principle will be best served by behavior other than the rule.

Upgrading from rules to principles provides you with better tools to achieve the best possible outcome independent of the particulars of the situation. While rules describe optimal behavior in specific situations, principles describe optimal behavior *across* specific situations. While rules are useful and helpful in the endeavor to learn more about God's character, greater progress requires that we transcend situation-specific rules through adopting and living by principles.¹⁰⁹⁵

Rules can't cover all situations

God's *commandments* cover all situations, but his *rules* can't.¹⁰⁹⁶ God's commandments are instructions indicating his will. His will in any situation is how Jesus would think, feel, and act in that situation. There is no situation where Jesus' thoughts, feelings, and actions are undefined. However, there are many situations where you will not be aware of a rule from God that prescribes what your thoughts, feelings, and actions should be. A list of rules that covered every possible situation would need to be as infinite as reality itself to cover every circumstance.¹⁰⁹⁷ For example, what color would Jesus paint the walls of your living room? What kind of car would Jesus buy? What would Jesus eat for breakfast? These questions and a seeming infinity of others remain unanswered by the rules-based commandments found in the scriptures. However, they *are* covered by the principles provided there.

While God can prescribe ideal behavior to anyone in any situation and provide the solution to any problem, the specific nature of rules

¹⁰⁹⁵ Who arose beyond the limits of dependence upon human rules or finite statements of God's law—which both have circumstantial and chronological limits of applicability and which are both limited in content and context—to the endless flow and breadth of eternal life, which has no limit in applicability or duration or content or context. The law appoints men as high priests in spite of their weakness. However, the word of the oath improves you beyond your weaknesses, making you an everlasting Son. (Hebrews 7:16, 28, Author's Reflection)

¹⁰⁹⁶ Rules cannot describe what Jesus would think, feel, or do where the rules do not apply: "And by [Jesus Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:39)

¹⁰⁹⁷ This is why King Benjamin gave the following disclaimer after his brief list of sins: "And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them." (Mosiah 4:29)

makes it impossible to provide a sufficiently large list of rules to describe all possible situations.

Rules break down amid changing circumstances

Rules describe preexisting solutions to previously seen problems. Rules are ill-fitted to adapt to changing circumstances. The more complex life becomes, the less likely existing solutions are to apply to present problems. As complexity increases, conditions change, new details emerge, and constraints change. Any change in circumstance makes it less likely that the prior rule still describes the path to the ideal outcome. The more complex life becomes, the more the limitations of rules become obvious, and the more principles and character are needed to thrive in and overcome that complexity.

Rules are traps for those who want to do less than their best

Rules often become traps for those seeking to excuse themselves for doing less than their best.¹⁰⁹⁸ Rules-based religious paradigms look at life through the filter of minimum requirements instead of maximal potential. God's rules are meant to help us understand what he is like and become like him, but instead of using rules to answer the question "what would Jesus do?" many Christians only ask "what can I get away with?" They don't seek to do the best they can, only the minimum they absolutely have to do.

The wicked will resist new and better ideas that violate their rules, because those ideas identify the areas of their character that aren't aligned with God, removing their ability to be wicked without feeling guilty about it.¹⁰⁹⁹ An unfortunate number of people remain in and venerate rules-based morality simply because it provides them with the ability to pursue what they know is less than best while feeling the least guilt—though few realize it.

It's common to hear complaints about how difficult rules-based moral systems are to keep. The real challenge isn't the difficulty of the system, but the difficulty of following it while maintaining your desires for anything else. Perceived difficulty in rules-based systems comes from a double mind and continued choice to sin. Rules-based systems are excellent at plainly manifesting limitations in submission to God, and until those limits are removed, no person is prepared to live commandments of principle or character.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Doctrine unto fools is as fetters on the feet, and like manacles on the right hand. (Sirach 21:19)

¹⁰⁹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:19-21)

Rules-based morality requires very little energy or thought. All you have to do is keep a list of rules that someone gives you. No matter the length of the list of rules, it will always be limited to a subset of life, and therefore easier to live than any principles- or character-based morality. Observing rules-based morality has a very high likelihood of giving someone an unrealistically high estimation of their own righteousness. Rules-based morality provides unrealistically high confidence. Unlike anything else known in reality, a rules-based moral system presents only two possibilities: everything is 100% correct, or nothing is. Finally, rules-based systems provide massive self-esteem for an exceedingly low price. With a rules-based moral code, there is no need to actually become a good person or provide others with actual value; if you keep the rules, you are as good a person as anyone could ever be, and you are better than anyone who doesn't.

While the ease of conveyance and obedience of rules makes them more accessible to more people than principles or character, each of their properties also makes it more difficult to ascend beyond them. The packaged, finished nature of rules makes the transition towards actively thinking about and testing what you believe all the more difficult for those who live such rules-based systems. Rules-based people have little practice with critical thought and feel overwhelmed in doing so. They are often taught that to question their rules is to betray God. It takes them a great deal of faith to learn to segment their beliefs and assess individual confidence measures for each of them, based on specific reasons. Their binary confidence assessment doesn't help, as it deprives them from any subtle onramp to a better way of thinking; in order to abandon their 100% confidence, their system tells them they must accept 0% confidence, and that is something that most people are not willing to do. Finally, anyone abandoning a rules-based moral code will likely have to accept a drastically downgraded self-worth, as they will need to face the reality that their rules probably failed to make them any better than those without them, failed to help them overcome significant challenges in reality, and may have actually made them significantly worse than they would have been without them. The only way to recover lost self-worth is to actually become the kind of person you assumed you were before.

Principles are harder to keep than rules

Professed Christians often present the Lord's way as easier than anything less.¹¹⁰⁰ For example, many believe that the principles Jesus

¹¹⁰⁰ The Lord said that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (see Matthew 11:30), but this is only obvious in comparison to the world's alternatives. The Lord's way does not have a lower cost than the world's way—it has a higher net benefit. The Lord's way is not cheapest, but it is the most valuable; it is not the fastest, but it lasts the longest; is not the easiest, but it is the most worthwhile.

taught during his mortal life are easier to live than the law of Moses.¹¹⁰¹ Principles will only seem easier than rules to those who inconsistently live them. Principles are more difficult to live than rules are to keep. A person unable to perfectly live rules is unable to live by principles.

The main difference between principles and rules is that a rule applies only to a specific situation, but principles scale and transfer across contexts. It is because principles are more generally described than rules and can be applied across any situation that they are much more difficult to keep than rules. There are infinitely more opportunities to break principles than there are to break rules.

To learn and live up to principles requires greater virtue than rules. Most people are not willing to become as good as they would need to be in order to live by principle.

Principles require a pure and noble motive. While you can obey a rule without understanding why it is necessary, principles specify action as the application of a motive. Principles specify *what* to do from the perspective of *why* to do it. Those who hold multiple motives will struggle to live by principles, because they will alternate between competing motives in response to challenges. The greatest motive is love, which is dedication to the benefit of others independent of the benefit to self.¹¹⁰² Love is a motive that cannot co-exist with any other.¹¹⁰³

Principles require honesty. Dishonest people will apply principles only when it serves their selfish interests, greedily maintaining a false nobility. Meanwhile, they use principles to justify whatever their arbitrary emotions have enticed them to do.¹¹⁰⁴

Principles require knowledge. Unlike obedience to rules, living by principle requires consideration of outcomes. The calculation of what benefits others the most requires knowledge of cause, effect, and value. What benefits the most cannot be stipulated with rigid rules for all, because what benefits the most differs between people and situations.

¹¹⁰¹ This is tragically incorrect: “The Law is not a check-list that we keep; it’s a benchmark that we fail.” (Tim Keller) God does not give commandments that are not possible to follow (see 1 Nephi 3:7). The law of Moses is not an exception to this. It was possible to perfectly follow the rules of the law of Moses. There are several people in the scriptures who are specifically said to have done so. Zacharias and Elisabeth kept “all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (see Luke 1:5-6). Simeon was “just” (Greek: innocent of sin) (see Luke 2:25). Paul said he was blameless “touching the righteousness which is in the law” (Philippians 3:6). The Psalmist pledged perfect behavior (see Psalm 101:2).

¹¹⁰² Fill me with joy through taking upon yourself the same inner motive, loving with the same love, being actuated by the same spirit, and coming to the unity of the same understanding as I have, Without any preference for yourself over others, or thinking you are more than you are, but humbly recognizing when others are better than you, Concerned more about others than yourself; These attitudes I direct you to are those that were in Jesus Christ. (Philippians 2:2-5, Author’s Reflection)

¹¹⁰³ A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

¹¹⁰⁴ For example, the Pharisees excused their failure to care for their parents as required by the law by dishonestly pretending to be reserving their wealth for themselves. See Mark 7:11-13.

Greatest net benefit is not the same as the greatest number of people that receive some benefit.

Principles require understanding. Principles require the individual to interpret and apply them. When you upgrade from rules to principle, what is right can no longer be discerned merely by blindly following something or someone; You actually have to query the light that God has given you, researching your options and evaluating the long-term cost and benefit of each. You actually have to study God's word, pay attention to the world, and actually think critically about the choices before you. You have to ask questions that identify your blind spots and crack open your preconceived notions with greater understanding from God.

If a person were honest, intelligent, and benevolent, the following would be sufficient to guide them for all eternity: always do everything you can to improve all things as much as possible. Unfortunately, honesty, intelligence, and benevolence are all rare qualities, and even less abundant in combination. Most people have none of the three, and those who have any of these qualities do not have very much of them. A shortage of these three qualities make the full, plain truth much harder to see and seem less desirable to obtain. In his mercy, God presents the truth in reduced quantity and quality, adapted as needed to hearer's preparation.

To cater to those who are less honest, intelligent, or good, lesser representations of this same truth must be given. In practice, this usually means by providing a rule. When a person can't handle a principle, a rule is the next best thing.

It is possible to keep God's rules and yet work against his purpose

A primary benefit *and* drawback of rules is that you do not need to understand their intent in order to follow them. While this enables more people to follow the rule if greater understanding were required, it also makes possible the exercise of the rule against the intended outcome.

The greatest example of using rules to argue against their intent is the treatment Jesus received at the hands of ruling Jews. The crimes they charged him with and most of the arguments they offered against his teaching and works were stipulated in the law of Moses, whose rules he indeed broke, but whose purpose he perfectly fulfilled.

Once people forget that the purpose of God's commandments is to instruct them in becoming more like him,¹¹⁰⁵ it becomes all too easy for religious practice to corrupt to the point that it turns the hearts of people *away* from God rather than *towards* him,¹¹⁰⁶ makes them *less* like him rather than *more* like him,¹¹⁰⁷ and makes them *hate* rather than *love* those who are more like him.¹¹⁰⁸ The Lord chastised the Pharisees for developing traditions so obviously against his purpose, but many Christians do the same or worse today.¹¹⁰⁹

It is possible to keep God's rules without ever learning his purpose, and this is precisely what happens most of the time, even in the rare case that people actually keep the rules at all. God's rules are meant to teach you about his principles,¹¹¹⁰ but this will only happen inasmuch as you actively question the reasons for his rules¹¹¹¹ and pay attention to their consequences (see John 7:17).

God does not want you to be an animal¹¹¹² that unthinkingly follows his rules.¹¹¹³ He wants you to learn how he is and choose to be like him.¹¹¹⁴ As you live by the rules you receive and pay attention to

¹¹⁰⁵ But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Romans 9:31-33)

¹¹⁰⁶ Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men— (2 Nephi 27:25)

¹¹⁰⁷ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves (Matthew 23:15)

¹¹⁰⁸ They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

¹¹⁰⁹ But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:3-9)

¹¹¹⁰ Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. (Psalm 119:66)

¹¹¹¹ Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. (Psalm 119:104)

¹¹¹² Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee (Psalm 32:9)

¹¹¹³ For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. (D&C 58:26-29)

¹¹¹⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:21) A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. (Matthew 12:35)

their consequences, you will develop a greater understanding of God's principles in ways you can't when you are already satisfied with judgment based on the unthinking acceptance of rules alone.

Keeping principles requires breaking rules

Wherever a principle exists, you will find situations where keeping the principle requires breaking the rules. Rules are generated from principles, but they can never adequately replace the principles they were emitted from. Where contradictions between rules and principles exist, the spirit of the law requires you to violate the letter of the law.

Knowing when a rule violates a principle requires you to understand the principles a rule comes from. Never break a rule whose purpose you do not confidently understand. Your lack of understanding for why a rule exists is not the same as or an adequate substitution for understanding the principle it is based on! Until you understand a rule well enough that you would gladly bear the consequences of breaking it, you shouldn't do so.

Keeping principles is always more important than keeping rules.¹¹¹⁵ On several occasions, Jesus broke rules from the law of Moses in order to keep the principles of the law of Moses. For example, the Lord taught that the purpose of the Sabbath was more important than the rules given to govern it. When confronted by the Jews because his disciples had broken the law of Moses by harvesting and eating grain from the field they walked through while preaching, he replied: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28) The principle of the sabbath wasn't that man should not work that day, but that on it he should exclusively pursue God's work. The eating of the grain furthered God's work as it allowed the Lord and his disciples to continue their preaching and walking.

How could Jesus break God's rules and still not sin?¹¹¹⁶ To be "perfect" isn't to live all of the rules all of the time, but to always live the intent for which they are given. Jesus only ever broke the rules in the law of Moses when it was required to keep the principles in the law of Moses.¹¹¹⁷ Whenever there was a conflict, Jesus lived the higher law—

¹¹¹⁵ All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Corinthians 6:12) All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. (1 Corinthians 10:23) ...Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind....I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (Romans 14:5, 14)

¹¹¹⁶ A much clearer way of stating this is that Jesus always did what was best for the world according to his understanding of the options available and the cost and benefit of each. He always acted out of a pure motive of love for all, even as his understanding of what was best grew.

¹¹¹⁷ For example, when he refused to stone the woman taken in adultery, as required by the law.

the law that more accurately described how the Father would live in his place.

Sin consists of doing less than the best you know.¹¹¹⁸ It is a sin to live a lower commandment when you know of a higher one, as higher commandments will always bring greater good. No commandment can excuse you for doing less than the greatest good that you know of. This is why Jesus spoke against the priest who refused to help the beaten man left for dead in order to preserve his ceremonial worthiness in the parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10). The Lord used the commandments to help identify the best course of action, but never used them to excuse himself for doing less than what was best.

Principles are more succinct than rules

Principles concentrate on conveying intent, allowing the individual to figure out ideal behavior in any situation instead of overtly prescribing it in every particular situation. You can imagine commandments as a signal coming from God with a slider that modulates between intent and means. The more you describe the intent of a commandment, the more the commandment becomes a principle. The more you specify the means of achieving the intent, the more the commandment becomes a set of rules.

Principles are richer and more succinct than the rules derived from them. Because principles apply over every circumstance and at every scale, a single principle may subsume many rules without any loss of information. Principles are succinct because they only describe intent, while rules describe a means to accomplish that intent in a specific situation. A rule contains everything you need to know to obey it, but obedience to a principle requires knowing its intent. The spirit of the law cannot be applied without understanding why the law was given, including the cost and benefit of obedience, disobedience, and any alternatives.

In order to live a principle, you need to understand more about reality than you do with rules. A principle is implementable across the full spectrum of awareness of reality. The more about reality that you correctly understand, the more effectively you can pursue a principle.

The power of a principle is in how many rules it can absorb. Jesus demonstrated the brevity of principles by collapsing the more than 600 rules in the law of Moses down to 44 verses of principles in the Sermon on the Mount, and then condensing those down to the two great commandments. Jesus said that the entirety of the law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets emitted from the principles “love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind,” “love your neighbor as

¹¹¹⁸ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

yourself.”¹¹¹⁹ On another occasion, he said all of the law and prophets are answered by the principle “treat others as you wish they would treat you,”¹¹²⁰ showing that you fulfill the first great commandment by living the second great commandment.¹¹²¹ Every instruction God has ever given or will ever give aims to this supreme end: We are to be like Jesus is,¹¹²² which is like the Father is,¹¹²³ by loving as he did.¹¹²⁴

Detecting violation of principles

The fact that principles scale and transfer to adjacent applications can be a powerful way to screen your life for hypocrisy, which is a form of dishonesty caused by a mismatch between what you do and why you do it. Principles scale, and if you violate your principles in small¹¹²⁵ or large¹¹²⁶ things, you are not a principled person.¹¹²⁷

Some people are not intelligent enough to realize when they violate their own principles. Others are smart enough to detect inconsistency, but too careless to notice. Still others know their hypocrisy well, but find sufficient comfort hiding behind the pretense of principle, having seared their conscience so thoroughly that their only source of shame is found in the negative opinions of others.

Jesus frequently pointed out the hypocrisy of others by identifying the principles the people pretended to keep, then measuring the consistency of their actions against them. For example, he pointed out that the Jews who attacked him for working miracles on the Sabbath didn’t actually oppose working on the Sabbath, since none ceased caring for their animals that day.¹¹²⁸ The principle of the Sabbath is to

¹¹¹⁹ Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)

¹¹²⁰ Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

¹¹²¹ “...he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law...if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Romans 13:8-9)

¹¹²² ...ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one. (3 Nephi 28:10)

¹¹²³ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

¹¹²⁴ This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

¹¹²⁵ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Matthew 7:3)

¹¹²⁶ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Matthew 23:23)

¹¹²⁷ He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. (Luke 16:10)

¹¹²⁸ And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. (Matthew 12:11-12)

provide a full day to dedicate to God's work. Had they been living the principle, they would have celebrated Jesus' work and not opposed it.

You can detect hypocrisy through measuring the consistency of your intent across your actions. As an exercise, consider your actions in a specific area or timeframe. For each action, ask yourself why you do it, and then whether there is a better way to accomplish your stated intent. Pay particular attention to mismatches between seemingly big and seemingly small situations. You are a principled person when you continuously make any changes needed to bring your intent and actions into mutual alignment.¹¹²⁹

Error rate in rules, principles, and character

Rules, principles, and character are all susceptible to the error of using a less important commandment when a more important, mutually exclusive commandment is available. You should never allow a less important commandment to displace a more important commandment. Each commandment type also has unique potential sources of error.

Rules are the easiest type of commandment to equivocate. Rules can be applied to the wrong situation, or be wrong altogether. In either case, if you are observant and honest, you will notice that the intended outcomes do not occur, do what you can to correct for the damage done, and learn from your mistake. Of course, those who have an affinity for rules are the least likely to notice or learn from this kind of error, as they are likely to think that keeping the rule is its own reward, and might even consider it a mark of faith to live a rule in spite of obvious negative outcomes.

Principles are more difficult to equivocate than rules, primarily because their generality prevents applying them to the wrong situation, but they can still be applied poorly. Principles can still be badly implemented in ways that counter the intent of the principle. For example, it is good to save up money and invest, but it might be very bad to make a particularly poor investment.

Character qualities are the hardest to equivocate. Unlike rules or principles, character qualities do not require the formulation of a definition or the application of it, just an example. Character qualities are embodied in people, and all that is required to minimize error is to follow the example of the person who has the quality. For example, you might attempt to embody the quality of love, but if you detach it from the example of Christ, even if you live it perfectly, you will likely live the world's corrupted version of it instead of the best version demonstrated

¹¹²⁹ A structured approach to aligning your entire life from purpose to goals and daily tasks is described in the author's book *Joy on Purpose*.

by the Lord. The world's version of love will do things like allow an adult child to live with you for free indefinitely without any improvement, but God's love will not.

It is easy to get a rule wrong. It is harder to get a principle wrong—there are a lot more examples that you can use to fine tune it from thinking and the experiences of others before having to make the mistake with your own experiences. It is harder still to get a character quality wrong. Even if a potential character quality passes the gauntlet of thinking about it or applying the experiences of others to it, the moment you embark on living true to a character quality, you will be barraged by evidence of whether it is worth it or not.

It is better to follow a principle, even in specific situations where the rule seems to yield a better result

Rules are never as important as the principles they come from. The most beneficial time to keep the principle rather than the rule is precisely when keeping the rule seems to yield the greater outcome. In fact, this is the correct version of the mistaken idea that it is righteous to keep a rule even when it causes obvious net-negatives.

Reality is designed with laws of cause and effect that are intentionally obfuscated in order to provide an opportunity to exercise faith. This means that you will *definitely* find specific situations where better *short-term* outcomes are obtained through following a rule that violates applicable principles. However, you will *never* find a situation where better *long-term* outcomes are obtained through following a rule rather than a principle. This isn't just because long-term outcomes of good decisions tend to far outweigh their short-term costs, but also because living by principle will spare you a lot more pain than it costs.

Understanding and living by principles can increase your ability to see the shortcomings of a given rule. You can leverage the fact that principles describe ideal behavior across *all* situations by abstracting the rule to a principle, applying it to other situations, and analyzing the results. The consequences of the rule in other applications may be more obvious or more extreme to you than in the original situation, suggesting that the rule isn't as good as you thought. For example, it might seem like a good idea to criminalize certain statements because they can be so offensive, but the benefits of the principle of free speech across all circumstances far outweigh the costs in any particular.¹¹³⁰

The closer you become to how God operates, the better off you will be long-term. God's laws of cause and effect are most fully described by character. Principles are a lower fidelity representation of those laws,

¹¹³⁰ For example, the ability to identify and discuss ideas that will degrade the quality of society as a whole is more important than how any person or group feels about it.

and rules are a still lower fidelity. If you ever have the choice between keeping a principle or a rule, always keep the principle.

Character is more important than principles

Character supersedes principles and rules precisely because it is held and demonstrated by a living being. While learning God's rules and principles teaches you about him, you can't learn God's character without coming to know him.

Rules, principles, and character each provide a mechanism for coming to know God better. While rules teach you how God behaves in certain situations, and principles teach you why God behaves as he does across all situations, only character teaches you who God is all of the time.

The purpose of God's commandments is to teach us more about him and persuade us to be the same way.¹¹³¹ His character does this more effectively than any other mechanism.

If God's character is so much more important than principles and rules, why does God spend so much effort teaching them to us rather than just teaching us his character directly? If all of the commandments trace back to love,¹¹³² why did God speak so many words, send so many servants, and even come down to die in order to convey the gospel to us? Why not simply reduce all of this down to "love one another, as I have loved you?" (John 15:12) The answer to these questions is found in the magnitude of the distance between how we are and how God actually is. God's love is so far above human nature¹¹³³ that nothing less than what was done and is still being done could be sufficient to begin to understand the depth, breadth, and motive of his love for us. Human nature is so much worse than most admit or care to know. Very, very few people would respond well to God directly teaching his character to them, even if this were possible. The results would be disastrous,¹¹³⁴ as the brightness of the light turned away from determines the amount of light lost by doing so.¹¹³⁵ If God

¹¹³¹ ...all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]. (2 Nephi 11:4)

¹¹³² For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Romans 13:9)

¹¹³³ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

¹¹³⁴ For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation (D&C 82:3)

¹¹³⁵ And it shall come to pass, if they are not more faithful unto me, it shall be taken away, even that which they have. (D&C 60:3) And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts. (D&C 1:33) 39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers (D&C 93:39)

were to teach his character more directly, so many would rebel against it that they would destroy their ability to draw nearer to him.¹¹³⁶ Instead, he provides a gradient of options for getting to know him, more closely matched to the willingness of each individual. Those that come to know him through the initial means he offers them are given greater demonstrations of how he is as they live up to what he's already given.

How to resolve conflicting commandments

There are circumstances in which God's rules will seem to conflict with one another. For example, while each rule prescribes ideal behavior under some circumstance, circumstances can combine in ways that make those prescriptions mutually exclusive. Alternatively, new rules that come from God can displace prior instructions with an advanced idea of what he would think, feel, or do in a certain situation.

You should only ever violate one commandment for the purposes of obeying a more important but mutually exclusive commandment. When Satan tempted Jesus with scriptural commandments, Jesus countered with other scriptural commandments, not ideas he made up in his head.¹¹³⁷ Your own ideas are not sufficient to counter God's commandments. There is a massive difference between saying, "I think there is a better way" and "I need to choose the better of two of God's commandments."

In all cases, apparent conflicts between commandments are not a license to disobey God, but rather an invitation to more fully take up his purpose and follow his example. Choosing to obey a *greater* commandment isn't the same as choosing not to obey *any* commandment. Breaking rules isn't a question of setting aside submission to God, but of choosing submission to God in something more important rather than submission to God in something less important.

All commandments are ultimately given to help us learn more about and live more like Jesus. New commandments reveal more of

¹¹³⁶ And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? (Alma 32:19)

¹¹³⁷ Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

God, providing the next increment of instruction beyond former commandments toward the fullness of the character of the Father. The Lord taught¹¹³⁸ that learning and living higher commandments in preference to lower commandments doesn't break them, but fulfill them,¹¹³⁹ attaining the intent for which they were given.

In the event that any two commandments aren't possible to keep at the same time, keep the more important of the two. The intent of all commandments is to enable people to be as much like God as they are willing to, but not all commandments equally contribute to this end.¹¹⁴⁰ The most important commandment is always the one that most accurately describes how God would live in your place.

The most important metric for selecting the most important commandment is by measuring it against the crowning character quality of God, which is love.¹¹⁴¹ God's love is different than how the world would define it. God's love is his willingness to suffer all things for the maximal benefit of all people. In all things, Jesus would choose what most benefits all people for the longest time.¹¹⁴² In order to rank commandments according to net benefit, you have to understand the options available to you, and the cost and benefit of each, which is no small feat given the complexity of reality. As you learn more about reality, your morality will increase in similarity to God's.

It isn't always possible to keep all of God's commandments all of the time, but it is always possible to always keep every commandment that doesn't displace a more important commandment. This is one and the same as living the best way you know of at all times.

