“THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF MORMONISM”: JOSEPH SMITH’S UNFINISHED REFORMATION by Don Bradley (p.32)

Emily Pearson, Brett Sanders, and John Gustav-Wrathall share stories of growth and the triumph of spirit (p.42)

THE ONLY WORD I KNOW Brown fiction contest winner by Helen Walker Jones (p.58)

BOUNDS AND CONDITIONS New SUNSTONE column on science and health (p.12)

Cherie Woodworth and Bruce W. Jorgensen celebrate The Backslider (p.70)

UPDATE President Hinckley issues strong denunciation of lingering racism; BYU protests; more!

MORMON MANTRAS A Journey of Spiritual Transformation by PHILIP C. MCEMORE
In conjunction with this year’s Salt Lake Symposium, SUNSTONE invites filmmakers to create and show short films on any aspect of Mormon life, thought, history, personality, or culture. Films can be serious treatments or lighthearted looks, polished works by experienced filmmakers or rough but sincere first efforts.

Submission deadline: 1 JUL 2006

For more information about the contest and other SUNSTONE events, visit www.sunstoneonline.com
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EVEN THE SNAKES

M Y DEEP THANKS TO H. PARKER Blount for his eloquent essay, “The God of Nature Suffers” (SUNSTONE, December 2005). May it be prayerfully read by all who desire to grow in spirit!

As a small girl who by age eight knew that God loved her, I was nevertheless slow to realize the extent of his love for all creation. At twelve, I had my Wyoming grandfather’s permission to borrow the .22 and spend the afternoon alone killing ground squirrels. It was a lot of fun. At fifteen, I accompanied my boyfriend on rabbit hunts and thoroughly enjoyed dissecting his kills, thereby learning something of anatomy. In my thirties, living rural, my husband and I both occasionally killed snakes, raccoons, and bats to protect our children, pets, and chickens; but killing had begun to pain me deeply. Then, one time, I had an epiphany.

A ferocious tomcat had torn all but one of a litter of new kittens into pieces. I was so furious at the carnage I borrowed a rifle from a neighbor. I determined to shoot the predator the next night, assuming he would likely return to the scene. He did. I had him directly in my sights. I hated him but couldn’t pull the trigger. No word of the Spirit forbade me to shoot the cat; instead a realization surprised me. In spite of my hot temper, I had too much compassion for him to do it. It shook me how much my commitment to Jesus Christ had slowly changed my heart. Mentally, it was almost like a physical kick in the head because “I had him.” Yet I chose only to chase him off and move the mother cat and kitten inside the house.

By the time I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I was primed for a prophet who didn’t kill rattlesnakes. Bless my non-Mormon husband’s heart, he be- came the extent of his love for all creation. At twelve, I had my Wyoming grandfather’s permission to borrow the .22 and spend the afternoon alone killing ground squirrels. It was a lot of fun. At fifteen, I accompanied my boyfriend on rabbit hunts and thoroughly enjoyed dissecting his kills, thereby learning something of anatomy. In my thirties, living rural, my husband and I both occasionally killed snakes, raccoons, and bats to protect our children, pets, and chickens; but killing had begun to pain me deeply. Then, one time, I had an epiphany.

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Second, in his preaching, Joseph Jr. himself made it quite clear that he understood the resurrection to be emphatically about reunions of loved ones [Scott Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 145–46].

Third, though he nods toward the development of baptism for the dead, Olaiz seems to misperceive its significance for the Smith family. Joseph Sr. desperately wanted Hyrum baptized for Alvin so that Alvin would be in heaven with his father. The visitation of Alvin to Joseph Sr. at his moment of death would provide further support for the dramatic license taken in the Church film. While we have no primary evidence that such words were spoken at Father Joseph’s deathbed, the implication that the Prophet’s promise to his father is an anachronism is incorrect. In fact, a careful reading of the deathbed scene in Lucy’s memoir underscores just how significant the eternal integrity of the family bond was to the Smiths long before 1841.

My other quibble concerns the lynching of Joseph Jr. Olaiz complains that “Mormon triumphalism [is] no longer able to stomach its founder’s death” because the camera work suggests the perspective of Joseph’s soul ascending to heaven as his body drops to the earth below. This complaint misses entirely the interpretation that Joseph’s murder was seen as a martyrdom from the very moment of his death. His followers never doubted, even in June 1844, that he ascended directly to heaven. While his corpse was with them, the fact of his martyrdom was of almost overwhelming significance to them. Hence I would argue that the camera work is more consistent with the nineteenth-century view than our current preference to focus on the gritty realism of a corpse dropping from a window.

While sympathetic to Olaiz’s concerns about excessive hagiography, I think we ought to be open to understand events the way those present at the time experienced them. And, at least in these two cases, the LDS Church film (by Olaiz’s report; I have not seen it myself) seems to get it just about right.

SAMUEL BROWN Cambridge, Massachusetts

Hugo Olaiz responds:

I appreciate Samuel Brown’s well-reasoned comments, and I especially welcome his substantial first “quibble.” In that part of my essay, I was trying to deal with a very complex topic, namely, the evolution of the doctrine of eternal families. In my effort to be succinct, I may not have been as clear as I might have.

In a paper to be presented this August at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, I will suggest that, if left uncensored, the statements that Joseph Smith made regarding the sociality of heaven bear little or no resemblance to the now-ubiquitous slogan “families can be together forever.” Smith’s “vision” of the afterlife stands in strong tension with that of the contemporary Church.

As I wish to keep this response brief, let me simply re-emphasize a more general point and then hold my peace til August. By
Kimball apparently doesn’t see that Ostler’s arguments with Southerton have nothing to do with science and more to do with logic—wherein Ostler is an “expert.” Ostler has correctly seen fallacies inherent in assumptions about DNA’s relevance to the Book of Mormon. Southerton has not disputed (and I would declare, cannot dispute). There is no dispute between Ostler and Southerton about the nature, principles, and relevance of DNA as a science.

Without “unfettered access” by Ostler to SUNSTONE’s pages in order for his ostensible lack of DNA expertise. Ostler, and SUNSTONE’s editors were right to reply to fraudulent arguments about the nature, principles, and relevance of DNA as a science.

Kimball apparently doesn’t see that Ostler’s arguments with Southerton have nothing to do with science and more to do with logic—wherein Ostler is an “expert.” Ostler has correctly seen fallacies inherent in assumptions about DNA’s relevance to the Book of Mormon. Southerton has not disputed (and I would declare, cannot dispute). There is no dispute between Ostler and Southerton about the nature, principles, and relevance of DNA as a science.

Without “unfettered access” by Ostler to SUNSTONE’s pages, DNA might well have impressed (depressed) LDS believers into (mis)takenly thinking DNA is actual scientific “evidence” against the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon. With time, these fallacies might well have begun to “snowball” into a rolling DNA impetus, much like similar fallacies have done with Joseph Smith’s “money-digging trials.” Kudos to SUNSTONE for not allowing DNA fallacies to snowball in this way.

GERRY L. ENSLEY
Los Alamitos, California

NO APOLOGY
I HAVE CAUTIONED MYSELF REPEATEDLY as I thought about writing a response to Frances Lee Menlove’s devotional address, “Walking the Road to Emmaus” (SUNSTONE, September 2005).

While I have been profoundly affected by Menlove’s comments about our responsibilities as disciples of Christ to open our eyes and hearts on our personal Emmaus roads, I have been equally troubled by her conclusions and judgments regarding homosexuality. Her statement, “Homosexuality is a given, not a chosen” is a blatant regurgitation of pop culture psychology and is a complete contradiction of the words of modern prophets.

May I remind readers that gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” and that “marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”).

I could not agree more with Menlove’s statement that “The Road to Emmaus happens every day.” I even used her address to prepare a talk I gave in our stake priesthood leadership meeting. But I believe a more appropriate scriptural story to describe the difficulty LDS people have in dealing with homosexuality is found in the Book of Mormon. It is found in the story of King Lamoni’s father, who, when he hears the words of a prophet, prays: “O God, I will give away all my sins to know thee . . . that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day” (Alma 22:18).

I fail to see the prudence of SUNSTONE magazine’s being the forefront of gay and lesbian activism for LDS people. As SUNSTONE perpetuates feelings and teachings that are clearly against established doctrines, it alienates the vast majority of Church members from continuing their subscriptions. While many articles in the magazine chide LDS leaders for presenting Church tenets only in the most positive light possible, SUNSTONE makes no apology for its publishing only one side of issues when it comes to Church doctrines and principles that it finds difficult. Clearly I feel strongly about this particular topic of homosexuality and make no apology for those feelings.

EVAN LEFEVRE
Hyrum, Utah

Frances Lee Menlove responds:
I thank Evan LeFevre for his thoughtful response to my devotional.
I chose the homosexuality example because my profession as a psychologist, my experience, and my conscience tell me that homosexuality is one of nature’s many variations, a trait that appears regularly. Research in the last decade indicates that basic homosexual orientation is beyond choice.

In each generation, issues arise in which Church authority is held in tension with the demands of an informed conscience. Slavery is a good example. I chose the homosexuality example as an obligation of conscience. I believe that the gospel of Jesus is a gospel of radical inclusivity, and my guess is that God has greater tolerance for diversity than we do.

The gospel is not fragile. Thanks to SUNSTONE for providing this forum where all parties can express their opinions freely on difficult issues like this one. And thanks again to Evan for his response.

Letters for publication are edited for clarity, tone, and space. Send them to EDITOR@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM.

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ON 7 APRIL, worried that they had not heard from their mother in several days, Valeen Tippetts Avery's son and daughter drove to her home outside Flagstaff, Arizona, to see if Val was OK. She was not. Although she was lying peacefully across her bed, her heart had stopped beating sometime between Monday night, 3 April, and the time they found her that Friday. A vital and incredibly dynamic woman whose persona gave meaning to the expression “full of life,” Val retired from teaching at Northern Arizona University at the close of last year. Her husband Brian Short had died three years earlier following a severe illness, but Val's death was both sudden and entirely unexpected.

On 24 March 2006, the Chronicle of Higher Education published an extended and very appreciative article about Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that described her as a “well-behaved” Mormon feminist. Val's death represents the passing from the scenes of Mormon and Western history and women's studies a scholar who was likewise a Mormon feminist. In the eyes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, this one was not so well-behaved.

Valeen Tippetts Avery was a gifted biographer with a special interest in the lives of women. She was the co-author with Linda King Newell of Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, Elect Lady, Polygamy's Foe (1984), and author of From Mission to Madness: The Last Son of the Mormon Prophet (1998). Both biographies won the Evans Award for the best biography in Western history. Val was also the author of many articles, reviews, and commentaries. Just as Laurel Ulrich’s career did not follow a conventional path, Val's career did not move in the ordinary fashion from college to graduate school to a university post. She reared four children and cared for an invalid husband in an astonishing house that she built—yes, she did the building herself—outside Flagstaff. While still “just Mormon housewives,” she and Linda Newell wrote the biography of Emma Hale Smith that is still the standard work on this important woman's life. While she was working on this manuscript, Val entered graduate studies in history at Northern Arizona University and earned her Ph.D. there. Mormon Enigma was published by Doubleday, selling more than 10,000 copies in hardback. Then in 1994, the University of Illinois Press published a second edition of this work. This same press published Val's second book, and both continue to sell well. In the years immediately following the publication of their biography of the Mormon prophet's first wife, Val and her co-author Linda Newell became popular speakers, especially to Mormon women’s groups. But probably because their book told the story of early Mormonism from the distaff side so that it seemed quite different from orthodox accounts, LDS general authorities “silenced” the two authors. They were forbidden to speak to any Latter-day Saint group—most particularly Mormon women—who gathered under the official auspices of the Church. Interestingly enough, the edict by which they were silenced did not reach them directly; it came down to them, as the Saints say, “through the priesthood.” Despite this ban, Val was elected to be the president of the Mormon History Association in 1987–88, and she served on its awards committee for well over a decade.

Although the ban against their speaking was later lifted, it is likely that the Church's reaction to her work was the main reason that Val became an “inactive” Mormon. But if she was no longer a part of the Mormon worshipping community, this intrepid scholar went ahead to write an extraordinary biography of the Mormon prophet's posthumous son who suffered so severely from mental illness that he spent the second half of his long life in a mental institution. At the time of her death, Val was preparing to deliver the “Distinguished Senior Scholar” lecture to the annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association. She was also scheduled to join her friends and colleagues at the Mormon History Association meetings in Casper, Wyoming, in May. Val's family has decided to donate her papers to Special Collections at Utah State University.

In many ways, Val's death from a heart arrhythmia was simply a tragic loss to her family and a huge array of friends throughout the historical community. But her death also closed the door on the signal career of a brave scholar and extraordinary woman.
I have a vision: 1938, small-town America, a knock on the back kitchen door. A woman, wiping her hands on her apron, sees through the screen a grizzled, hungry man in dusty overalls. She wraps a ham sandwich in waxed paper and hands it to him with a smile.

The only famished creatures at my back door are the deer that eat the roses. But I see them—the homeless and the hungry—on the way to the opera, the theater, the gym.

Some sit on the sidewalk, their backs pressed against shop walls, a paper cup in front of their crossed legs. Some have signs. Some have dogs, also hungry. Some walk along with me, pressing their faces close to mine, asking urgently for money. Some are selling the street newspaper.

Sometimes I give, sometimes I don’t. I don’t if I’m rushed, if my wallet is buried too deeply in my bag, if the person is smoking cigarettes, if the person looks like a con artist, if the person looks like a con artist, if I gave at the last corner.

I feel guilty, whether I give or not. I tell myself I shouldn’t have to apologize for my generosity and judgment, I remember a Thanksgiving at the house of friends who live in a neighborhood where more than the deer are hungry. The doorbell rang. Our hostess sent the scruffy man down the stairs with a plate piled high with food.

And it was a china plate.

Karen Rosenbaum
Kensington, California

On my fifth birthday, Nanny gave me a beautiful dress. Every stitch had been sewn by my grandmother on her old black pedal-driven Singer sewing machine. Included were a pair of matching panties, finished off with a tiny tablet of paper so small it fit into the pocket of the panties. The sheets of paper were different colors: pink, blue, green, yellow. The little tablet cost perhaps five cents. I was so enamored of it that all day long, whenever anyone wished me “Happy Birthday,” I hiked up my beautiful dress and showed off the notepad. (Draw your own conclusions from the fact that the paper, rather than the dress, enchanted this writer-to-be.)

Wealth is whatever we have beyond what we actually need: the jam in addition to the bread, the velvet trim as well as the coat itself. (We’re talking here about material wealth, of course, not spiritual; but the connection turns out to be closer than generally assumed.)

There is a catch or two to having wealth, even so modestly defined.

Ben Franklin, or maybe it was Erma Bombeck, said, “First the man owns the house; then the house owns the man.” The five-year-old fell in love with paper of all sorts; sixty years later, the woman darts around the house, tripping over tons of paper, including boxes of dittoed handouts older than the garbage man; file drawers of operating instructions and warranties for appliances long since interred in the landfills of several states; trunks jammed with handwritten journals of every shape and design, some half-full of dated entries, others with only a page or two used in the whole notebook. Taking care of our stuff, as George Carlin teaches us, can be an ironic bondage. But obviously the Hunting and Gathering genes of most humans are vastly more dominant than those that trigger Releasing and Recycling.

Gathering can be a demanding addiction. An enthusiast in Orem sports a T-shirt reading, “She Who Dies With The Most Fabric Wins.” Fabric: go figure. But what constitutes wealth is definitely in the eye of the holder, in the first place, and finally in the heart.

Therein lies the other catch. Wealth is what we want, not what we merely need—and wanting is easy. I have rarely met anyone who does not want many things. (Peace Pilgrim never hiked my way, and folks who copied her in the Sixties are now studying the Dow Jones numbers, taking each dip personally.) It’s human nature to want. But far less common is loving and delighting in what you want once you get it. Half the world’s novels and most of the biographies attest to that paradox.

We have all looked into the impoverished eyes of men and women who wanted hugely and got pretty much all that they wanted.
only to find ashes where they had expected ambrosia. There is no joy in having something unconnected to loving that something. Pride, yes, arrogance, yes, even revenge. But joy? No.

So is that the real secret to wealth, not only to have what you want, but to want what you have?

If so, I've been very lucky. I've lusted after paper in all its textures and forms; and it delights me as much now as it did on my fifth birthday. I've handkered after books; and while my arthritic joints have suffered from shoving sagging boxes of them from one place to another, the heft and feel, not to mention the music and meaning, of books gives me more pleasure today than ever before. I've wanted dogs; and despite the relentless chores involved with being a pet owner (or, more accurately, a pet's staff person), my heart still leaps up when I behold a furry face waiting at the window. Sometimes gratitude sweeps over me like a sneaker wave for wealth like this—for wanting, for having, and most of all, for loving.

ELOUISE BELL
Edmond, Oklahoma

ONE NIGHT WHEN I was working as a hospital chaplain, I was called to do an end-of-life ceremony for a thirty-year-old man who had had an aneurysm and been declared brain dead. His fiancée, to whom he was to be married the next month, had decided to donate his organs. Here she was, looking beyond her own grief to think about those who might benefit from this tragedy. Many people struggle with the decision to donate their loved one's organs. I think this is because brain death doesn't look like death—the patient looks healthy, feels warm. They look like they'll wake up any minute.

As I went into the ICU room, filled with bothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews, I braced myself. End-of-life services are difficult, and I expected this one to be harder than usual. This man's mother was flying in from Ireland. She would arrive at 10:00 pm, and the organ harvesting needed to happen at 11:00 pm. This service would be her only chance to say goodbye while he was still breathing.

Yet, in this room I noticed sadness but also a feeling of peace. We read scriptures and said the Our Father. Then, each of the twenty family members said what they loved best about this patient and told him goodbye. They kissed him and stroked his hand. This man would be missed by so many; but during this sad, sad time, they seemed to be blessed with the gift of the Comforter.

Early the next morning, three patients received the vital organs they had waited so long for, and others received the gifts of skin and corneas.

EMILY CLYDE CURTIS
Phoenix, Arizona

HAVING HEARD MANY times as a child, “We don't have enough money,” I grew up hoping that a money-growing tree or a fairy godmother (I knew better than to ask God) would bless me with incredible wealth so I'd never have to say again, “We don't have enough money.” Going to Ronzone's Department Store in Las Vegas with a friend whose family had a large amount of money always proved to be an embarrassing occasion. I was certain there was an indelible message written all over my face and that the saleslady would look down her nose and say, “It's clear that you, young
my dancing feet, laughter when I wasn’t taking myself too seriously, a bicycle that could carry me into new kingdoms in the desert, friends whom I adored and always the possibility of new ones. It’s not a surprise that I ended up feeling wealthy even if the real-time money can still play mysterious tricks—being near-then-far, looking as if it won’t be enough, disappearing-then-appearing as if it were the stuff of genies.

PHYLLIS BARBER
Salt Lake City, Utah

ONCE I CAUGHT my father hunched over his chest of drawers, crying. He had found there the money my brother had recently earned shoveling snow. Dad knew he and Mom hadn’t left it. Money was scarce enough they always knew how much they had and where. And he knew what a pittance that cash was compared to family needs. But he’d also learned that at least one of his kids had cared enough to give all he had. So he cried.

I scurried down into the basement and cried, too. Why?

By paying a little money for some jobs we eight kids did around the house, our parents taught us to work in order to earn. Most chores we did because we wanted to keep living there. On our own, we learned we could earn more by cleaning, mowing, shoveling, babysitting, or tutoring for others, so we older kids snagged those jobs as fast as we could and left the lower-pay work to the younger crowd.

All of us felt proud to ease our parents’ burden by earning enough to buy some things we needed ourselves in addition to what we deemed “nicer” presents for family birthdays and Christmas. So by the time Dad cried, I was a self-important teen smugly working in an office but only belatedly learning what one of those “younger kids” already knew.

CAROL B. QUIST
Salt Lake City, Utah

RICHES ARE BAD; wealth is good. Riches deal with vanity and pride, with lust, selfishness, covetousness, and greed—to “get gain and grind upon the face of the poor” (2 Nephi 26:20). They not only corrupt, but outwardly show your haughty corruption (“costly apparel”). The love of riches is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Wealth, on the other hand, is the good things of the world that the Lord liberally pours down on his righteous people and wants them to abundantly enjoy: flocks and fields, bountiful harvests and comfortable dwellings, music, art, education, good food, travel, recreation, computers, books, enter-

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entertainment systems, DVDs, mountain bikes, iPods, cut flowers, beach houses—all to gladden the eye, please the ear, improve the mind, expand the soul, and celebrate Creation. It is possible to enjoy things not because they’re expensive, though they may be, but because they are good. What’s wrong with edifying conversation with mighty fine friends on a luxury barge on the Canal du Midi in the south of France? Or owning an exquisite classical music collection? Nothing. Still, St. Paul hauntingly asserts: “having food and clothing let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:8). While there is an epicurean aspect to spirituality, ‘tis the gift to be simple. The no-man’s-land between riches and wealth is wide and fuzzy: Do I like my Armani suit because of my vanity or because it hangs so well that I’m easy and unself-conscious in it, which helps me better serve people? The damning challenge of good things is having them when others don’t: “that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance. But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (D&C 49:19–20). Ay, there’s the rub!—unequal distribution.

And so, finally, we get to God’s perpetual abundant-living fund: consecration—the self-reliant management of your life (stewardship) to provide for the needs and wants of you and your family and to deliberately create a generous surplus to set up others in self-supporting stewardships. God blesses his righteous people through various individuals with diverse gifts that must be liberally shared for all to be blessed equally. Hence, the material blessings of tithe-paying are primarily given and received communally, not individually.

The timeless, illusive challenge for individuals is, of course, to create any surplus. For even base needs and legitimate wants are darn elastic: even the most liberal Democrat lives in the largest house he can afford. But isn’t a house a good retirement investment? Sure, but with that question you enter the never-ending internal war of guilt and justification until you throw up your hands in frustration and just go shopping. To ethically and morally enjoy wealth one must also deny many mighty worthy personal pursuits of happiness to enable those of others. How much self-denial is enough? Where do you draw the line between your legitimate wants and others’ basic needs? Albert Schweitzer proposed that whenever you purchase a luxury you should also donate an equal amount to supply the necessities of someone else. If you dine out, donate the cost of the meal to a food bank. If you register for an art appreciation class, contribute to someone’s college tuition. If you buy a CD, or go to a movie—you get the idea. That formula allows you to still enjoy the luxury of hundred-dollar-a-seat Broadway productions of Les Misérables (albeit less often) and help the poor.

One simply cannot live a consecrated life without lowering one’s standard of living, and if a smaller house and thriving on just half of one’s luxuries is too burdensome for middle-class American Saints, well, who then can be saved? What realistic hope, then, do we have for the Millennium? It hurts to prune oneself, especially of damn worthy endeavors, but on unpruned plants leaves flourish, on pruned ones, flowers. This widow’s mite principle of self-denial applies equally to rich and poor: when you voluntarily reduce your standard of living so others will have more, when you “give ’til it hurts” (or at least until you have less)—especially when done anonymously—an incomprehensible and unexpected spiritual quantum leap occurs. Your life is richer. Less is indeed more. O so much more!

ELBERT EUGENE PECK
Salt Lake City, Utah
FROM THE EDITOR

BREAKS IN THE SKY

By Dan Wotherspoon

Shadow and shade mix together at dawn.
But by the time you catch them simplicity's gone.
So we sort through the pieces my friends and I,
Searching through the darkness to find the breaks in the sky.

—from “HERO” by DAVID CROSBY and PHIL COLLINS

I THINK ABOUT spiritual growth—a lot. It's on my mind most of the time. I read about it more than any other subject. Quiz me on the developmental matrices of all the theorists, and I'll wow you. Yet for all my thinking and reading about spiritual growth, I really know next to nothing about it.

My words reveal why. I'm a headcase. For most of my life, my approach to spiritual development, like my approach to almost everything else, has been primarily cerebral. I tend to enter headfirst, with the rest of me getting dragged into the fray only to whatever degree is absolutely necessary.

I like my head. My mind is strong. It's fast. Ideas track well. My brain has taken me to fascinating places, allowing me to peek into many different worlds. My smarts have brought me recognition from time to time.

But with the rest of me, my approach to spiritual development has been primarily cerebral: I've been showing me that a lot lately.

If you're kicking myself for being such a weakling. I want to think the interruptions represent only one step back—a moment to regroup and stabilize after the two forward steps I just took. But I don't know. Am I afraid of something?

As soon as I could after taking this post at Sunstone, I invited James Fowler to give a workshop and speak at our Salt Lake symposium. He's the author of Stages of Faith and several other books that led me to all my other reading about faith and spiritual growth. During a break in the workshop Dr. Fowler was leading, my friend Tom Kimball asked what he could do to come to really trust that what Fowler had described as the next stage of faith development was something real and that people weren't just claiming spiritual growth based upon expectations they had grown up with.

So why should he trust if anything they were saying is real?

Fowler's answer caught Tom by surprise. He asked if Tom were praying or engaged in some kind of spiritual practice. When Tom answered that, at that time, he wasn't, Fowler replied something along the lines of: If you're not standing in the tracks, how do you expect to get hit by the train? In short, he recommended that Tom begin to perform the practices that put someone in a position to experience his or her spirit.

Tom's predicament and Fowler's answer remind me of the dilemma at the crux of William James's classic essay, “The Will to Believe.” In it, James responds to an argument put forth by William Clifford that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” Clifford isn't arguing against belief itself so much as calling us, as rational beings, to make sure that before we act on our beliefs, we have acquired them by patient investigation, not simply through stifling our doubts. We shouldn't jump before we're convinced what the result will be.

James recognizes that Clifford has a point: that it is important to avoid making mistakes. James formulates the “first and great commandments of would-be knowers” as: “we must know the truth; and we must avoid error.” He continues:

“Believe truth!” “Shun error!”—these... are two maternally different laws, and by choosing between them we may color differently our whole intellectual life. We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary, or we may treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance.

In the end, James believes the chase for truth should outweigh our fear of, in his words, “being duped.” He votes against Clifford's approach:

Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf.

James honors skepticism to a point, recognizing that we truly don't have an “infallible intellect” that can give us “its solving word.” But if we have come to recognize “that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp,” then it “seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell.” In somewhat the same spirit as Fowler's answer to Tom, James points out: “We may wait if we will; but we do so at our own peril, as much as if we believed. In either case we act, taking our life in our hands.” Whether we choose to stand on the train tracks or not, we are choosing.

But what are we choosing into when we decide to undertake deeper spiritual practice? Jonah received a “call” and was afraid and ran. But it was a call he could only run from for so long. Depressed, in the belly of the whale—"the belly of
“hell”—Jonah, like Alma the Younger, “remembered the Lord,” called out, and was delivered (Jonah 1–2; Alma 36:6–24).

My good friend Marylee Mitcham (who has a letter to the editor in this issue) says she knows she’s received a call because I experience the grace that flows from my struggle to answer that call. Grace flows when I agree to struggle with it at some unspecified future time. Grace even flows when I simply think about trying. Whatever small amount of consent I offer, I am generously rewarded. What she describes sounds wonderful! I’m in! But wait. She continues: the struggle itself is never consoling; it always feels hard and lonely and beyond me. I could say it this way: my consent feels like leaving home; God’s grace feels like coming home; the struggle to be faithful to a call feels like being outside in the weather. Is that what I’m afraid of? Weather?

I’m excited about Phil McLemore’s cover essay in this issue. Phil and I have been friends for seven or eight years, and, as you’ll read, he’s been obsessed with spiritual growth even more than I have. For thirty years as a Church Education System employee and chaplain, he was driven by a desire to be more Christlike, to experience a genuine transformation in his character, only to keep hitting up against what felt like a brick wall. I’ll let Phil tell his own story, but he ultimately found his way through that wall—yet not through any means he’d previously imagined. In his journey, he’s found keys for understanding why it is that we all struggle when it comes to genuine spiritual transformation. He’s also found practices that have worked for him and quietly testifies that when living in your spirit, even “weather” feels okay—exciting even. Regardless of whether you’re a headcase like me or not, I trust you’ll enjoy learning from him just as I have.

NOTES


SPRING SYMPOSIUMING

OUR GREAT THANKS to everyone who helped organize or who attended the 2006 Dallas and Sunstone West symposiums! The Dallas symposium was held 18 March in the home of Daryl and Steve Eccles, where forty-some attendees were treated to presentations on subjects ranging from the way Latter-day Saints differ from others in many cultures in our view of prophets to a creative exploration of sin and guilt in the story of Cain.

Sunstone West was co-sponsored by the Claremont Graduate University School of Religion and held 21–22 April on the CGU campus, drawing nearly one hundred attendes. Symposium co-organizers John and Jana Remy were wonderful on-the-scene resource people, before, during, and after the event, and we are also very grateful for the campus support of CGU’s dean of religion, Karen Jo Torjesen, and her assistant, Lisa Maldonado.

Audio recordings from both symposiums are available through Sunstoneonline.com.
BOUNDS AND CONDITIONS

AS WE’RE CAPABLE OF RECEIVING

By Rick Jepson

And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space... and unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.

D&C 88:37–38

And also, if there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars—... all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times.

D&C 121:30–31

WHAT ARE THE bounds and conditions of creation? Who set them? Who is subject to them? And how will they be revealed?

In the first issue of SUNSTONE, Keith Norman examined our most unique, most defining, and most heretical doctrine: “As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.” This tenet warrants our attention. And applied to the introductory questions above, it sets a powerful foundation.

The doctrine puts God inside a system rather than outside. Inside a set of laws, bounds, and conditions. If our Heavenly Parents grew into godhood, they did so by mastering and conforming to an antecedent system—we assume, the same system in which we find ourselves. Of course one could argue that at some point in the mastery process, they might have become free to create their own, original set of rules. But this is both less appealing and less supportable. It seems more likely that the system is inherent and eternal. That one generation is as bound to it as is another.

This supposition is easiest to approach through the question of moral law. Are moral laws inherent or arbitrary? For example, are incest and child abuse wrong because God says so, or because such actions are inherently heinous? If we choose the first possibility, we’re forced to concede that God could have created a different set of rules: a universe in which these atrocities were allowable, even commendable.

In his classic book Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis shows the absurdity of full-blown moral relativism by asking readers to think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two make five.

As I’ve posed the dilemma of whether God authored or is subject to moral laws, my non-Mormon friends have invariably responded that God would never create a system as preposterous as the one Lewis tries to imagine. But doesn’t such a response presuppose that even God recognizes and works within some sort of inherent framework?

If laws of morality are inherent, it’s hardly a stretch to suggest that other laws, such as gravity, might be equally fixed, not divinely decreed. President Spencer W. Kimball seemed to think so: “The law of gravity is an absolute truth. It never varies.”

According to Joseph Smith, our world was organized from existent matter. Matter that can neither be created nor destroyed. Not even by God. If this matter is eternal and self-existing, should we expect the same of its properties? Would it follow that protons are always positive, that entropy always increases, and that ice always floats? Albert Einstein believed it would: “God himself could not have arranged those connections in any other way than that which factually exists, any more than it would be in His power to make the number 4 into a prime number.”

Is that blasphemy? Would such limitations marginalize God? “If God had drawn the world from pre-existent matter,” the Catholic Catechism justifiably asks, “what would be so extraordinary in that?” The importance of the question is to suggest that the creation of the world can be an extraordinary event worthy of God’s majesty only if it is a creation ex nihilo. But, in fact, creativity is only possible within a framework of limitations.

Inherent laws do not lessen the miracle of creation. Just look at human creativity—music, art, literature, agriculture, medicine—the heights we’ve climbed while limited by our natural constraints. Think of the satisfaction we feel from planting a garden or raising a family. Like God on the seventh day.

What if our world is patterned after God’s? Is that so bad? Reflecting on his boyhood years on a farm in Arizona, President Kimball spoke to that very question:

There were evenings those many years ago, at about sunset, when I would walk in with the cows. Stopping by a tired old fence post, I would sometimes just stand silently in the mellow light and the fragrance of sunflowers and ask myself, “If you were going to create a world, what would it be like?”

Now with just a little thought the answer seems so natural: “Just like this one.”

RICK JEPSON is a registered nurse in Provo, Utah. He is headed toward graduate study in neurology and mental health and is currently researching mental deficits associated with a specific type of stroke. He met his wonderful wife, Wendy, in the MTC, and they have two magical children. Rick is the author of the November 2005 SUNSTONE cover article, “Godwrestling: Physicality, Conflict, and Redemption in Mormon Doctrine.”