The process for changing rules, principles, and character

You should change your belief in a rule when you discover the rule is false, notice limits to it, find a better rule, or discover and live the

¹¹³⁸ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19)

¹¹³⁹ Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end. (3 Nephi 15:5)

¹¹⁴⁰ The Lord made several statements to indicate that some commandments are more important than others. For example: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40)

¹¹⁴¹ And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16)

¹¹⁴² He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

principle that it came from. The best way to ensure you have the best set of rules is to always live the rules you believe. By doing so, you will quickly gather evidence for or against the rule, learn its limits, and gain motivation to exert greater effort in finding something better.

One barrier that prevents people from living principles is their willingness to change their principles in the moment as a result of an increase in cost for the living the principle or increased desire for something that violates it. You cannot be a principled person while violating your principles when they are tested. The benefits of living by principles are gained precisely by living them at all times and in all places. Principles can change, but you should view those changes as intentional and outside of the scope of what happens as a part of daily life. Changing your principles isn't something you do when you are in the middle of something else. They should be changed through intentional thought and during set aside time.

Shifts to character qualities are done through looking for and finding examples of people with better character than you. You can assess your character qualities, choose qualities that are better than your own, and intentionally apply them in daily life. An effective strategy for making these changes is given in the author's book *Joy on Purpose*.

Submission to God through rules, principles, and character

It is easy to pretend that you are willing to submit unconditionally to God by claiming you live at the principles level. Your willingness to obey a set of rules serves as a test against using principles as an excuse to avoid obeying rules. A person capable of living by principles is more than capable of living by rules. Unconditional submission to God never occurs in a person unwilling to first submit fully to a set of rules.

While a willingness to submit fully to a set of carnal rules is a useful tool in measuring your willingness to submit unconditionally to God, perfect obedience to a set of carnal rules does not indicate unconditional submission to God. It is possible to be fully obedient to a set of carnal rules without being willing to learn or obey principles. In the time of Jesus, there were many Jews willing to live the letter of the law of Moses, but unwilling to live the spirit of the law of Moses.¹¹⁴³ Many baptismal candidates have willingly subjected themselves to

¹¹⁴³ But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Luke 11:42) And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? (Luke 14:3-5)

initial rules, only to fail to continue to obey God as he taught them more about himself.¹¹⁴⁴

Unconditional obedience to God, in its fullest sense, is only possible at the level of character. At the rules and principles levels, obedience to God is based at least in part on your appraisal of value in what God is asking of you. Unconditional obedience to God at the character level occurs when your decision to follow his instructions comes fully from your belief in the merits of God rather than your belief in the merits of the particular instruction.¹¹⁴⁵ When you truly believe that because God is more loving, wise, and benevolent than you, you have no reason to hesitate to gladly obey him in all things, no matter how difficult, painful, or bad the effect of doing so may seem in the moment.

¹¹⁴⁴ A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Luke 8:5-8)

¹¹⁴⁵ This is how a person "...[puts] off the natural man and [becomes] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father." (Mosiah 3:19)

16. Servants and sons

Reclaiming your severed relationship with God

Christians presumptively refer to themselves as children of God, assuming the continuation of a relationship with him that all have severed and very few have reestablished. You are here to establish a relationship with God, not to maintain or grow one you already have.¹¹⁴⁶ Every person alive today chose to use the agency God gave them to rebel against him, and in that rebellion severed their title as his children.¹¹⁴⁷

Human nature uniformly opposes God. You were born as an individual with desires so strongly opposed to the character and purpose of God that it is not an embellishment to describe you as his enemy.¹¹⁴⁸ The gospel is an elaborate process designed to remediate and reverse your nature,¹¹⁴⁹ but it is neither quick nor easy.

The gospel provides a means for you to traverse from being an enemy to God to being his servant, friend, and son.¹¹⁵⁰ Each type of relationship with God is characterized by a different level of knowledge about God and obedience to him. A servant is primarily defined by a role or function of obedience to specific commands, a friend by their intimate knowledge of God, and a son by similarity to God¹¹⁵¹ and their right of inheritance from him. Servants do not need to understand the commandments they receive or the purpose of the master they serve. A friend knows everything he needs to be a son, but has not yet achieved the dedication required to become a son. Friends understand the purpose of the master they serve, and are expected to obey him,¹¹⁵² but their fidelity to God can be intermittent.¹¹⁵³ Sons of God search out his will, develop a model of his character, and proactively apply it to

¹¹⁴⁶ Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state. (Alma 42:10)

¹¹⁴⁷ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:23) ...because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. (2 Nephi 9:6)

¹¹⁴⁸ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Moses 3:19)

¹¹⁴⁹ Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (Ephesians 2:2)

¹¹⁵⁰ The last section of this chapter addresses daughters of God.

¹¹⁵¹ Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. (Ephesians 5:1, NLT)

¹¹⁵² Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:14)

¹¹⁵³ And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless (Matthew 22:12)

advance his purpose. Sons of God always live as they believe Jesus would live in their place.¹¹⁵⁴

Each type of relationship with God differs in the degree of interaction with God. Servants of God interact with God when God reaches out to them. Friends are invited to dwell with God,¹¹⁵⁵ but sometimes choose to leave him.¹¹⁵⁶ Sons of God seek to continuously dwell in his presence.¹¹⁵⁷

How to become a servant of God

God's servants are those who receive and obey God's instructions.¹¹⁵⁸ In order to become a servant of God, you need to learn something about God's will and seek to bring it to pass.

To serve God is to prioritize his interests above your own.¹¹⁵⁹ You cannot serve God if anything else in your life holds a higher priority than his purpose.¹¹⁶⁰ Service to God requires singleness of purpose¹¹⁶¹ and your full intensity.¹¹⁶²

Those who claim to serve God yet do not obey him are not his servants.¹¹⁶³ If you disobey God's instructions or work against his

¹¹⁵⁴ Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons. Amen. (Moses 6:68) These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. (Revelation 14:4)

¹¹⁵⁵ He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour (John 1:39)

¹¹⁵⁶ Jesus called his disciples his friends, yet all of them "forsook him, and fled" in his time of need (see Mark 14:50).

¹¹⁵⁷ And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (John 8:35-36)

¹¹⁵⁸ Some scriptures figuratively refer to those who unknowingly advance his purposes as his servants (see, for example, references to Nebuchadnezzar as God's servant in Jeremiah 25:9). In this chapter, only those who willingly and intentionally serve God are discussed.

¹¹⁵⁹ But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? (Luke 17:7-8)

¹¹⁶⁰ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24) And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. (Mark 3:24-26)

¹¹⁶¹ Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men. (Ephesians 6:5-7)

¹¹⁶² ...love the Lord your God...walk in all his ways...cleave unto him, and...serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Joshua 22:5) Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. (Colossians 3:22-23)

¹¹⁶³ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27) Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

purposes, you are not his servant.¹¹⁶⁴ You can occupy your time in seemingly religious duties, even with fervor and true intent, and still not be a servant of God if you don't actually obey what God says¹¹⁶⁵ and do what he would rather you do.¹¹⁶⁶

A servant of God is distinguished by their obedience to God, not a title or office held in a church. Church office is not required to serve God, and church office is not an adequate replacement for actually serving him. You can hold a position in a church without serving God.¹¹⁶⁷ An appointment to a church office does not magically confer power or holiness onto the occupant, as it does not force them to adopt the purpose of God or become more like him. Church offices are meant to be occupied by those who are already like Christ,¹¹⁶⁸ not those who hope to one day become like him.¹¹⁶⁹

You are either a servant of God, or a servant of the devil

You are the servant of the master whose will you pursue. It is incorrect to interpret the choices we make as free autonomy. While

¹¹⁶⁴ Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. (Isaiah 1:2-3)

¹¹⁶⁵ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46) [The Lord said] go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. (1 Samuel 15:18-24)

¹¹⁶⁶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

¹¹⁶⁷ A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts To you priests who despise My name.... (Malachi 1:6, NKJV)

¹¹⁶⁸ And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such. (Alma 13:3) And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them. (Moroni 3:4)

¹¹⁶⁹ After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. (1 Kings 13:33)

every person has full autonomy in every choice they make,¹¹⁷⁰ we neither create the options available to us nor the value of each. All choices are not equally good or acceptable in the eyes of God. God has a preference in every decision you make, and your choices determine your allegiance to or rebellion against him.¹¹⁷¹

In any decision, the best option is the will of God, the will of God is the best option, and all other options are the will of the devil.¹¹⁷² Though some bad choices are worse than others, everything less than what is best achieves the purposes of Satan and works against the purposes of God.

You don't get to choose whether you are a servant or not, only whom you will serve. Those who do what is best at all times and in all places, as far as they understand, are servants of God. Those who do anything less are the servants of Satan. You cannot serve God and the devil.¹¹⁷³ You can't serve two masters, because serving the interests of one requires prioritizing it over the other.¹¹⁷⁴ You will most desire what you most value.¹¹⁷⁵

Submission to God is the sacrifice of making God's purpose your singular desire and highest priority. You cannot follow Jesus without fully and exclusively adopting his purpose.¹¹⁷⁶ If you adopt God's purpose, you are in his kingdom; if you don't, you can't be.

You have either forsaken your sins and fully submitted to God, or you remain captivated by the spirit of the devil.¹¹⁷⁷ Those who still allow themselves to think, feel, or do less than the best they know, even on occasion,¹¹⁷⁸ remain servants to the devil.¹¹⁷⁹ All negative feelings in response to greater light and truth reveal rebellion against God.

¹¹⁷⁰ And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will. (Alma 42:7)

¹¹⁷¹ Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. (2 Nephi 2:16)

¹¹⁷² Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

¹¹⁷³ For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. (Romans 6:20)

¹¹⁷⁴ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

¹¹⁷⁵ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:21)

¹¹⁷⁶ And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out. (2 Nephi 25:29)

¹¹⁷⁷ Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. (John 8:34)

¹¹⁷⁸ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:19)

¹¹⁷⁹ I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil? (Alma 5:20)

There is absolutely no good or valid reason to serve Satan.¹¹⁸⁰ No good result can come from serving Satan,¹¹⁸¹ and everything that seems good will either evaporate in perceived value¹¹⁸² or otherwise erode into something far worse than imagined.¹¹⁸³

Growing from servant to friend

The quality of your service to God is a question of how ardently you seek to learn about him and how valiantly you live like him.¹¹⁸⁴ Your qualifications for being a servant of God are completely based on your choices,¹¹⁸⁵ not things you didn't choose and can't change or things that other people do or don't do.¹¹⁸⁶

The more you learn about and live like God, the more you will be able to contribute to God's purpose. While even the most minimal knowledge about God provides a person with the ability to serve him, the greatest service to God can only be accomplished by those who know him the most and are most like him.

Servants become friends through faithful service to God over time. As you learn more about God, you gain the required knowledge about him to become his friend. While all that is required to be a servant of

¹¹⁸⁰ But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye 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, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. (Moroni 7:17)

¹¹⁸¹ Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing. (Alma 34:39)

¹¹⁸² And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell. (Alma 30:60)

¹¹⁸³ For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge. (Mosiah 2:33)

¹¹⁸⁴ Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul; And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence. (D&C 4:2-6)

¹¹⁸⁵ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28) And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned. (Alma 32:23) For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33) Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price. (2 Nephi 26:25)

¹¹⁸⁶ Some of the most diligent and holy servants of God labored for a lifetime with very little response in the people they taught.

God is to receive and obey at least one instruction from him, a friend of God knows what he is actually like.¹¹⁸⁷

Popular depictions of Jesus portray him as a friend to all. While Jesus invites all people to be his friends, very few accept the invitation. Even his closest friends during his life abandoned him in his time of greatest need,¹¹⁸⁸ in spite of his warning them that they would do so.¹¹⁸⁹

Most supposed friendships are based on mutual perceived benefit, but a true friend cares more about you than they do themselves. You can't be a friend of Jesus without pursuing his purpose above your own.¹¹⁹⁰ To be a friend of God, you must be consistent in your submission to his purpose.¹¹⁹¹

Enmity against God is the natural state of man, and only those who fully submit to God overcome this state.¹¹⁹² While our modern language artificially raises the criteria of being an enemy to intentional, constant, and extreme enmity, all you have to do to be an enemy of God is not actively and consistently advance his purpose to your full ability.¹¹⁹³ As long as your purpose is different to God's, you are no friend of God, but his enemy. Those who do not consummately serve the Lord are treated by him as wolves and will be destroyed,¹¹⁹⁴ even if they consider themselves sheep.¹¹⁹⁵

What is a son?

A son of God is one who knows and lives the character of Christ and proactively pursues to implement the Lord's will in the world.

¹¹⁸⁷ Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:15)

¹¹⁸⁸ And they all forsook him, and fled. (Mark 14:50)

¹¹⁸⁹ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? (John 6:67)

¹¹⁹⁰ He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. (Matthew 12:30)

¹¹⁹¹ Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (John 15:14)

¹¹⁹² See Mosiah 3:19, previously quoted.

¹¹⁹³ Behold, this is my doctrine—whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me; therefore he is not of my church. (D&C 10:67-68)

¹¹⁹⁴ For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him. And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed. (Alma 5:59-60)

¹¹⁹⁵ I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you....And again, doth a man take an ass which belongeth to his neighbor, and keep him? I say unto you, Nay; he will not even suffer that he shall feed among his flocks, but will drive him away, and cast him out. I say unto you, that even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called. (Mosiah 5:12, 14)

In the ancient languages, *son* can mean a male child, but is widely used to denote other relationships, including: an heir, a representative, and one who fulfills the potential or calling of another. Each of these relationships has special meaning in the kingdom of God.

A son has legal claim on everything that is his father's. While earthly princes inherit their father's kingdom by being the oldest surviving son, heavenly princes inherit kingdoms by becoming like their king. A throne in God's kingdom is based on righteousness, established by the character of the person who sits upon it.¹¹⁹⁶

A representative of God is someone who not only has the authority to act in the place of God, but one who knows how and why God would act in his place, and who only does what God would in his place.¹¹⁹⁷

A son can exceed their father by fulfilling the potential or calling that he had. For example, David fulfilled the birthright of his ancestor Judah—a wicked man—and surpassed his father Jesse by becoming king of Israel.

Jesus is a son in all of the above senses, as shown by his roles as the Son of God, Son of David, and Son of Adam or Son of Man.

The Lord is the Son of God. He is the heir, representative, and demonstrator of the Father. Jesus had authority from the Father.¹¹⁹⁸ He knew how the Father would act in his place.¹¹⁹⁹ He only ever did what pleased the Father.¹²⁰⁰ He only ever sought the will of the Father.¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁹⁶ It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. (Proverbs 16:12) And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness. (Isaiah 16:5) Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:7, NKJV)

¹¹⁹⁷ They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. (John 8:39) Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. (Helaman 10:4-5)

¹¹⁹⁸ And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17) He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. (John 3:31)

¹¹⁹⁹ I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. (John 8:26) Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:10-11)

¹²⁰⁰ And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. (John 8:29)

¹²⁰¹ I can do of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30) Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. (John 5:19)

The Lord is the Son of David.¹²⁰² Jesus is the king of Israel and Judah, and the fulfillment of everything David could have been.

The Lord is the Son of Adam or Son of Man. Adam was created by God in his physical express image, and was called to live in his express character. Jesus is the fulfillment of the potential of mankind, the demonstration of what Adam was called to be.¹²⁰³

While the Lord's roles as the Son of David and the Son of Adam are not open to the general public, all of us are called to become sons of God.¹²⁰⁴ You are called to be the light of the world,¹²⁰⁵ to be one with the Father, to manifest his will here on earth,¹²⁰⁶ and to be so much like him that others learn more about him by learning about you.¹²⁰⁷

How to become a son of God

Sons of God are those who seek, find, and follow God's example.¹²⁰⁸ To become a son of God, you have to learn and live the

¹²⁰² The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1) And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. (Matthew 9:27) And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. (Matthew 21:9)

¹²⁰³ And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)

¹²⁰⁴ ...what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:27)

¹²⁰⁵ Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. (Matthew 5:14)

¹²⁰⁶ And that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; And that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one—The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men. I was in the world and received of my Father, and the works of him were plainly manifest. (D&C 93:2-5)

¹²⁰⁷ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

¹²⁰⁸ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14) And it came to pass that when Satan had departed from the presence of Moses, that Moses lifted up his eyes unto heaven, being filled with the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of the Father and the Son (Moses 1:24)

character of God.¹²⁰⁹ You learn and live the character of God by being a diligent servant¹²¹⁰ and faithful friend of God. You learn and live his purpose.¹²¹¹ The more you serve God, the more you can learn about him, and the more you can proactively implement his example.¹²¹²

Not all teaching about God can come through scripture study and prayer. Limits of understanding, honesty, faith, and other virtues necessitate the ministry of others in helping you learn more about God.

You become a son of God through seeking, recognizing, and learning from those more like Jesus than you.¹²¹³ God's kingdom is a vine with many branches, and grafting into it is a matter of finding and

¹²⁰⁹ And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh.... (3 Nephi 9:17) I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God, even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one. (D&C 35:2) But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: (John 1:12) Hearken and listen to the voice of him who is from all eternity to all eternity, the Great I Am, even Jesus Christ—The light and the life of the world; a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not; The same which came in the meridian of time unto mine own, and mine own received me not; But to as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons. And verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me. (D&C 39:1-5) I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not; but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles, and to become the sons of God; and even unto them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life. And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me. Wherefore, come ye unto it, and with him that cometh I will reason as with men in days of old, and I will show unto you my strong reasoning. (D&C 45:8-10) He who has become like God's Son is a son of God, and will inherit the kingdom of God, and he who has not become like God's son is not a son of God, and will not inherit the kingdom of God. I have written these things to you who know and live according to the character of the Son of God, that you might understand the eternal life you have and that you might continue to obtain and live according to the character of Jesus Christ, by which you have it. (1 John 5:12-13, Author's Reflection)

¹²¹⁰ A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. (Proverbs 17:2)

¹²¹¹ And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives. (Mosiah 5:7-8)

¹²¹² For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart? (Mosiah 5:13)

¹²¹³ Consider John's reaction to and comments about Jesus: "But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me." (Matthew 3:14) "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all." (John 3:29-31)

adopting the purpose of one who is already there.¹²¹⁴ Scriptural examples of this pattern abound. For example, consider how Jonathan and his son Mephibosheth took upon themselves the role of sons of David. Though Jonathan was the heir to the throne of Israel, he adopted the purpose of David, knowing that David was more virtuous than he (see 1 Samuel 20). Jonathan's disabled son Mephibosheth acted as a son by preferring David's welfare and presence over his own fortune and reputation (see 2 Samuel 19).

Sons of God love everything that is from and like God, including teachings and people that those who love him less would find offensive.¹²¹⁵ Sons of God seek out, recognize, and respond to God's invitations to improve, whether those invitations come by his words, the words of his servants, or life itself.¹²¹⁶

Becoming an only begotten son through becoming a beloved son

While the phrase "only begotten" is used literally in some scriptural instances,¹²¹⁷ it is also used to mean the best of more than one son, specifically the son most like the father. For example, Paul referred to Isaac as Abraham's "only begotten son," but Isaac was neither Abraham's only nor first son.¹²¹⁸ While whatever portion of the Lord's title as the Only Begotten comes from before his birth is beyond our reach in this life, all of us can and should reach to become his "only begotten son"—or person most like him—in every sphere in which we inhabit, up to the limit of our abilities.¹²¹⁹

Becoming more like God requires you to learn more about how God is. What inhibits learning more about God isn't just a lack of obedience to what you understand or desire to learn more, but also your reaction to new truth. You can't learn much more about God than

¹²¹⁴ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:1-7)

¹²¹⁵ Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. (John 8:42)

¹²¹⁶ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (Hebrews 12:7-8)

¹²¹⁷ The widow's only son in Luke 7:12, Jairus' only daughter in Luke 8:42, and the man's only son in Luke 9:38.

¹²¹⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. (Hebrews 11:17)

¹²¹⁹ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18) In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

your already know without being confronted with ideas and people that are much better than those already in your life. The natural reaction to things of much greater value is to feel worse about what you presently value, including your present beliefs, your present associates, or even yourself. Many respond to this bad feeling by turning away from greater good.¹²²⁰

If you want to get to know God, you have to learn to seek, receive, and apply correction.¹²²¹ Those who receive the most correction from God limit him least in duration, intensity, and topic. They are willing to be corrected in any way, on any topic, by any person or situation. They desire it more than others, respond to it better than others, and share what they learn more often with others.

The process of getting to know God is called being loved by him. Just as Jesus “loved” the rich young ruler by showing him that he was less righteous than he thought,¹²²² you are loved by God as you seek, receive, and apply his correction. God chastens those who he loves.¹²²³ Those who are most loved are those who have accepted the greatest correction from God. One who abides in the love of God is one who has received chastisement from God and responded by implementing the suggested improvements while seeking for more.

The more of God’s love you receive in the form of correction, the more of God’s love you will receive in the form of affection and blessing. While God is willing to love all of his children equally, God does not value all of his children equally.¹²²⁴ God does not value those who profess to believe in him or say that they love him above those who

¹²²⁰ And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed. (1 Nephi 8:25)

¹²²¹ My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Proverbs 3:11-12) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Hebrews 12:6) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:11) And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer. (D&C 105:6) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

¹²²² Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. (Mark 10:21)

¹²²³ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Hebrews 12:6)

¹²²⁴ Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God.... (1 Nephi 17:35)

do not.¹²²⁵ Rather, he values those who are more similar to him above those who are less similar to him.¹²²⁶

Those who seek, receive, and apply the most correction from God are known as “beloved sons.” The Greek word translated as “beloved” in the New Testament is *agapétos* (Strong’s 27) is a measure of reconciliation to God and worthiness of eternal life. *Agape* is the highest form of love, the kind that God has. It is not something God has for others except through their similitude toward him. His love for sinners consists of paying the price for them to receive forgiveness on condition of forsaking their sin,¹²²⁷ but he hates those who refuse to repent.¹²²⁸

You become most *like* Jesus by receiving the most correction *from* Jesus. John was “beloved” by Jesus¹²²⁹ because he was the person most like Jesus during the Lord’s ministry. John did not become the person most like Jesus by birth or accident. He became most like Jesus through seeking, receiving, and applying the most correction from him.

The Lord became a “beloved son” through continually living in full alignment with the Father as the Father taught him better ways of being. According to John, Jesus was filled with “grace and truth” (John 1:14) one step at a time, learning more about the Father as he continued living in full alignment with what he was taught about him. The Lord did not receive a fulness of how the Father is at first, but received it through incrementally learning and living more like the Father,¹²³⁰ becoming “the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

¹²²⁵ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:28-31)

¹²²⁶ Because you are precious and revered in my eyes, and because I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. (Isaiah 43:4, Gileadi Translation)

¹²²⁷ We love him, because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

¹²²⁸ The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing; the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. (Psalm 5:5-6) For the Most High himself also hates sinners and will inflict punishment on the ungodly. (Sirach 12:6)

¹²²⁹ Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. (John 13:23) When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! (John 19:26)

¹²³⁰ And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first. And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son. (D&C 93:11-15)

God provided us a record of this process specifically because we are all capable of following it.¹²³¹ This is the unified message of God's servants throughout time: become as God is by following his example, living for the benefit of others, just as God would in your place.¹²³²

The power and authority of servants, friends, and sons

All of God's power and authority comes from similitude to him. Wherever there is a difference in similarity, there must be a difference in power and authority. Servants, friends, and sons of God all possess power and authority from God to the extent that they know and are like him.

The power and authority of a servant comes from the commands of God. They are on the errand of the Lord, having been told what to say¹²³³ and what to do.¹²³⁴ The Lord's command is the Lord's authority, and the Lord's command is the authority of his servants. The presence of the power of God demonstrates the presence of his authority.¹²³⁵ Without demonstration of the Lord's power, presumed servants prove to have no authority, and are mistaken or lying about having received his commands.¹²³⁶

The work of God's servants is to help others become more like God. They do not tell people what they want to hear.¹²³⁷ What they have to say shows people their hidden sin—flaws they ignore, flaws they minimize, and flaws they don't yet know about. They warn people of

¹²³¹ I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn; And all those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn. (D&C 93:19-22)

¹²³² Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. (Ephesians 5:1-2) Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]; (Ephesians 5:1, AMP)

¹²³³ Jesus commanded the Nephite twelve to "declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth." (3 Nephi 11:41) He told Abraham, "I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words." (Abraham 3:15) Enoch saw a vision where "the Lord spake with me, and gave me commandment" to speak specific words to specific people. (Moses 6:42) Nephi son of Helaman "declare[d] unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him." (Helaman 10:12) King Benjamin's famous speech was an exposition of "the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord" the night before. (Mosiah 4:1)

¹²³⁴ ...as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence (John 14:31)

¹²³⁵ That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers.... (Isaiah 44:26)

¹²³⁶ Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:16)

¹²³⁷ I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah....from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. (Jeremiah 23:14-15)

the consequences of their present actions¹²³⁸ and point out to them a better way.¹²³⁹

We are commanded to do many good things of our own volition, and you can only do this to the extent you know and live the character of God.¹²⁴⁰ The power and authority of those who only possess stated instructions is limited to the fulfillment of those instructions. To the extent that you correctly understand the purpose of God, your power and authority expands to meet its accomplishment.¹²⁴¹

Friends of God know him better than his servants, and therefore possess greater power and authority. Sons know God better than his friends, and therefore possess greater power and authority.

What about daughters of God?

The scriptures refer to both sons and daughters of God.¹²⁴² The Greek term translated as son (*huios*, Strong's 5207) is actually neuter, and could be translated as "son," "daughter," or "sons and daughters," depending on the context of its use. Most of what is written in this chapter about sons of God also applies to his daughters. However, there are some important distinctions.

Women and men both become children of God through finding and establishing a relationship with a man who is already a son of God. If you are a man, this is done through finding a man more like the Lord than you are and becoming his "son" by adopting his purpose. If you are a woman, this is ideally done through finding a man more like the Lord than you are and adopting his purpose by becoming his wife.