FRANCIS Collins, the head of the Human Genome Project and a devout Christian, recently called his scientific exploration “an occasion of worship.” His work helps him appreciate the mind of God. From our Latter-day Saint vantage point, we should be all the more excited about such discoveries since through them, we not only...
personal revelation. But he could receive outlines of where to cut and suture. It was a second valve, but He can reveal it to you. Your mind is so prepared.

Elder Russell M. Nelson illustrated this connection between science and revelation with a personal experience. While a practicing cardiac surgeon, he was approached by a friend who asked him to correct a valve disorder—a condition then considered inoperable. Though reluctant, Elder Nelson was persuaded when his friend insisted, “The Lord will not reveal to me how to repair that valve, but He can reveal it to you. Your mind is so prepared.”

So he consented to perform the surgery and, sure enough, when the chest was opened, he could see in his mind’s eye the outlines of where to cut and suture. It was a personal revelation. But he could receive that revelation only because he had the requisite knowledge.

Too often we try a contrasting approach, choosing to cram scientific discoveries into an *a priori* dogma. We insist on a young earth, on a universal flood, or on a special creation of the center of the universe. Joseph Smith’s accounts are more advanced scientifically but still limited. And why shouldn’t they be? Smith had never seen a periodic table, and we shall not insult Him with their employment.

The idea that our existing knowledge affects our ability to receive or understand revelation was defended by Apostle Stephen L. Richards in his “An Open Letter to College Students”:

> Can any interpreter even though he be inspired present his interpretation and conception in terms other than those with which he has had experience and acquaintance? Even under the assumption that Divinity may manifest to the prophet higher and more exalted truths than he has ever before known and unfold to his spiritual eyes visions of the past, forecasts of the future, and circumstances of the utmost novelty, how will the inspired man interpret? Manifestly, I think, in the language he knows and in the terms of expression with which his knowledge and experience have made him familiar.

The creation story is the best possible example. We Latter-day Saints have four differing versions, each better than the previous one. Moses’s version describes a flat world covered by a dome of water and located in the center of the universe. Joseph Smith’s accounts are more advanced scientifically but each is still limited. And why shouldn’t they be? Smith had never seen a periodic table, learned about evolution, or heard the theory of relativity. Imagine the creation story we’d be privy to if we were all as smart as Stephen Hawking. But in the most important sense, that story wouldn’t be any truer than the version we read in Genesis.

**NOTES**


2. In a 1980 Ensign article, Kent Nielsen suggests an alternate view: that “the order of nature is not simply a given” and “does not necessarily extend to other spheres.” Speaking primarily of a celestial or pre-Fall earth, he cites differences in “the biology of a world in which there is no death” or the thermodynamics of a “world of eternal progression.” His conclusion is that “God has placed us in one sphere; but there may be many other types of spheres for us to learn about at some future time.” F. Kent Nielsen, “The Gospel and the Scientific View: How Earth Came to Be,” *Ensign*, September 1980, 70.

According to this view, the parameters of physics, chemistry, and biology are mutable. This would certainly allow for our own Heavenly Parents to establish conditions very different from their own. Still, I believe our theology makes this viewpoint very difficult to defend. While different spheres may have different solutions to the same constraints, it’s difficult to imagine that any sphere is completely free from them.


5. As Joseph Smith explained in the King Follett Discourse, “we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory...
and couldn’t that afternoon, with wobbly throat folds in her gravelly granny voice, Grandmother whispered and played the harp.

for the Lord, fought giants Mary and a baby propped by her pillows in bed. my sister and me

work. The skeptic might say that the Red Sea episode we understand it. The lesser law of gravity is sus-

“We may also say, there is no such thing, in reality, as they are fully understood. Brigham Young taught, God’s acts may be explainable in natural terms when of “miracle” as something above natural laws. Even creativity would not be possible.

reaches within a set of constraints. If none existed, rules than a liberation from them. In any conceivable Pollock was bound by the constraints of his medium.

random behavior, not creative acts.” Vivian J. Cook & forms, in part determined by intrinsic human capaci-

tions by space and time, chose to use the mechanisms of evolution to create you and me, who are we to say that it wasn’t an absolutely elegant plan? And if God has now given us the intelligence and the opportunity to discover his methods, that is something to cele-

brate. I lead the Human Genome Project, which has now revealed all of the 3 billion letters of our own DNA instruction book. I am also a Christian. For me scientific discovery is also an occasion of worship.” Claudia wallis, “the Evolution Wars,” time, 15 August 2005, 34.

This is already a common sentiment in our tradition. Hugh nihley writes, “The Latter-day Saints have always believed that the breakthroughs of sci-

cence that have bettered the condition of man by bringing light and truth are an organic part of the restoration of the gospel.” Hugh W. Nihley, “Breakthroughs I’d Like to See,” in Approaching Zion: Collected Works of Hugh Nihley, vol. 9 (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS), cited in Hugh W. Nihley, “Breaking Through to Zion,” SUNSTONE, March 2004, 80.


For a comparison of the creation story ver-


To comment on this essay or read comments by others, please visit the Sunstone blog: www.SunstoneBlog.com.

CANCER AND THE LIONS’ DEN

Grandmother taught us to pray, my sister and me propped by her pillows in bed. She read about angels, a man in a den of lions, Mary and a baby and a boy who danced for the Lord, fought giants and played the harp. Grandmother whispered in her gravelly granny voice with wobbly throat folds we stroked, holding books she hadn’t read to us, yet, and couldn’t that afternoon, and never did.

—WALT MCDONALD

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The rest of the story

RETHINKING JUDAS

ONE OF THE HOTTEST RELIGION STORIES OF recent months has been the announcement of the discovery and translation of another “lost” text: the Gospel of Judas. And even more startling than the existence of the text is its message, which presents fascinating ideas about the motives of the “Betrayed.”

In the canonized Gospels, Judas is instrumental in turning Jesus over to the Jewish authorities to be executed. Following Jesus’ arrest and trial, Judas expresses remorse and seeks to have the deal undone. When he realizes the gravity of his mistake, he throws away the money and hangs himself.

The recently discovered text presents an image of Judas that seems to contrast starkly with this story. In this version of the story, Judas is the most perceptive of the apostles, the only one who comprehends the Savior’s mission enough to know what must be done. “You will exceed all of them,” Jesus tells Judas.

While some might find that these ideas completely contradict the Gospel narratives, James M. Robinson, retired professor of Coptic studies at Claremont Graduate University and editor of the “Nag Hammadi Library” in English, says they’re not so odd. In an interview he gave to the New York Times on 6 April, Robinson asserts that the Gospels of Mark and John both portray Jesus as handpicking and encouraging Judas to betray him. Other scholars have also noted evidence of Judas’s priority among the Twelve. (For excellent overviews of the various opinions on Judas, see Raymond E. Brown, The Death of the Messiah, [New York City: Doubleday, 1994], 2:1394–1418, and Hyam Maccoby, Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil, [New York City: The Free Press, 1992].)

WHAT HAVE LATTER-DAY Saints taught regarding Judas? In most cases, LDS teaching has followed traditional Christian lines: Judas is a son of perdition, a follower of the devil, who committed an unforgivable

PECULIAR PEOPLE

LITERACY AND FAMILY SIZE IN MEXICO

According to Mexico’s 2000 Census, members of the LDS Church have substantially lower rates of illiteracy as well as smaller families than do members of other major religious groups in Mexico. Less than 3 percent of Mormons are illiterate compared to about 10 percent nationally. Protestant groups have much higher rates. Mormons also reported having 2.3 live births compared to a national average above 2.6. Several Protestant groups and Catholics have larger families. Since only about a fourth of the million members claimed by the LDS statistical office actually reported LDS affiliation in the census, these findings could reflect both selective conversion and selective retention.
sin in betraying Jesus Christ. Using John's Gospel for primary support—that Gospel refers to Judas as a “son of perdition” (17:12), a “devil” (6:70), a “thief” (12:6), and as someone possessed (13:27)—Mormon commentators have cast Judas as an evil individual who, through greed and the temptations of Satan, betrayed the Lord and fell from grace, becoming a servant of the devil for eternity.

Heber C. Kimball, a member of the First Presidency under Brigham Young, voiced an interesting speculation in his thinking about Judas, suggesting that Judas did not commit suicide but was “blood-atoned” by his fellow quorum members:

Judas lost that saving principle, and they took him and killed him. It is said in the Bible that his bowels gushed out; but they actually KICKED HIM until his bowels came out. “I will suffer my bowels to be taken out before I will forfeit the covenant I have made with Him and my brethren.” Do you understand me? Judas was like salt that had lost its saving principles—good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. (Journal of Discourses 6:125–26)

Not all Church leaders see things quite so clearly. In fact, there have been several debates in Church organs about whether Judas had enough knowledge to commit the unpardonable sin. George Q. Cannon, first counselor to Presidents Young, Taylor, and Woodruff, wrote:

There are some sins which are greater than others. To sin against the Holy Ghost, or to shed innocent blood, is a most dreadful crime, the worst a man can commit, and one that cannot be forgiven. Judas Iscariot was guilty of this, and many other apostates have been guilty of the same crime.” (Juvenile Instructor, 27 May 1871, 84)

On the other hand, in a response to the question of whether Judas was a son of perdition, President Joseph F. Smith wrote:

Did Judas possess this light, this witness, this Comforter, this baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, this endowment from on high? If he did, he received it before the betrayal, and therefore before the other eleven apostles. And if this be so, well may you say, “he is a son of perdition without hope.” . . . I prefer, until I know better, to take the merciful view that he may be numbered among those for whom the blessed Master prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Improvement Era, June 1918, 732–37)

IT IS POSSIBLE that Judas was, as it is recorded in the Gospel of Judas, a firm believer in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. It is possible that Judas, like the rest of the apostles prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection, misunderstood what Jesus’ mission truly was. Is it not possible that, while being a believer in Jesus and his mission, Judas also felt that things were moving too slowly and thus felt called to act as the catalyst to force Jesus to reveal himself as the Son of God? It could be that Judas felt his was a righteous act, and only after Jesus refused to call down the angels to save himself did Judas understand the magnitude of his betrayal. Driven by guilt at betraying his Master, he ultimately killed himself. A close reading of the gospel narratives suggests this could be the case.

Scholars believe the newly discovered “Gospel of Judas” to be a third-century copy in Coptic of a second-century Greek text, something written more than one hundred years after Christ’s crucifixion. Its existence is evidence of a lively debate about Judas that was raging some 1800 years ago. I’m pleased to note that the discussion is receiving new life, for at its core, it is a debate that teaches us much about our own hearts and about being human in a world in which we operate with imperfect understanding.

BRIAN H. STUY
Lehi, Utah

Cybersaints

WHO LOVES BIG LOVE?

ALREADY SLATED FOR A SECOND SEASON, HBO’s Big Love has attracted a solid fan base. Yahoo Groups alone boasts eight Big Love discussion groups. The largest of these, Big-Love-On-HBO (http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/Big-Love-On-HBO), boasts more than four hundred members. No newsnet groups have yet been dedicated to the drama/comedy about Mormon fundamentalism, but five or six contain regular posts about the show. Join a couple of these groups, and you will not only receive more than two hundred posts a day, but you will quickly discover that the show’s fan base is as interesting as the series itself.

Curious to find out about the demographics of the show’s fans, I posted a survey to the largest of the discussion groups. The show seems to be most popular among women (61 percent of the respondents) and especially older women. 38 percent of all who responded (both men and women) are between forty and fifty; 26 percent are between fifty and sixty; 22 percent are between thirty and forty; and 13 percent are between the ages of twenty and thirty.

I learned that a substantial number of the fans are polygamists (35 percent): 26 percent are Mormon fundamentalists (mostly from Utah) and 9 percent are Baptist and Pentecostal Christian polygamists from Florida and Texas respectively. Thirty-five percent of the fans reported being non-religious; 17 percent claim to be mainstream Mormons; and 13 percent say they are religious but are neither Mormon nor polygamist.

I am not surprised to find that many Mormon fundamentalists are fans of the show. The great majority of their posts enthusiastically approve of the show and are filled with comments such as “This is our show” and “They are finally telling our story.” Of the polygamists who responded to my query, an equal number were men and women. The majority of them consider themselves “independent”—that is, they have no official affiliation with a fundamentalist religious organization. 33 percent of these independents live in urban areas, while 17 percent classify themselves as living in a rural area. The re-
remaining polygamist respondents are evenly distributed among rural fundamentalist communities such as those of the Apostolic United Brotherhood (which holds all things in common), and the True and Living Church (which does not). Of these respondents, 67 percent say they are presently practicing the principle of plural marriage while the other 33 percent profess a belief in the principle but do not at present practice it.

Given official Church press releases and letters sent to priesthood leadership expressing concerns about the show, it is no surprise that mainstream Mormons represent the second smallest subset of the *Big Love* fan base. This situation might be changing, however. The same LDS.org webpage containing the Church’s news release also provides a link to a positive review of *Big Love* in the *New York Sun* (http://www.nysun.com/article/28628). In addition, instead of decrying the show, comments on the newsnest group, alt.religion.mormon, are almost always positive—often tinged with a tone of surprise. It appears that as word gets around that the show is a positive portrayal of both Latter-day Saints and Mormon fundamentalists and that it clearly delineates the differences between them, the number of mainstream Mormon fans is growing. This growth is already evident in chat on Mormon-HBO-Big_Love (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Mormon-HBO-Big_Love/), where Mormon fans giggle at the obvious mistakes, offer advice they’d like to give this or that character, predict the outcome of certain subplots, and otherwise chitchat about the show that has captivated them.

**Scot Denhalter**
Cybersaints editor

In this regular *Cornucopia* column, humorist Todd Robert Petersen investigates Mormon culture, art, and politics from the perspective of a baptized outsider. This is Part Two of Petersen’s reflection on Mormon portrayals in pop culture.

**I’m a Mormon, Mister—Part II**

I was raised Catholic in a privileged Portland, Oregon, neighborhood where I was given access to liberal amounts of booze, marijuana, and Led Zeppelin. My friends and I knew as little then about Mormons as we did about Jews and African-Americans. Even when we met Mormons—my best friend, Andy, began dating a Mormon girl in his senior year—we didn’t know anything more than the fact that she didn’t drink. So, when I joined the Church seventeen years later, my friends didn’t have any questions, really. There was nothing much to talk about, so for seventeen years, nothing was said. But a month ago, I happened to be back in Portland, surrounded by those friends and their wives and children. And this time, they were full of questions—all of them connected in some way to HBO’s new series, *Big Love*. They wanted to know if I’d seen families such as the one pictured in the series. I said, “No, but I want to.” I told them that I write this column for a magazine in Utah and that I’m probably going to have to say something about the show eventually.

I thought this would be the end of it, but it wasn’t. They went on and on about the house with the shared yard and asked me again if I’ve known any people like that, “How many people actually do things like that?” The implication was clear: they wanted to know if I was “into” polygamy. Since I was in Portland without my wife, I told them that if more polygamist women looked like Jeanne Tripplehorn, I’d probably consider it (cue: uncomfortable laughter).

The only other media property that has given me more opportunities to discuss my beliefs is Jon Krakauer’s book *Under the Banner of Heaven*, which friends and colleagues have told me should be “mandatory reading for all Mormons.” In the first half of this reflection on Mormon media portrayals, I tried to communicate my frustration that there are so many boneheads out there that it is hard to do any real missionary work. I cited Larry Miller’s *Brokeback Mountain* standoff and a host of other indignities. While Mormon people can certainly make it hard to proclaim the gospel and perfect the saints, there are other impediments, such as when, with a completely straight face, my stepmother asked me if there were any Mexican Mormons. I am not lying—she really thought we were all white. My shock at her question threw me so much that I didn’t have the wit of my Jeanne Tripplehorn comment available. I simply said that, “There are more Mormons in the world who speak Spanish than speak English.” (To make a long story short, she didn’t believe me.)

How do people get these ideas? When I was a teenager, my lack of knowledge about Mormons was simply that: a lack, a hole, an absence of information. And with that hole, we did nothing but drink Andy’s girlfriend’s allotment of beer and ask her to be our designated
driver. These days, it seems like there is a great disinformation project in the works—perhaps even the sinister hand of the devil in our media. Maybe, and I know this is borderline heresy, pornography is just misdirection, and the real work against the gospel is being done by sillifying true principles before the general public, confusing the true church with Bill Paxton's home-improvement business in a cable version that might alternatively have been named Desperate Polygamists.