Many women are already married when they learn about the magnitude of consequences that follow from their choice of man to

¹²³⁸ [False prophets] say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:17)

¹²³⁹ But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. (Jeremiah 23:22)

¹²⁴⁰ For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. (D&C 58:26-29)

¹²⁴¹ And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done. (1 Nephi 17:50)

¹²⁴² Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters (Ether 3:14) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17-18) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 43:6)

marry, and some wish they had chosen someone else. For those already married, the Lord has been very clear: treat your husband how you would treat the Lord,¹²⁴³ no matter how he treats you,¹²⁴⁴ and the Lord will reward you accordingly.¹²⁴⁵

The benefits that marriage provides to women in drawing nearer to God do not preclude their ability to do so outside of marriage. However, there is no relationship a woman can have that is likely to provide the same benefits of marriage. Marriage is the only relationship in a woman's life where someone sees her how she really is, and her husband is meant to provide the most valuable feedback she can ever receive.¹²⁴⁶ Furthermore, marriage is meant to provide a woman with a lifeline of greater reason through her husband, backed by a sufficient backlog of evidence of his wisdom and his love for her that cannot be replicated in any other way. Finally, the experience of bearing, birthing, and raising children is designed by God to teach a woman more about him, herself, and godly love than anything else she can do. All of God's children have access to him through the same sacrifice of heed and diligence, but women have advantages available to them in marriage that are not available to them without it.

¹²⁴³ Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22) Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Ephesians 5:24)

¹²⁴⁴ Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; (1 Peter 3:1)

¹²⁴⁵ Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

¹²⁴⁶ This is the meaning of the symbolism of a veil that is removed during many wedding ceremonies.

Scriptural paradigms for justification and sanctification

17. Seeking God's face: Preparing for his presence by adopting his purpose

Seeing and knowing God

Some have conflated knowing¹²⁴⁷ the Lord with seeing him. While seeing someone is a component of knowing them, it by no means is the same as knowing them or even the most important part. Anyone who has cultivated a real friendship with someone they've only met online, and never seen in person, can attest that it is possible to know a great deal about what someone is like without ever seeing them in person. Meanwhile, you can see someone many times without even knowing their name, such as a person at work.

Knowing someone is not a question of knowing what they look like, but knowing what their character is like. To truly know a person requires you to accurately anticipate how they will think, feel, or act in all situations.

There is a broad range of depth of character, ranging from extremely shallow to exceptionally deep. The deeper someone's character, the harder they are to know. With most people, you can come to understand a great deal about them in a short amount of time. While it is easy to learn the character of a simple person, you cannot know a deep person simply by meeting them.¹²⁴⁸ As God is the deepest being, it is astonishing that anyone believes they can know him just through meeting him.

How well you know the Lord has little to do with whether you have seen him or not. Our relationship with God is a function of how much of his character we have learned, which is determined by how thoroughly we live according to the portion of his character we already know about. While seeing him is something that has either happened or not, you can know him a lot, a little, or not at all.

What is the meaning of "face"?

The scriptures are full of rich words and phrases that conveyed much more information to those who wrote them than they do to those who read them today. One such word is "face." In modern English, the noun means the front part of a head and the verb means to confront or orient oneself towards something. Such narrow definitions make it

¹²⁴⁷ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

¹²⁴⁸ The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable. (Proverbs 25:3)

nearly impossible to extract the power and clarity of ancient phrases that describe our relationship with God, his relationship with us, and even the purpose of life.

The Hebrew and Greek counterparts¹²⁴⁹ extend beyond the English definition of face in interesting and important ways. To face something is not just to turn or pay attention to, but also to return to, to approach, to dawn, to clear away, and to prepare for. The noun form is not just used for the front of someone's head or a surface,¹²⁵⁰ but also someone's expression,¹²⁵¹ attitude,¹²⁵² attention,¹²⁵³ presence,¹²⁵⁴ aura of presence,¹²⁵⁵ direction of travel or progression,¹²⁵⁶ and priority in time¹²⁵⁷ or attention.¹²⁵⁸ While these extended meanings are intriguing in and of themselves, they have clear, interesting, and important overlap with the concepts of desire, purpose, motive, and character.

Seek the face of God by learning and living his character

A more accurate and expanded definition of “the face of God” provides practical next steps in our progression towards God. A key example is found in the idea of “seeking the face of God.”

Many have been inspired by God's promise that those who forsake their sins, come unto him, call on his name, obey his voice, and keep his

¹²⁴⁹ *Panim* (Strong's Hebrew 6440), *panah* (Strong's Hebrew 6437), and *prosōpon* (Strong's Greek 4383).

¹²⁵⁰ And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (Genesis 1:29)

¹²⁵¹ But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? (Genesis 4:5-6)

¹²⁵² And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.... And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. (Genesis 31:2, 5)

¹²⁵³ And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14)

¹²⁵⁴ And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

¹²⁵⁵ And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. (Genesis 45:3)

¹²⁵⁶ So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. (Genesis 31:21)

¹²⁵⁷ And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. (Genesis 29:26)

¹²⁵⁸ And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh. (Genesis 48:20)

commandments will “see my face and know that I am.”¹²⁵⁹ Few are willing and able to read the conditions provided beyond the ambiguous but inapplicable familiarity with which we tend to endlessly rehash scripture. The conditions of the promise are to learn and live the Lord’s character.¹²⁶⁰ If you understand that Jesus is one with the Father because he has learned and lives the character of the Father, and that he is “the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” you know that the only way to obtain this promise is by learning and living the character of Christ. By doing so you won’t just know that he exists, but “that I AM.”¹²⁶¹ You will see as he sees and know as he knows,¹²⁶² even if you don’t see his literal face. You will know how he is,¹²⁶³ even if you don’t know what he looks like.

You seek the face of God by finding and emulating the examples of those who know him better than you. Since the beginning, God has carefully arranged creation such that all people always have access to whatever human or heavenly messengers may be required so that each person can learn as much about God as they are willing to live.¹²⁶⁴ The Lord’s messengers help you prepare for the Lord’s presence by walking ahead in¹²⁶⁵ and turning others toward¹²⁶⁶ the path that leads closer to him.¹²⁶⁷

Seeking the face of God is not an overtly religious practice, but rather an activity that spans every domain in your life. To seek the face

¹²⁵⁹ Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am; And that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; And that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one— (D&C 93:1-3)

¹²⁶⁰ And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. (D&C 88:67-68)

¹²⁶¹ And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:14)

¹²⁶² They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; (D&C 76:94)

¹²⁶³ And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen. (Ether 12:41)

¹²⁶⁴ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

¹²⁶⁵ Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. (Exodus 23:20)

¹²⁶⁶ For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory. (Alma 13:24)

¹²⁶⁷ “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall *prepare* the way *before* me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:1) Here, “prepare the way before me” literally means “to walk in and turn others into the way toward my presence.”

of God is to seek improvement in yourself, others, and the world itself.¹²⁶⁸ The path toward God's face is the path of improvement.¹²⁶⁹ You seek the face of God by learning more about the potential and relative worth of all things, and working toward helping everything be as good as it can be.¹²⁷⁰

The benefits of facing God

Recall that one of the meanings of "face" is to adopt a direction of travel or progression. To face God consists of more than just turning toward him, but actively moving toward him in the same direction he is traveling.¹²⁷¹ To seek the Lord's face is not about obtaining an outcome, but about following a process.¹²⁷² The process of facing the Lord consists of adopting everything you know about him as he continues to teach you more about himself.¹²⁷³

You draw nearer to the Lord by becoming more like him. As you become more like him, you encounter more of everything that is good,¹²⁷⁴ including new or better information about how he is, enabling you to grow still more like him.¹²⁷⁵

Everything of worth is found in the path toward God.¹²⁷⁶ The more like him you become, the more you will ask what he wills and the more

¹²⁶⁸ But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. (Moroni 7:13)

¹²⁶⁹ And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world. (Ether 4:12)

¹²⁷⁰ Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. (3 John 11)

¹²⁷¹ And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. (Luke 9:23) If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. (John 12:26)

¹²⁷² And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:19-20)

¹²⁷³ Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes. (Psalm 119:135)

¹²⁷⁴ Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. (Acts 2:28)

¹²⁷⁵ And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof. (3 Nephi 19:25)

¹²⁷⁶ Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. (1 Chronicles 16:27)

you will receive what you ask.¹²⁷⁷ Greater and more enduring peace¹²⁷⁸ and joy¹²⁷⁹ are found in increasing intensity the nearer you draw toward him.

Fall on your face

To fall on your face is a phrase that means to prostrate yourself in total submission to another, crouching down as low as you can on the floor.¹²⁸⁰ There are multiple scriptural references to falling on one's face. For example, Joseph's brothers prostrated themselves to him after finding out who he was,¹²⁸¹ Abraham prostrated himself to God as God spoke with him,¹²⁸² John prostrated himself before the angel who showed him the vision he recorded,¹²⁸³ the chief steward of King Ahab prostrated himself before the prophet Elijah,¹²⁸⁴ and the people prostrated themselves before God when Elijah called down fire from heaven.¹²⁸⁵

As with the face, the forehead carries metaphorical significance as the location of your understanding. The surfaces upon which we walk are known for their uncleanness, especially in the street, and even more so in ancient times when they were the dumping areas for human and animal waste. Falling on your face is a visceral admission of submission that physically acknowledges that your best understanding is as dung compared to the one to whom you bow. It is unfortunately and exceptionally rare for anyone to come to feel this way, even with God, and even for the moment required to signify it by falling on their face.

It is rare for a person to be willing to exercise the humility required to fall on their face before God, let alone anyone else. The importance

¹²⁷⁷ And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. (John 16:23-28)

¹²⁷⁸ The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (Numbers 6:26)

¹²⁷⁹ Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. (Acts 2:28)

¹²⁸⁰ And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. (Ezra 9:6)

¹²⁸¹ And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. (Genesis 50:18)

¹²⁸² And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him... (Genesis 17:3)

¹²⁸³ And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. (Revelation 22:8)

¹²⁸⁴ And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? (1 Kings 18:7)

¹²⁸⁵ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God. (1 Kings 18:39)

and process of submitting to God is discussed in the chapter *Submit to God by learning and living his presence* and elsewhere in this book.

Turning your face toward God through repentance

Repentance means to turn toward God. To turn toward God obviously includes more than simply feeling sorry for being turned away from him in the past. The Hebrew and Greek words related to repentance are not limited to regret, emphasizing the need to change one's desires¹²⁸⁶ and actions¹²⁸⁷ toward God.¹²⁸⁸ To turn toward God is to learn more about and adopt his purpose, qualities, thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Repentance is not a limited or partial action, but corresponds to an active and total adoption of his character, as far as you understand it, at all times and in all places. It is to share his motive, value what he values, desire what he desires, and use your attention and other resources as he would. You can't "face" God while "facing" anything else.¹²⁸⁹ You must either serve God or someone else, but you can't serve both.¹²⁹⁰

The opposite of repentance is rebellion, which is turning your face away from God. You might believe that rebellion against God requires an active choice. This is not so. Our nature is so inclined against God that we rebel against him by default.¹²⁹¹ The very absence of active turning toward God is rebellion against him. Any rebellion against God increases your distance from him, dimming his light within you, making it more difficult to see what is best and easier to turn further away from it.

God's will is that you remove the differences between you and him. Jesus has already provided everything necessary for you to have the

¹²⁸⁶ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: (Daniel 9:3)

¹²⁸⁷ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:23-25)

¹²⁸⁸ Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:22)

¹²⁸⁹ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

¹²⁹⁰ Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. (Isaiah 56:11)

¹²⁹¹ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

power and reasons to reconcile your known differences with him.¹²⁹² He will continue to provide everything necessary for you to continue to align with him as you learn more about him. The steps towards becoming more like God consist of iteratively perceiving more differences between how you are and how God is and reconciling yourself to how you now perceive him to be.¹²⁹³ The bridge from where you are to where God is necessarily begins where you are.

The more you repent of the differences you know of between you and God, the more additional differences will be revealed to you.¹²⁹⁴ The more you approach the light of God's presence, the more of your remaining faults will be exposed. The fire of his presence will both illuminate ways you can improve and assist you in removing what cannot endure a greater relationship with him. Repentance is a dawning of a new approach to God that includes adding what is required for a closer relationship with him and clearing away anything that prevents it, preparing you to continue this process as you learn more about him.

Face to face as familiarity with God

God's relationship with you is filtered by certain protocols designed to protect you¹²⁹⁵ from the negative effects of accessing more of his glory than you are prepared to bear.¹²⁹⁶

The existence of these barriers becomes more evident by describing what it is like to have them removed. This degree of relationship with God is referred to in scripture by the phrase "face to face." "Face to face" can be interpreted as a measure of intimacy. In this sense, to see God face to face is to see him as fully as he sees you, to communicate with him as you would another person, and to have him communicate with you as your closest friend would.¹²⁹⁷ This would include the ability

¹²⁹² For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5, NLT) Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. (2 Nephi 10:23-24)

¹²⁹³ If we remove every difference between us and God revealed as he shows us more of his glory, he will show us more and more of his glory, and we will be gradually transformed into his image, just as the Lord was, from his spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, Author's Reflection)

¹²⁹⁴ Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. (Psalm 90:8)

¹²⁹⁵ For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

¹²⁹⁶ I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (John 16:12)

¹²⁹⁷ And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle. (Exodus 33:11)

to ask him about anything, and have him fully explain it to you, up to the limits of your understanding.¹²⁹⁸

The artificial distance imposed between us and God includes, but is not limited to, frequency of his contact with you, manner of his contact with you, breadth or depth of what he says to you, and formality of his contact with you. God desires the reduction and eventual removal of these barriers between you and him. God places these barriers between you and him for your benefit, and they are removed as soon as you are capable of bearing more of his glory.

To reduce the barriers between you and God:

- Reduce the differences between you and God. You will never see much more of him than you live up to.
- Learn to value holiness based on how much better it is, not artificial qualities such as the popularity or recognized authority of the messenger or the riches or comfort provided by the message.
- Learn to notice holiness even when it is not presented loudly or with pomp. Those dependent on specific settings, rituals, or clothing are not ready for greater familiarity with God.

It is possible for you to come to stand in the presence of God and speak with him face to face as plainly as you would another person.¹²⁹⁹ Until you are ready to do so, the Lord will continue to do all he can to teach you the next increment of how he is, providing you with continual incremental invitations to improve,¹³⁰⁰ forming an unbroken ramp towards how he is that you can travel as fast as you are willing to notice and implement them.¹³⁰¹ This path is exemplified by Jacob, who

¹²⁹⁸ To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. (Acts 25:16)

¹²⁹⁹ ...I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things; (Ether 12:39) And I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face; and he said unto me: Look, and I will show unto thee the world for the space of many generations. (Moses 7:4)

¹³⁰⁰ Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged....Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (John 16:7-11, 13-15)

¹³⁰¹ And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours. (D&C 78:18)

met the Lord face to face.¹³⁰² While Jacob's famous wrestle with the Lord was an event that happened in one night, it was just the next step of a process that had been unfolding his whole life—a life of facing challenges that lay beyond his limits and incrementally overcoming them through learning more about and living like God.

You spit in God's face by undervaluing his life, sacrifice, and gospel

Isaiah provided a prophetic description of the torment the Lord would face during his ministry when he wrote:

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6)

The shame inflicted on the Lord was not limited to physical spit in his literal face—which was the worst possible insult of his time—but, more significantly, included ignoring the inestimable gift of his demonstration of the character of the Father.¹³⁰³

All who learn and live the character of Christ will face similar treatment as he did at the hands of those who are not like him.¹³⁰⁴ The scriptures provide examples of the Lord's servants being rejected and persecuted just as he was.¹³⁰⁵ The more like Jesus a person becomes, the more people will treat them like they would treat him.¹³⁰⁶ If you fail to

¹³⁰² And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. (Genesis 32:30)

¹³⁰³ And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men. (1 Nephi 19:9)

¹³⁰⁴ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)

¹³⁰⁵ Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed thence and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron. (Alma 8:13) And we have entered into their houses and taught them, and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues and taught them; and we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks; and we have been stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison; and through the power and wisdom of God we have been delivered again. (Alma 26:29) ...And they spit upon him, and cast him out from among them, and also all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek; and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them. (Alma 14:7)

¹³⁰⁶ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (John 15:20)

notice his servants, you will fail to notice him. If you reject his servants, you will reject him.¹³⁰⁷

It is imperative to notice those who know Jesus better than you instead of ignoring them.¹³⁰⁸ It is essential to heed their teachings rather than rejecting them.¹³⁰⁹ It is important to support them¹³¹⁰ instead of persecuting them.¹³¹¹ The Lord said that how we treat his servants is how we treat him.¹³¹²

God withdraws his blessing by setting his face against you

If you turn your back on the Lord, the Lord will turn his back on you.¹³¹³ This isn't because he doesn't love you, but precisely because he does. To bless those who rebel against God would be to encourage them and others to increasingly do so.

As we refuse to change based on the teachings and examples of others,¹³¹⁴ he is left with only one remaining way to persuade us: pain. In order to best assist those who continue in rebellion against him, the Lord increasingly exposes them to a greater share of the consequences of their choices. This is symbolically described as both his "setting his face against you" and "hiding his face from you." The Lord's face is "set against you" when his perceived role changes from being the provider of blessings to being the provider of punishments.¹³¹⁵ The

¹³⁰⁷ He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. (Luke 10:16)

¹³⁰⁸ We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

¹³⁰⁹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. (John 13:20)

¹³¹⁰ Whoso receiveth you receiveth me; and the same will feed you, and clothe you, and give you money. And he who feeds you, or clothes you, or gives you money, shall in nowise lose his reward. And he that doeth not these things is not my disciple; by this you may know my disciples. (D&C 84:89-91)

¹³¹¹ Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

¹³¹² He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. (Luke 10:16)

¹³¹³ And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. (Jeremiah 32:33)

¹³¹⁴ But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. (Ezekiel 3:7-10)

¹³¹⁵ The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. (Psalm 34:16) And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. (Leviticus 26:17) For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the Lord: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. (Jeremiah 21:10) And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am Lord. (Ezekiel 14:8)

Lord “hides his face from you” when he withdraws from you the merciful unearned blessings he provides to those who seek him.¹³¹⁶

The Lord turns his face back towards those who turn back towards him.¹³¹⁷ Life features a myriad of ways to increase our appreciation for options for improvement.¹³¹⁸ Those who continue to buck against life’s lessons are exposed to ever greater measures of the consequences of doing so,¹³¹⁹ while those who turn back to God begin once again to enjoy the blessings of his countenance.¹³²⁰

Multiplying on the *face* of the earth, and being destroyed from the *face* of the earth

Many Christians have *grown* the size of their families based on interpreting God’s injunction to Adam¹³²¹ and again to Noah¹³²² to “be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.” Far fewer Christians have *improved* their families based on what that injunction actually meant. The mistaken oversimplification of this instruction to mean that parents are meant to have the largest possible families is a terrible mistake that can actually lead to the polar opposite of God’s intent, creating unnecessary misery and children who are least likely to reach their

¹³¹⁶ Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods. (Deuteronomy 31:17-18)

¹³¹⁷Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts....(Malachi 3:7)

¹³¹⁸ I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. (Hosea 5:15)

¹³¹⁹ And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. (Ezekiel 39:23-24) And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs. (Deuteronomy 32:20-25)

¹³²⁰ In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:8) If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

¹³²¹ And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

¹³²² And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

potential instead of maximizing joy through making all things as good as they can be.

God's purpose in creating the earth was to provide an opportunity for people to learn and live more like him. God's charge to Adam and Noah was not simply to reproduce, nor to reproduce abundantly, but rather to advance his purpose through all means at their disposal.

We have well established that God's face does not just mean the forward part of his head. In like manner, the earth's face doesn't just mean its surface. To "multiply on the face of the earth" (Genesis 6:1) doesn't just mean to produce posterity on the earth's surface, as there is no alternative location to do so. Rather, it means to develop families according to and in advancement of the plan and purpose of God. Remember, one meaning of "face" is the direction of, flowing through time or in increasing intensity or other progression.

The Lord's improving influence is what demarcated a difference between what was "in the beginning" and what came to be through the various stages of creation. It was his influence on the raw materials that preceded the earth that yielded what would become the earth,¹³²³ with each interaction consisting of inputs from God and responses from matter, then plants, animals, and humans. In our phase of God's continued creation, we operate under the instructions to make things on earth more like they are in heaven.¹³²⁴ The task of mankind is to obtain the image of the Lord in themselves, and to act in the world so as to bring about his image in the earth. In short, we are charged to align the face of the earth with the face of the Lord.

There are bounds within which the purposes of the earth can be achieved. When a person operates outside of those bounds, God makes the necessary changes to prevent them from impeding his purposes.¹³²⁵ When a person's rebellion from God is sufficiently extreme, God can end their life. The same occurs when a group, city, or country violates God's constraints: he warns them through messengers and mercifully minimized consequences, and if they continue in their rebellion, he destroys them. In the days of Noah, mankind as a whole had become so corrupted that it was no longer possible for the earth to fulfill its purpose, and God destroyed everyone except Noah, his three sons, and their wives.

¹³²³ "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2) Important details can be derived from understanding that "face" here can mean more than "surface."

¹³²⁴ And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. (Luke 11:2)

¹³²⁵ Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. (Genesis 4:14) And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. (Genesis 4:16)

With a better understanding of the concept of “face,” you can understand the purpose and necessity of the flood better than you ever have before. Read the KJV version of Genesis 6, where the italicized words are all the same Hebrew word for “face.”

5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

7 And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the *face* of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

9 These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

10 And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 The earth also was corrupt *before* God, and the earth was filled with violence.

12 And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence *through them*; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Genesis 6)

Now read this clearer rendering:

5 And when God saw man that he had made, it caused him great pain.

6 For the wickedness of man was so great that his every desire was completely evil all the time, and God was compelled to decree their destruction, notwithstanding the deep sorrow it caused him.

7 For he had loved mankind, creating all things for their sake, from birds and creeping things to beast, and man himself.

8 But Noah had pleased God by finding out about and becoming like him.

9 Noah walked with God; He was full of the revelations of God, and he lived in perfect accordant at all times to what God taught him.

11 And the earth had turned aside from the knowledge of God's character and plan that had been plainly revealed

and adequately demonstrated to them; all mankind was filled with injustice and malice.

12 And God recognized that the earth had become unable to attain its potential in its present state, because all men had so fully turned away from the path to becoming how he is that they had made it impossible for them to see what was good sufficiently to choose it of their own will; they had turned away from such plain and evident instruction toward improvement that their damaged senses could not be repaired through any righteous means.

13 And God said to Noah: the end of the procession of human life has come due to the fulness of rebellion against the revelation of my way, for they have allowed themselves to be used as a conduit to fill the earth with malevolence and injustice to the point where their children cannot choose what is right, and now I must destroy them. (Genesis 6, Author's Reflection)

The destiny of the earth is for God to dwell upon it.¹³²⁶ When he returns, everything that cannot dwell in his glory will be destroyed from off the face of the earth. In Noah's day, the Lord swept the earth clean with water.¹³²⁷ When he returns, he will do so with the fire¹³²⁸ of his glory.¹³²⁹ Until then, it is the duty of his servants to flood the earth with truth,¹³³⁰ offering persuasive arguments towards the next increment of improvement to all people,¹³³¹ such that every person has everything needed to become as much like Jesus as they are willing to.¹³³²

¹³²⁶ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. (Zechariah 2:10)

¹³²⁷ ...I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the *face* of the earth. (Genesis 7:4)

¹³²⁸ For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4:1)

¹³²⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

¹³³⁰ And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem. (Moses 7:62)

¹³³¹ Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. (D&C 88:81)

¹³³² Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads. (D&C 88:82)

Seek the face of God by remembering what he has done and making his goodness known to others

It is critical to recall and consider the many good things God has done for you and others.¹³³³ Those who recount the Lord's good works will find themselves with greater trust in God and greater willingness to submit to him.¹³³⁴ Proclaiming the good God has done for you and others¹³³⁵ will help more people receive these same benefits.¹³³⁶

Failing to give God credit for the good things he has done for you and others is a form of turning away from God.¹³³⁷ Those who refuse to credit God for what he has done will find themselves with less gratitude, less joy, less trust in God, less willingness to help others, and less willingness to obey God.

Eternal life in the presence of the Lord

Seeking the face of God is the path of eternal life.¹³³⁸ Those who seek his presence will find themselves continually striving for and benefiting from the best possible situation in their circumstances. We read:

I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. (Psalm 16:8)

¹³³³ Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; (1 Chronicles 16:10-12)

¹³³⁴ And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. (Mosiah 4:11-13)

¹³³⁵ And it came to pass that Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers. (Ether 6:30)

¹³³⁶ Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. (1 Chronicles 16:8-9)

¹³³⁷ And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments. (D&C 59:21) Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. (Jeremiah 2:27)

¹³³⁸ And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life. (D&C 101:38)

There is much more to this scripture than modern translations indicate. Here “before me” is one of the several words we have analyzed in this chapter relating to the presence of God. Coupled with the idiom of the right hand, the author is stating that he always acts as he believes the Lord would in his place. The accompanying promise is also richer than it might otherwise seem. The word “moved” here is translated from a Hebrew word that means to be carried away, cast out, turn out of course, fall into decay, or fall down. Here is a clearer rendition:

I circumscribe my behavior to what I believe the Lord
would do in my place, and because I do all that I imagine
he would, I will not be overcome, and I cannot go astray.
(Psalm 16:8, Author’s Reflection)

The way of God is the way of growth, and his way is narrow.¹³³⁹ To turn away from the Lord is to turn away from what is the very best. Any path that leads away from God leads to decay. Turn toward the Lord’s face and enjoy his favor.¹³⁴⁰

¹³³⁹ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7:14)

¹³⁴⁰ In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain. (Proverbs 16:15)

18. What are the words of eternal life, and how are they obtained?

Words means more than a written or spoken expression

The gospel definition¹³⁴¹ of *word* extends far beyond the limits of its English equivalent. *The word* is the set of all ideas that pertain to how Jesus is, what Jesus is, and why Jesus is. The word obviously includes spoken or written words describing Jesus in some way, but also includes much more. Because all of creation testifies of God in some way,¹³⁴² everything that exists in creation is part of *the word*; everything we experience or learn about in life—every person, object, or situation—provides us with opportunities to learn more about Jesus.¹³⁴³ While *the word* includes all of physical reality, it also extends beyond it. Because God's ideas exceed our own in breadth, depth, accuracy, sincerity, and power, *the word* extends beyond the bounds of human language.¹³⁴⁴ Through our thoughts and feelings, we can access ideas that exist beyond the limits of our language and understanding.