Just once, I'd like to have someone approach me and say, "Hey, I was reading the Book of Mormon the other day, and I was wondering—if that Jared guy's brother saw only the finger of the Lord, then was the finger just...you know, like the end of a finger, with skin, or could you see the bone and muscles and stuff?" I'd rejoice that someone was paying close enough attention. I'd even like to field a question like this: "Hey, I was reading about your Word of Wisdom, and I'm a little confused: Can you people eat meat or not?" But I don't get these kinds of queries. Instead I get, "Have you ever heard of the Lafferty brothers?" To which I reply, "So, you've been reading Krakauer, huh?" To which they respond, "It's a fascinating book." In my mind—but only in my mind, because actually saying this would net me nothing—I tell them if they want something fascinating, go read 3 Nephi.

I have to admit that this all gets pretty tiring. There is so much crazy information floating around out there in the media. Even in the twenty-first century, people have absolutely insane pictures of what Mormons are. It's so bad that even Mormon people have absorbed a similarly crazy idea of what Mormon people are—a picture fed in a lot of ways by Utah culture. As a consequence, Mormon people can be pretty hard on their brothers and sisters in the gospel. If you're a Mormon and you like punk music, for example, there's not much room for you. In a workshop, Neil Labute told me that he left the Church to help his sons, who had a lot of trouble socially because their friends' fathers had jobs where they made money while their own father had a job where he made R-rated movies. These are trifles really; they have so little to do with the gospel, but they add up.

I'VE BEEN A member of the church for seventeen years now, which means that I've been through something like two hundred fast and testimony meetings, and I've learned that Mormon people agree about the big things. We might call them the Five Pillars of Mormonism: Joseph Smith was a prophet. He saw God and Jesus in the grove. He translated the Book of Mormon. Jesus atoned for our sins. And we really need to get our home and/or visiting teaching done. The rest is just details. I've never heard of many people leaving the church over any of the Five Pillars. I'm sure they do, just as I am aware that some people leave the Church because it never fully "took hold" after their baptism. But when I hear of believers who leave the Church, their story is usually about perceived intolerance, injustice, and hypocrisy—in short, knotheadedness drove them away. And who can blame them, really? How many people want to stay connected to a church with which they are at best incompatible and at worst unwelcome?

A friend of mine who is a family counselor once told me that the masses have misinterpreted the whole "opposites attract" thing. On a literal level, he said, "people are attracted to someone different, but if they get married, their relationship shouldn't be based on a bunch of differences or they'll be coming to see me."

The list of little things that can strain a marriage will and won't surprise you: music choice, how loud to play the stereo, kinds of television to watch, how loud, style of furnishing, décor, level of cleanliness of the house, types of vacations, relationship to and contact with siblings, intrusiveness of in-laws, clothes (both type and cost), kinds of food, amount of food, times of meals. The list goes on. Any one of these differences won't create a divorce, but when they compound, my friend told me, you have serious incompatibility on your hands. It makes sense, doesn't it? If a person's day-to-day life differs from someone else's life, then it's pretty hard to live with them. Because, as recent studies have shown, a significant part of being married involves living with someone else. Being Mormon involves a kind of marriage to the Church as well. So I imagine that this principle of the small things adding up also applies to this relationship.

A WONDERFUL FILM by Greg Whiteley, a bishop from Los Angeles, has just been released on DVD and will be featured at this year's Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. You should see it if you can. It's called New York Doll, and it's the story of rock and roll icon Arthur "Killer" Kane's transformation from androgynous alt-rocker to mild-mannered family history worker. When Arthur joined the Church, he stopped living the rock and roll lifestyle, but he never forgot nor abandoned his memories of being an icon. When British pop-star Morrissey asked Arthur to participate in a reunion concert in London with his former band, The New York Dolls, Arthur's ward rallied around him and paid the amount he needed to get his guitars out of the pawn shop so he could practice for the show.

I can't imagine any Mormon being more outside Mormon culture than Killer Kane, unless it's former Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. But for me, what's most profound about New York Doll is the tolerance and acceptance coming from Arthur's ward and bishop. For many Mormons, Arthur should have refused the siren song of Babylon—just like Daniel from the Old Testament refused unholy food or like the righteous suck-up in an exemplary Sunday School story always turns away from the R-rated movie. But this ward took a different approach. They loved him and shared in his excitement. In short, they made it okay for Killer Kane to go on stage, in the full glory of his faith in the Savior, and bring the gospel to some pretty dark corners. I think that if we had more media messages that Mormon people are accepting and tolerant and fewer that paint us as crazy, uptight, arbitrary, or polygamists, we'd spend less time doing damage (or performing damage control) and have more opportunities to reach out and be neighbors.

—Todd Robert Petersen
Cedar City, Utah
PLAYDATERS RECEIVE INSPIRED COUNSEL

By Amy Chamberlain

SALT LAKE CITY, UT—Nursery and Junior Primary members were counseled today not to engage in intimate playdates too soon. “The youngsters with whom you form playdate associations now will become those with whom you will lose your first teeth, play soccer, go to ballet class, take piano lessons, attend homeroom, go to prom, and eventually marry,” said Elder Hugh L. Weaver of the Seventh Quorum of the Seventies.

“I am concerned,” he continued, “to read reports of young men of playdate age riding their Big Wheels through young women’s dolly-and-tea parties. Surely this is not behavior that the Savior would condone.” He also encouraged the young women of playdating age to keep their diapers modestly covered and to support the young men in fulfilling their Primary duties.

Playdaters should seek out wholesome environments, such as sunny parks or Primary activities, and should avoid places with raucous music and dark corners, such as Chuck E. Cheese. “At all costs,” he said, “you should avoid parties where you know sugar is going to be served.”

“My Little Factory” CUT FROM PRIMARY SONG LIST

By Paul Allen

SALT LAKE CITY, UT—The General Primary Music Board announced today that it has removed the song, “My Little Factory” from consideration as it compiles its list for proposed updates to the Primary Songbook. Said Eva Cushman, spokeswoman for the Song Selection Appropriateness Committee, “We just felt that it introduced a spirit of inquiry in Primary that our Sharing Time teachers were not prepared to handle. ‘What does the factory produce? Why does it run out? How do you start it up?’ I ask you—who wants to deal with that in a group of CTRs?”

The songbook update is intended to include songs that not only teach gospel themes but also Church standards. Songs such as “I Will Never Let My Navel Show,” “White Shirts and Snappy Ties,” and “One Piercing, Enough for Me” are intended to remind children of the importance of appropriate dress and grooming, while “Never Ever a Boozer Will I Be” reinforces the theme that the Word of Wisdom is a sacred commandment. While “My Little Factory” was said to have had support at the highest levels of Church leadership, many in the Primary organization are grateful that the Brethren ultimately listened to those who work directly with the children.

Other songs that were deleted early from the list of suggestions included “Missionary to the Muslims” (which included references to hand grenades and surface-to-air missiles) and “Joseph and Emma and Fanny and Lucinda and Louisa and Zina and Prescendia and Agnes and Sylvia and Mary and…” (The committee was concerned that it would become the Mormon equivalent of “99 Bottles of Beer on Wall.”) Two songs, “Froot-Loops and Sacrament” and “I’ll Baptize All the Dead One Day” survived an extra round of vetting, being okayed message-wise but rejected because their tunes were judged to be “too jingley” and “too somber,” respectively.

Views from the Street

HBO’s Big Love, a series about a polygamous family, seems to be a hit. What do you think of it?

I don’t know what’s in a bigger public relations fiasco—the Church or Home Depot.

I’m going to watch it only until I learn if Bill’s gonna get Margene her own car. Then I’m turning it right off!

I was counseled my wife to watch it prayerfully so that she’ll know what kind of chores will await her in the celestial kingdom.

And here I was thinking Desperate Housewives had finally taken a moral stand.

I wasn’t going to watch, but my TiVo said I should.

Those three women sure live in nice houses, don’t you think?
SUNSTONE

Does having “spiritual experiences” mean we are growing spiritually? How might we make lasting, transformative, Christlike changes in our personality and character?

MORMON MANTRAS
A JOURNEY OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

By Philip G. McLemore

Spirituality . . . is the consciousness of victory over self, and of communion with the Infinite.1

In our worship there are two elements: One is the spiritual communion arising from our own meditation; the other, instruction from others. . . . Of the two, the more profitable . . . is the meditation. Meditation is one of the most secret, most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.2
—PRESIDENT DAVID O. McKay

I WAS RAISED CATHOLIC BUT STOPPED GOING TO church when I started college at age seventeen. Mass was boring, and the doctrines, as I understood them, did not seem reflective of a kind and just God. I was always intrigued by what people believed and the impact those beliefs had in their lives, so even though I left Catholicism, I continued to search for a new spiritual home. I attended many Protestant and Evangelical churches, studied with Jehovah’s Witnesses, and if there was a tent meeting off the side of the road, I always stopped in. A friend tried to interest me in Eastern religious practices, but the incense nauseated me and the sharp pains in my knees from trying to twist into the lotus position discouraged me from further investigation.

Eventually I was exposed to Mormonism by a wonderful group of young adults, and at age nineteen, I joined the Church. The doctrine was more comprehensive and made more sense than anything I had experienced. The beliefs were clearly integral to the lives of Church members, which is what I envisioned the hallmark of a true religion to be. I loved the equality of expectation for spiritual growth: each individual, not just a holy elite, has a responsibility to be Christlike. Most important, I began having personal spiritual experiences, which made God real to me in a way I’d never known before.

The gospel and the Church were very stabilizing, helping turn an insecure, confused teenager into a more mature and responsible young man. Within seven years, I had served a mission, earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees, was employed by the Church Educational System as a seminary supervisor and director of an LDS Institute of Religion, and was married in the temple to the loveliest woman on the planet.

After eight years with the Church Educational System, I had the opportunity and honor of representing the Church as a military chaplain in the United States Air Force, in which capacity I served for the next twenty years. It was an amazing experience to share the full range of life—with all its joys and pains, successes and failures, delights and disappointments—with such a diverse group of people trying to make their way. I became friends and worked closely with priests, rabbis, and ministers from a wide variety of religions and denominations. In many of my assignments, I was the spiritual leader for a variety of non-LDS groups and worship services.

In my associations with Latter-day Saints, as well as with leaders and members of other faiths, I have encountered some wonderful, Christlike people. However, I noticed that their spiritual qualities seemed to be related to them as individuals rather than being connected to any particular religion or spiritual practice. It was much more common to see leaders and members of religious organizations striving for a Christlike nature but, under the pressures and responsibilities of life, failing to achieve a genuine, lasting spiritual transformation. Eventually I came to realize that I was one of those in this second category. I felt so validated by success at my jobs and in my church positions and activities, it was easy to overlook the fact that, at the deepest levels, I really wasn’t growing more Christlike. When failures came, I bounced back so well that I could live in the illusion that I was okay. Like many “faithful” persons—LDS or not—I was having periodic, if not regular, spiritual experiences, which had to mean that I was on the right path and progressing. It took a long time before I realized that having spiritual experiences often has little to do with spiritual transformation.

PHILIP G. McLEMORE is currently working as a hospice chaplain and meditation instructor. He is a former LDS Institute of Religion director and a retired Air Force chaplain. He lives in West Point, Utah. Phil and his wife, Kim, have four married children and six-and-three-fourths grandchildren. Phil welcomes comments at trans7med@yahoo.com.
Like many people, when I was at work and at church, I was fairly angelic—kind, patient, loving, helpful, accepting. At home, I was often a different guy. I loved my family and worked hard for them, but I could be defensive, selfish, judgmental, impatient, and I lacked the emotional honesty and vulnerability to love openly and deeply. And to the extent I recognized these deficiencies in character, I approached them in typical Mormon fashion—through goal-setting, scripture study, fasting, and prayer. But I made only pitiful progress, mainly in learning how to love my wife. I provided, protected, disciplined, and taught, but I did not give my children enough of the love and kindness they needed when they were young. I was dismayed that even after years of sincere effort devoted to spiritual growth, I still did not embody the key Christlike qualities I earnestly desired. Religion and spiritual growth were my business! What was I missing?

Despite these occasional realizations of my shortcomings, I forged ahead, still sure that I was on the right path, confident that continued, directed effort would eventually produce the genuine transformation I sought. Finally in August 2000, I reached what I considered to be a pinnacle of professional, personal, and spiritual success. My inner dialogue went something like this: Even though I still lack some key spiritual qualities, I have theological certainty, I can teach the gospel with impact, I have overcome some serious character flaws, and I have learned how to really love my wife. I felt like I had completed the purpose of my mortal probation and sensed no fear of death.

Oh what a difference a month can make! A year earlier, I had injured my neck, back, and left shoulder. The full extent of the injuries to my neck and back were overshadowed by the severe shoulder pain, which became the sole focus for medical care. In September 2000, I was stunned by an unrelenting cascade of muscle spasms, headaches, unusual pain patterns, and episodes of dizziness, anxiety, and depression. Responding to these new symptoms, my doctor diagnosed me as having an anxiety disorder. It was a misdiagnosis that delayed the search for underlying causes for eighteen months and eventually left me, Mr. Pinnacle of Success, a confused, unstable, fearful mess. Again, I approached this challenge in typical Mormon fashion—goal-setting, scripture study, fasting, prayer, a series of priesthood blessings, and a concerted effort to develop greater faith.

Nothing helped. Exhausted and resigned to a life of misery, I finally surrendered.

At this point, two gifts providentially appeared: the book, Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and the audio program, Training the Mind, Healing the Body, by Deepak Chopra. These introduced me to the practice of meditation and meditative yoga. Within just a few weeks of practice, I was symptom-free during each period of meditation—which then was twenty minutes twice a day, but this gave me hope I could extend that relief into my day-to-day activities.

After two months of meditation and yoga, I shifted from practicing “mindfulness meditation” (in which the goal is to create greater awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, and body sensations by observing them from a witness position without judging them) to a mantra-based meditation practice. Almost immediately, I noticed that my scripture studies were more insightful and my prayers more rich and profound. I soon realized that meditation was not primarily about relaxation and stress reduction but rather an awakening into the Spirit—and that this communion with Spirit had the power to heal and transform. Touched by the sacredness of this realization, I began to meditate in a kneeling position. It wasn’t long before I began to consider my symptoms a small price to pay for their role in leading me into expanded states of bliss, peace, and spiritual connection.

After seven months of devoted meditation practice, I began to have consciousness-expanding experiences that provided exhilarating moments in which I felt a deep sense of oneness.
BASICS
for a beginning meditation practice

1. Find a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed. Early morning is best, but do it, when you can, prior to eating a meal.

2. Choose a comfortable sitting position in which you can hold your neck and back straight. If you are in a chair, make sure your hips are slightly higher than your knees. If needed, use a cushion to support your lower back, but your head should be unsupported. Place your hands, palms up, on your thighs.

3. Twenty minutes is an ideal time for a substantive meditation. If that is too long, start with ten and work up to twenty.

4. Close your eyes, and offer a short, devotional prayer expressing your intent to commune with God.

5. Inhale, exhale, and make sure you are breathing diaphragmatically. That means your belly expands when you inhale and recedes when you exhale. If you find this difficult, practice this breath for several minutes until it flows naturally. Bring your awareness to the breath flowing in and out of your nostrils. Let your breath find its own pace.

6. Begin your mantra, and repeat it gently in your mind. Initially associate your mantra with your inhalations and exhalations. A two- or four-word mantra is easily divided between the “ins” and “outs” of your breath. A longer phrase should have a natural break.

7. When other thoughts distract you, gently and without distress return to the mantra. The intrusion of these thoughts can be frustrating at first, but after a few weeks of consistent practice, your thoughts will calm down (along with your nervous system and blood pressure!).

8. At some point, you want to begin just hearing the mantra rather than thinking it, and your breath can become so soft that the mantra will detach from it and flow at its own pace. Sometimes the mantra will cease, and you will be in a superconscious state of silence that is healing and transforming. Even before this occurs, you will experience many physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual benefits. Each person develops at a different pace. Meditate without expectation. Be patient.

9. If you need to time yourself, use an alarm with a gentle tone. After my meditation, I usually do scripture study or other spiritual reading and pray.

10. Try to bring the peace and divine presence of your meditation into your daily activities and personal interactions.

with the universe and all of creation. I also began to identify much more with my spirit instead of my body, thoughts, and emotions. These states of higher awareness are nicely captured in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s phrase, “You are not a human being in search of a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being immersed in a human experience.” I was so captivated by these “cosmic” events that I began to expect them and felt disappointed with my meditation if one did not occur. In a conversation I had with Deepak Chopra about these disappointments, he told me not to get attached to the meditation experience itself and be trapped by the expectation of “meditation highs.” He said I would know that my meditation was effective by seeing spiritual growth manifesting in my day-to-day living. I pressed on using the “Liahona” principles of faith and diligence (1 Nephi 16:28). I expressed faith by remaining confident that the spiritual growth I desired would come to pass, and diligence by continuing my daily meditation regardless of the perceived quality of the experience.

This proved to be a wise course. As the months passed, unhealthy thought and behavior patterns receded and Christlike virtues became more deeply rooted. After three-and-a-half years of daily meditation, I experienced the realization that, without the goal-setting or other conscious self-improvement efforts I’d tried in the past, I had become much less defensive, selfish, impatient, and judgmental. I had also become far more emotionally vulnerable, open, and honest. The positive spiritual qualities I had worked at, mostly unsuccessfully, for thirty years were simply unfolding! Three-plus years might seem like a long time to some. It is a mustard seed compared to the mammoth miracle of transformation that was taking place. What had started as a last-ditch attempt to relieve pain and reduce stress had become a journey of spiritual transformation.

My neck and back injuries were properly diagnosed by September 2002, and the combination of meditation, yoga, and medical care have enabled me to be symptom-free 90 percent of the time. A number of physical disabilities and limitations remain. I see them as reminders of my need for God and the wonderful door he opened for me.

AWAKENING TO THE “IMAGE OF GOD” WITHIN
Liberation from past experience and conditioning

SPIRITUAL GROWTH UNFOLDS as we have direct experience of the Divine and an increasingly intimate relationship with God. This experience and relationship awakens the Divine within; increases our ability to make conscious, loving choices; and nurtures unity within ourselves, with God, and with others. We develop emotional honesty; a calm, appreciative spirit; an increased capacity to love; and freedom from conditioned perception and response. Both Eastern and Western spiritual texts refer to this state as awakened.

Over the past few years, I have asked people from many different walks of life and religious traditions to rate the percentage of human perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that are based on conditioned response as opposed to conscious choice. Almost without fail, they estimated that it is
about 90–95 percent. I believe honest reflection by any thoughtful person will verify that this is true. In admitting this, we’re acknowledging that our free agency actually functions in the 5–10 percent range. What an astounding realization!

Scientists and philosophers sometimes refer to this phenomenon as the hypnosis of social conditioning. Our brains love the economy of repetitive patterns. When this process is combined with our subconscious inner dialogue and the habits of a lifetime, we find ourselves imprisoned in a very narrow range of perception and response. Both Eastern and Western spiritual texts refer to this state as asleep.

We cannot sleep our way toward spiritual growth! Since our deepest biological instincts are fear-based, our negative experiences usually dominate our conditioning, making the development of faith, love, and spiritual growth an uphill battle. How easy has it been for you to make lasting, transformative, Christlike changes in your nature, personality, and character? As a military chaplain, I counseled thousands of people, many with deep religious convictions, including many Latter-day Saints with strong testimonies. They deeply desired to improve themselves and their relationships, but in most cases, their spiritual insights, noble intentions, and hopeful commitments were overwhelmed by their conditioned perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

For the past several decades, it has been popular in LDS literature to emphasize that in this life, we "chart a course" for our growth, with the expectation that this growth toward perfection continues into the next life. I wonder if this rhetoric has arisen out of the subconscious realization that because so few are experiencing a deep spiritual transformation, it must not be possible to attain while here on earth? The three-fold mission of the Church contains the goal of "perfecting the saints." Yet the emphasis of late is upon behaviors such as being perfect in our tithe paying and meeting attendance. I’ve had several Church members and leaders ask me if rebirth and sanctification are things that we just talk about or if they can really be achieved in this life. Have we as Latter-day Saints come to believe that we must wait for the next life before really becoming like Christ?

Scripturally, the word “perfect” carries the meaning of wholeness and completeness. As I read the scriptures, they speak forcefully of rebirth, sanctification, and spiritual transformation. I believe that when we consistently spend time in spiritual communion, the Spirit of God nourishes the divine qualities we inherited from our heavenly parents, and this divine nature unfolds in our perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. We are reborn, transformed, and liberated from past experience and the limitations of our conditioning. We can and should experience wholeness and transformation in this life. God promises us his light, grace, and power, so that we can be one with him in Christ. This is not a promise of “pie in the sky”: we can experience these blessings now.

President David O. McKay’s statement at the beginning of this article, that spirituality is the consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite, contains the two critical elements of spiritual growth. I interpret the “self” in President McKay's reference to “victory over self” as being the "natural man" which the Book of Mormon tells us is an “enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). This is the self of conditioned perceptions and responses that rob us of free agency, a self that is “acted upon” and not “free. . . to act” according to Divine will and nature (2 Nephi 2:14, 26). President McKay’s words suggest that we must become conscious of the sleep of conditioning that has taken place through our interaction with the finite world around us. Then, through communion with the Infinite, we must awaken to the “image of God” within our
FOUR THINGS
that can happen when you begin
a meditation practice

1. You fall asleep. (You are tired; get more rest!)
2. Stress release manifested as restlessness or boredom;
a flood of thoughts or emotions including anxiety,
anger, sadness; physical responses like twitching and
pain. (This sounds grim, but it is part of the healing
and balancing process and will pass; keep your
attention on the mantra.)
3. Pleasurable or inspiring subjective manifestations.
4. The experience of spiritual communion and
transformation.

Our minds are constantly buzzing with thoughts at the con-
scious and subconscious levels. The biggest complaint new
meditators have is that they’re having “too many thoughts.”
Actually, they are just now becoming more aware of how perva-
sively we all talk to ourselves. These thoughts that now feel in-
trusive were always there. Most thoughts consist of reviews of
the past and projections into the future; they represent memory
and desire. Our thoughts are rarely purely in the present.

But the spirit is a present-moment reality! That is why med-
itating, pondering, and contemplating are such powerful spir-
tual disciplines. They take us to the present, where the spirit is
experienced directly—to the only state in which we can com-
mune with the Infinite.

Although there are many different styles and practices of
meditation, each with its own benefits, I have found mantra
meditation and mantra practice to be valuable tools for spiri-
tual growth and for reclaiming and maintaining our essential
state. I will first address the use of mantra in meditation. Then I
will discuss some ways mantra is used in inner dialogue—
knowingly and unknowingly, in healthy or unhealthy ways—
and in LDS culture.

MANTRA MEDITATION

True meditation is not a blank mind but an awakened spirit

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that uses words or vibrations (1) to instill one-pointed concentration by interrupting the flow of the normal thinking process, allowing attention to slip into silence, beyond body and mind to spirit; and (2) to put one into a state of harmony with the Divine or with specific qualities or characteristics of the Divine. Mantras are used silently in meditation and vocally in chanting.

In a meditation course I attended, the instructor stated that mantra practice is a way to use the mind to free oneself from the mind. The objective is to use a word, sound, or phrase that is devotional in nature and will not generate more mental activity. The mantra is then repeated gently, becoming the sole focus of your attention. Your mind will resist this process and spin up a number of thoughts and sensations in an effort to regain its normal flow and control. The meditation discipline is

**FORMULA MANTRAS**

Creating a “space” where we can respond with loving awareness instead of with instant, mindless reactions

In addition to meditation mantras, there are the mantras of our inner dialogue and the subcultures in which we live—for example, our families, professions, the Church. I call these *formula* mantras. Ideally, these mantras should support the spiritual growth unfolding in our meditation practice. As discussed above, good mantras should take one through and beyond the slavery of conditioned perceptions and responses to the experience of spiritual connection and insight that allow us to see through God’s eyes and to respond in harmony with divine nature. Good mantras create a “space” where we can see more clearly and respond with

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**WE ARE SEDUCED SO MUCH**

by the noise, form, and activity of the material world that we lose awareness of our true identity and become identified primarily with our thoughts and bodies.

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loving awareness instead of with instant, mindless reactions.

Through my years as a military chaplain counseling couples, I have become convinced that most expressions of anger are protective coverings for fear or pain. Usually, when we see people afraid or in pain, we respond in a nurturing way. The problem arises when the expression of fear or pain surfaces as ugly anger. When I first came to understand this connection between anger, fear, and pain, I had the couples (and myself) repeat over and over, hundreds of times, the phrase, or mantra, “Anger is a sign of fear or pain; nurture him/her.” I wanted this idea driven deep into our subconscious minds. As a result, many of the couples were empowered to react to anger in more positive ways.

Fast forward to a new assignment that did not require me to counsel couples, and hence to a time when I hadn’t repeated this mantra to myself for several months. Though frequent military moves are never easy on anyone of us, they exacted a particularly heavy toll on our son, Gordon—so much so that he ended up attending three different high schools. When he was sixteen, we had just moved to Washington, D.C., and he
was trying to adjust to a new school and new friends. One day, our usually kind and gentle son came home from school in a foul mood, and when my wife spoke to him, he snapped at her in a rude and ugly tone. Like a trained dog, I was immediately in his face giving him Dad Lecture Forty-One—you know, the one that goes: “Don’t you EVER use that tone with your mother in this house or I’ll . . . ”

Well, Gordon wasn’t eight years old anymore with a giant dad towering over him. We were actually very close to the same size, eyeball to eyeball. He did not back down, and I can remember seeing in his eyes, as clearly as if it were on a ticker-tape scrolling across them, the thought, “I think I can take him.”

Instinctively, we both clenched our fists; a tragic, physical fight was no more than a second away. Before that second passed, however, a timeless “space” opened up, and I heard the mantra, “Anger is a sign of fear or pain; nurture him.” I said, “Gordon, for you to be acting this way, you must really be hurt or afraid.” He looked stunned, took two steps backwards, collapsed into a chair, leaned over, and began to cry. I immediately moved to his side, placed my arm around him, and asked him to share what was going on. Our near-brawl and the tender moments that followed this reversal of energies proved to be a lifelong, bonding moment for us. Because of the liberating space the mantra created, a potential disaster was transformed into a sacred moment of intimacy between a father and son.

I place formula mantras and their effects into three categories:

**Ideal mantras**
- help us awaken to the divine nature within and lead to harmony with God
- create “space” for conscious, inspired decision-making and responses
- promote unity within self, with God, and with others

**Helpful mantras**
- help us endure or hold on
- provide comfort
- promote organizational unity

**Problem mantras**
- reflect superstition or “bad” religion and cripple spiritual independence (see sidebar)
- excuse or cover ungodly behavior
- oppress or lead to taking advantage of others

In preparing this essay, I asked several people for what they consider to be the most common, formula-type “Mormon mantras” used by mainstream Church members. The following are a few I received. Some are the exact wording of the phrases we frequently hear; some are concepts that we hear expressed in a range of ways:

- I know the Church is true.
- But the Church is still true.
- Follow the prophet/Brethren.
- Keep the commandments.
- Sustain the Lord’s chosen.
- I’m active in the Church.
- I have a testimony.
- Obedience is the first law of heaven.
- Higher Church position means greater inspiration or spiritual development.
- Revelation comes according to stewardship.
- This is the Lord’s church so . . .
- Disagreement/dissent equals unfaithfulness or sinfulness.
- I hold the priesthood, so . . .
- If I (go to the temple, keep this commandment) then . . .
A little analysis reveals that, at their best, these mantras fit into the “Helpful” category. They serve a number of useful purposes, but none leads to the kinds of transformation described in the “Ideal” category. Most thoughtful mainstream members I’ve spoken with have confirmed this perspective. A few argued that “following the prophet” and “keeping the commandments” bring the Spirit into one’s life, which results in spiritual growth. The question then becomes, “How much growth?” Enough to overcome conditioned behavior and to experience the unfolding of the divine nature within us? Few will assert that. Like my past experience, most of those who actively participate in church services, activities, and ordinances are lifted to live more maturely and responsibly, enjoy gospel fellowship, and have wonderful spiritual experiences but still lack desired Christlike characteristics and feel shackled by unhealthy conditioning. For many, being “active” and in good standing in the “true church” feels like enough. When big crises come, these mantras help them endure and “hold on.” Helpful, but not ideal.

At their worst, these mantras lead to events described under the “problem” category or they become “end-states” that dull the hunger and thirst for further growth. They can also set people up for failure. I worked with a couple in Mississippi who were in constant stress and conflict over financial problems. After hearing a general conference message about how going to the temple improves marriages, they decided to be obedient and follow this counsel. In those days, the nearest temple was in Washington, D.C. The couple had an “inspiring” trip but returned home $500 more in debt, and within a week, they were even more stressed and fighting even more severely.

I’ve always cringed whenever I hear the mantra, “But the Church is still true,” because it is usually preceded by some unfortunate event—usually the result of ungodly behavior by a member or leader. Instead of addressing the behavior or the circumstances supporting it, members often gloss over it with the “But…” mantra. During the first year of my mission in Brazil, I witnessed outrageous abuses. “Gospel salesmanship” was taken to its ugliest extreme. Missionaries were being bullied and bribed to get more baptisms. Spiritual oversight was neglected. Over and over I heard, “But the Church is still true!” In the thirty-three years since I’ve been home, I’ve heard similar accounts. Glossing over this kind of behavior has disrupted spiritual growth for too many.

Let me give two more examples of common formula mantras gone awry: As a home teacher, I felt inspired to advise a sister who was married to a violent, alcoholic husband to pack her bags immediately and to find a safe place. She agreed. I told her I would contact the bishop and go with her to counsel with him that Sunday. She weakened after I left and reached the bishop by phone before I did. He advised her to stay at home until Sunday when they could talk about what to do. When I visited her in the hospital the next day, after her husband had threatened their baby, sexually abused her, and severely and repeatedly beat her face with a gun, she said she hadn’t taken my advice because she believed a bishop had more inspiration than a home teacher. Repairing her face took several surgeries.

A second example: Last year, I sat in a Gospel Doctrine class where a sister asked for advice about something that was troubling her. An incident of child sexual abuse had occurred in another stake. She reported that during the next stake conference, the stake president advised the brethren that they should not change their daughters’ diapers. She didn’t understand how an inspired leader could make such an absurd comment. The teacher wasn’t sure how to handle the question, so the bishop rose to help. I can only assume he felt the need to support this leader, so he used one of the stewardship/revelation mantras and said, “What is revelation in one stake might not
be in another.” This response proved to be even more confusing, and one bright brother in the class, who had plenty of female diapers to change, asked if that could be a revelation in their ward as well!

Since so many of our mantras are designed to protect Church interests, the truth and the needs of individuals often get lost. In the case of the sister who had been troubled by the stake president’s counsel, I told her that in reaction to this distressing incident, the president had probably just made an unwise comment. Her response was, “Oh, that makes sense.” She seemed satisfied at that point and, I believe, thought no worse of the Church or that leader.

I’ve always been inspired by President David O. McKay’s rich statements about spiritual growth through meditation and communion. I’ve heard it said that we Latter-day Saints left the sacred grove many years ago and have been trapped in a beehive ever since. I agree. Through the years, I’ve personally listened as Elders Boyd K. Packer and Dallin H. Oaks taught principles that support deep transformation instead of surface spirituality. In an LDS military chaplain’s conference, I heard Elder Oaks state that our responsibility is not to get a testimony but to become converted and experience a profound change of nature. In 2001, I attended a four-hour leadership meeting in which Elder Packer flat-out stated that we are too wrapped up in organizations and programs and, as a result, are losing the gospel. He begged us to streamline programs, meetings, and activities so more focus could be placed on personal and family spiritual growth. The next week, our stake increased the number of meetings! Our common LDS mantras, and the culture they create, support external compliance and organizational activity to such a degree that even influential general authorities working hard to promote genuine spiritual growth have minimal impact.

Before discussing ideal Mormon mantras, we should pause a moment to ask if there are Sunstone community mantras, and assess what category they might fit in. Though I sampled fewer friends about this question, I think we identified several that fairly represent attitudes found among some who affiliate with Sunstone:

- Most Mormons don’t think for themselves.
- There is nothing for me to learn at Church meetings.
- Commandments are for gospel beginners.
- The Church’s focus is too narrow.
- Church leaders are out of touch with the “real” issues.
- Progress in the Church comes too slowly.
- The Church would be better off if it listened to its liberal members.