What are the words of eternal life?

The *words of eternal life* are any idea that leads to learning more about and living more like Jesus. Like all other ideas, *the words of eternal life* can be expressed at different levels of breadth, depth, accuracy,

¹³⁴¹ The ancient languages of Greek and Hebrew can provide closer associations to the intended meaning of those who wrote in them than English, but are still limited to similar problems. No human language should be considered expressive enough to yield an exact expression of gospel concepts. All are limited to the best words that match most closely to the intended meaning, retaining the distance from what was intended and carrying with them unintended associations with other meanings of the same words. In the case of *word*, a good example of these limitations is noted with the Greek words *logos* and *rhema*, where some verses indicate a clear distinction between the two, and others seem to ignore this distinction. Analyses that assume mathematical precision in the Hebrew or Greek words used to describe gospel ideas are inherently and unavoidably flawed. Relaxation of these constraints is essential when one is approaching God in search of better expressions of his ideas.

¹³⁴² And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63)

¹³⁴³ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth demonstrates his power. Day after day, he utters speech, and night after night he reveals knowledge. There is no word nor action where his voice is not heard. His words flow like cords through all the earth to every extremity of it. (Psalm 19:1-4, Author's Reflection)

¹³⁴⁴ For example, those in the Americas visited by Jesus after his resurrection said: "...The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak..." (3 Nephi 17:16-17)

sincerity,¹³⁴⁵ and power.¹³⁴⁶ They are obtained incrementally as one learns more about Jesus while living up to what they already know.

There are two components to the *words of eternal life*, and both of them are conditioned on the individual. The first portion of the *words of eternal life* is a person's sincere idea of what is best. If a person believes in Jesus, what is best ought to be how they imagine Jesus would be: what he would think, feel, and do in their situation. If they do not believe in Jesus, they will still have an idea of what is best, and this idea is, to them, the *words of eternal life*. Note that the person may be living their lives in full alignment with this ideal, partial alignment, or no alignment. The second portion of the *words of eternal life* is the next increment of improvement over the individual's present understanding of what is best. By definition, they will not yet know about this portion of the *words of eternal life* until someone or something makes this increment known to them, at which point it becomes part of the first. It is important to note that this increment becomes a part of the first portion of the words of eternal life to an individual based on whether they have sufficient reasons to believe it, not on whether or not they actually do.

As should be readily apparent, the *words of eternal life* are individual because they are specific to what information the individual presently understands, has access to, and the capacity to evaluate and receive. Any idea that helps an individual learn more about and become more like Jesus than they presently are is part of the *words of eternal life* for them.

The *words of eternal life* are not synonymous with the truth. The truth is objective and exists whether you are aware of it or not and whether you possess the capacity to identify it as true or not. Therefore, while the *words of eternal life* intersect with the truth, only the portion of the truth of which a person is aware and capable of recognizing and living could be considered the *words of eternal life*. The *words of eternal life* are the portion of truth a person already knows and lives, combined with the next increment of truth that they are capable of receiving. They consist of the best feelings, thoughts, and actions a person knows of and the path to what lies just beyond that.

¹³⁴⁵ But a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall declare whatsoever thing ye declare in my name, in solemnity of heart, in the spirit of meekness, in all things. And I give unto you this promise, that inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say. (D&C 100:7-8)

¹³⁴⁶ And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him. (Moses 7:13)

The words of life provide continuous direction in continuous improvement

The *words of eternal life* are the path of life, or the process of obtaining a more abundant life.¹³⁴⁷ The process of eternal life consists of an unbroken chain of continuous growth and improvement. The defining quality of the *words of eternal life* is not *what* they are (because they can consist of anything), or *where* they come from (because though they come *from* God, they can come *through* anything or anyone), but what they *result in*, which is improvement. All good things come from and are found in Jesus Christ, and it is important to understand that the *words of eternal life* include the set of ideas that improve, spanning all domains. Applying this definition makes it exceptionally easy to recognize, obtain, implement, and even generate the *words of eternal life*. Each person can imagine the ideal state of themselves, others, and the world, and each has the capacity to devise actions they can take to bring all things closer to their potential. It also makes evident how far from God most professed Christians are, as they artificially separate improvement from their practice of religion.¹³⁴⁸

Any idea that leads to improvement over the present state of a person is part of the *words of eternal life* to them. The *words of eternal life* cause improvement from how a person, situation, or thing is toward how it could be. The words of eternal life include everything that makes anything better than it is—even if it isn’t purported to be from God, and even if it does not pertain to “religious” contexts. To turn away from opportunities for improvement is to turn away from God, as improvement comes from and leads to him.¹³⁴⁹

We are surrounded at all times and in all places with opportunities to make things better than they are. In fact, opportunities for improvement are so numerous that the only way to ensure that you are paying attention to and prioritizing them is to explicitly capture, rank, and work on them.¹³⁵⁰ Without intentionally addressing opportunities for improvement, you can guarantee that you are living your life with less joy, less meaning, and greater exposure to unnecessary suffering than God intended.

¹³⁴⁷ ...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

¹³⁴⁸ And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now. (D&C 84:49-53)

¹³⁴⁹ Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation. (D&C 93:31)

¹³⁵⁰ A framework for doing this is provided in the author’s book *Joy on Purpose*.

The Lord has promised to give the faithful the continual guidance needed to guide them directly in the path to him.¹³⁵¹ The words he provides are “living,”¹³⁵² or continuously flowing. They do not end.¹³⁵³ One of the strongest indications of our current relationship with God is the incidence of improving ideas, whether new or recalled from before.¹³⁵⁴

Those who find themselves with insufficient instruction from God ought to immediately and honestly examine their heed and diligence to him,¹³⁵⁵ as he has indicated that this will not be the case with those who live up to what he has already provided.¹³⁵⁶ The more you follow the instructions God has given us, the more instructions he will give you.¹³⁵⁷

The rate at which you improve is the rate at which you draw nearer to the Father.¹³⁵⁸ All able-minded adults have a sense of discernment that enables them to perceive the actions available to them and the

¹³⁵¹ Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man. (D&C 84:85)

¹³⁵² Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. (John 4:10)

¹³⁵³ And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come, and there is no end to my works, neither to my words. (Moses 1:38) ...truth abideth and hath no end; and if it be in you it shall abound. (D&C 88:66)

¹³⁵⁴ 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)

¹³⁵⁵ [God grants his word] unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)

¹³⁵⁶ But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14)

¹³⁵⁷ And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day. Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions. And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual. For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land. And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever. (Alma 37:40-46)

¹³⁵⁸ I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord. (D&C 132:12)

relative value of each.¹³⁵⁹ The more you live up to the best you know and the more you seek to learn, the more God will teach you.

Until you live up to the best that you know, you should not expect greater opportunities.¹³⁶⁰ It is only to those who are making the best use of what they have that God gives more.¹³⁶¹ Living up to what God has taught you thus far is essential to being prepared to notice, receive, and follow additional instructions he will send.¹³⁶² The word of God you live up to will illuminate the next steps in obtaining more of the word of God.¹³⁶³ You will see what lies beyond your present position only as you become the best person you can be.¹³⁶⁴ If you reach for what lies beyond the improvements of which you already know, you will fall behind where you presently are.¹³⁶⁵

Incessantly ask God what he would do in your place, and unflinching do it.¹³⁶⁶ Search out and live what is best. Make everything as good as it can be, starting with yourself and your family, and flowing out through your entire sphere of influence.

It is only to those who are living up to their understanding of how Jesus would live in their place that the Lord reveals more about himself.¹³⁶⁷ The Lord will make available more of his word to those

¹³⁵⁹ And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life. For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 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. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. (D&C 84:43-47)

¹³⁶⁰ For they do not forsake their sins, and their wicked ways, the pride of their hearts, and their covetousness, and all their detestable things, and observe the words of wisdom and eternal life which I have given unto them. (D&C 98:20)

¹³⁶¹ For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. (Matthew 25:29)

¹³⁶² And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God. For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith. (D&C 98:11-12)

¹³⁶³ Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)

¹³⁶⁴ For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: (Proverbs 6:23)

¹³⁶⁵ For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30)

¹³⁶⁶ "...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) *Words* is a Hebraistic idiom that means much more than the English translation. This scripture would be clearer if "example" were used in place of "words."

¹³⁶⁷ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. (John 14:23)

who live up to what they know,¹³⁶⁸ even if it requires sending some person into their lives who can provide it.¹³⁶⁹ Often, these opportunities are missed¹³⁷⁰ by those who assume that what they are looking for will come in some other way.¹³⁷¹

The words of eternal life guide us in learning and obtaining the character of Christ

When you perceive and live the *words of eternal life*,¹³⁷² you become better than you were before.¹³⁷³ This is the definition of holy: different and better. By obtaining¹³⁷⁴ and assimilating¹³⁷⁵ God's word, you are made holy, or sanctified.¹³⁷⁶

Receiving the *words of eternal life* means learning what he is actually like and living like him, not just memorizing scripture or living certain rules. As we live according to our sincere idea of how God would in our place,¹³⁷⁷ he will regularly teach us more about himself.¹³⁷⁸

As you receive more of the *words of eternal life*, you will become more like God in the same way the Son became more like the

¹³⁶⁸ For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true. (Alma 29:8)

¹³⁶⁹ And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)

¹³⁷⁰ Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2)

¹³⁷¹ Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise. And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls. (Alma 37:6-7)

¹³⁷² ...that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; (Moses 6:59)

¹³⁷³ The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. (Psalm 119:130)

¹³⁷⁴ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. (John 15:3)

¹³⁷⁵ Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Helaman 3:35)

¹³⁷⁶ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:17)

¹³⁷⁷ Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (John 18:37)

¹³⁷⁸ Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. (D&C 121:45)

Father:¹³⁷⁹ Incrementally, as you learn more about what Jesus is like and continue to live as your increasing understanding indicates he would in your place.¹³⁸⁰

Jesus was more like the Father than anyone else before this world was created, and he came to the earth to demonstrate how the Father would be in his place.¹³⁸¹ He showed the world what the Father is like.¹³⁸² You are called to become more like Jesus than you were before so that anyone who gets to know you will get to know Jesus more than they did before.¹³⁸³ Jesus was everything the Father would be if the Father were in his place, and this is exactly what you are called to be—to follow the example of Jesus Christ in your own situation, thinking, feeling, and doing what he would in your place.¹³⁸⁴

Jesus was the embodiment of God's word. You must be, too. While the injunction to be like Jesus is dismissed by many as impossible or too difficult, Jesus showed it was possible¹³⁸⁵ through his own example in life,¹³⁸⁶ and argued that it was easier than any alternative when the true costs are considered.

Why should we seek and receive the words of eternal life?

The *words of eternal life* are worth obtaining because of what they yield hereafter, but they also carry worthwhile benefits in this life.

Life is full of challenges that can overcome you. Life's challenges can steal from you the joy you presently have and even rob from you the joy you experienced in the past.¹³⁸⁷ The *words of eternal life* increase the

¹³⁷⁹ The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth; And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:26-28)

¹³⁸⁰ And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. (John 1:16)

¹³⁸¹ Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. (John 5:19)

¹³⁸² ...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.... (John 14:9)

¹³⁸³ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

¹³⁸⁴ Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and I pray for them, and also for them who shall believe on their words, that they may be purified in me, through faith on their words, even as they are purified in me. (3 Nephi 19:28)

¹³⁸⁵ And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. (Mark 10:26-27)

¹³⁸⁶ And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? (2 Nephi 31:9-10)

¹³⁸⁷ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

joy you experience¹³⁸⁸ and keep¹³⁸⁹ in spite of the challenges of life. Those who search for the character of Christ and apply all they learn as they learn it will increasingly obtain greater power to obtain and keep peace¹³⁹⁰ and well-being.¹³⁹¹

The *words of eternal life* include the wisdom, beliefs, and skills to overcome what presently overcomes you.¹³⁹² As you contemplate how *the words of eternal life* are sequential and hierarchical steps from how a person is and how they see everything else to how God is and how he sees everything, you can begin to see how the stream of *the words of eternal life* form a layered foundation, each with the ability to solve increasingly difficult problems.¹³⁹³ One component of *the words of eternal life* highlights the fact that the foundation is already built. As you live the best you know and do all you know to keep learning, you will be protected¹³⁹⁴ from what would otherwise overcome you.¹³⁹⁵ The other component of *the words of eternal life* highlights the process of continuous growth, where you are trained to be able to overcome what overcomes you.¹³⁹⁶

¹³⁸⁸ And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. (John 17:13)

¹³⁸⁹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (John 15:11)

¹³⁹⁰ For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Romans 8:6)

¹³⁹¹ And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. (1 Nephi 15:24)

¹³⁹² So everyone who hears these words [logos] of Mine and acts upon them [obeying them] will be like a sensible (prudent, practical, wise) man who built his house upon the rock. (Matthew 7:24, AMP)

¹³⁹³ ...I am the rock, and upon this rock I will build my house, using rocks. And all of hell cannot overpower the people of my house, because they are built upon me, and I will overcome all things. This is the secret by which you can obtain all power in heaven and earth: Learn my Father's will, and do all things that lie in your power to bring everything into greater alignment with him, and the impact of your actions will endure eternally. (Matthew 16:18-19, Author's Reflection)

¹³⁹⁴ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:27-28)

¹³⁹⁵ And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. (Helaman 5:12)

¹³⁹⁶ Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked— (Helaman 3:29)

Who has the words of eternal life?

Jesus is the living conduit through which we perceive, receive, and value *the word*.¹³⁹⁷ Jesus is the embodiment of the word of God,¹³⁹⁸ or the word made flesh,¹³⁹⁹ or the character of the Father as a man.¹⁴⁰⁰ Eternal life can be thought of as the process of perceiving, receiving, and valuing *the word*.

Popular translations of John's gospel open with a reference to Jesus Christ as "the word," but without a description of the meaning of the phrase. Here is a more explanatory rendition:

1 The word has always existed. Having the word and being the word is what makes God who and what he is.

2 Before the world was created, Jesus Christ was with the Father, and had obtained and become the word.

3 He made all things according to the pattern by which all things have ever been made, according to the word.

4 He had obtained eternal life before this world was, and by laying down his eternal life, he provided the light of men. (John 1, Author's Reflection)

The *words of eternal life* existed before the world was created. We do not create them, but rather discover them. We receive them from the Son, who already has them, having received them from the Father.¹⁴⁰¹

The Lord operates through the spirit of God¹⁴⁰² and messengers under its influence¹⁴⁰³ to incrementally mete out more knowledge about himself. Jesus brought down the *words of eternal life* by making himself

¹³⁹⁷ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

¹³⁹⁸ Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Hebrews 1:3)

¹³⁹⁹ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

¹⁴⁰⁰ I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

¹⁴⁰¹ He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:24)

¹⁴⁰² Therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven; the Comforter; the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment. (Moses 6:61)

¹⁴⁰³ Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. (2 Nephi 32:3)

known to Adam,¹⁴⁰⁴ others after Adam,¹⁴⁰⁵ to those he ministered to in the flesh, and by making himself known to others after his resurrection.¹⁴⁰⁶ Those who know him more provide the *words of eternal life* to those who know him less.¹⁴⁰⁷ However, the sources of the *words of eternal life* are much broader than most would anticipate.

The *words of eternal life* are information suggesting how things could be better than they are. Anyone who can form a plausible path to something better than what is has the *words of eternal life*. The *words of eternal life* come from God, and God can “speak” to anyone¹⁴⁰⁸—whether through visitation, voice, life experience, or quickening their thoughts.¹⁴⁰⁹ God can speak to those who don’t even believe in him, including in ways that they will not recognize. He can even speak to those actively attacking him, such as he did to Caiaphas as he was in the midst of proposing that Jesus should die.¹⁴¹⁰

Those who have the *words of eternal life* exist in a hierarchical tree,¹⁴¹¹ each with a differing capacity to help a specific person improve from where they are. In one sense, the work of the End Times is to repeatedly connect each person to the one who has the words of eternal life to them until they learn and live all the words they are willing to receive.

The one who can form an effective path to the greatest improvement is the one who has the greatest *words of eternal life*. Jesus has the ultimate *words of eternal life*, because all improvement comes from and leads to him.

¹⁴⁰⁴ And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you. (Moses 6:52)

¹⁴⁰⁵ For example, he appeared to the Brother of Jared: “Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.” (Ether 3:14)

¹⁴⁰⁶ For example, he appeared to his followers in the Americas after his resurrection: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.” (3 Nephi 11:10)

¹⁴⁰⁷ But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23)

¹⁴⁰⁸

¹⁴⁰⁹ And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, 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 unto salvation. (D&C 68:4)

¹⁴¹⁰ And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; (John 11:49-51)

¹⁴¹¹ He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38)

The words of eternal life are information about how Jesus would think, feel, and act in your place. Anyone who is more like Jesus than you do has the *words of eternal life*.¹⁴¹² It should be immediately obvious that one can only lead people to be like God to the extent that they know the way, and that they only know the way as far as they have travelled it themselves.¹⁴¹³ Someone who can correctly explain what Jesus would think, feel, or do in your place further or more persuasively than you can provides you with invaluable information to enable you to draw nearer to him by becoming more like him.

The process of climbing the tree of the kingdom of God entails finding and learning from those who know Jesus better than you, learning all you can from them, and proceeding to repeat the cycle.¹⁴¹⁴ In one sense, the work of the End Times is to repeatedly connect each person with someone more like Jesus than they are, from whom they can learn more about him, until they have met the person most like Christ they are willing to learn from and follow the example of. Jesus has the ultimate *words of eternal life*,¹⁴¹⁵ as he knows each change needed to render a person into how he is, no matter how they presently are. While each individual's understanding of the Lord is different, as individuals live what they understand about Jesus, their understanding of him will merge towards his actual identity.

You won't have room for living water while you fill yourself with putrid water

Present day churches fail to produce the qualities they claim Jesus has in their adherents. The true gospel contains the power to produce people who reconcile to how they believe Jesus to be.¹⁴¹⁶ By the Lord's

¹⁴¹² But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23)

¹⁴¹³ And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? (Luke 6:39)

¹⁴¹⁴ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

¹⁴¹⁵ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

¹⁴¹⁶ And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness. (Alma 32:31)

standard, any church that fails to produce people more like him cannot be his.¹⁴¹⁷ Where do today's churches go wrong?

Believing that the *words of eternal life* can be found in an institution is a grave mistake. The *words of eternal life* are *never* in a church, except through individuals who actually:

- 5) Live as they believe Jesus would in their place.
- 6) Seek to learn more about Jesus.
- 7) Accept and live better ideas whenever and wherever they find them.

Becoming more like God requires the removal of anything less than he is.¹⁴¹⁸ Those who fail to become more like God do so because they are unwilling to improve their idea of who he is and what he wants. In order to grow towards God, it is necessary to cut away anything that can't co-exist with a greater understanding of how he is.

We are naturally inclined to refuse voices from God whose words do not meet our preconceived notions or fulfill our carnal desires. We interpret invitations for improvement as arrogant criticism,¹⁴¹⁹ dismissing as hateful what is actually the greatest channel of love that can be expressed.¹⁴²⁰ The greater the invitation to improvement, the greater the love that is demonstrated, the harder it is to find, and the more likely it will be responded to with extreme harm to the giver.¹⁴²¹ People much prefer those who tell them what they want to hear, namely that they are wonderful as they are, and that they will receive wonderful things without the need to change.

26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and

¹⁴¹⁷ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21) For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive. (Mosiah 26:22) And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel. (3 Nephi 27:8)

¹⁴¹⁸ Therefore, having removed everything which has greater cost than benefit, or which gets worse, be willing to receive the implantation of the word which alone has the power to save your souls. (James 1:21, Author's Reflection)

¹⁴¹⁹ Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide. (Helaman 12:6)

¹⁴²⁰ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Hebrews 12:6)

¹⁴²¹ And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. (Psalm 109:5)

iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.

27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth -- and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.

29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light? (Helaman 13)

In place of God's voice, we are naturally inclined to attribute to God voices that are not his: churchy actions (outward, designated actions that are often disconnected from the heart, as betrayed by their absence from daily life), churchy thoughts (rehearsing the same canned ideas given to you in your sect's traditions rather than actively searching for and reasoning about God for yourself), and churchy desires (seeking salvation as an escape from the vicissitudes of life instead of consecrating the challenges of life for the benefit of others).

Hearing the word is about doing, not just listening

You cannot receive the *words of eternal life* simply by reading them or hearing them spoken. Those who think they are improving their situation simply by reading or hearing God's word are practicing a particularly harmful form of dishonesty.¹⁴²²

Receiving the *words of eternal life* is about what you become,¹⁴²³ not what you hear. There is an immense difference between knowing what

¹⁴²² Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:21-22)

¹⁴²³ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

someone is like and only knowing what they look like. Those who live the *words of eternal life* know how Jesus is because they are like him, not because they have heard how he is from someone else. Receiving the *words of eternal life* begins by perceiving them,¹⁴²⁴ but the benefits do not begin until and unless you actually make the improvements they suggest.¹⁴²⁵ Familiarity with God's word does not make you righteous;¹⁴²⁶ Living it does.¹⁴²⁷ Those who "hear" the word of God with their ears without improving their actions are not his children,¹⁴²⁸ but hypocritical liars.¹⁴²⁹

Speaking the word includes what you have become, not just what you say

What would it be like to have the spirit flow into and through you at all times and in everything you do? God has given a tremendous promise to all who will declare what they declare in his name in solemnity of heart and in meekness:

7 But a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall declare whatsoever thing ye declare in my name, in solemnity of heart, in the spirit of meekness, in all things.

8 And I give unto you this promise, that inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say. (D&C 100)

¹⁴²⁴ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14)

¹⁴²⁵ ...Only one who actually carries out the works of Christ will obtain the blessings attending the works of Christ. (James 1:25, Author's Reflection) For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. (Hebrews 4:2)

¹⁴²⁶ There are so many scriptures whose value is severely restricted by poor English translation. Here's one: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Psalms 119:11) This does not mean that memorizing scripture prevents you from sin. The Spanish translation is closer to the intent: "En mi corazón he guardado tus dichos, para no pecar contra ti." Literally: "In my heart I keep your word, so as not to sin against you." The word "keep" here is the same one used in the phrase, "keep my commandments." The English translation leaves a lot of room for committing all the same mistakes of the Pharisees, who managed to focus on outward acts while neglecting the more important inward motive, all the while doing all sorts of terrible things "in between" the rules of the law. These same failings are repeated all over common Christianity.

¹⁴²⁷ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:28-31)

¹⁴²⁸ Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:18)

¹⁴²⁹ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (1 John 2:4-5)

To declare does not just mean to speak. The Hebrew definitions of words translated as *testify* and *declare* also mean *to demonstrate*, and the Lord explicitly defined what you *say* as your desires, thoughts, and actions.¹⁴³⁰

What you say and do should align fully with what you feel and believe. When what you feel, think, and do are fully aligned with each other, you maximize the conduit through which the light of God can flow in and through you. To the extent your feelings, thoughts, or actions are out of alignment with one another, you can be assured that you are experiencing less than the full measure of joy, peace, and growth that God wants for you.¹⁴³¹

During his mortal life, the Lord walked in the full power of the spirit because everything he said, did, and felt was the full measure of his sincere belief of what the Father would do in his place, based on everything he had learned about him.¹⁴³²

To speak the *words of eternal life* is to seek, know, and do what the Lord would in your place. He calls us to learn and live his purpose, just as he learned and lived the Father's purpose.¹⁴³³

¹⁴³⁰ A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:35-37)

¹⁴³¹ Any man whose feelings, thoughts, and actions are fully aligned is a man achieving his full potential. (James 3:2, Author's Reflection)

¹⁴³² For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak. (John 12:49-50)

¹⁴³³ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11:29)

19. What is the name of Christ?

Names and titles in God's kingdom

We use names to refer to people and things. God uses names differently. To God, a name is not just a title describing *who* someone is, but a description of *how* they are or could be. While parents name their children based on trends, tradition, or hopes of how a child will turn out, God perfectly knows each person's actual and potential qualities. Names given by God can refer to past, present, or future circumstances—whether promised or potential.

The way God names people is much closer to the way the world bestows titles than how people name their children. In the world, titles are bestowed by authoritative individuals or groups as a recognition of prior achievement or as a call to future performance. While God uses names and titles to recognize a person's past achievements,¹⁴³⁴ he also uses them to invite them to develop otherwise unseen potential qualities,¹⁴³⁵ forewarn them of danger,¹⁴³⁶ and to promise outcomes that would otherwise seem impossible.¹⁴³⁷ God's names can combine any or all of these purposes. For example, God renaming Abram as Abraham was an example of recognition of his past accomplishments and present properties as well as an invitation to further develop his potential with a promise of an otherwise unlikely outcome.¹⁴³⁸

Appellations given by God are a call to action. Every name or title is either an invitation to do something or a record of it having been done. They can remind the recipient or those who know them of past

¹⁴³⁴ For example, God called Jacob *Israel* when he overcame the struggle of approaching him. "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." (Genesis 32:28)

¹⁴³⁵ The Greek verb translated as "to name" (*kaleō*) also means to bid, call forth, and invite.

¹⁴³⁶ The Lord called Simon to become *Peter* as an invitation to lean on him as the rock of his strength: "And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." (John 1:42)

¹⁴³⁷ For example, God commanded Isaiah to name his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz ("quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"), prophesying that before the child was old enough to say father or mother, the riches of Damascus and Samaria would be plundered by Assyria (see Isaiah 8:1-4).