Just as with the mantras of mainstream members, even if there is some truth in these statements, I contend that such formulas do not promote spiritual growth. Instead, I believe they keep those who hold them stuck in intellectual and ego satisfaction, or possibly in distress over feelings of disappointment or betrayal.

**IDEAL** MANTRAS

*Meditation, done mindfully, expands the soul.*

What are some formula mantras that fit Mormon culture and also have the potential to break through conditioned thinking and responses, to awaken the higher self, to create “space” for inspired decisions, and to promote unity within self, with God, and with others? As discussed earlier, meditation mantras are designed to focus attention on the silence beyond thoughts and bodily sensations so we can commune deeply with Spirit and be nourished and transformed in Christ’s image. Intentional formula mantras are a way to change our internal dialogue to support a godly nature as we live day to day. Some might consider the mantra suggestions that follow to be similar to “affirmations.” Call them what you will. The important point is their function: they can assist you in breaking through past perceptions and
thought patterns that have been repeated in your minds millions of times, narrowed your agency, and crippled your power to change. And if the ones I suggest don’t work for you, find some that do!

Mantras are intended to be repeated hundreds of times throughout the day. “Vain repetitions” numb the mind, but mantra meditation, done mindfully, expands the soul.8

- “Be still and know that I Am God” (Psalm 46:10). This is a classic that can be used as a meditation or formula mantra. When it’s repeated meditatively, you can feel your soul expand to receive divine presence. “Thy will be done” works in much the same way.

- “Love as Christ loved” (John 13:34). Why we tend to quote Jesus’ summary and restatement of Old Testament law in Matthew 22:37–40 (to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves) in preference to the “New Command-ment” in John 13:34 is a mystery to me. Our love of self is not always a wise standard by which to love God and neighbor. To state that we will love as Christ loved opens our minds and hearts and causes us to extend ourselves beyond our weaknesses and limitations to benefit others.

- “I am not bound to accept anything that is contrary to the character and attributes manifested in Jesus.” I call this my “Lowell Bennion mantra” as I adapted it from his book, I Believe (page 11). Something very similar to this phrase came into my heart when I was baptized. A year later, it assisted me in staying independent and unspotted from the pressures and abuses I experienced during the first year of my mission (described earlier). Since then, it has stabilized me on several other occasions when a Church leader has attempted to use his authority to constrain me or a family member to participate in activities that I felt were contrary to fundamental Christian ideals.

- “Afflictions are consecrated for my growth [or enlightenment]” (2 Nephi 2:2). If all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28), then our number one task is to love God. Communion with Him can transmute pain and disappointment into treasures of wisdom and compassion.

- “I will suffer with Him,” or “I will bear others’ burdens.” Jesus says we will be heirs of God if we suffer with him (Romans 8:16,17). His atonement is evidence of the core truth that the highest qualities of intimacy and unity (John 17:21–23) are inseparable from suffering. By bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2) and suffering with Christ, we make the unity of the cosmic Atonement a reality in mortality. We do this the same way he did: we look past sin and ignorance, we forgive, and we nourish the divine within others. It’s not easy when others’ sins and ignorance create suffering for us and when their burdens generate resistance to our best efforts. It’s not easy when we have our own burdens to deal with at the same time. It’s difficult and painful. But it’s impossible if we are stuck in conditioning. This is why we have to be one with God. This oneness enables us to be “new creatures” liberated from past patterns, and to suffer with Christ, who, since he has walked the path, can sustain us in the process (Alma 7:12). When one of these mantras carries this meaning, it is powerful.

- “Forgiveness, with love and tolerance, accomplishes miracles” (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Forgiveness,” Ensign, November 2005).

- “Speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

- “Peace and presence in all circumstances.” Whenever I feel provoked into impatience or anger, this mantra has been successful in reminding me to...
reconnect with the peace and presence of God experienced in morning meditation and prayer. The mantra creates “space” for me to respond from the spiritual mind and not the carnal mind (Romans 8:6).

- “A testimony is not enough; I need to become Christlike” (Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” Ensign, November 2000). This is an inspiring general conference address, full of great potential mantras.

- “Bathe me in thy light, life, and love.” This mantra has sustained and lifted me during periods of pain and distress as I meditatively reflect on each element.

- “What can I do with God today?” A hospice patient shared this mantra with me shortly before his death. He said, “I’m tired of hearing people say what they are going to do for God. He doesn’t need our help. Let’s do something with Him and bless people’s lives.” He told his nurse he could die now since he had passed his mantra on to me, and I had agreed to share it. Thanks, Ed.

- “Anger is a cover for fear or pain—nurture him/her” (Matthew 6:44).

- “I am above no one; I am beneath no one” (Matthew 7:3–6). This is a great mantra to assist in achieving balance if you are being intimidated or tempted to put down another.

**RESPONDING TO THE ALLURE OF FAITH**

“*The field of all possibilities . . .*”

**HUMAN GROWTH AND development are analogous to spiritual growth and development. Babies are under the care of a person of authority who protects and nourishes them in the same way spiritual leaders care for their young ones of any age. Yet soon the young ones need to be moved toward independence, so they are given rules and commandments which expand their range of activity free of direct supervision. Rules and commandments are helpful but lack universal application in many of life’s grey areas. As soon as feasible, it is important to teach the principles that underlie the rules so wise decisions can be made in a greater variety of circumstances. Ultimately we want our children or disciples to be able to draw on spiritual intuition or inspiration that will provide guidance in any and all situations.

There is no question that Mormon mantras and teaching focus on authority and commandments. The benefit is safety and predictability. However, this focus creates boredom and hampers spiritual growth. The biggest complaint I hear from faithful, mainstream Mormons is that so many of our meetings and classes are boring. Contrast these emphases and the resultant boredom to what happens when people live by principles and Spirit. Passion and excitement arise when we move into unpredictable paths in response to the allure of faith. Something like this was expressed well by Nephi when he said, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Nephi 4:6). Neither life nor spiritual growth is safe and predictable. Spiritual living is creative—which means new and wonderful things can emerge with each step. Living by faith is being open to the wisdom of uncertainty. In the words of Deepak Chopra:

> The search for security and certainty is actually an attachment to the known. And what’s the known? The known is our past. The known is nothing other than the prison of past conditioning. . . . The unknown is the field of all possibilities, ever fresh, ever new, always open to the creation of new manifestations. . . . This means that in every moment of your life, you will have excitement, adventure, mystery. You will experience the fun of life—the magic, the celebration, the exhilaration, and the exultation of your own spirit. True spirituality has to be more than the
practice of a religion and maintaining good standing in an organization. The Apostle Paul said, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). This transformation is, as President McKay said, the result of “consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite.” I hope the practices of mantra described here for use in meditation and for strengthening the qualities of your innate divinity will bless you in moving beyond the bonds of conditioning and into the creative life of spiritual growth. Thus awakened, we truly become the sons and daughters of God, possessing the mind and heart of Christ.

NOTES

1. David O. McKay, Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 390
4. Some people resist the idea that meditation is a necessary practice for transformative spiritual growth. There are a few individuals who seem to be born with divine consciousness, but for most of us, meditation or one of its cousins (such as contemplative prayer) is the most reliable, intentional practice for piercing through the carnal man to our underlying spiritual nature.

This truth is pervasive in the ancient, yogic scriptures. Consider this quote from the Katha Upanishad 2:24: “The Self (or our true nature) cannot be known by anyone, who desists not from unrighteous ways, controls not his senses, stills not his mind, and practices not meditation.”

5. This translation is from Primal Sound Meditation Manual for Students. It was written by Roger Gabriel for Deepak Chopra’s meditation course and is not available for purchase. The two translations and commentaries of Patanjali’s yoga sutras I recommend are: (1) How to Know God. The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, trans. (Hollywood, California: The Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1953). This has been a standard translation for many years and is available in several new editions. (2) Roy Eugene Davis, The Science of Self-Realization (Lakemont, Georgia, CSA Press, 2004). This is a very clear translation with a brief commentary by my current meditation teacher.

6. The sound “Ah” is prominent in many meditation mantras since it is associated with the name of God (G) in many cultures and religions. You can hear it pronounced in names such as Allah, Krishna, Rama, Jehovah, Yahuwah, Ra, Abba, and others. Ab is a primordial sound that is very soothing and the only sound we can make without having to manipulate our lips, tongue, throat, and jaw. Many ancient meditative traditions feel that one of the quickest ways to enter into union with God is to use God’s name in your mantra.

7. In post-mission conversations with past mission leaders and our interim mission president, we estimated that 50 percent or more of the returned missionaries from that regime went inactive in the Church. Humble, poor Brazilians were strong-armed into baptism by large, forceful Americans who were at their homes every day. Submitting to baptism was a quick way to get rid of them. Young boys were promised soccer balls if they would watch a filmstrip and be baptized. Missionary discussions were not necessary. When I protested against these practices, I was demoted from district leader to junior companion and sent to a two-Elder town out in the interior. Freed from such pressure tactics, I had a wonderful experience.

8. Ideally, after some initial experimentation, a meditation mantra should not be changed. Once rooted, it gains strength, taking one more quickly into higher states of consciousness and communion with the Divine. On the other hand, formula mantras are changed depending on one’s circumstances and the areas of spiritual growth one chooses to focus on.

“THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF MORMONISM”

JOSEPH SMITH’S UNFINISHED REFORMATION

By Don Bradley

SINCE THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD FIRST DEFINED the “Five Pillars” of Islam, Muslims have proclaimed them as the sine qua non of Islamic devotion. For some twenty-six centuries, Buddhists have similarly been guided by the “Four Noble Truths” and “Eightfold Path.” And however poorly they have often lived their Master’s first and second “great commandments,” Christians have always acknowledged the absolute centrality of these to the faith. Mormons, by contrast, have all but forgotten the final definition of the essence of Latter-day Saint faith given by their founding prophet, Joseph Smith.

Many of the Saints have some awareness of the 1830 statement of belief included in D&C 20. More know of the 1835 “Lectures on Faith,” and most are quite familiar with the 1842 “Articles of Faith.” Few, however, would recall “the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” defined by the prophet during the last year of his life. Indeed, one can attend ward meetings and read works by LDS authors for a lifetime without ever becoming aware of this summation of the faith’s foundations.

This is surprising and unfortunate. Joseph Smith’s identification of “grand fundamental principles” is of great significance. Joseph rarely undertook to define the fundamentals of Latter-day Saint faith.1 And, in light of contemporary definitions, his choice of the phrase “grand fundamental principles” communicated that these were cornerstones of the faith’s foundation—the basis of [the] system,” its “rules of action” or normative standards.2

In this paper, I examine the sermons in which Joseph Smith introduced the “grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” and attempt to situate these principles in a broader context that illuminates their meaning and purpose. I also describe how Joseph may have come to formulate this set of principles, and I explore their place in his life and faith. Finally, I suggest how these grand fundamental principles may have faded from the Mormon memory and what place they might be given in the faith today.

THE “GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES” OF MORMONISM

“I will have a reformation.”

IN JULY 1843, Joseph Smith delivered a series of remarkable sermons. On Sunday, the 9th, he proclaimed himself a friend to all, having “no enmity against anyone.” Echoing his opponents’ perplexity at his success, he asked, “Why is it this babbler gains so many followers, and retains them?” He explained his secret simply: “Because I possess the principle of love.” Offering the world “a good heart and a good hand,” he declared himself “as ready to die for a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or any other denomination” as “for a Mormon.”

Narrowing the gap between Latter-day Saints and those of other denominations, the prophet asserted, “we do not differ so far in our religious views.” He declared the Saints’ faith ready to receive the truths of all others: “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from where it may.”3

The following Sunday, 16 July, Joseph preached again, proposing a radical change in church organization. William Clayton, the prophet’s personal secretary, wrote of Joseph’s sermon, “He stated that Hyrum held the office of prophet to the church by birthright, and he was going to have a reformation, and the Saints must regard Hyrum for he has authority.”4 Apostle Willard Richards gave a similar report in a letter to the absent Brigham Young: “[Joseph] said he would not prophesy anymore—Hyrum should be the prophet.” Richards added that Joseph had withheld from his hearers the anticipated arc of his post-prophetic career: “[he] did not tell them he was going to be a priest now, nor a king by and by.”5

We don’t know what reaction Joseph expected for this
sermon, but it caused considerable alarm. The following morning, a number of fretting Saints came to him protesting, “Brother Joseph, Hyrum is no prophet: he can’t lead the church.”

In response, the following Sunday, the 23rd, Joseph returned to the pulpit to eat his words. Of his earlier assertion that he was no longer prophet, he explained, “I said it ironically,” adding enigmatically, “It was not that I would renounce the idea of being a prophet, but that I would renounce the idea of proclaiming myself such.” Then, as to bewilder the assembled Saints, Joseph reiterated that he was vacating the office of prophet—and revealed the trajectory of his future: “I will advance from prophet to priest and then to king, not to the kingdoms of this earth, but of the Most High God.”

In this same sermon, Joseph expounded on the virtue of friendship. Having characterized himself in his 9 July sermon as the universal friend of humankind, the aspiring “priest” now proclaimed this as not merely a personal virtue, but the essence of the faith: “Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism.”

No doubt it was difficult for those who heard him to take in the dizzying swirl of sweeping pronouncements in this series of sermons. But Joseph provided a key to understanding his intent: “I will have a reformation.” His appointment of Hyrum as prophet, his advancement to the enigmatic office of “priest” now and “king” in a time to come, and his declaration of two “grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” were not disconnected innovations but different aspects of a single, seismic shift. Joseph was intent on reforming the faith he had founded.

For most of us, the term “reformation” conjures up images of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenburg chapel. But for Joseph, who consistently understood his identity in terms of biblical patterns, the paradigmatic reformer was more likely King Josiah, who reformed Israelite religion in the early days of the prophet Jeremiah.

Josiah based his reformation on a startling find in the Jerusalem temple. Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered and sent to the king “the book of the law of the LORD.” Dismayed at the distance between the commandments of the book and Israel’s faith as it had been practiced during his reign, Josiah rent his clothes and threw himself upon God’s mercy. With the backing of both prophet and high priest, Josiah set about the difficult task of conforming Israel’s religion to the standard of the newfound book (2 Kings 22–23).

Josiah’s reformation had served as a model for Joseph Smith at the opening of his prophetic career. A revelation Joseph presented to Martin Harris in March 1829 characterized the new prophet’s task of bringing forth the Book of Mormon as God’s way to “work a reformation.” This revelation also required of Harris a covenant of obedience modeled on the covenant Josiah made on behalf of his people as a key part of his reformation (2 Kings 23:3, 2 Chronicles 34:31, D&C 5:28).

A revelation on 22-23 September 1832 again connected the Book of Mormon to Hilkiah’s book and Josiah’s reformation. D&C 84:57 warned that the Saints would languish under divine condemnation “until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written.” This echoes Josiah’s lament that God’s wrath was kindled against Israel “because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written . . .” (2 Kings 22:13).

Several years after these revelations implicitly modeled Joseph’s early work on that of Josiah, the prophet again stepped into the shoes of that ancient reformer.

To understand the nature, extent, and zeal of Josiah’s reformation of Israel, one must know about Hilkiah’s discovery of the book and the impact of its message on Josiah. Similarly, to understand how and why Joseph Smith undertook to reform Mormonism, we must know the standard by which he intended to reform it.

Like Josiah’s reformation, Joseph’s began with teachings received from the temple—not the Latter-day Saint temple, but the Masonic temple. It was in Freemasonry that he first encountered the structure, principles, and rituals with which he would reform Mormonism.

Joe Joseph Smith and Freemasonry

“Bro Joseph Ses masonary was taken from The priesthood but has become degen[e]rated. but menny Things are perfect.”

Joseph Smith began his relationship with Freemasonry early in life. His father Joseph Smith Sr. joined the Masons when Joseph Jr. was eleven years old, and Joseph’s brother Hyrum eventually joined their father at the lodge. The young Joseph’s own early religious experiences echoed in remarkable ways those attributed in Masonic legend to Enoch. Ironically, however, the fruit of those experiences—the Book of Mormon—was understood by many, including its special witness Martin Harris, as an “anti-Masonic Bible.”