¹⁴³⁸ Abraham's apostate father named him Abram ("my father is exalted"), but God renamed him Abraham ("all nations of the earth will exalt the name of God through your name"), "for I have given you all people not in my family, to rule over them; that through you they will be called to me and begin to understand how I am." (Genesis 17:5, Author's Reflection) The "many" (Hebrew *hamoun*) people referred to here links to the confounded people at the tower of Babel, where the organization of the human family was balkanized to limit their ability to self-organize for evil after rebelling against good (see Genesis 11:1-9). Abraham's new name was given as a testament of the blessings God would give him, signifying that the entire world would come to know God through coming to know Abraham. In other words, that the God they would come to know would be "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

actions taken or charge them to achieve certain accomplishments in the future.

Names and titles provide examples of what is possible and demonstrations of how to obtain it

Some seek names and titles from God to inflate their ego or improve how others treat them. Authentic names and titles from God always come with an increased sense of one's nothingness,¹⁴³⁹ and are more likely to result in others hating you¹⁴⁴⁰ rather than loving you.¹⁴⁴¹ God's names and titles aren't a pathway to greater honor than you deserve. While worldly appellations are often given for reasons other than merit,¹⁴⁴² those given by God are only ever given in truth and justice. God will never describe you as something you aren't, suggest you could be something you can't become, or promise you something you can't obtain.

God's names and titles aren't a way to extract more from others. Those in the world seek names and titles to increase the honor and privileges they receive from other people, but those in the kingdom of God receive names and titles in relation to increases in how much they provide to others. Christians tend to pursue their faith as a way to increase what they receive from God, even though Jesus said that the way to do this was to increase what you give to others.¹⁴⁴³

Because they are rooted in present or potential reality, God-given appellations distinguish one person from another. They enumerate the differences between people who might otherwise be indistinguishable. In the world today, pointing out the differences between individuals is seen as exceedingly rude, if not a gross moral violation. However, intentional improvement is impossible without first identifying the

¹⁴³⁹ And it came to pass that it was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed. (Moses 1:10)

¹⁴⁴⁰ For example, when Nephi was proclaimed a ruler by God, his brothers accused him of usurping power and sought to kill him: "Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger." (1 Nephi 16:38)

¹⁴⁴¹ And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

¹⁴⁴² That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. (D&C 121:36)

¹⁴⁴³ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26-28)

difference between how things are and how you would like them to be, and identifying the differences between two individuals is necessary in order for one to intentionally change to be more like the other. Names and titles describing past achievements call others to consider possibilities beyond their present achievements and to rise up to obtain the same.

The glory of God can never be received outside of actually becoming more like him, so every honor given by God reveals some additional aspect about him, both to the recipient and those who interact with him or her. Those who have lived up to the designations given by God provide an example of the character qualities and decisions needed for anyone else to do the same. Anyone fulfilling the role described by any name or title becomes worthy of it because God is impartial in how he treats us.¹⁴⁴⁴ You seek and receive the God-given appellations possessed by others by seeking and living their character qualities and living your life the way they have.¹⁴⁴⁵

The Lord's titles describe ways in which we can become like him

The Lord has well over one hundred known names and titles. These appellations, like all others given by the Father, both describe how he is different from us and how we can become more like him. You take upon yourself a name or title by adopting the character qualities that correspond to it, changing the choices you would otherwise make to match those someone with those qualities would make. You take upon yourself the names of Christ by adopting his character qualities and living as he would in your place.

Many of today's professed Christians would consider the ability for any other person to obtain the same titles as Christ to be blasphemous in the same way and for the same reasons that the Jews crucified Christ.¹⁴⁴⁶ Here, two key distinctions might reduce the controversy.

First, there is a big difference between reducing God down to man by diminishing his character and raising man up to God by rising up to his character. It is not blasphemous to suggest that God gives men the capability, opportunities, and reasons to become more like him. Showing how man can be more like God is, in fact, the epitome of glorifying him. Like any good father, God's greatest glory, principal purpose, and utmost joy is the advancement of his children beyond where they would be without his continual, consummate sacrifice on

¹⁴⁴⁴ For there is no respect of persons with God. (Romans 2:11)

¹⁴⁴⁵ For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:5)

¹⁴⁴⁶ Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (Philippians 2:6)

their behalf. Every individual improvement that brings any person closer to being like God increases the evidence of his goodness and power.

Second, even when names and titles are the same, they can feature gradations. Appellations can have multiple levels of fulfillment, just as some military awards do.¹⁴⁴⁷ In the gospel, two people who have received the same name will overlap in at least some qualities, and yet can have notable differences as well. For example, consider the differences between the various men called Elijah/Elias. John the Baptist was *an* Elijah/Elias even if he wasn't *the* Elijah/Elias who had come before him or would come after him.

The scriptures are replete with examples of titles popularly thought of as unique to the Lord being given by God to others. His shared titles include even the most seemingly exclusive. Consider just a few:

- *God*. As offensive as it is for mainstream Christians to acknowledge, Christianity is unavoidably polytheistic even beyond the three individuals that form the godhead (or, more accurately, head of the gods)¹⁴⁴⁸. This should not come as a surprise to anyone who has bothered looking up the word God in Hebrew.¹⁴⁴⁹ Though the definition of what it means to be a god lies beyond the scope of this book, a sufficient argument that this is a title that God applies to some men exists in the story of Moses, whom God appointed to be a god over Israel,¹⁴⁵⁰ Aaron,¹⁴⁵¹ and Pharaoh.¹⁴⁵²
- *Messiah*. The title *messiah* literally means “one who has been anointed by God.” Many prophets, priests, and kings have been anointed by God, both literally and figuratively. For example, God commanded¹⁴⁵³ that all priests¹⁴⁵⁴ in Israel were to be anointed with consecrated oil as part of their setting

¹⁴⁴⁷ In the US Army, for example, certain commendations have gradations that denote different criteria or successive awards.

¹⁴⁴⁸ For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. (Psalm 95:3)

¹⁴⁴⁹ *Elohim*, translated as God, is actually a plural word.

¹⁴⁵⁰ And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:14) And they shall hearken to your voice... (Exodus 3:18)

¹⁴⁵¹ And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. (Exodus 4:16)

¹⁴⁵² And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. (Exodus 7:1)

¹⁴⁵³ And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him. (Exodus 29:21)

¹⁴⁵⁴ And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. (Exodus 30:30)

apart. God commanded his prophets to anoint at least some of Israel's kings, including Saul, David, Solomon, and Joash. Elijah anointed Elisha figuratively by covering him in his robe after the Lord commanded Elijah to appoint Elisha to take his place. All of these actions were symbolic gestures pointing to the overflowing outpouring¹⁴⁵⁵ of God's spirit upon the recipient. Not all people are kings and priests, but all people are called of God¹⁴⁵⁶ to receive the anointing of his spirit¹⁴⁵⁷ through learning about and living up to the example of Jesus Christ. As Moses said, "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29) Why hasn't he? Because those called prefer the honors of men and treasures of the world above the honor of God and the treasures of eternity (see D&C 121:34-36).

- *The Son of God.* There is more than one son of God mentioned in the scriptures.¹⁴⁵⁸ God specifically referred to Enoch,¹⁴⁵⁹ Abraham,¹⁴⁶⁰ Moses,¹⁴⁶¹ Solomon,¹⁴⁶² and others as his sons. The apostle John explained that God empowers everyone who receives God by believing on his name to become the sons of God.¹⁴⁶³ The apostle Paul explained the process as becoming

¹⁴⁵⁵ It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; (Psalms 133:2)

¹⁴⁵⁶ For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

¹⁴⁵⁷ He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38) And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:29) Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (Psalms 45:7)

¹⁴⁵⁸ When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:7)

¹⁴⁵⁹ And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people, and say unto them—Repent, for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people, and my fierce anger is kindled against them; for their hearts have waxed hard, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes cannot see afar off; (Moses 6:27)

¹⁴⁶⁰ And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof. (Abraham 3:12)

¹⁴⁶¹ And now, behold, this one thing I show unto thee, Moses, my son, for thou art in the world, and now I show it unto thee. (Moses 1:7)

¹⁴⁶² I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: (2 Samuel 7:14)

¹⁴⁶³ But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: (John 1:12)

different from the world by rejecting what deviates from God.¹⁴⁶⁴

- *The Lamb of God.* God's many lambs include anyone who continuously obeys God's voice.¹⁴⁶⁵ They "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth...." (Revelation 14:4)
- *Savior.* A savior is someone who saves someone from something from which they could not save themselves. Examples of temporal saviors abound in the scriptures. They include Noah, who saved the entire human race, Joseph, who saved the known world from starvation, Moses, who saved Egypt from slavery, and Samson, who saved Israel from the Philistines. Human saviors are not limited to temporal circumstances. For example, Abraham obtained a covenant for the whole world, Moses obtained a covenant for Israel, and anyone who "converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:20) Prophecy indicates that the Lord will continue to use people as saviors in his work.¹⁴⁶⁶
- *King.* Jesus is the King of Kings,¹⁴⁶⁷ and therefore there are other kings in God's kingdom besides him, over whom he rules and reigns.¹⁴⁶⁸
- *Lord.* Jesus is the Lord of Lords,¹⁴⁶⁹ and therefore there are other lords in God's kingdom besides him.
- *The Alpha and Omega.* Besides Jesus Christ, at least one man—Adam—will fulfill the title of Alpha and Omega in this creation. He is the first man and the last man. He governed in the beginning, and he will govern in the end, receiving his kingdom from and returning it to the Alpha and Omega above him—Jesus Christ, who alone came down before Adam and will come down after Adam.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

¹⁴⁶⁵ And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. (Mosiah 26:21) But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:26-27)

¹⁴⁶⁶ And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's. (Obadiah 1:21)

¹⁴⁶⁷ And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King Of Kings, And Lord Of Lords. (Revelation 19:16)

¹⁴⁶⁸ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:4) Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (James 1:12) And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (1 Corinthians 9:25)

¹⁴⁶⁹ These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. (Revelation 17:14)

- *The Word*. All who become like the Lord also become the Word (this topic is more fully expounded in the Chapter: *What are the words of eternal life, and how are they obtained?*).
- *The Son of Man*. The Lord called himself “Son of Man” to demonstrate the Father in fulfillment of the mission Adam failed to achieve. The title is no less applicable to anyone who strives to fulfill their potential as a human being created in the image of God, as we all are. For example, the Lord called Ezekiel “son of man” many times in the Old Testament.
- *Light of the World*. The Lord said to his disciples: “Ye are the light of the world...” (Matthew 5:14) The Lord is the light in men¹⁴⁷⁰ and was the light of this world while he was living here.¹⁴⁷¹ He calls all of us to be the light in the world until he returns.¹⁴⁷²

If none of the aforementioned titles refer only to Jesus, by what name can he uniquely be described?

What is the name of the Lord?

It would seem that the easiest way to find out the name of the Lord would be to ask him. It turns out that it is not, in fact, that easy.

We have records of several people asking God¹⁴⁷³ what his name is. When the father of Samson asked him, he replied: “Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” (Judges 13:18) A better translation would be: “Why do you ask my name? You are incapable of comprehending it.” Moses, who was much more clever in persuading the Lord to divulge his name, was told:

...I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:14)

There has been some argument over the meaning of the Hebrew words translated as “I Am That I Am,” but consider this rendition: “I am *what* I have done, what I do, and what I will do; I am *why* I have done it, why I do it, and why I will do it; I am *how* I did it, how I do it, and how I will do it.” These attributes form the character of an individual, and this is

¹⁴⁷⁰ In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (John 1:4)

¹⁴⁷¹ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:5)

¹⁴⁷² Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed. (3 Nephi 18:24)

¹⁴⁷³ Or his “angel,” a distinction beyond the scope of this book.

precisely what the Lord's name is: It is what he does, how he does it, and why he does it. This should come as no surprise.

Though perhaps lost to most in modern times, the ancients understood that there exists a link between a person's character and their name. In fact, the Greek noun translated as "name" in the New Testament (Strong's 3686, *onoma*) means the manifestation or revelation of someone's character. In this sense, a name is an attempt to circumscribe the essence of a person's attributes within a single term or short phrase.

The breadth and depth of the Lord's character explains his apparent reluctance to tell others his name when asked: it isn't that he *won't*, but that he *can't*.

God is extremely limited in his ability to convey to us more about how he is. On several occasions, the Lord introduced himself to others. Most notably, he came down from heaven and lived a mortal life among the Jews. He also vocally introduced himself to some,¹⁴⁷⁴ as well as face-to-face to others.¹⁴⁷⁵ He has introduced himself face-to-face to some individuals throughout history. In every case, he was immensely limited in what he could convey about himself to those he spoke to. For example, to the twelve best men he could find during his mortal life, with whom he had spent three years, he lamented: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." (John 16:12)

The difficulty of conveying the name of God in words

Words are powerful tools. To those who know them, they provide ready handles to easily describe more ideas with greater clarity and less length than otherwise needed. To those who do not yet know them, words provide an invitation to improve their ability to think and communicate, while their definitions provide the means of coming to comprehend and, hopefully, use them. An interesting property of a dictionary is that all words are defined by other words. If there were a purely novel word, the dictionary would have no ability to define it. How would one define such a word? This is the challenge of defining the name of the Lord.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. (3 Nephi 9:15)

¹⁴⁷⁵ Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Nephi 11:10-11) Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3:14)

No textual description can sufficiently describe God. While the character of the Lord can be *referred to* with a name or title, it cannot be adequately *described* in words.¹⁴⁷⁶ How would you describe everything that God does, how he does it, and why he does it in words? The apostle John said it couldn't even be done if all the books in the world were dedicated to that purpose.¹⁴⁷⁷

Every word we have at our disposal means something less than Jesus. To adopt any understandable adjective in attempting to describe him would be to describe him as less than he is,¹⁴⁷⁸ and yet stringing together these inadequate adjectives is the best we can do. To one who knows him very little, these words provide an invaluable basis from which a more accurate understanding can grow, but there is an absolute limit in the ability of words to fully describe God. God must be experienced to be known.

It is not possible to come to know God through simply reading about or hearing about him. The more part of God's character can only be discovered incrementally, through many interactions with him over time. However, his name gives us a convenient way to refer to him, providing a placeholder that can be extended and corrected as we progress in our understanding of how he is. More importantly, whatever details may be lacking or flawed, descriptions of the Lord serve the invaluable purpose of providing something we can emulate, opening the door to further revelation.

While there are many who get quite hung up on which single word they should use to address the Savior, it turns out that, whatever the merits of any of the several options, they are all so vastly inadequate that our effort would be much better spent learning how he is and living that way rather than arguing over what to call him.¹⁴⁷⁹ The label you use to address the Lord matters much less to him than the description you attach to that label and how fully you follow it in your own life. What you call him matters less than whether you call *on* him, and the most important part of that tends to be your decision to change as a

¹⁴⁷⁶ O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. (Psalm 92:5-6)

¹⁴⁷⁷ And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. (John 21:25)

¹⁴⁷⁸ The single word chosen to describe him by John the Beloved was "love," but even the Lord's apex attribute is insufficient for describing him. Most people have an airy, weak, or downright wrong definition of love, but even with a rich and accurate definition, such as the measure of how much you are willing to suffer for the benefit of another, individuals are limited in comprehension by the limits of suffering they have themselves experienced. God's love is living—it flows and grows continuously, and cannot be defined outside of its experience. He dedicates everything he was, is, and can be to our benefit, as far as we will receive it, forever.

¹⁴⁷⁹ The argument surrounding how to address him is not new, and it is not pleasing to God, because it clearly demonstrates substantial deviation from the Lord's understanding and priorities (see 3 Nephi 27).

result of it. Rather than being partial to one title for the Lord over another, we ought to recognize that all names are equally insufficient for him. The only sufficient description of God is God himself.

The process of defining the name of God is one and the same as the process of becoming like him. You learn God's name through assuming all his qualities as you understand them so far, which will result in him revealing more of himself to you as you become more like he is.

Some people know the name of God more than others

Comprehension of the Lord's name is incremental and subjective. The extent to which you learn God's name depends on how well you know what he has done, is doing, and will do, and why. Your understanding of each point of God's character will increase commensurate with your effort in learning more and your diligence in living up to what you know.¹⁴⁸⁰ Because people exert different levels of heed and diligence in their acquisition of knowledge about God, they come to know him differently.

The most generally accessible repository for knowledge about God is the scriptures, where the testimonies of many people who knew him to a greater or lesser extent can be found.¹⁴⁸¹ While written words are invaluable and necessary resources in coming to know God, it is essential to remember that they are only valuable because they were written by those who know God better than you.

Our words are as incapable of demonstrating the glory of God as man-made temples are of housing it.¹⁴⁸² Human beings, made in his image, provide the best way of doing both. The Lord explained that he has built the only temple that can adequately demonstrate his glory by creating us in his image—or capable of learning and acquiring his character. No word can be made in God's image, but a person made in his image can become the word. Only in mortality can a person demonstrate or learn substantially more about God's character. Jesus came to earth to obtain and demonstrate the character of the Father.

¹⁴⁸⁰ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Revelation 2:17)

¹⁴⁸¹ But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)

¹⁴⁸² The Lord lamented through Isaiah how foolish it was to think that man could build a sufficient temple to house his glory: "Thus says Jehovah: The heavens are my throne and the earth is my footstool. What house would you build me? What would serve me as a place of rest?" (Isaiah 66:1, Gileadi Translation)

He has sent and will send others to do the same¹⁴⁸³ within their scope.¹⁴⁸⁴ The Lord told Moses:

Who, what, and how I am cannot be found in anything not like me, nor explained in anything less than me. However, I always have and always will make myself known through people who are more like me than those who seek me, until they come to know me directly. I send you to Israel as I sent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By coming to know you and obey your instructions, they will come to know and obey me. (Exodus 3:14-15, Author's Reflection)

As you study the character of God as revealed in the scriptures and reconcile yourself to it, you will be increasingly prepared in the event that you meet a living individual who knows him better than you do. Whether in print or in the flesh, sources of information about the character of God increase the quality of a person's direct relationship with Christ.

What it means to take his name upon you

To take upon yourself the name of Christ is to reconcile yourself to your understanding of how he is.¹⁴⁸⁵ Taking upon you the name of Christ means learning more about what he is like and living what you learn. It is to think, feel, and act in complete and constant accordance with your understanding of God's character. You take the Lord's name upon yourself by reconciling your desires, beliefs, and actions to your sincere current understanding of his, and then doing all you can to learn more about him while instantaneously applying it.

The Lord commands us to be just as he and his Father are.¹⁴⁸⁶ Just as Jesus "subjected the flesh to the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:2) by assimilating the qualities his "name" described, we are called to subject our flesh to the will of the Father by taking upon us his name.

The scriptures are not ambiguous in defining "taking upon you the name of Christ" as the complete cessation of everything contrary to your understanding of God, the complete emulation of everything aligning with your understanding of God, and the totality and constancy of both:

¹⁴⁸³ Then said Jesus to them...as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. (John 20:21)

¹⁴⁸⁴ All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. (D&C 93:30)

¹⁴⁸⁵ And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Colossians 3:17)

¹⁴⁸⁶ Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect. (3 Nephi 12:48)

That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you. (Alma 34:38)

There is a totality of expression in taking the name of Christ upon you that is so distant from common Christianity that it turns the idea of following the example of the Lord at *all* times, in *all* places, and in *all* things from being the most basic doctrine to something only an assumed extremist would consider. In reality, the idea of thinking, feeling, and doing as Jesus would in your place is so basic that it is the message of what many consider to be the very first ordinance received in the gospel: At baptism, you promise to follow Jesus' example "at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death...that ye may have eternal life." (Mosiah 18:9)

Jesus took upon himself the name of Christ

In tribes around the world, initiation rituals exist in which boys are instructed to take upon themselves the identity of the tribe's mythical hero. The idea of a boy patterning his life on an exemplary figure of story—or prophecy—wasn't as rare historically as it is today. At the time of Christ, all young Jewish boys would have been raised to live so that they could qualify to be the prophesied Messiah. Though most believe that Jesus was raised from birth by his knowing mother as the literal Messiah, there are significant lessons provided by the idea that he differed from his childhood peers only in the fact that he did not deviate from the pattern given.

Most assume that Jesus knew his identity and details of his mission as a child. They point to his comment when his parents found him teaching the elders in the temple: "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) Whether Jesus meant this as an assertion that he was the Son of God is not clear, as Jews in his time would have all referred to God as their Father.¹⁴⁸⁷

What is clear is that Jesus followed the pattern all Jewish boys should have of living up to the calling their tribe bore to produce a boy worthy of being the Messiah. As a boy, Jesus had access to the scriptures that described how all people should be, just as everyone else in his nation could do. Young Jesus, hearing the scriptures that described the promised Messiah, did not think "this is who I am as the Son of God,"

¹⁴⁸⁷ ...We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. (John 8:41)

but rather, “this is how the Father wants us *all* to be.” His realization that he was different than others came as he noticed that the way he was living was different and better than what others had done, were doing, or would do.

The Lord’s example is exceedingly valuable to all of us. In learning what the scriptures said about human potential and living his life as prescribed, he followed the path to eternal life available to all from the beginning.¹⁴⁸⁸ Jesus did not *create* the name of the Father. Rather, he *discovered* and *lived according to* more of it than anything else in creation had, helping others to improve the extent and accuracy of their understanding of the character of the Father.

Jesus took upon himself the name of Christ just as all of us can and must. Jesus learned who he was by following the same commandments the Father gives to everyone. He looked and realized he was the only one who was doing what he was doing, in spite of the fact that everyone else had the same access he did. He learned who he was by reading the scriptures. Though he himself had given them, he had no way of remembering that. He relied on what others had written from and about him. Without them, he never could have assumed his mission.

All are called in the name of Christ, few respond, and very few respond valiantly

You are called by the name of Christ any time you are invited to live a greater share of his character in your life. The Lord “calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” (John 10:3) The call of Jesus consists of an invitation to become more like him.

You do not need to believe in Jesus to be called by him, or to recognize or heed his call. The call of Jesus consists of the next manageable increment between your choices and his character, whether

¹⁴⁸⁸ Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:27-30)

you know or believe anything about him or not. Most people who claim to believe in Jesus do not heed his call.¹⁴⁸⁹

Answering the call of the name of Christ requires much more than simply claiming to believe in him. Answering God's call requires you to become a disciple. A disciple doesn't just profess to believe in Jesus, but actually follows him in feeling, thought, and action.¹⁴⁹⁰ They know the name by which they are called, recognizing the Lord's voice and following it wherever it leads, no matter the earthly consequences.¹⁴⁹¹ They have a model of how the Lord is, can confidently predict how he would think, feel, and act in their place, and proactively and intentionally consult that model before making any decision.

A popular reason why God's voice is ignored or only partially followed is because what he says is not attractive to those who do not yet love him—including many of those who say they do.¹⁴⁹² A central purpose of our lives is not just to discover God's ways, but to increase our desires for them. There is no promise that the call of the name of Christ will be attractive to you. In fact, the promise is quite the opposite. The natural man finds the ways of God repugnant,¹⁴⁹³ and a person will only be attracted to God's ways inasmuch as they have become like him.¹⁴⁹⁴ Answering the call of the name of Christ requires you to change what you value and by how much you value it. You will

¹⁴⁸⁹ 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. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world. And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now. (D&C 84:46-53)

¹⁴⁹⁰ He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you; (D&C 41:5)

¹⁴⁹¹ These are they who "have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives. And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ." (Mosiah 5:8-9)

¹⁴⁹² This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. (Matthew 15:8) If ye love me, keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

¹⁴⁹³ For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Anyone who draws nearer to me will only do so if they desire the Father, those who draw near to me will do so by becoming more like me, and I will raise up all who are like me at the last day. (John 6:44, Author's Reflection)

desire and think about what you value the most.¹⁴⁹⁵ By nature, people most value the maximization of their earthly comforts rather than prioritizing the purpose of God. As you choose to prioritize the purpose of God, you will increase in your understanding of why doing so is superior to all other alternatives.

God's calling is not limited to a few select people from the scriptures. His calling is to *all* people.¹⁴⁹⁶ You do not need to be spoken to by Jesus or his servants to be called by him. Every situation in life presents all people with the opportunity to choose to live up to the best they know or not.¹⁴⁹⁷ Whether or not they respond is a different matter. While the call of Christ is universal, the response is extremely limited.¹⁴⁹⁸ Among those few who acknowledge his voice, most answer it only temporarily or partially. God blesses those who respond valiantly to his call,¹⁴⁹⁹ whether they say they believe in him or not,¹⁵⁰⁰ and he punishes those who ignore or lethargically reply to his call,¹⁵⁰¹ whether they say they believe in him or not.¹⁵⁰²

Missing the call due to not understanding that God's voice is the voice of improvement

The most common reason that Christians fail to answer the call of Christ is that they fail to notice it. The more you believe that your religion spares you from the need for improvement, the less likely it will be that you notice and act appropriately in the situations that provide an opportunity to do so. Many who proclaim to be staunch atheists do more to improve themselves and others than many professed Christians. Those who artificially filter their actions in life by whether it falls under

¹⁴⁹⁵ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

¹⁴⁹⁶ Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear. (D&C 1:11)

¹⁴⁹⁷ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:19-21)

¹⁴⁹⁸ For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14)

¹⁴⁹⁹ Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine. (Mosiah 26:18)

¹⁵⁰⁰ As the prophets wrote, God will reach out in demonstration of himself to all people. No matter where they begin, how small their initial steps, or how long the journey may be, every man therefore that heeds him will come unto me. (John 6:45, Author's Reflection)

¹⁵⁰¹ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:28-31)

¹⁵⁰² And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

religion or not are doomed to an extremely limited relationship with God and far less joy here and hereafter than they would otherwise have. While the Lord's invitations can come in the form of an established church teaching, or something you notice while reading your scriptures, or an idea you receive during prayer, most of them come in the form of a situation providing an opportunity for improvement.