Despite his anti-Masonic reputation, the prophet pursued at Nauvoo a line of spiritual inquiry that was almost certain to pique his interest in Masonic keys, grips, and tokens: he explored the keys to revelation and the signs by which true messages and messengers from God could be distinguished from false. In his Nauvoo sermons before his Masonic initiation, the prophet addressed this subject no fewer than half a dozen times, offering keys for testing the goodness of a spirit, a principle, or one’s own conduct. Among other keys, he famously explained how to test a spirit by attempting to shake the visitor’s hand, and he identified the dove as a sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Similarly, Joseph’s explanation of Facsimile 2 of the Book of Abraham, published in the Times and Seasons under the same date that Joseph received the first Masonic degree, describes God as having revealed “the grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood” to Adam, Noah, and others, and giving “the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham in the form of a dove.”

Freemasonry claimed to possess signs and keys handed down from the ancient worthies of the biblical age. Franklin D. Richards, a Nauvoo Mason and Joseph Smith intimate, attributed Joseph’s entry into the Masonic brotherhood to this claim:
Joseph, the Prophet, was aware that there were some things about Masonry which had come down from the beginning and he desired to know what they were, hence the lodge. The Masons admitted some keys of knowledge appertaining to Masonry were lost. Joseph enquired of the Lord concerning the matter and He revealed to the Prophet true Masonry, as we have it in our temples.

Joseph apparently accepted at face value the Masonic traditions that traced the roots of the institution to the builders of Solomon’s temple, and from them to the patriarchs Enoch and Adam. Heber C. Kimball, a long-time Freemason, wrote shortly after his own initiation into the Nauvoo endowment ceremony, “Bro Joseph Ses masonry was taken from The priesthood but has become degenerated but menny Things are perfect.”

But signs and keys were not the only elements of Masonry Joseph appropriated and amended in an effort to restore their purity. In proposing in July 1843 to ascend the ladder of priesthood stations—from prophet to priest to king—he both adopted and adapted Masonic structure. These same offices were employed in Royal Arch Masonry, with high priest being the most prestigious, followed by king, and then by scribe/prophet. Joseph reshuffled the preeminence of the offices, placing the king at the highest level, followed by the priest (or high priest), and then the prophet.

As “prophet,” Joseph had presided over the institutional church. As “priest” or “high priest,” he would preside over the Anointed Quorum, the council of men and women who had received the endowment ceremonies. And when later ordained king on 11 April 1844, he would preside over the political kingdom of God and take charge of its directing body, the Council of Fifty.

Although the separation of offices of prophet, priest, and king is biblical in origin, Joseph’s introduction of this order in the context of the “true Masonry”—Nauvoo temple ritual—suggests that Freemasonry was the spark that led him to “study out in his mind” their place in Mormonism.

In addition to its role in the development of priesthood ordinances and offices, Freemasonry almost certainly impacted Joseph’s identification of “the grand fundamental principles” of Mormonism. Masonry was founded upon a few broad concepts, often referred to as “grand tenets” and “grand principles,” and sometimes also by the distinctive phrase “grand fundamental principles.” Of these three tenets, two correspond to the principles Joseph enunciated in his July sermons: “truth” and “brotherly love.” The Masonic principle of “truth” corresponds to what Joseph introduced as the fundamental Mormon imperative “to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.” And Freemasonry’s principle of “brotherly love” corresponds to the Mormon principle of “friendship,” or, as Joseph Smith also called it in his July 1843 sermons, “the principle of love.” Extant accounts of Joseph’s teachings show him applying the term “grand fundamental principle” only to these Masonic principles.

That Joseph would have encountered these principles during his Masonic sojourn is beyond doubt. They were defined as foundations of the Masonic order by the early 1700s and have continued to hold that place of honor to this day.

The 1818 edition of Thomas Smith Webb’s *The Monitor of Freemasonry* describes the third section of the lecture of the first Masonic degree (Entered Apprentice) thus: “Brotherly love, relief and truth, are themes on which we here expatiate.”

Similarly, a detailed account from later in the Nineteenth Century gives the following wording for the catechism for an Entered Apprentice candidate:

WORSHIPFUL MASTER: “Name the grand principles on which the Order is founded.”

CANDIDATE: “Brotherly love, relief and truth.”

Joseph Smith passed through the first three Masonic degrees on 15 and 16 May 1842, and should have then learned the “grand fundamental principles” of this venerable tradition. As in the catechism above, these principles included not only truth and brotherly love, but also “relief,” or assistance to those in need.

At the very time Joseph learned the importance of relief as a principle of Masonry, his wife Emma was independently working to put the principle into practice. The “elect lady” had been working with Sarah Kimball and others to organize a group to sew for the Nauvoo temple workmen and administer aid to those in need, adding yet another to the “thousandfold Relief Societies” Emerson had complained of the year before in his famous essay “Self-Reliance.” The society thus began at the “grassroots” with the women of Nauvoo. But immediately upon his initiation into Freemasonry, Joseph Smith placed the society under the auspices of the church and co-opted it as an institution of the faith.

Joseph Smith first officially convened the new society on 17 March 1842 in the “lodge room” where he had been raised to Master Mason the night before. One of the women at this meeting found in the room, upon an open Bible, a scrap of paper bearing the following prayer: “O Lord! help our widows, and fatherless children! So mote it be. Amen. With the sword, and the word of truth, defend thou them. So mote it be. Amen.” This bears the earmarks of a Masonic prayer to accompany the opening of a lodge. The otherwise obsolete use of “mote” for “might” was and is perpetuated in Masonry and often used to conclude Masonic prayers in the phrase “so mote it be.” And the Masonic ceremony for opening a lodge reminds participants of their duty to protect widows and the fatherless. Finding this Masonic prayer to encapsulate their own purpose in meeting, the sisters of the Relief Society adopted it as a kind of motto, giving it a place of honor as the frontispiece of their society’s record book. The Relief Society and the Masonic lodge converged in their benevolent purposes.

Addressing the Relief Society again two weeks later, Joseph characterized it in Masonic terms, stating that “every candidate” should be examined closely and that “the society should grow up by degrees,” and became “a kingdom of priests,” “moving according to the ancient order of the priesthood.” Why did Joseph act so promptly to make this voluntary society into a semi-autonomous branch or “female lodge” of Mormon
“Masonry”? Two reasons suggest themselves. First, the workmen the society was to assist were—like the Freemasons’ legendary forbears in the days of Solomon—temple builders. And, second, Joseph Smith had adopted, or was contemplating the adoption of, the Masonic “grand fundamental principles” as a blueprint for reforming Mormonism. If, as seems likely, he considered the core of Masonry ancient and divine in origin and regarded its best elements as something to enhance and restore to the Church, then the Relief Society would have suggested itself to his mind as the appropriate “female lodge” of the faith precisely because it was dedicated to relief, a grand fundamental principle belonging to both church and lodge.

As we have seen, the Mormonism of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo “reformation” overlapped with Masonry in significant elements of ritual, hierarchical structure, and foundational principles. It would appear that in Freemasonry, as supplemented and amended by his own revelations, this latter-day Josiah found the “book of the law” upon which he would reform his Israel.

To Joseph Smith, the principles of truth and friendship, likely alongside the principle of relief, comprised a single set. In declaring openness to all truth to be “one of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism,” Joseph Smith implied the existence of a set of such principles. In naming friendship a “grand fundamental principle” as well, he placed it in the set. Joseph further implied the linkage of these principles by speaking of them in conjunction. In the sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of truth, he also expounded that of friendship. And in the sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of friendship, he also expounded that of truth. In his mind, it would appear, they were inextricably bound.

While less certain, it seems reasonable to conclude that Joseph understood relief to belong to this set as well. Had he formulated a complete statement of foundational principles during the Nauvoo reformation, it might have been, “The grand fundamental principles of Mormonism are truth, friendship, and relief.”

To further illuminate the reformation Joseph began, we need to recognize what the principles on which it was based meant to him and what role they played in his life and faith.

THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF TRUTH

“Let it come from whence it may”

The principle of receiving truth, “let it come from whence it may,” is a thread that runs through the establishment of Mormonism. Joseph Smith’s story is one of seeking and drawing into his personal faith and the teaching and practice of the Church from diverse sources—sources ranging from the traditional to the radical. Indeed, the Joseph Smith story effectively begins with Joseph’s flouting the mores of establishment Protestantism by seeking latter-day revelation and setting it on par with the Bible.

This revelation in turn promoted an attitude of openness to further truth. The Book of Mormon enticed its readers with “greater things” just beyond their present spiritual reach (3 Nephi 26:9), tantalized them with a foretaste of other records yet to come forth (Alma 37; Ether 4–5), and promised hidden knowledge through latter-day spiritual gifts (Moroni 10). Their old men would dream dreams; their young men would see visions. With sufficient faith and devotion, they would “speak with the tongue of angels” (2 Nephi 31:13–14), “know the mysteries of God” (Alma 12.9–10), and “reveal things which never had been revealed” (Alma 26.22).

The book taught that God reveals his word to all nations, implicitly inviting the reader to embrace the world’s scriptures (2 Nephi 29). It advocated performing “experiments” to discover moral and spiritual truths (Alma 32). It affirmed the truth and divinity of “every thing which inviteth to do good, and to . . . believe in Christ.” (Moroni 7:16).

The revelatory texts presented by Joseph Smith after the Book of Mormon further encouraged this broad search for truth. The 1832 “Olive Leaf” chartering the School of the Prophets (D&C 88:78–79) established for the Saints a curriculum so extensive that one commentator has compared it to that of a university. Three months later, a revelation to the First Presidency commanded Joseph and his counselors to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15). Joseph carried out this injunction in the School of the Prophets, where he began his study of Hebrew—an effort for which he was repaid with numerous doctrinal insights.

Near the end of his life, Joseph even drew on insights he acquired through studying German. Reading from the Bible in both these languages—the Book of Genesis in the original Hebrew and the New Testament in Martin Luther’s German—afforded him the new perspectives he used in crafting what B. H. Roberts called his life’s “crescendo,” the King Follett discourse.

Openness to truth from all sources was integral to the prophetic career of Joseph Smith from call to crescendo. Anticipating his later identification of truth as a “grand fundamental principle,” Joseph wrote in a March 1839 letter to Isaac Galland:

Mormonism is truth . . . . The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of
men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same. \(^{36}\)

He further expounded this principle in the 23 July 1843 sermon in which he also defined the grand fundamental principle of friendship. Joseph's diary, kept by Willard Richards, offers the following sketchy report of this portion of the sermon: "Presbyterians any truth? Embrace that. Baptist. Methodist &c. Get all the good in the world. Come out a pure Mormon." We might reconstruct his message as follows: "Have the Presbyterians any truth? Embrace that. Have the Baptists, Methodists, and so forth? Embrace that. Get all the good in the world, and you will come out a pure Mormon." The prophet himself proved a "pure Mormon" in the very act of drawing Masonic tenets into Mormonism. \(^{37}\)

Prior to declaring these "grand fundamental principles," Joseph had attempted to define Mormonism in doctrinal terms in D&C 20, the Lectures on Faith, and the Articles of Faith. But each of these inevitably failed to provide a timeless or final definition of the faith's essence. The task of capturing Mormonism in a creedal statement was Sisyphean, because Mormonism was more committed to the principle of forever acquiring truth than to any particular formulation of the truth. It was a circle no static set of doctrines could square.

**THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF FRIENDSHIP**

"All drink into one"

Joseph Smith envisioned a restoration not only of the lost, but of the broken. Not content to reinstitute ancient doctrine, practice, and authority to humankind, he sought to restore humankind itself to wholeness and peace—to mend a world fractured into opposing nations, sects, parties, and cliques. In the Book of Mormon's "Sermon at the Temple," the resurrected Jesus teaches that it is Satan who has divided the human house against itself, desiring to stir "up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29).

In the Sermon on the Mount, the mortal Jesus had preached that standing in right relation to one's fellow beings is a prerequisite to standing in right relation to God. He taught that before one could have his or her sacrifice accepted by God at the altar of his temple, he or she needed to make amends for wrongs inflicted on others: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matthew 5:23–24). Reiterating this in 3 Nephi, the resurrected Jesus broadens and universalizes this instruction by removing it from its Jewish temple context.

Joseph would later similarly teach the women of the Nauvoo Relief Society that "fuller fellowship" among human beings would lead them to fuller fellowship with Deity: "It is by union of feeling," he told them, "that we obtain power with God." \(^{38}\)

Joseph propounded a theology in which salvation is obtained by covenant. \(^{39}\) And the covenants of salvation must be made not only between the human soul and the Divine but also between human souls. At the first baptism recorded in the Book of Mormon, the church founder Alma identifies baptism as the way one witnesses a willingness to keep the commandments of God and also to "bear one another's burdens . . . mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9). And the "everlasting covenant," which is represented in Joseph's revelations as essential to salvation, is described as a covenant not only between God and humans but also between humans and humans—a covenant of friendship. \(^{40}\)

Nothing could be clearer than the revelation commanding the teacher of the School of the Prophets, or Smith as its president, to open its sessions by first "offer[ing] himself in prayer upon his knees before God, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant" and then greeting the arriving students with uplifted hands and the following words of covenant:

"Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant and then greeting the arriving students with uplifted hands and the following words of covenant:

The students were then to return the salute "with this same prayer or covenant, or by saying Amen, in token of the same" (D&C 88:133).

The students were then to return the salute "with this same prayer or covenant, or by saying Amen, in token of the same" (D&C 88:135).

In a 15 April 1842 Times and Seasons editorial that followed this revelation by nearly a decade, and after he had been received as a brother in the Masonic fellowship, Joseph expounded the principle of human brotherhood:

The Mussulman condemns the heathen, the Jew, and the Christian, and the whole world of mankind that reject his Koran, as infidels, and consigns the whole of them to perdition. The Jew believes that the whole world that rejects his faith and are not circumcised, are Gentile dogs, and will be damned. The heathen is equally as tenacious about his principles, and the Christian consigns all to perdition who cannot bow to his creed, and submit to his ipse dixit.

But while one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men, causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. \(^{41}\)

Compare these expansive sentiments to the lecture Joseph had received in the Entered Apprentice degree precisely one month earlier:

"By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to re-
gard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, the rich and poor; who, as children of one Almighty Parent and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other. On this principle, masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

The parallels between these strongly suggest that Joseph was expounding the Masonic principle of brotherly love as he had encountered it in the lodge. Further confirming Masonic influence on his editorial, Joseph calls God the “Great Parent of the universe,” evoking both the “Almighty Parent” from the Entered Apprentice degree and the distinctively Masonic divine appellation “Great Architect of the Universe.”

Joseph Smith further expounded “the principle of love” or “friendship” in the 9 July 1843 sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of truth.

In explaining the principle of friendship, Joseph raised a frequently asked question—“Wherein do you differ from other[s] in your religious views?”—to which he gave an unexpected answer: “In reality & essence we do not differ so far in our religious views but that we could all drink into one principle of love.”

Several years earlier, when his theological understandings were much closer to those of traditional Christians, Joseph had characterized the difference between Latter-day Saints and those of other denominations less ecumenically: “We believe the Bible and they do not.” In the intervening years, Joseph’s theological understandings had moved further from those of traditional Christians, and the pace of this widening had quickened in Nauvoo. Yet, at the very time that many non-LDS Christians saw the gulf between themselves and Joseph Smith broadening most rapidly, he aimed to bridge it.

The assertion that Latter-day Saints and Christians of other denominations “do not differ so far in our religious views” is remarkable in its own right. But how truly magnanimous this declaration is cannot be appreciated without knowing the origin within scripture of the phrase “drink into one.” Outside of the 9 July 1843 sermon, the phrase appears in LDS literature only in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul uses the expression to explain the mystical or metaphorical “body of Christ”:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12–13)

Invoking this passage, Joseph Smith conveyed the radical idea that the Latter-day Saints and those of other traditions jointly comprise the body of Christ.

In his 9 July sermon, Joseph also identified the building of an ecumenical fellowship based on mutual friendship and love—a universal Christian unity—as a positive duty of discipleship. “Christians should cultivate . . . friendship with others & will do it.”

By defining the principle of love (or friendship), on which all denominations can agree, as more fundamental to Mormonism than its particular doctrines or “religious views,” Joseph collapsed the distance between Latter-day Saints and the faithful of other sects. They were not different bodies but distinct parts of one body, all animated by a single spirit, that of love.

Joseph envisioned a Christendom united by faith in God and Jesus Christ and by mutual love, a contemplated unity which might best be understood on the model offered by Freemasonry. Freemasons have long sought cross-denominational unity, without ecclesiastical integration, based on belief in God, brotherhood, and a commitment to truth and to relieving the needs of the poor.