Rather than see improvement as something different than or only a part of the calling of Christ, it is more correct to invert this—invitations to improve are precisely what show us how Jesus is. Jesus calls you in his name by providing you with an opportunity to change how you think, feel, or act after a better option is made known to you.

The voice of the Lord is the voice of improvement. Because all good things come from and lead to God, all invitations to improve are a call in the name of Christ. All of God's creation is designed to invite us to become better than we are.¹⁵⁰³ All people are called by the name of Christ: in every problem they face, every question they have, every example of improvement they see, and every choice better than those they have hitherto made. The desires you have, the challenges you face as you fulfill them, every interaction you have with everyone else, and all things besides are all designed to lead you to recognize and make use of opportunities for improvement.

The church of Christ is called in his name

The primary purpose of the church of Christ is to help others become more like him.¹⁵⁰⁴ The church of Christ reveals more of what he is like¹⁵⁰⁵ and invites others to change to be more like him. The church has the responsibility to invite others to take upon themselves the name of the Lord by demonstrating more of how God is and

¹⁵⁰³ And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63) ... all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:44) ...ye have received all things, both things in heaven, and all things which are in the earth, as a witness that they are true. (Helaman 8:24)

¹⁵⁰⁴ ...follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do. (2 Nephi 31:12) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

¹⁵⁰⁵ And thus ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—That inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received. Inasmuch as ye do it not, it shall be taken, even that which ye have received. (D&C 43:9-10)

providing persuasive reasons to follow his example.¹⁵⁰⁶ The church of Christ consists of those who have taken his name upon themselves by living up to what they believe him to be.¹⁵⁰⁷ They testify of how God is from their own personal experiences with him.¹⁵⁰⁸

Modern churches have misappropriated, diluted, and adulterated the name of Christ through pretending their activities serve God's intended purpose while watering down the truth and teaching false doctrine. Churches not of God do not demonstrate more of his name or persuade others to become more like him. Instead, they make people worse than they were before¹⁵⁰⁹ by teaching false ideas about the character of Christ, insisting it is not necessary to be like him, or even arguing that it is impossible to follow his example. Most attendees of supposedly Christian churches are hell bound, having never taken upon them the name of Christ:

22 For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

23 For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand.

24 For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

28 Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day. (Mosiah 26)

¹⁵⁰⁶ Many quote the following verse without realizing that to “call” someone “in the name of Christ” is to invite them to be more like him: “Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.” (3 Nephi 27:7)

¹⁵⁰⁷ And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come. (Alma 46:15)

¹⁵⁰⁸ And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 12:2)

¹⁵⁰⁹ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)

There are only two churches.¹⁵¹⁰ The church of Christ is led by Jesus and contains the few¹⁵¹¹ people who are “baptized in his name,”¹⁵¹² or who actually follow him by living their lives at all times and in all situations as they sincerely believe he would in their place.¹⁵¹³ Everyone who isn’t in the church of Christ is in the church of the devil,¹⁵¹⁴ whom they continue to serve by failing to live up to the example of Jesus.

The Lord defined his church as those who repent and follow his example.¹⁵¹⁵ You cannot be in the Lord’s church without forsaking sin.¹⁵¹⁶ Those joining his church are required to obey God fully, demonstrated through their obedience to his commandments.¹⁵¹⁷ The Lord said that those who refuse to forsake sin are not to be allowed to join his church,¹⁵¹⁸ and that those who willfully sin after being admitted should either immediately repent or have their membership revoked.¹⁵¹⁹

¹⁵¹⁰ And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth. (1 Nephi 14:10)

¹⁵¹¹ And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw. (1 Nephi 14:12)

¹⁵¹² And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. (3 Nephi 26:21)

¹⁵¹³ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; (3 Nephi 27:21)

¹⁵¹⁴ Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd. (Alma 5:38)

¹⁵¹⁵ And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you. (3 Nephi 18:16)

¹⁵¹⁶ See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out. (Mormon 9:29)

¹⁵¹⁷ And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church. (D&C 20:37)

¹⁵¹⁸ Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward. (Mosiah 26:32)

¹⁵¹⁹ And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out. (Mosiah 26:36)

All people can join the Lord's church through learning something about what he is like¹⁵²⁰ and making whatever changes necessary to follow that example.¹⁵²¹

Jesus will write his name upon you and seal you to himself

The challenge of learning the otherwise unknown¹⁵²² name of God is a central purpose of life. You learn more about God's character line upon line as you live what you already know about him. Solving the mystery of God's character by learning more about him, living what you have learned, and discovering why his character is better than any alternative is symbolically described as having his name written upon you. The Son has the name of the Father written on his forehead,¹⁵²³ and has declared that he will write that name on the foreheads¹⁵²⁴ of all who pass the trials of life through learning and living as Christ would in their place at all times and in all places.¹⁵²⁵

The Lord progressively engraves his name upon you as you continuously choose to learn more about and live by his example in each choice you face.¹⁵²⁶ As you reconcile to how you understand him to be, the Lord leads you to and through situations that expose the differences between you and him beyond the prior limits of your understanding. Knowing Jesus is an iterative process¹⁵²⁷ in which you continually receive new invitations to be more like him through recognizing and responding to those you already received.¹⁵²⁸ As you seek his purpose completely in all things, you incrementally become

¹⁵²⁰ And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. (Mosiah 26:21)

¹⁵²¹ Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. (Moroni 6:2)

¹⁵²² Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: (Ephesians 1:9)

¹⁵²³ His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. (Revelation 19:12)

¹⁵²⁴ And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1)

¹⁵²⁵ Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. (Revelation 3:12)

¹⁵²⁶ I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances? (Alma 5:19)

¹⁵²⁷ The Lord transforms you into a person more and more like he is, expanding and cementing your life to be more like his, in the equal and opposite fashion that the devil seals you his by enwrapping you in flaxen cords that thicken over repetition into thick chains. See 2 Nephi 26:22, 2 Nephi 28:22, and Alma 12:11.

¹⁵²⁸ I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you. (Mosiah 5:12)

more like him.¹⁵²⁹ As you become more like him, you receive the incremental increase in the blessings that derive from how he is.¹⁵³⁰

It is through being iteratively engraved into the image of God that you become sealed to him, or sealed up to eternal life.¹⁵³¹ Jesus became sealed by and to the Father through learning and living the character of the Father,¹⁵³² and it is through learning and living the character of the Son that we become sealed by and to him.¹⁵³³ The high priest under the law of Moses was commanded to wear a golden plate “like a signet” (otherwise known as a seal) on his forehead to symbolically invite all to receive and live the name of the Lord in order to become holy and be bound to God by becoming like him.¹⁵³⁴

Contrary to what some churches have taught, being sealed to God is a process,¹⁵³⁵ not an event, because it consists of learning and living like him,¹⁵³⁶ which happens over time, through increasing information, and against increasing opposition. The only way to make your relationship with God permanent is to overcome all things that could cause you to turn away from him. While you have yet to face the greatest possible challenges in mortality, you have no assurance that your relationship with God is eternal in nature. While you are not yet indistinguishable from God, there is still more to learn and grow, and blessings to obtain that you cannot have in any other way.

Being baptized in his name

The idea of baptism in the name of Christ is comprised of two idioms: *baptism* and *the name of Christ*. What was an exceptionally clear one line description in ancient times is a jumble of confusion in ours

¹⁵²⁹ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. (Revelation 22:3-4)

¹⁵³⁰ Behold, I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee. (Abraham 1:18)

¹⁵³¹ He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. (John 3:33)

¹⁵³² Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. (John 6:27)

¹⁵³³ And of as many as the Father shall bear record, to you shall be given power to seal them up unto eternal life. Amen. (D&C 68:12)

¹⁵³⁴ And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, Holiness To The Lord. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord. (Exodus 28:36-38)

¹⁵³⁵ Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen. (Mosiah 5:15)

¹⁵³⁶ For example, Nephi was given power to seal because he knew and exclusively sought the will of God (see Helaman 10:4-11).

due to the loss of a correct understanding of either of the contributing ideas.

Baptism means immersion. Ancient believers knew that baptism by water consisted in you being immersed completely in water. Baptism in the name of Christ is also immersion, but you are immersed in his character rather than water. You are baptized in the name of Christ when you obtain and fully submit to an understanding of how the Lord is. To be baptized in his name is to immerse yourself in the example of Jesus, consistently living as he would in your place,¹⁵³⁷ as far as you understand, at all times and in all places.¹⁵³⁸ In place of the baptizing priest is your idea of Christ, as far as you understand him (which comes from those who know him better than you).

Valid baptism by water always includes baptism in the name of Christ, because a baptizing priest will require you to take upon yourself his name by following his example, as far as they are able to teach you, before you are baptized in water.

All people must be baptized in the name of Christ if they will be saved.¹⁵³⁹ Very few professed Christians have immersed themselves in the name of Christ. Those who do not reconcile to their understanding of Jesus at some level cannot dwell in his kingdom. However, not everyone who is baptized in the name of Christ knows that they are baptized in his name.

The Lord provides the opportunity to be “baptized in his name” to all people, whether they explicitly believe in him or not. It is through subjection to what a person understands to be best that they are baptized by his name. While the fullest understanding of what is best requires explicit belief in Jesus, a person’s understanding of what is best might come from a different religion or secular understanding of morality.

Being saved in his name

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. His example clearly defines the process, possibility, and result of salvation. The only way to be saved is to take upon yourself the name of Christ:

¹⁵³⁷ And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives. (Mosiah 5:8)

¹⁵³⁸ And all that call upon the name of the Lord, and keep his commandments, shall be saved. Even so. Amen. (D&C 100:17)

¹⁵³⁹ And as many as repent and are baptized in my name, which is Jesus Christ, and endure to the end, the same shall be saved. Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved; Wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day; Wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 18:22-25)

And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. (Mosiah 3:17)

You are forgiven as you live up to the example of Christ as far as you understand it:

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

When you completely adopt all of Jesus' teachings as far as you presently know them, you are washed in his name. As you incrementally learn more about him as you live up to all you know, you are sanctified in his name. Through this process, Jesus will justify you (forgive you of your past sins) before the Father.¹⁵⁴⁰

There are many who claim to be Christian who think they are saved while freely admitting that they are nothing like Jesus. Unfortunately, they await a rude awakening.¹⁵⁴¹ You can't be saved without first becoming like Jesus.¹⁵⁴² You can't come to be like someone you never knew.¹⁵⁴³ You can't come to know Jesus if you do not serve

¹⁵⁴⁰ And such some of you were, but you were washed from who you were, justified in the name of Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11, Author's Reflection)

¹⁵⁴¹ I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil....Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd. And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil. For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil. Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him. And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works. (Alma 5:20, 25, 38-42)

¹⁵⁴² Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:5-6)

¹⁵⁴³ Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:22-23)

him.¹⁵⁴⁴ You can't be saved while you continue to actively rebel against the example that Jesus provides us with.

Having your name written in the book of life

The Lamb's book of life contains exactly one name: the name of Jesus Christ. His character is exactly what one needs to be in order to obtain a fulness of eternal life.¹⁵⁴⁵

Though each person who seeks to know and live like Jesus will understand him differently, all will be judged according to whether they fully live up to what they understand and blessed in accordance with how much they learned about him.

To have your name written in the book of life means to attain the character of Jesus Christ, or learn what Jesus is like and become like him while in this life, as far as you understand him to be. Your name is "written" in it when you learn about and live like Jesus,¹⁵⁴⁶ and "blotted out" when you cease to live up to his example¹⁵⁴⁷ as you understand it.

In the resurrection, you will be judged by your similarity to Christ,¹⁵⁴⁸ as far as you understood him to be.¹⁵⁴⁹ You must be fully obedient to everything you know in order to be saved.

Those who have failed to become like they understand Jesus to be will be cast into a lake of eternal fire.¹⁵⁵⁰ Those who have lived as he would

¹⁵⁴⁴ For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart? (Mosiah 5:13)

¹⁵⁴⁵ And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God. And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts. I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you. (Mosiah 5:10-12)

¹⁵⁴⁶ For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand.... (Alma 5:58)

¹⁵⁴⁷ And I give unto them a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression. (Mosiah 1:12)

¹⁵⁴⁸ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (Revelation 20:12) The book has to be opened because God's character is not generally known or perceived.

¹⁵⁴⁹ For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand. (Mosiah 26:24)

¹⁵⁵⁰ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:12-15)

in their place, as far as they understand, will be blessed up to the accuracy of their idea of how he actually is.¹⁵⁵¹

¹⁵⁵¹ Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. (Psalm 91:14)

20. Acting in the name of the Lord

Calling on the name of the Lord

The scriptures are full of the injunction to “call on the Lord’s name.”¹⁵⁵² All too often, this phrase is interpreted as a synonym for prayer. To call on the name of the Lord means more than to pray to him,¹⁵⁵³ especially given that most prayers are focused on asking for what we want instead of finding out and advancing what God wants.

To call on the name of the Lord is to actively seek additional understanding and application of the Lord’s character in your life. To call on the name of the Lord is to fully live and apply the name of the Lord in every aspect of your life¹⁵⁵⁴ while fully expecting him to reveal more of himself to you.¹⁵⁵⁵ It is to seek to see yourself, others, and the world more like God does in order to enumerate changes you can make to more fully think, feel, and act as he would in your place. Calling on the name of the Lord is the means of obtaining outcomes through faith by actively recognizing situations in yourself, your family, and the world that are out of alignment with his character and doing all you can to reconcile them to his will. Calling on the name of the Lord means more than simply praying and asking for what you want. To call on the Lord is a matter of studying the scriptures, considering your experiences with God, and even asking those whose relationships with him exceed your own in order to:

- 1) Find out the will of God,
- 2) Make a plausible path to advancing God’s will, and
- 3) Patiently, joyfully, and fervently work in a systematic and consistent way to advance God’s will.

¹⁵⁵² But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering; (Alma 13:28)

¹⁵⁵³ The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)

¹⁵⁵⁴ ...O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. (D&C 4:2)

¹⁵⁵⁵ For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

We are instructed to continuously call upon the Lord for blessing in all that we do.¹⁵⁵⁶ We should do nothing without first calling on the name of the Lord by comparing our options for action against our model of what Jesus would do in our place.¹⁵⁵⁷ We are instructed to call “on the name of the Lord daily,” proactively considering God’s goodness, our own nothingness, and pursuing his purpose in all we do.¹⁵⁵⁸ Subjecting our choices to God’s will is not arbitrary compliance; long-term wellbeing is a function of alignment with the will of God. Calling on God’s name will result in universally better outcomes compared to any alternative.¹⁵⁵⁹

When you call on the name of the Lord, God will answer you, and through obtaining and living up to the information he provides in interactions of increasing frequency and intensity,¹⁵⁶⁰ you will come to more fully know the abundance of his peace and the value of his truth.¹⁵⁶¹

Asking in the name of Jesus

Prayer “in the name of Jesus” does not mean ending a prayer by saying “in Jesus’ name.” Instead, it means that you know something

¹⁵⁵⁶ Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks. Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies. Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. (Alma 34:19-27)

¹⁵⁵⁷ But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 32:9)

¹⁵⁵⁸ And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. (Mosiah 4:11)

¹⁵⁵⁹ And now, my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts; and it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. (2 Nephi 32:8)

¹⁵⁶⁰ But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear; and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering; (Alma 13:28)

¹⁵⁶¹ Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is his name; Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not....Behold, [I] will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. (Jeremiah 33:2-3, 6)

about the Lord's will and your prayer is focused on advancing it. Asking in Jesus' name requires proactively seeking to discover and achieve his will on earth. Asking in his name means learning everything you can about what Jesus wants, then doing everything you can to bring his will to pass in all things. To ask in the name of Jesus is to ask God for what will advance his purpose.¹⁵⁶²

Most Christians treat prayer as if God is a genie standing ready to fulfill any wish they might contrive, and then wonder why God does not answer their prayers.¹⁵⁶³ When we focus our prayers on what we need to accomplish the purpose of Jesus, we are much more likely to receive what we ask for.¹⁵⁶⁴ God answers prayers that pursue the purpose of Christ.¹⁵⁶⁵

When you fail to receive what you ask in prayer, there are only a few possibilities:

- You are failing to live up to God's character as far as you believe it to be in your life.¹⁵⁶⁶
- You lack sufficient reasons to believe God will grant what you are asking.¹⁵⁶⁷
- You have not done what you can yourself to obtain it.¹⁵⁶⁸
- You do not desire what you are asking for enough for God to give it to you.¹⁵⁶⁹

¹⁵⁶² After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

¹⁵⁶³ Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God. (Mormon 9:28)

¹⁵⁶⁴ O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him. (Mormon 9:27)

¹⁵⁶⁵ And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. (1 John 3:22-24)

¹⁵⁶⁶ You can't work "...a miracle in the name of Jesus save [you are] cleansed every whit from [your] iniquity." (3 Nephi 8:1) "Every whit" means in totality.

¹⁵⁶⁷ The Lord said: "all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matthew 21:22)

¹⁵⁶⁸ Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. (D&C 123:17)

¹⁵⁶⁹ When two blind men cried to the passing Lord, the crowd tried to silence them. They responded to the opposition by crying even more: "And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened." (Matthew 20:30-33)

In each case, more work on your part is needed before you comply with the conditions God has set for giving what we ask.

You can't pray in Jesus' name while living in a way that contradicts his character. You can vastly increase your confidence in what you pray for by always thinking, feeling, and doing as he would in your place.¹⁵⁷⁰ Those who serve God the most know him the best. You cannot get to know God except through spending a great deal of time and effort developing a deep love for him through perfect obedience to him. The more you learn about Jesus and immerse yourself in his purpose, the more accurate your idea of his will becomes, and the more confident you will be in what you ask for.¹⁵⁷¹ God does not grant special requests to those who are not living "in his name," according to how they understand him to be, any more than he does to the wicked.¹⁵⁷² However, he answers the prayers of those who have learned about and live like him.¹⁵⁷³ Jesus said: "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (John 14:14)

The Lord will answer the prayers of all who are abiding in his purpose,¹⁵⁷⁴ but this obviously presupposes that they know what his purpose is¹⁵⁷⁵ and that they are asking in accordance with it.¹⁵⁷⁶ You can't pray in Jesus' name when you ask for something other than you think he would or for reasons other than you think he would.¹⁵⁷⁷

¹⁵⁷⁰ Our knowledge of God's will and our obedience to it in all things is our confidence with God; it is how we know what to ask from him and how we know that he will give us what we ask. (1 John 5:14-15, Author's Reflection)

¹⁵⁷¹ And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you. (Moses 6:52)

¹⁵⁷² For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent. (Helaman 7:23)

¹⁵⁷³ And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. (D&C 50:29)

¹⁵⁷⁴ Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 37:36-37)

¹⁵⁷⁵ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:7)

¹⁵⁷⁶ And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. (Moroni 7:33)

¹⁵⁷⁷ ...Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it. (Enos 1:15)

Effectual prayer requires a reason to believe that what you are asking for is according to God's will and in alignment with his righteous purpose. Doubtful prayers are seldom answered.¹⁵⁷⁸ The power of asking in the name of Jesus comes from having confidence in your idea of God's character and your similitude to him, as far as you understand.

You can't fulfill the requirements of asking the Father in the name of Jesus without confidence that what you are asking for accords with God's will. When you pray, you ought to first focus on discovering the will of the Lord.¹⁵⁷⁹ Until you have high confidence that what you ask for in prayer accords with God's will, your requests should focus on finding out more about God's will for you and those for whom you pray.¹⁵⁸⁰

You can't pray in Jesus' name if you have not yet done all you can to bring to pass what you are asking for. A fundamental attribute of the Lord's character is that he always does the best he can, not the worst he can get away with. Asking in the name of Jesus is how you engage in your part of his work: you find out what he wants, and you work to help it come to pass. When you merely "ask" God vocally for something, you are engaging in far less than he intended when he commanded us to ask him for things.¹⁵⁸¹ Asking in the name of Jesus requires a full effort to obtain what you request, not just a vocal effort to ask God to obtain it *for* you. Asking in the name of the Lord is a joint effort akin to calling for air support during an infantry mission: assistance is given to supplement your efforts, not to take their place.

Asking in the name of the Lord requires you to focus your whole soul on what you are asking for. The Greek word translated as ask, *aiteó* (Strong's 154), means more than to vocally make a request. There is a strong internal connection in this word that combines the meanings of English words "beg," "request," "crave," "desire," and "require." Asking in the name of the Lord results in a prayer with so much sincerity and fervor that it bears no resemblance to the rote and thoughtless routines practiced by most Christians, in particular at prescribed settings.¹⁵⁸²

¹⁵⁷⁸ Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth. (Mormon 9:21)

¹⁵⁷⁹ See 2 Nephi 32:9, previously cited.

¹⁵⁸⁰ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

¹⁵⁸¹ Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. (D&C 9:7) Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. (D&C 123:17)

¹⁵⁸² "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." (Matthew 6:7)

Working miracles in the name of Jesus

The power of God flows “in his name,”¹⁵⁸³ or according to and from his character. The more a person knows about God and the more fully they live their lives as God would in their place, the more of the power of God they will experience.¹⁵⁸⁴

The ancients knew that asking God for blessings in accordance with his character was the key to receiving miraculous outpourings of his power. Abraham knew that God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. He invoked God’s characteristic of justice to spare Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction.¹⁵⁸⁵ David invoked the Lord’s characteristic of mercy when God gave him three choices of punishment for having numbered Israel contrary to God’s command.¹⁵⁸⁶ Moses frequently leveraged God’s reputation to intercede for Israel. He reminded God that if he destroyed the Israelites, the surrounding people would think less of him, but if he saved them, he

¹⁵⁸³ And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name; (Alma 19:4)

¹⁵⁸⁴ I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not; but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles, and to become the sons of God; and even unto them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life. (D&C 45:8)

¹⁵⁸⁵ And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty’s sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake. (Genesis 18:22-32)

¹⁵⁸⁶ Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days’ pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing place of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house. (2 Samuel 24:12-17)

would show how merciful he was with his people and how powerful he was to save them.¹⁵⁸⁷

If you do not know the character of God, you can't do miracles in his name. God's power comes through serving him, but serving him requires you to know what he desires, why he desires it, and how he intends to get it. Those who attempt to exercise God's power without ascertaining the Lord's desires, reasons, and plans are more likely to work against him than for him.¹⁵⁸⁸ The key to receiving more information about his will lies in living up to what you already know about him.

Your ability to call down miracles from heaven is directly proportional to the completeness of your reconciliation to God. If you have things in your life that are contrary to his will, as you understand it, you will not have his power in your life, and you will suffer unnecessarily. Every aspect of your life that is out of alignment with the character of God increases the impedance of the flow of his power through you. The more fully you live your life as God would in your place, the more God will reveal about himself to you, and the more of the power of God you will experience. Only those who fully dedicate themselves to the will of God through living as they sincerely believe he would will experience the greatest possible measure of God's power in their lives. As God reveals more of himself to you, God's power will only be limited by the accuracy of your understanding of how he is and your obedience in living that way yourself. The difference in the magnitude of God's power revealed in the lives of those who fully dedicate themselves to his will and those who do not is incomparable.

Too many Christians foolishly assume that God will give them magic power to do mighty miracles while they do not yet know him, and have not yet obeyed him. Mighty miracles do not come to those who merely ask God for them. The powers of heaven only operate in accordance with the character of God.¹⁵⁸⁹ Who among us would not

¹⁵⁸⁷ ...the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. (Numbers 14:13-19)

¹⁵⁸⁸ He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. (Luke 11:23)

¹⁵⁸⁹ That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. (D&C 121:36)

like to see the sick healed, the dead raised, the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, and every other manifestation of God's power in our lives? Yet, there are few miracles today. This is a critical problem, for "if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made." (Moroni 7:38) Redemption works by the same faith and at the same time as manifestations of God power. If you don't have the latter, you don't have the former. The shortcoming in both cases is the same: falling short of full adoption of God's purpose. The mechanism of miracles—the name of Jesus¹⁵⁹⁰—explains why there are so few miracles today. People do not know the name of Jesus very well, and they do not take upon themselves the portion they do know.¹⁵⁹¹ God's power works through faith.¹⁵⁹² If you do not live as Christ would in your place, as far as you know, you don't have faith, and you will not have power to work miracles.¹⁵⁹³

Often, miracles fail to materialize because they are sought for according to the desires of those who ask rather than the desire of God. The purpose of miracles is to advance the purpose of God, not to fulfill the desires of men. When the apostles asked Jesus to help them have more faith, he told them to stop being so concerned with their own will, and start being more concerned with God's.¹⁵⁹⁴ The same advice applies today.

¹⁵⁹⁰ And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men; and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus. (4 Nephi 1:5)

¹⁵⁹¹ And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. (D&C 50:29)

¹⁵⁹² ...wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever. (Moroni 10:7)

¹⁵⁹³ Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings. (Mosiah 8:18)

¹⁵⁹⁴ And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:5-10)

Taking the name of the Lord in vain

Many people have heard of the commandment God gave against taking his name in vain,¹⁵⁹⁵ but far fewer understand what it means. To take the name of the Lord in vain is to profess to be a believer in God while feeling, thinking, or acting contrary to how God would in your place. It is not about saying names of God, but about failing to live up to his character while pretending to believe in him. The Hebrew word used in the phrase “take the Lord’s name” (Strong’s 5375 *nasah*) does not mean “speak,” but (among other things) accept, bear, desire, marry, magnify, raise up, respect, wear, and swear. The description of what it means to take the Lord’s name upon you given in the prior chapter should seem obviously relevant to these synonyms.

You take the Lord’s name in vain when you fail to live up to the Lord’s example in front of others, profaning his character instead of helping them see more of his goodness. One reason that God grants his children what they ask for in prayer is to manifest his name to people who otherwise would not know it.¹⁵⁹⁶ As you gain knowledge of and power with God, you increase in your capability to more fully demonstrate how God is to others,¹⁵⁹⁷ helping them increase the goodness they perceive in him.¹⁵⁹⁸ The Lord punishes those who profane his name to preserve the reasons his children have to believe in him.¹⁵⁹⁹

You take the name of the Lord in vain when you end a prayer in the name of Jesus, when you lack sufficient information to suggest God’s will, when you know his character or will is opposed to what you are saying, when you have more you can do to bring to pass what you are asking him for, or when you are living differently than you believe he would outside of your prayer. When your prayers are vague, weak, or ineffectual, you make the Lord seem capricious, aloof, and weak, when you could be showing others how to communicate sincerely with God and how doing so results in the outpouring of his peace and power.

¹⁵⁹⁵ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain [that is, irreverently, in false affirmations or in ways that impugn the character of God]; for the Lord will not hold guiltless nor leave unpunished the one who takes His name in vain [disregarding its reverence and its power]. (Exodus 20:7, AMP)

¹⁵⁹⁶ And whatever thing ye ask the Father in my name, I shall do this thing, that the Father be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13, Wycliffe Translation)

¹⁵⁹⁷ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. (John 2:11)

¹⁵⁹⁸ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

¹⁵⁹⁹ And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. (Ezekiel 36:23)

When you mindlessly “testify” of something being good or true without actually researching or testing it against alternatives, you are taking the Lord’s name in vain and bearing false witness.

Taking the Lord’s name in vain is a serious sin carrying strict penalties.¹⁶⁰⁰ God considers taking his name in vain so seriously because of the harm it does to those who do it and to those in front of whom they do it.¹⁶⁰¹

Swearing by the name of God

In former times, it was common to indicate the seriousness of a commitment by swearing an oath. Both Jesus and James spoke against this practice.¹⁶⁰² When you make a specific promise, you are trapping yourself in the event that the conditions under which you made your promise change. You can find yourself in a situation where keeping your promise requires you to do less than your best.

A better approach to making specific promises is to promise that you will always do what the Lord would do in your place, subject to your understanding of his will. By committing to always live as the Lord would in your place, you fulfill an ancient and still valid commandment to serve, cleave to, and swear by the name of God.¹⁶⁰³ To always act as he would in your place as far as you understand him to be is referred to as the oath and covenant of the priesthood.¹⁶⁰⁴

Part of being a Christian is to conduct yourself to the same standards you believe Christ would.¹⁶⁰⁵ When you act differently than God would in your place, you profane his name.¹⁶⁰⁶ While the stalwart

¹⁶⁰⁰ Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

¹⁶⁰¹ For this is a day of warning, and not a day of many words. For I, the Lord, am not to be mocked in the last days. Behold, I am from above, and my power lieth beneath. I am over all, and in all, and through all, and search all things, and the day cometh that all things shall be subject unto me. Behold, I am Alpha and Omega, even Jesus Christ. Wherefore, let all men beware how they take my name in their lips—For behold, verily I say, that many there be who are under this condemnation, who use the name of the Lord, and use it in vain, having not authority. (D&C 63:58-62)

¹⁶⁰² Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matthew 5:33-37) But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (James 5:12)

¹⁶⁰³ Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 10:20)

¹⁶⁰⁴ And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood. (D&C 84:39)

¹⁶⁰⁵ Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 6:13)

¹⁶⁰⁶ And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:12)

honest example of faithful believers makes a powerful argument in favor of Christianity,¹⁶⁰⁷ lackluster examples of professed Christians make it difficult to take the faith seriously. It causes great harm to God's cause and makes him angry when professed Christians lie, cheat, or steal.¹⁶⁰⁸

Coming in the name of the Lord

What does it mean to come in the name of the Lord, and what does it mean to “say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”?

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, crowds of people lined the streets to greet him:

And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Mark 11:9)

Just a few days later, Jesus lamented over their rejection of him:

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often
would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen
gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!
38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.
39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye
shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the
Lord. (Matthew 23)

Someone who comes in the name of the Lord is someone who is in the character and purpose of the Lord, doing his works in so far as they are able and understand. All believers in Christ are called to come in the name of the Lord through living as Jesus would in their place. Taking the name of God upon you is represented symbolically through accepting robes indicating you are an emissary of the heavenly king.¹⁶⁰⁹ High priests demonstrated this lesson by wearing robes representing

¹⁶⁰⁷ And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The Lord liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people. (Jeremiah 12:16)

¹⁶⁰⁸ Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. (Isaiah 48:1)

¹⁶⁰⁹ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 22:11-13)

God's glory and even wearing the engraved name of God draped upon their forehead.¹⁶¹⁰

Most people—particularly professed Christians—incorrectly believe that they would rejoice at the opportunity to know God better. Most people—including professed Christians—would respond to Jesus the same way the people in his time did if he lived here today.¹⁶¹¹ These people respond the same way to his servants as they would to him:¹⁶¹² by ignoring, rejecting, and even persecuting those more like Jesus than they are. The principle error made by those who rejected Jesus during his life was appraising his worth in terms of what they thought they already had. What they failed to recognize was that Jesus possessed power,¹⁶¹³ wisdom,¹⁶¹⁴ and love¹⁶¹⁵ far beyond their limits. Instead of drawing near to him for what was better than what they already had, they rejected him for differing from it. Do not make the same mistake.

If you truly desire to learn more about how Jesus is, it is absolutely essential that you get better at correctly identifying those who come in the name of the Lord and improve how you would respond to one if you were to meet them. The best way to achieve both outcomes is to fully live up to what you presently believe about Jesus. When you live up to what you know about Jesus, not only have you chosen to value his character and purpose, as far as you understand it, more than anything else, but you will have the clearest possible picture of your ongoing limitations and lack, and will be best suited to recognize and value the opportunity to learn more about the Lord when he sends you someone who knows him better than you.

Believing on the Lord's name

The importance of belief in Jesus is attested to by countless scriptures about it and that, for most Christians, belief is the defining quality of whether you are a Christian or not. Unfortunately, Jesus does

¹⁶¹⁰ And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord. (Exodus 28:38)

¹⁶¹¹ They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

¹⁶¹² If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. (John 15:19-21)

¹⁶¹³ And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. (Matthew 12:27)

¹⁶¹⁴ The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:42)

¹⁶¹⁵ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

not define belief this way, nor do the scriptures pointed to by those who do.

Belief in Jesus is not the same as believing in his name. Belief in Jesus can be anything one defines it to be, as attested to by the diversity of beliefs held by those who claim to. Most people who claim to believe in Jesus have no idea what he is like. They've never met him, and they don't bother seeking to learn about him from those who know him, such as by reading the scriptures. For these people, Jesus is a catch-all cosmic idol constructed to be whatever they hope he is like.

Belief in his name is uniquely defined by how he actually is. To believe in the name of the Lord, you must actually find out what he is like, and actually be the same way.¹⁶¹⁶ If you do not act, think, and desire as he did and does, according to the example he gave, you do not believe on his name. You might be able to claim you believe in Jesus while not actually following his example, but you can't believe in his name while intentionally ignoring and living differently than the example given in the scriptures.¹⁶¹⁷

The degree to which you believe in God is the degree to which you follow his example, as far as you understand it. If you believe on the name of Jesus, you will act, think, and desire as he did and does, as far as you understand him to be. It is through belief in his name, and not in his mere existence, that remission of sins comes.¹⁶¹⁸ If you believe on the Lord's name, you believe that God is "mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness." (Alma 7:14) If you believe on the Lord's name, you believe that, through him, you can do anything he shows you he would do in your place: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Philippians 4:13) You believe that, in him, you can do all things he commands.¹⁶¹⁹ If you believe on the Lord's name, you believe he can show you how and why to be sinless.¹⁶²⁰ If you believe on

¹⁶¹⁶ And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life. And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits. (Helaman 14:8, 13) I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God, even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one. (D&C 35:2)

¹⁶¹⁷ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

¹⁶¹⁸ To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. (Acts 10:43)

¹⁶¹⁹ Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever. (Alma 26:12)

¹⁶²⁰ And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits. (Helaman 14:13)

the Lord's name, you know that those who do not follow his example are damned.¹⁶²¹

If you believe on the Lord's name, you will do mighty works by following his example in all things. You believe that when he said, "he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also" (John 14:12), he meant it. You believe that when he said, "greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14:12), he meant that if you believe him enough to seek and obey him, he can put enough of himself into you to do everything he ever did here *and more*. When you believe in the Lord's name, you believe all of this in spite of all your weakness, and all your ignorance, and all of your problems, because you know it is about *him* and how *he* is, not *you* and how you think *you* are.

Glorifying the name of Christ

What is God's glory? While God's name is his character, God's glory is the effect of that character. God's name describes and dictates his actions, motives, and means, while his glory consists of what results from them. God's name and his glory cannot be separated. His name causes his glory.

To glorify God means to increase how much of God's goodness is seen by ourselves and others. To glorify God is to increase understanding and valuation of who, how, and what God is and why he is that way through learning more about him and living more fully as he would in your place.

To magnify the name of Christ or to glorify the name of Christ or to sanctify the name of Christ all refer to slightly different ways of helping others increase the accuracy and depth of their perception of the goodness of God. Nothing you do can make the name of Christ better than it already is. However, you *can* help others to *see* more of the greatness of God than they did before.¹⁶²²

The Son glorified the Father by learning and living his character as a man on earth.¹⁶²³ You glorify the Son by learning and living his

¹⁶²¹ And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it. (2 Nephi 9:24)

¹⁶²² Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. (Deuteronomy 32:3)

¹⁶²³ Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. (3 Nephi 9:15)

character in this life.¹⁶²⁴ You glorify the name of Christ by learning and living it yourself¹⁶²⁵ and by doing all you can to help others to do the same.¹⁶²⁶

¹⁶²⁴ I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word....For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me....I am glorified in them. (John 17:6, 8, 10)

¹⁶²⁵ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:8)

¹⁶²⁶ Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:13)

21. Justification and sanctification as the horizontal and vertical

Justification and sanctification as the horizontal and vertical bars of the cross

One of the most solemn instructions Jesus gave was: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) This instruction wasn’t given only to special people, nor expressed as something that would only rarely or intermittently apply, but as something for any believer, all of the time. One reason readers limit the scope and application of this instruction from the Lord is that they do not understand what it means to take up his cross and follow him.

The cross provides a two-dimensional metaphor for discipleship through alignment with God: justification and sanctification. Justification—the complete reconciliation of your character to how you believe God to be—is represented by the horizontal bar of the cross. Sanctification—the degree of your similitude to God—is represented by the vertical bar of the cross. In terms of the Lord’s instruction, justification answers the question of whether you have taken up his cross or not, and sanctification answers the question of how accurate your understanding of God’s character has become.

As you live what you understand about God, you will learn more about him. Living what you understand about God is akin to being stretched across and fixed to the horizontal bar of the cross. Learning more about God is akin to being raised higher on the cross, coinciding with a widening of the horizontal bar to which you must live up to in order to repeat the cycle. You move “up” the cross as you learn more about Jesus while remaining reconciled to all you know about him.

Several words are used ambiguously in the scriptures to refer to the horizontal and vertical bars of the cross, including staff, bar, rod, scepter, tree, arrow, and bow. The meanings and uses of each figure are overlapping. For example, the shepherd’s staff can be used both as a tool to lean upon vertically, or a tool for goading sheep horizontally. For clarity, each scriptural reference usually includes enough context to identify the horizontal and vertical components.

For example, when Balaam prophesies that “there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel,”¹⁶²⁷ “come” gives the “star out of Jacob” away as the horizontal component, as it is the

¹⁶²⁷ See Numbers 24:17.

same Hebrew verb used to describe shooting an arrow, and the scepter rising gives it away as the vertical component.

One of the most famous psalms is another example of the cross imagery:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

In addition to meaning what it does in English, the word translated here as “comfort” also means “to cause to repent.” The rod “comforts” horizontally as you are chastened for your known shortcomings until and unless you improve beyond them, while the staff “comforts” vertically in at least two ways: First, by reminding you how far you’ve come, and second, by revealing how you could be even better.

Justification as the horizontal bar

The horizontal bar represents your understanding of what is best. It is your model of the character of Christ. It consists of what an ideal person would think, feel, and do in every situation, according to your present understanding. It is the standard to which you are held accountable.

The bar of justification can be thought of as akin to a finish line, in the sense that your relationship with God begins a new phase as soon as you reconcile to what you know about him, albeit that finish line is itself the start of the path of learning more about him. As you learn more about God, remaining justified requires you to immediately reconcile yourself to anything you learn, as depicted in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life,¹⁶²⁸ where pilgrims had to maintain a grip on an iron railing as they walked along it.

Sanctification as the vertical bar

The Lord was literally lifted up on the cross at the end of his life, but everything until that point was a figurative fulfillment of the same

¹⁶²⁸ And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. (1 Nephi 8:19)

as he progressively grew more like the Father. As you continue to learn about and live like the Lord, you will also be “lifted up.”¹⁶²⁹

The “lifting up” of Jesus included his demonstration of the goodness of God at greater resolution and visibility than ever available before.¹⁶³⁰ The challenges that Jesus faced, the lessons he learned, the teachings he shared, and the miracles he performed all demonstrated the goodness of God beyond the limits of what could be known without them. The Lord’s entire life¹⁶³¹ was a demonstration of the goodness of God to a greater extent than it could have been shown in any other way,¹⁶³² culminating with crucifixion¹⁶³³ and resurrection.¹⁶³⁴

Every person is on a path where they are either growing toward or falling away from God, and each person’s trajectory and pace is unique to them, with each of these variables determined by the heed and

¹⁶²⁹ Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father....Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:13-17, 21-22)

¹⁶³⁰ Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3)

¹⁶³¹ “And it came to pass that the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man.” (Ether 3:21) Glorifying God means to more fully reveal his goodness to others. The Lord’s name refers to his character.

¹⁶³² And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world....And the Lord said unto Enoch: Look, and he looked and beheld the Son of Man lifted up on the cross, after the manner of men. (Moses 7:47, 55) Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. (John 8:28)

¹⁶³³ Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. (John 12:27-28)

¹⁶³⁴ I have shown your goodness by living as you would here in every situation I have faced, and have completed the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, allow me to again experience the glory that I had in your presence before this world existed by becoming exactly as you then were. Provide me with the remaining experiences to show the final remaining portion of how you are. (John 17:4-5, Author’s Reflection)

diligence exercised by the individual.¹⁶³⁵ At all times, in all things,¹⁶³⁶ each person is exposed to demonstrations of the character of Christ, and according to their response, blessed for their faithfulness and shown more about him, or punished for their unbelief and shown less about him.

Special concentrations of God's character are available in his servants who, like shepherds, wield staffs both as indications of what they have to offer and as the tool by which it is received. Moses gave literal examples of both purposes of a vertical staff. Moses demonstrated the authority of God as he performed miracles with a staff empowered for that purpose¹⁶³⁷ and helped the people lift their focus to Christ by raising a serpent on the end of a staff.¹⁶³⁸ Other shepherds fulfill these purposes symbolically, through showing the content and effects of greater similitude to Christ in how they are. The staff of the shepherd indicates his role and provides his power. The similitude of the servant to Jesus indicates his role and provides his power.

Those who seek, perceive, and live greater portions of the Lord's character are "lifted up" after him, becoming more and more like him in the process. As you become more like him, you will demonstrate more of his character and goodness to the world.¹⁶³⁹

¹⁶³⁵ Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. (D&C 130:18-19)

¹⁶³⁶ And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63)

¹⁶³⁷ And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. (Exodus 4:1-5)

¹⁶³⁸ Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal. (Helaman 8:14-15)

¹⁶³⁹ Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

When you don't obey, God will shorten your staff and remove your bar

God holds you accountable for what you understand about him. As you think, feel, or act differently than you believe he would in your place, you will lose some of your understanding about him.¹⁶⁴⁰ Disobedience causes you to reduce the width of the horizontal bar and the height of your vertical bar.¹⁶⁴¹ The decay of your understanding about God protects you from the moral responsibility of knowing as much about him as you did before, but removes you from the blessings that would be yours for living more like him,¹⁶⁴² but won't preserve you from the temporal penalties of having a lesser understanding.¹⁶⁴³ Descent down the cross also brings with it an increased difficulty in regaining your prior position, as your ability to recognize, value, and receive more will diminish along with your understanding of God.

The pattern is inverted when the cross theme is applied to the wicked. The wicked have their own understanding of how reality works, and they expect to get gain through following their wicked ways. But just as living righteously leads to growth, living wickedly leads to decay. Consider this description:

14 The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation.

15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. (Psalm 37)

Here, the sword is the vertical component, and the bow is the horizontal. Though the psalm applies literally, the figurative application is much broader and perhaps more important. The moral code of the wicked will lead to the diminution of their power and cause their own harm.

The judgment bar has horizontal and vertical components: The plummet and the line

The scriptural symbols of the plummet and the line are closely related to the symbolism of the cross. The plummet is a weight attached

¹⁶⁴⁰ And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers. (D&C 93:39)

¹⁶⁴¹ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away... (John 15:2)

¹⁶⁴² For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4:1)

¹⁶⁴³ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:6)

to a line used by builders to measure vertical lines. The line is a tool to measure whether a surface is horizontal. Each tool projects the ideal, against which the actual progress can be measured.

In the scriptures, the line is justice,¹⁶⁴⁴ or the measure of how closely you match your understanding of the ideal, and the plummet is righteousness, or how much you know about God while continuing to live like him.

For the Lord to stretch the line and the plummet¹⁶⁴⁵ over a person, group, or nation is for him to hold them accountable to what they ought to think about him given their opportunities to learn about and obey him.

The two trees in Eden, justification, and sanctification

In the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a place free from any knowledge that would exceed their willingness and ability to remain reconciled to God. In their aligned state, they were able to freely interact with God face to face without feeling any guilt, in spite of the fact that they were flawed (as revealed by their nakedness) and that they were capable of sin in environments with more knowledge (as revealed by their imminent fall). Satan exposed them to a greater increment of knowledge, Eve succumbed to his enticements, and Adam succumbed to her enticements, causing both Adam and Eve to be exiled from the presence of God. They received and obeyed commandments from God,¹⁶⁴⁶ reconciling themselves to him, culminating in Adam regaining the presence of God prior to his death.¹⁶⁴⁷

Adam and Eve provided us with an example of the pattern to which all of us are exposed. They:

¹⁶⁴⁴ *Justice* and *judgment* are words used interchangeably by scripture translators, even though they have significantly different meanings in English.

¹⁶⁴⁵ And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. (2 Kings 21:13) Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. (Isaiah 28:17) For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth. (Zechariah 4:10)

¹⁶⁴⁶ And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord. (Moses 5:5)

¹⁶⁴⁷ Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing. And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the prince, the archangel. And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever. (D&C 107:53-55)

- 1) Were aligned with God, enjoying his presence at the level of knowledge they had access to.
- 2) Were exposed to greater knowledge.
- 3) Chose to rebel against God, leaving their state of alignment with him.
- 4) Realigned themselves with God through forsaking past sins and remaining faithful as additional knowledge was given to them.

Access to the Tree of Life comes through justification.¹⁶⁴⁸ When you reconcile yourself to how you understand God to be, you are redeemed from the fall and gain access to his presence.¹⁶⁴⁹ Access to the Tree of Knowledge enables sanctification. A justified individual cannot become more like God than they already are without access to additional knowledge. The goal of mortal life is to regain access to the Tree of Life while retaining greater exposure to the Tree of Knowledge. In greater detail, the goal of mortal life is to become eternally reconciled to God with greater knowledge than was possessed prior to this life, which is the only way for the individual to become more like God than they were before, which is the only way for the individual to have more eternal joy than they had before.

The bars of the ark

The ark of the covenant was a stylized box that contained, among other things, the tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments. The lid of the box featured two angels whose wings joined each other, called the meeting place of God or, alternatively, the mercy seat. The design given to Moses specified rings on the side of the ark into which long staves were slid in order for priests to bear the ark on their shoulders as they traveled around the desert.¹⁶⁵⁰ While Israel remained encamped, the bars were removed from the box, a veil was drawn over the Holy of Holies where it abode, and the glory of the Lord abode on the ark. When removed, the bars of the ark were long enough that they protruded slightly into the adjacent room, called the holy place. They could be seen by the priests who ministered in the holy place, but not the public, who could not enter. When the glory of God

¹⁶⁴⁸ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)

¹⁶⁴⁹ And the Lord said unto him: Believest thou the words which I shall speak? And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie. And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you. (Ether 3:11-13)

¹⁶⁵⁰ And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. (1 Chronicles 15:15)

withdrew from the ark, Israel took down the tabernacle and carried it and the ark until they reached their new destination.¹⁶⁵¹

The bars of the ark are symbolic of your present understanding of the commandments of God. They are given to you through the priests who carry them. As you live them completely, God's glory rests upon you.

Rods as instruments of governance and justice

In the present day, learning more about and living more like God is seen as an optional pastime suitable only for religious zealots. Modern life features so much prosperity detached from merit that people can convincingly adopt the belief that God's law is merely moral, with implications that only matter after you die, if at all.¹⁶⁵²

Those who do believe in God's justice tend to limit it to the punishment of the wicked.¹⁶⁵³ God's judgment is the restoration of what is deserved, resulting in the blessing of those who have fully lived up to their understanding of how God is in life,¹⁶⁵⁴ to the degree they learned about and lived like him.

Whenever God's judgment is imposed, you will be held accountable for the choices you have made, subject to the limits of your knowledge

¹⁶⁵¹ Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. (Exodus 40:34-37)

¹⁶⁵² Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. 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 28:7-8)

¹⁶⁵³ Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen. (Jacob 6:13) And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you? (Alma 5:22)

¹⁶⁵⁴ Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil—If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation—Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent. And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved? (Mosiah 16:10-13)

and understanding.¹⁶⁵⁵ The standard you will be judged against includes everything you could have learned if you have sought for and listened to the servants God sends to demonstrate more about himself.¹⁶⁵⁶

God's justice is sometimes obfuscated and often delayed during mortality to facilitate the conditions necessary to grow and exercise faith. The payment of God's justice is guaranteed at the judgment bar, but can be paid partially or in full during life, whether at the personal, group, or national level.

The establishment of the kingdom of God always comes with the enforcement of God's law to a greater extent than we see today. There are multiple scriptural references that foretell a time to come when the Lord will govern the earth "with a rod of iron." These references describe a time when the world will be held to a higher law, with consequences for greater good or greater evil poured out more directly than we presently experience.¹⁶⁵⁷

The time will come, and is shortly at hand, when a significant difference will exist between those who have searched out and lived up

¹⁶⁵⁵ Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel. But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! (2 Nephi 9:25-27)

¹⁶⁵⁶ And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? (Moroni 10:27) For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen. (2 Nephi 33:15)

¹⁶⁵⁷ Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (Psalms 2:6-9) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. (Revelation 2:26-27) And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (Revelation 12:5) And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King Of Kings, And Lord Of Lords. (Revelation 19:13-16)

to God's example and those who have not.¹⁶⁵⁸ It is imperative that you do not delay making all necessary changes so that the rendering of God's justice will result in your blessing, and not your punishment.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. (Malachi 3:14-18)

22. Justification and sanctification as obtaining the robes of righteousness

Clothing as the assimilation of the character of God

Learning about and living God's character is often described as washing, putting on, or changing out clothing. The analogy fits well in several ways.

God's character is received and put on, not created. God already is what you are trying to become.¹⁶⁵⁹ He provides the way by which you can become more like he is. That path is revealed from above, not invented down below. God's character already exists and is better than anything you can devise yourself. God's character isn't something you can create out of whole cloth.¹⁶⁶⁰ Instead, you receive it by finding and learning it from those who already possess it. The scriptures are full of examples of people following this pattern. For example, Elisha spent as much time as possible learning from and living like Elijah. Having been true and faithful to everything Elijah taught, he received Elijah's mantle as Elijah ascended into heaven.¹⁶⁶¹

Attempts to create God's character ourselves will be just as ineffective¹⁶⁶² as Adam and Eve's attempt to hide their nakedness from God with the fig leaf coverings they made. The real protection came from the animal skin garments they received from God, not their juvenile imitation of the real thing. Note that in spite of the goodness of one's intentions, counterfeiting what can only come from God is never sufficient for the task or commended by God.¹⁶⁶³

¹⁶⁵⁹ Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. (Psalm 104:1)

¹⁶⁶⁰ God's commandments, power, and covenants are received by people, not created by them. The path to acquiring the real thing is humble repentance, not prideful fabrication.

¹⁶⁶¹ He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him... (2 Kings 2:13)

¹⁶⁶² Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. (Isaiah 59:6-8)

¹⁶⁶³ Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon. (Exodus 30:9) And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. (Leviticus 10:1-2) And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. (Genesis 4:3-5)

Garments are put on all at once. You can add or remove items of clothing, but you don't wear half a shirt or one leg of a pair of pants. You would not replace one portion of your present robe at a time, attempting to sew the new into the old.¹⁶⁶⁴ Your idea of how Jesus is will improve over time, but you submit to a single snapshot of how you believe him to be and must fully resubmit to any changes as they occur.

While it is possible to wear layers of clothing, at some point, you can't put anything else on before taking something else off. It's quite normal to change out one item of clothing for another, whether because the former is dirty or worn, or to make room for something better.¹⁶⁶⁵ Similarly, adopting new ideas about Jesus, yourself, others, and the world will frequently require you to let go of old ideas about them.¹⁶⁶⁶ You repent through forsaking your sins.¹⁶⁶⁷ You cover the sins of others by persuading them to abandon their former ways of living for better ways of living.¹⁶⁶⁸

Degrees of clothing

The robe of righteousness is the character of Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁶⁹ To put on the robe of righteousness¹⁶⁷⁰ is to learn about and live more like Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁷¹

There are many versions of the robe of righteousness, as each person's understanding of how Jesus is differs, and many paths flow from that understanding to how Jesus actually is. Each improvement to a person's understanding of the character of Christ could be considered

¹⁶⁶⁴ No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. (Matthew 9:16)

¹⁶⁶⁵ Elisha tore his old clothing before receiving the mantle of Elijah: "And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces." (2 Kings 2:12)

¹⁶⁶⁶ And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles. (Mark 2:22)

¹⁶⁶⁷ By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. (D&C 58:43)

¹⁶⁶⁸ Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20) And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

¹⁶⁶⁹ Righteousness means "as God is."

¹⁶⁷⁰ If thou followest righteousness, thou shalt obtain her, and put her on, as a glorious long robe. (Sirach 27:8)

¹⁶⁷¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:21-22)

another, better robe of righteousness,¹⁶⁷² forming a chain of successively improving models of the character of Christ.

Each “garment” represents a level of understanding of how Jesus is, and as such, there will always be limitations in every garment, and a better garment still.¹⁶⁷³ No matter what we have sacrificed in our pursuit of God, at least some of what we understand about him will be incomplete or incorrect, and as the inadequacies of our model are revealed, we will feel as if our whitened robes of “righteousness are as filthy rags....” (Isaiah 64:6) As you live fully up to the character of Christ as you presently understand it, you will come to see shortcomings in your model of how Jesus is. These shortcomings are essential to providing you with the motivation and desire to receive additional teaching about how Jesus is beyond your present understanding, which almost always includes the difficult and painful task of abandoning at least some of the ideas you had about him before.

The growing nature of one’s understanding of God is one reason why the robe of righteousness can correctly be called a garment of light. While a garment of cloth or the skins of dead animals is fixed and can only ever wear out, a garment of light grows and flows. Though a robe is given to another all at once, the robes of righteousness are received as an unbroken series of individual lessons on the Lord’s nature that weave into an indistinguishable flow of constant and custom guidance. The incremental discovery and adoption of the character of Christ is akin to continuous development of a piece of software, where new portions are written, old portions are rewritten, most of it is reused, and sometimes everything needs to be scrapped and started over from scratch.

If you consider taking his name upon you as the decision to reconcile yourself to how you presently understand him to be, then you receive a robe of righteousness through the act of justification. If you consider taking the Lord’s name upon you as the process of learning more about him while remaining reconciled to how you understand him to be, then receiving the robes of righteousness becomes a process of wearing a robe of ever-increasing brightness, corresponding to your increasing understanding of how he is.

¹⁶⁷² The process of taking off lesser garments in order to receive better garments is demonstrated in a little-known passage in the Old Testament, where an angel is sent from God to replace the righteous high priest’s dirty garments with heavenly garments: “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by.” (Zechariah 3:3-5)

¹⁶⁷³ And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all. (Abraham 3:19)

As you put on holier robes, you become qualified for holier places. God's kingdom is organized into different levels of glory, each defined by the extent and accuracy of the model of Jesus which the inhabitants live according to.¹⁶⁷⁴ God will reveal more of himself to those who live what they already know about him. It is through obtaining and living successively more expansive and accurate models of Christ that you ascend in his kingdom. The task of mortality can be expressed as obtaining the kind of garment necessary to dwell in the highest level of God's kingdom that we desire.

Clothing as a mantle and girdle: Power comes from the law lived

Two symbolic clothing items that frequently co-occur in scripture are the mantle and the girdle. A mantle is an outer covering. A girdle is a belt.

The mantle is a symbol of the power that comes from similitude to God.¹⁶⁷⁵ God's power comes through the assimilation of his character. When you take upon yourself the character of Christ, you become more like him in character *and* in the power you wield.

The girdle is a tool to bind and constrict, symbolizing how one who serves God circumscribes their desires and actions to match those of the Lord. It is precisely through girding yourself with the righteousness of God¹⁶⁷⁶ that you receive his mantle of power.¹⁶⁷⁷

As you gird yourself with each of God's qualities, you receive a mantle in the form of that character quality and its associated power and blessings.¹⁶⁷⁸ The composite of God's attributes is love. When you practice charity by living for the benefit of others without preference for self, you receive the blessing of truly becoming as God is.¹⁶⁷⁹

¹⁶⁷⁴ And thus ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—That inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received. Inasmuch as ye do it not, it shall be taken, even that which ye have received. (D&C 43:9-10)

¹⁶⁷⁵ And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. (2 Kings 2:14)

¹⁶⁷⁶ And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (Isaiah 11:1-5)

¹⁶⁷⁷ And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. (Isaiah 22:21)

¹⁶⁷⁸ And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. (D&C 88:34)

¹⁶⁷⁹ And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace. (D&C 88:125)

Clothing as armor for the coming battle

In scripture, the preparation that God provides for future challenges by revealing more of himself to you is called the armor of God, the armor of righteousness, and the armor of light.¹⁶⁸⁰ God prepares you for coming challenges¹⁶⁸¹ by exposing you to the limits of your present understanding and providing you access to something better. For example, God gave Adam and Eve instructions and clothed them in coats of animal skins after their fall but before their expulsion from Eden to protect them from the conditions they would experience in the fallen world.

God will not force you to notice or take up the preparation he provides. He will show you more about himself and give you every sufficient reason to choose to become more like him, but he will never force you to become like him. The preparation for what is to come is always reachable from where you presently stand, but you have to notice and make use of it.

One reason warnings from God go unnoticed and unheeded is because they often come in times of seeming prosperity¹⁶⁸² to those who stop improving beyond what seems good enough for now. The only way to ensure you are as equipped for life's challenges as you could be is to improve in all things at all times, to the full extent of your capability.

Even when a person strives to do the best they know of, they can reject God's warnings when they refuse to adopt better choices when presented. Invitations of this type usually come through other

¹⁶⁸⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; (Ephesians 6:10-18) The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. (Romans 13:12) See also 2 Corinthians 6:7.

¹⁶⁸¹ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

¹⁶⁸² And also, after that they had heard him, they came up before him, saying: Behold, we are the sons of God; have we not taken unto ourselves the daughters of men? And are we not eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage? And our wives bear unto us children, and the same are mighty men, which are like unto men of old, men of great renown. And they hearkened not unto the words of Noah. (Moses 8:21)

people¹⁶⁸³ whose ability to see afar off¹⁶⁸⁴ gives them a different and more accurate perspective of the long-term consequences of your present course¹⁶⁸⁵ and the existence of another superior option.

When you ignore the warnings God provides, he allows you to experience the consequences of what you would have been saved from in order to persuade you to be more likely to listen the next time.¹⁶⁸⁶

The fuller's field

In ancient times, the task of whitening cloth was involved and valuable enough to be a full-time skilled profession. Those who did this work were called fullers, and their significance is attested to by the frequency and content of the multiple scriptural references to them.

The act of whitening cloth is referred to in terms of sanctification,¹⁶⁸⁷ God's servants' role in it,¹⁶⁸⁸ and the Lord's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.¹⁶⁸⁹ It was at the fuller's field where Hezekiah paid a heavy tribute to the king of Assyria after the people rebelled and refused to keep the covenant given to Moses (see 2 Kings 18:12, 14-17), where Isaiah traveled to meet Ahaz, king of Judah, to tell him not to fear the oncoming attack of the new super alliance formed between the king of Syria and the king of Israel (see Isaiah 7:1-4), and where the emissary of the king of Assyria shouted taunts against those on the wall and God (see Isaiah 36:1-21).

Cloth was whitened anciently by soaking it in urine, requiring: 1) proximity to enough people to provide the required supply of

¹⁶⁸³ For example, when Lehi said the following, his sons did not believe themselves to be doing anything wrong: "Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust." (2 Nephi 1:23)

¹⁶⁸⁴ And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people, and say unto them—Repent, for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people, and my fierce anger is kindled against them; for their hearts have waxed hard, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes cannot see afar off; (Moses 6:27)

¹⁶⁸⁵ See Acts 27, where in fair weather, Paul warns the captain of the ship to delay the voyage or risk damage to the ship, loss of the cargo, and danger to the passengers. The captain ignores his warning, but begins listening to Paul when the ship is wrecked in a severe unexpected storm.

¹⁶⁸⁶ But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. (Psalm 81:11-14)

¹⁶⁸⁷ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7)

¹⁶⁸⁸ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:1-3)

¹⁶⁸⁹ And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. (Mark 9:3)

concentrated urine, 2) enough distance from the same people to avoid the terrible smell,¹⁶⁹⁰ and 3) a substantial supply of running water to rinse the cloth after whitening. The fuller's field outside of Jerusalem provided all of these qualities.

Fulling provides many rich analogies to elements of the gospel. Fulling was a step in the process of woolen garment manufacture, where a professional would endure putrid conditions to improve the garment beyond the quality it would otherwise remain in. It required interaction with the people who would receive the finished product, but only by contributing your bodily waste, which he would miraculously use to render your clothing more valuable than it would otherwise be. Whitening was performed by stomping on the soaking garments, just as wine was made by stomping on grapes.¹⁶⁹¹ Fullers were closer to the water source used by city dwellers for drinking, and they used a lot more of it than anyone did for drinking in order to make high-value products for those who lived downstream. Some traditions consider the fuller's field to be the same location as the Mount of Olives and the place where the sacrificial red heifer was burned.

Whitening cloth is not an event, but a process. The ancients repeatedly soaked garments in new batches of chemicals to whiten them. To describe the whitening of cloth with justification and sanctification language, the complete immersion of a garment into the whitening solution is a justifying event, but the subsequent whitening is a gradual sanctification process. The duration of the soaking and the potency of the solution matters.

Wash your garments in the blood of Jesus by learning more about and living like him

You wash your garments in the blood of Christ by fully reconciling your life to how you understand God would live in your place.¹⁶⁹² To

¹⁶⁹⁰ In John 9, Jesus led a man born blind to a pool outside of the city in order to wash away the street filth Jesus had smeared into his eyes and be healed from his blindness.

¹⁶⁹¹ Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. (Genesis 49:8-12)

¹⁶⁹² I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins. (Alma 5:21) O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day. (Mormon 9:6) And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. (3 Nephi 27:19)

have your garments made white in his blood is to choose to “repent and work righteousness,” by “bring[ing] forth fruit meet for repentance,” abhorring any deviation from Christ’s example in any way at any time.¹⁶⁹³

You must remain sinless to keep your garments spotless.¹⁶⁹⁴ Only those who live as they believe Jesus would at all times and in all places keep their garments white in the blood of the Lamb.¹⁶⁹⁵

As you live up to everything you know about Jesus and learn everything you can about him, your garments become even more white.¹⁶⁹⁶

You receive new garments from time to time as you make those you already have as white as they can be by living up to your current model of Christ completely. When you remain fully reconciled to God and continually learn more about him, you make yourself worthy of receiving a greater understanding of how he is.¹⁶⁹⁷ Like a crustacean outgrowing its shell, you will reach the limits of your present beliefs, paradigms, and situations, and God will invite you to take up something better.

¹⁶⁹³ Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish; Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. (Alma 13:10-13)

¹⁶⁹⁴ And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received....being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times....And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless.... (Alma 7:22-23, 25)

¹⁶⁹⁵ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7, NKJV) And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb. (Alma 34:36)

¹⁶⁹⁶ Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins? (Alma 5:27)

¹⁶⁹⁷ And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb. (Alma 34:36)

God whitens your garment through subjecting you to greater challenges

Answering trials with adherence to God's character whitens your garments.¹⁶⁹⁸ When you respond to trials with insufficient trust in or obedience to God, you dirty your garments and cut yourself off from his blessing.¹⁶⁹⁹

Trials are not just hard times. By definition, a trial is not just a time where you experience undesirable things, but a discovery of a more accurate idea of the worth of a thing. When you try something, you evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, its costs and benefits, and its relative value compared to alternative options.

Trials are opportunities to change your beliefs, feelings, or actions to reflect the new appraisal of value they bring.¹⁷⁰⁰ As you adjust what you value and by how much, and change your behavior to align with your new appraisals of value, you draw nearer to God in how you feel, think, and act.

Trials reveal the insufficiencies in what you previously considered necessary, adequate, or desirable. Reductions in perceived value can increase the urgency and benefit of finding something better, and this replacement is one way that God makes weak things strong.¹⁷⁰¹

All trials are an opportunity to grow towards God. When you are subjected to changes in the value of what you have, hope for, or give, you have an opportunity to adopt greater trust in and affinity for God.¹⁷⁰² When you respond correctly, trials purge¹⁷⁰³ from you from

¹⁶⁹⁸ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you.... (John 15:3-4) And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14) And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. (Revelation 6:9-11)

¹⁶⁹⁹ ...As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me....without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:4-6)

¹⁷⁰⁰ Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. (Daniel 12:10)

¹⁷⁰¹ And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

¹⁷⁰² Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; (Hebrews 5:8) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7)

¹⁷⁰³ Some of the wise will fall, so that they may be purged, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it is still for the appointed time. (Daniel 11:35, MEV)

what keeps you from ascending to a greater relationship with and blessing from God.¹⁷⁰⁴

This life is the only time we can purchase a garment of light

Righteousness can only be acquired through learning more about and living more like Jesus. In order to become more righteous, you have to sacrifice whatever would preclude you from learning more about and living more like Jesus. This sacrifice *for* God is often spoken of as buying righteousness *from* God. The Lord counsels us to:

...buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. (Revelation 3:18, ASV)

The sacrifice required to obtain a garment of light must occur during this life.¹⁷⁰⁵ For example, in the parable of the Ten Virgins, the Lord explains how the groom's arrival marks the point when it is too late to purchase more oil for the virgins' lamps needed to go out to meet him (see Matthew 25:1-13). At another time, the Lord elaborated on this parable, stating that those who will be able to abide his presence are those who have sought for, received, and lived more information about him (see D&C 45:56-59).

The work required to purchase a garment of light can't be performed after this life.¹⁷⁰⁶ The condition to abide with God *after* this life is to have reconciled yourself to him *in* this life.¹⁷⁰⁷ You cannot remain in God's presence without remaining reconciled to him. If you have not received and implemented all that was available prior to that event, you are not prepared to receive what can only come from the presence of the Master.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit....I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit....Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love....Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (John 15:2, 5, 8-10, 14)

¹⁷⁰⁵ And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness. (Alma 7:21)

¹⁷⁰⁶ For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. (Alma 34:32)

¹⁷⁰⁷ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned....If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:6, 10)

The trials that yield the garment of light do not exist in heaven.¹⁷⁰⁸ Only in this life do you have access to the situations and people that can help you learn more about and live more like Jesus. These situations and people provide constant opportunities to learn more about Jesus, constant feedback on the value of your present character, and the opportunity to recover from mistakes.

Don't be caught without a garment

Many professed Christians believe that all that is required to dwell in the kingdom of heaven is a vague idea of the existence of God.¹⁷⁰⁹

In order to remain in the presence of God, you require a covering to protect you from his fiery glory.¹⁷¹⁰ This covering is provided by learning about and living the character of Christ.¹⁷¹¹ You receive his covering by learning more about Jesus,¹⁷¹² removing from yourself whatever you believe to be offensive to his character,¹⁷¹³ and adding into your life whatever you believe he would in your place.¹⁷¹⁴

Don't wear dirty garments

Failure to live up to your understanding of how God would live in your place is akin to wearing dirty garments.¹⁷¹⁵ All professed Christians believe that they will be welcomed into God's eternal

¹⁷⁰⁸ And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:33)

¹⁷⁰⁹ 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)

¹⁷¹⁰ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:11-14)

¹⁷¹¹ Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, inasmuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned. (Alma 12:13)

¹⁷¹² Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11:29)

¹⁷¹³ And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: (Mark 9:43)

¹⁷¹⁴ Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness. (2 Nephi 9:14)

¹⁷¹⁵ And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you? Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?...ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil. (Alma 5:22-23,25)

kingdom after death whether they live up to their idea of how God is or not. Anything about yourself that you believe to be impure will cause seething pain to you in the presence of God¹⁷¹⁶ so great that you will do anything to flee from it.¹⁷¹⁷ If you do not live up to your sincere understanding of how Jesus is, you will recoil from his presence so painfully that you would prefer being in hell.¹⁷¹⁸

Don't wear the wrong garment

Some professed Christians live up to an incorrect idea of how Jesus is. Some conflate the commandments of men with the commandments of God,¹⁷¹⁹ and others invent their own imagined version of the Lord independent of and contrary to the eye witness accounts found in the scriptures and living persons.¹⁷²⁰

While it is not good to be naked in the presence of the Lord, it is even worse to appear before him wearing a garment you made up for yourself. God is just as displeased with those who wear garments he has not ordained¹⁷²¹ as he is those who make offerings he did not command.¹⁷²² Acknowledging your nakedness before God is essential in order to receive clothing from him, and you will never seek what you already think you have.¹⁷²³ Those who refuse to acknowledge their lack

¹⁷¹⁶ For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:5)

¹⁷¹⁷ For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence. (Alma 12:14)

¹⁷¹⁸ ...Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. (Mormon 9:3-4)

¹⁷¹⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9)

¹⁷²⁰ There is a difference between the sincere composite of what you have learned about how Jesus is and an imagined alternative that bears no resemblance to his depiction in the resources you have access to, including the scriptures and those you know (or could) who know him better than you.

¹⁷²¹ And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. (Zephaniah 1:8)

¹⁷²² Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon. (Exodus 30:9) And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. (Leviticus 10:1) And Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord, when they offered strange fire before the Lord.... (Numbers 3:4)

¹⁷²³ ...thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father. (Ether 12:37)

of the real thing will see a future day when what they thought they had is taken away.¹⁷²⁴

There is nothing magical about religious clothing

There is precedent for the use of ceremonial clothing in the clothing of prophets, priests, and high priests in the Old Testament and in the peculiar garments worn by Jesus in the New Testament. However, like so many other gospel topics, the idea of special clothing has grown in some religious traditions to carry meaning independent to and greater than its original purpose.

While there is nothing necessarily wrong about inventing practices regarding clothing, it is wrong to promote these practices to the same importance as God's actual commandments.¹⁷²⁵ There is value to wearing clothing as commanded by God in the conditions he has commanded it. It is not correct to impute the same value to clothing and conditions he hasn't commanded, simply because other people at another time were instructed to wear it.¹⁷²⁶ In fact, impersonation can quickly degrade from flattery to blasphemy. Recall that impersonation of priests carried the death penalty in Old Testament times.

Whether commanded or not, there is no magic power in the clothing we wear. It does not impart special powers. It is, at best, an external example of an internal commitment, and even then is only worth the value of whatever improvements we make to how we think, feel, and act.

¹⁷²⁴ Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. (Luke 8:18)

¹⁷²⁵ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. (Mark 7:8)

¹⁷²⁶ But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9)

Conclusion

God is the source and destination of everything that is good, including salvation and eternal life. God's goodness emanates from his character. What provides eternal value is maximally obtained, retained, and shared with others through learning and living his character.

As you discover the centrality of God's character to all that is good, you will begin to see how fully it is woven into every aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you learn more about the Lord's character and more fully apply it in your life, you will experience more of God's intent for life, family, work, and religion. You will better learn how Jesus would think, feel, and act in each situation you face in life, and in following his example, you will enjoy more of the blessings he makes available to all as they become more like him.

Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary defines key terms as they are used in this book. Several of these terms carry specific meanings that differ from how they are commonly used in mainstream Christian theology. Understanding these definitions will help the reader follow the arguments presented throughout the book.

Authority. *See Power and Authority.*

Born Again. The event of choosing to stop sinning. Being born again is a choice, not a passive gift. It occurs when a person fully submits to God by deciding to cease doing what they know to be contrary to God and begins living according to their understanding of Him at all times from that point onward. The gift of the Holy Ghost follows this choice but does not cause it. (See Chapter 10)

Baptism. A symbolic ordinance that publicly confirms and commemorates the inward change of being born again. Baptism does not itself produce the remission of sins; rather, it is performed after a person has already ceased sinning and submitted to God. It requires behavioral alignment with God and a priest to certify that this alignment is complete and ongoing and to perform the ordinance. (See Chapter 11)

Character. The part of your identity that you choose. Your character is what you do, why you do it, and how you feel about it. It is the composite of qualities that describe how and why you will think, feel, and act under any given circumstance. Character is not defined by external circumstances, possessions, or attributes beyond your control. It is built, destroyed, and changed through decisions. (See Chapter 1)

Character of Christ (God's Character). The complete description of how God thinks, feels, and acts—and why. The character of Christ is the central subject of the gospel and the pattern all people are meant to emulate. Knowing God's character perfectly would require the ability to predict how he would act, why, and how he would feel about it in any situation. (See Chapters 1, 12, 14)

Eternal Life. The state one enters after being justified by forsaking all of their sins. Not merely living forever, but the quality of life obtained through becoming like God. Eternal life is acquired by degrees and is proportional to how fully a person has learned about and lived like Jesus Christ. It is a measure of character, not merely duration of

existence. The degree of eternal life received corresponds to the accuracy, depth, and breadth of one's reconciliation to Jesus. (See Chapter 3)

Glorify God. To make the divine qualities or their effects more apparent, or to bestow them upon someone more fully. You glorify God by thinking, feeling, and acting more like him, or by helping others to do the same. A person who becomes like God glorifies him more than any other act of worship. (See Chapter 1)

God's Purpose. Everything God is and does is dedicated to enabling all people to obtain and retain the greatest joy they are willing to receive. God's purpose encompasses the immortality and eternal life of man—immortality being to live forever, and eternal life being the quality of that immortality, obtained by learning more about and living more of the character of Jesus Christ. (Chapters 9, 4)

Gospel. The process by which God shows you more of how he is while providing you the opportunity, reasons, and capability to become the same way yourself. The word comes from two Old English words meaning “good” and “story.” The gospel encapsulates what is good, how to do good, and why to do good. It is not a static set of rules or beliefs, but a living mechanism for transformation. (See Chapters 1, 6)

Justification. The decision to submit fully to God as you presently understand him. Justification is an event, not a process. It is the choice to forsake everything you know to be contrary to God and to embrace all things that align with him. It is synonymous with repentance in the fullest sense. A person is justified when they are living up to everything they currently understand about God's character. (See Chapter 6)

Model of Christ. A person's present understanding of how Jesus thinks, feels, and acts. Everyone who believes in God has a model—an internal picture—of what he is like. This model is always incomplete and contains errors. The process of sanctification involves continually updating, extending, and correcting this model as new understanding is gained. (See Chapter 14)

Perfect / Perfection. In the ancient languages, not the description of a flawless outcome, but of a process that maximally flows and grows toward the intended end. To be perfect in Christ is to progress as quickly as possible in your understanding of how he is, by living exactly as you believe he would in your place given your present understanding.

Perfection is alignment with your current knowledge of God, not omniscience. (See Chapter 1)

Power and authority. Power is the ability to achieve, obtain, and retain what you desire. God has all power because he achieves, obtains, and retains what he desires. God's power comes from his character—it is the embodiment of his wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment that make him God. God's power and authority are inseparable; valid authority is a question of what you can do and have done, not who you claim to be. Godly power is distinguished from the power of evil by its independence from the choices of others. (Chapters 4, 9)

Priesthood. Any information that extends one's understanding of how God is, how he would live in your situation, the benefits of doing so, and the consequences of failing to. The priesthood is a conduit of information through which people who have adopted God's character are linked, providing the power to do, feel, and think as God would in your place, as far as you choose to. Priesthood does not just *require* righteousness—it *is* righteousness, and does not exist outside of merit. (Chapter 4)

Remission of Sins. The state defined by the cessation of sin. Remission comes from the internal change of no longer willingly choosing to act contrary to one's understanding of God, not from the performance of any outward ordinance. Baptism commemorates but does not produce the cessation of sin. (See Chapter 11)

Repentance. The event of choosing to forsake everything you currently understand to be contrary to God and embracing all things that align with your current understanding of him. Repentance is not a process but a decisive moment of submission. It includes the understanding that God will incrementally teach you more than your present understanding contains. (See Chapters 6, 10)

Robes of Righteousness. The character of Jesus Christ. To put on the robe of righteousness is to learn about and live more like Jesus Christ. There are many versions, as each person's understanding of how Jesus is differs. Each improvement to a person's understanding could be considered another, better robe, forming a chain of successively improving models of the character of Christ. One receives a robe through justification and wears robes of ever-increasing brightness through sanctification. (Chapter 22)

Rules, Principles, and Character. A three-tier hierarchy of understanding God's commandments. Rules are fixed behaviors that describe specific situations (do this, don't do that). Principles are the generalized purposes behind rules (the "why") that apply across all situations. Character is the composite of qualities that produce both rules and principles. Most Christians encounter God's commandments only at the level of rules. Knowing the Lord requires progressing from rules to principles to character. (See Chapter 15)

Salvation. The process of being saved from the consequences of sin and death through becoming more like God. (See Chapter 3)

Sanctification. The ongoing process of learning more about Jesus while remaining reconciled to him. Where justification is the event of deciding to submit, sanctification is the lifelong journey of growing in understanding and living according to that understanding. It is the process by which a person's model of Christ becomes more complete and accurate over time. All blessings that God enjoys flow from how he is, and the more sanctified a person becomes, the more of God's blessings they will enjoy. (See Chapter 6)

Servants, Friends, and Sons. Three progressive relationship types a person can have with God. A servant obeys specific commands with limited understanding of God's purpose. A friend possesses intimate knowledge of God's purpose and character. A son has achieved similarity to God and inherits from Him. Each level is characterized by a different degree of knowledge of and intimacy with God. (See Chapter 16)

Submission to God. Knowing and fully adopting God's purpose as your own. Submission is not mere belief in God or obedience to a list of rules. It requires knowing God's purpose—maximal joy for all—and making it your own without reservation. Very few Christians, by this definition, have actually submitted to God. (See Chapter 9)

Words of Eternal Life. Any idea that leads to learning more about and living more like Jesus. The words of eternal life can be expressed at different levels of breadth, depth, accuracy, sincerity, and power. They are obtained incrementally as one learns more about Jesus while living up to what they already know. The defining quality of the words of eternal life is not what they are or where they come from, but what they result in, which is improvement. (Chapter 18)

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