While advocating Christian unity, however, Joseph clearly did not envision the institutional unification of Christendom, the merging of all church structures into one. He continued to maintain Mormonism’s exclusive claims to authority to perform ordinances or sacraments. Sandwiched between his ecumenical 9 July and 23 July sermons, for instance, Joseph dictated and taught a revelatory text declaring that the sacrament of marriage was eternally binding only if performed by the priesthood of Elijah and that Joseph himself was the one man on earth holding the keys of this priesthood.

But Joseph averred that he would not use his authority to press others to follow his beliefs and revelations, nor would he condemn them for failing to do so: “If I esteem mankind to be in error shall I bear them down? No! I will lift them up. & [each] in his own way if I cannot persuade him my way is...
better! . . . I will ask no man to believe as I do.”48

In the 23 July sermon in which he declared friendship a “grand fundamental principle,” Joseph voiced his love for his friends, the Latter-day Saints: “Let me be resurrected with the saints whether to heaven or hell . . . what do we care if the society is good?” In short, “good society” makes a “good place.” People bound together in true friendship create their own heaven.

Joseph placed the virtue of friendship, or love, above other virtues: “[I] don’t care what a [man’s] character is if he’s my friend.—a friend a true friend . . . I will be a friend to him[.] Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism.” While declaring moral perfection “the prettiest thing of all,” Joseph taught and modeled the forbearance of imperfection that ought to exist among friends: “I see no faults in the church . . . . I do not dwell upon your faults [and] you shall not upon mine.”

Employing the common Masonic metaphor of welding, Joseph preached that friendship, if truly taken as a foundational principle, would weld all together “like Bro. Turley [in his] Blacksmith Shop.” It would “revolutionize and civilize the world.”49

**THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIEF**

“To be righteous is to be just and merciful.”

**RIGHTEOUSNESS** IS NOT that which men esteem holiness. That which the world calls righteousness I have not any regard for. To be righteous is to be just and merciful.50 With these words, Joseph shoved aside conventional piety to make space for the righteousness of helping one’s fellow beings.

This emphasis on social righteousness pervades the Book of Mormon. Yet the Book of Mormon is so familiar to many of us that we often overlook this focus as a distinctive aspect of the book. We need to view it with fresh eyes—like those of the distinguished non-LDS historian of American Christianity Nathan O. Hatch. To Hatch, “the single most striking theme in the Book of Mormon is that it is the rich, the proud, and the learned who find themselves in the hands of an angry God.”51

The Book of Mormon describes the punishment and ultimate destruction of two societies as they wax in pride, divide into social classes, and exploit or ignore the poor. The book thus invites privileged latter-day readers to liken the pattern to themselves. Thoughtful readers may ask themselves where they are in this cycle of pride, exploitation, and destruction (cf. Alma 5:55).

Such self-scrutiny is necessary in the Book of Mormon worldview because to turn one’s back on the poor is to invite personal damnation as well as societal destruction. This is nowhere clearer than in the magisterial sermon of King Benjamin. As R. Dennis Potter has observed, “For King Benjamin, the fundamental sin . . . is the failure to take care of the poor.”52 Since for Benjamin, to serve others was to serve God, to neglect others in need was to neglect God, jeopardizing one’s standing before him. In Benjamin’s theology, receiving a remission of sins requires faith and repentance, but “retaining a remission of sins from day to day” requires that one “impart of [one’s] substance to the poor” (Mosiah 4:26).

From this perspective, relief is essential to the spiritual health of religious communities as well as of individuals. In the Book of Mormon, the apostasy of Christendom consists as much in its inversion of relief as in its perversion of truth; it is social and ethical as well as doctrinal. Nephi and Moroni foresee that churches will be “corrupted” and “polluted” because they “love money . . . more than [they] love the poor and the needy” and thus “rob from” the poor by spending sacred resources lavishly on “that which hath no life” (2 Nephi 28:9–15; Mormon 8:32–40).

Joseph’s revelations subsequent to the Book of Mormon perpetuated and intensified this emphasis on relief. An 1831 revelation told the Saints pointedly, “And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple” (D&C 52:40). Here, it is assistance to those in need that separates the true disciples from those who merely profess discipleship.

In an 1834 revelation, willingness to assist the poor also separates the saved from the damned: “Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart...”
comes to include the Gods themselves, who—to borrow the bonds of unity enjoyed by the Gods, their circle of friendship built the strongest bonds of unity and friendship.

Another revelation similarly taught that when the Saints succeeded in establishing a Zion society, their Zion would be literally united with that of Enoch. The latter-day Saints succeeded in establishing a Zion society, their Zion defined by unity and the absence of poverty: "And the church’s early years was the establishment of Zion, a righteous society defined by unity and the absence of poverty: “And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Joseph anticipated that when the Saints succeeded in establishing a Zion society, their Zion would be literally united with that of Enoch. The latter-day Zion established through the law of consecration was to rise from below while that established under the prophet Enoch descended from above (Moses 7:62–63; D&C 84:100). Another revelation similarly taught that when the Saints achieved "the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom," that of consecration, God would “receive her unto myself” (D&C 105:4–5).

The “law of the gospel,” or principle of relief, is, in many ways, a practical extension of the principle of friendship. Where bonds of friendship are strong, people will be motivated to give assistance to others. And relief, taken to its ultimate conclusion, creates equality, the ground on which can be built the strongest bonds of unity and friendship.

In Joseph Smith’s vision, when human beings live in the bonds of unity enjoyed by the Gods, their circle of friendship comes to include the Gods themselves, who—to borrow the words of W. MacNeil Dixon—"stoop to admit these creatures of promise into their divine society."54

AN UNFINISHED REFORMATION

What if Joseph’s “grand fundamental principles” had taken hold as the foundation stones of the faith and the standards for defining the “pure Mormon”? In Joseph Smith’s final and most mature definition, the foundation of Mormonism is not a doctrine or practice, nor a set of doctrines and practices, but a set of principles through the application of which doctrines could be worked out and measured and by which actions could be judged and directed. But Joseph Smith’s reformation of Mormonism on the basis of these principles, and other elements of “true Masonry,” failed to entirely take hold among the early Latter-day Saints. Joseph slowed the pace of this reformation when the Saints balked at recognizing Hyrum as their prophet. Joseph continued to act publicly as prophet and kept secret his 28 September 1843 ordination to the office of high priest, or president of the Anointed Quorum.55

The Saints’ understanding of Joseph’s intent to reform the faith was likely further obscured by his declaring the grand fundamental principles in separate sermons, rather than a single sermon, and by the fact that these sermons, like virtually all of Joseph’s sermons, were not published until after his death. And more than anything, this untimely death, coming less than a year after he had publicly inaugurated his reformation, stopped its progress.

Since Joseph Smith’s assassination, the world in which Latter-day Saints live has changed, and the Church has evolved. His successors in the presidency have collapsed the offices of prophet and priest into a single position and deferred Joseph’s project of establishing a political kingdom of God until the second coming of Christ. Still, the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism he declared have never been revoked.

On no less authority than that of Joseph Smith, these principles provide foundation stones of the faith, as well as standards for defining the “pure Mormon”—for distinguishing between what is and what is not purely, or legitimately, Mormon. When these principles are accorded their proper place, it becomes clear that Mormonism does not need to be “liberalized” from without, on the basis of external standards. In its final formulation by the prophet, Mormonism is inherently liberal in the classical sense of that word—it is generous, open, and expansive. Whether it is so in its embodiment in the world depends on the willingness of individual Latter-day Saints to continue their prophet’s reformation by reforming Mormonism as it exists in their personal faith and lives.

Sweeping declarations aside, Mormonism will encompass all truth no faster than individual Mormons seek out and embrace all truth. Mormonism will “revolutionize and civilize the world” no faster than individual Mormons receive erstwhile enemies and strangers as “friends and brothers” and sisters. Mormonism will provide relief to the needy of the world, and build a heaven on earth, no faster and more effectively than individual Mormons shoulder this responsibility themselves, as did the women of Nauvoo.

How would such a Mormonism look? How would the beliefs, institutions, and lives of Latter-day Saints improve if conformed to the standard of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism—openness to truth no matter what its source, universal friendship, and relief to those in need? The answer, if there is to be one, is in the hands of the living disciples of Joseph Smith’s religious vision.
NOTES

1. In searching the extant reports of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo sermons, I was unable to find any explicit declaration of foundational principles other than those discussed in this essay.


3. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 229. In the interest of clarity, I have largely standardized the spelling and punctuation of quotations from the reports of Joseph Smith’s sermons.

4. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 16 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 232. The complex series of events that led Joseph to announce his resignation as prophet are the subject of a book I’m writing tentatively titled Fortune Fall: Polygamy, Transgression, and the Prophetic Transformation of Joseph Smith.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. While the term “reformation” is not used in the Bible, it was frequently employed by nineteenth-century Christians in referring to the Josian reform. See, for instance, Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible: with a Commentary and Critical Notes, vol. 2 (New York: Phillips and Hunt, n.d. [1830]), 701, commentary on 2 Chronicles 34:2. Clarke remarks, “He [Josiah] never swerved from God and truth; he never omitted what he knew to be his duty to God and his kingdom; he carried on his reformation with a steady hand.” (emphasis added)

10. I am summarizing the account of Josiah’s reign offered in 1 Kings 22–23. According to a variant account in 1 Chronicles 34, the book of the law of the Lord was found in the temple after Josiah began his reformation and served to intensify the reform, rather than initiate it.

11. The version of this revelation published in the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 to the present is heavily edited and has had the reference to “a reformation” removed. The most accessible version of the unpurged text, which contains the term “reformation,” is H. Michael Marquardt, ed., The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 26–31.

12. Parallel phrasing is also found in 1 Chronicles 16:40 and D&C 24:14.


16. See Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 6–7, 58, 60, 64, 66, 74. The process culminating in the establishment of the Nauvoo lodge had been initiated some months earlier, demonstrating that the prophet’s interest in Masonry preceded his initiation.

17. Joseph was initiated into Masonry “in the evening” of 15 March. It is possible that this issue of the Times and Seasons was not readied until after this date, and that the interpretation of the facsimiles was directly influenced by Masonry. Such influence would only serve to confirm that the prophet valued Masonry in substantial measure for its potential to reveal “signs” and “keys.”


20. Joseph Smith’s re-ranking of the “principals” or officers of a Royal Arch lodge actually restored their traditional order in Masonry. In British lodges, the chief among the principals had always been the king. But in the United States, the king was demoted in favor of the high priest, perhaps reflecting anti-monarchical sentiment inspired by the American Revolution. For the traditional ranking of the Royal Arch principals, see Rev F. de P. Castells, Historical Analysis of the Holy Royal Arch Ritual (London: A. Lewis, 1929), 14–18.


22. The term “grand principles” is used quite frequently in early Masonic literature. See, for example, the instances in notes 25 and 27 below. The term “grand fundamental principle” is occasionally used as well. I have located two late eighteenth-century sources that use the phrase in reference to “brotherly love”: William Hutchinson, The Spirit of Masonry in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures, 2nd. ed. (Carlisle, England: J. Billie, 1796); and James Wright, A Recommendation of Brotherly Love, Upon the Principles of Christianity. To Which is Subjoined, An Inquiry into the True Design of the Institution of Masonry... (Edinburgh: printed for J. Dickson, and C. Eliot, and J. Murray, 1786). I have also read a source from the 1780s that applies the term “grand fundamental principles” to the full set of three principles, but I have thus far been unable to locate this source again.

23. Freemasonry also links brotherly love with friendship. The lecture of the
first degree says of brotherly love, “On this grand Principle, Masonry conciliates true Friendship amongst those, who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual Distance.” J. Browne, The Master Key through All the Degrees of a Free-mason’s Lodge (London: n.p., 1768), 28. Although the term “grand principle” has largely fallen out of use in Masonry, a review of Masonic literature shows that the remaining wording of this quotation is still used by Masons today.

24. That Joseph Smith applied the term “grand fundamental principle” only to principles that held that status within Freemasonry was pointed out to me by Clinton Bartholomew, who reviewed and offered helpful suggestions on this essay.

26. These Masonic principles are enumerated in several early eighteenth-century sources I have encountered, including the anonymous work The Ancient Constitutions of the Free and Accepted Masons, Neatly Engraved on Copper Plates, 2nd ed. (London: n.p., 1731), 17. This work refers to “our three Grand Principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.”

27. Thomas Smith Webb, The Freemason’s Monitor; or Illustrations of Masonry: In Two Parts (Salmon, Massachusetts: Cushing and Appleton, 1818), 39.


29. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” text available in the online complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson at http://www.rwe.org/.


31. “In the opening of the Lodge is mention of the widowed and the fatherless, that we may never forget a Mason’s duty to those whose natural protector is no more.” Anonymous, Short Talk Bulletin 12, no. 6 (June 1934).

32. Relief Society Minutes, March 1842–March 1844 (MS 3424), Selected Collections, LDS Church Archives, DVD 19. My thanks to Joe Swick for bringing this Masonic prayer to my attention.

33. Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, 30 March 1842, in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 109, emphasis added.

34. For a differing approach to Joseph Smith’s purposes for the Relief Society, see D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in Maxine Hanke, ed., Women and Authority (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 365–409.


36. Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, in The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, compiled and edited by Dean C. Jesse (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 420–21. It is noteworthy that Joseph Smith had identified openness to all truth as “the first and fundamental” principle of Mormonism before his encounter with Masonry; Learning later that one of Masonry’s “grand fundamental principles” was “truth” may have helped spark his insight that the entire set of Masonic foundational principles belonged to Mormonism as well.

37. It should be noted that Masonic literature speaks of the grand tenet of truth principally in the sense of truthfulness (honesty), but also in the sense in which Joseph Smith understood it—as anything factual or spiritually edifying.

38. Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, 9 June 1842, in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 123.

39. The centrality of covenant in Joseph Smith’s theology is examined at length in Rex Eugene Cooper’s anthropological study Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1970).


41. Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842, 758.

42. Webb, 39.

43. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 229. The meaning of Joseph Smith’s identification of friendship as a “grand fundamental principle” has also been explored by Steven Epperson. Epperson understands “friendship” in this context to refer to close and unique interpersonal relationships and explores the place such sociability had in Joseph Smith’s life. See his “The Grand Fundamental Principle: Joseph Smith and the Virtue of Friendship,” Journal of Mormon History 23, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 77–105.

44. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 7 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 229.

45. Journal of Joseph Smith, entry for 21 January 1836, in Scott H. Faulring, ed., An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 117. “He then asked me wherein we differ from other Christian denomination[s]. I replied that we believe the Bible and they do not.”

46. This interpretation of the allusion is reinforced by context. Joseph’s apparent intent in delivering the sermon containing the allusion was to build ecumenical bridges, as noted by Levi Richards, who called it “a conciliatory address to Strangers & all.” Journal of Levi Richards, entry for 9 July 1843, in Words of Joseph Smith, 231.

47. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7 (dictated 12 July 1843), and Sermon of Joseph Smith, 16 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon), in Words of Joseph Smith, 232.

48. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 229.


50. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 21 May 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 206.


52. “Liberation Theologian in the Book of Mormon” (unpaginated), in the forthcoming volume of the proceedings of the first annual conference of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, to be published by Greg Kofford Books. My thanks to Annie Bryce for bringing this paper to my attention.

53. Compare this to the parable of the unjust servant (Matthew 18:23–35) and the Lords Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13).


55. After the initial alarm created by his designation of Hyrum as prophet, Joseph Smith backtracked and attempted to introduce Hyrum’s new status gradually. Two weeks after publicly retracting his own resignation, Joseph deferred to Hyrum on a matter of revelation for the Church, advocating that the Saints obey Hyrum’s revelation to vote for Joseph Hoge for state representative and stating, “I do not want anyone to tell [that] I am a prophet . . . .” See Sermon of Joseph Smith, 6 August 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 236–37.

56. That insiders knew Joseph Smith had secretly risen from prophet to priest is indicated by Franklin D. Richards’ reference to him as “Joseph the Priest” the day before the organization of the Council of Fifty. Franklin D. Richards, entry for 10 March 1844, “Scriptural Items” notebook, in Ehat and Cook, The Words of Joseph Smith, 344 (emphasis in original).

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**ON SPEAKING A CHILD’S BLESSING IN NOVEMBER**

To give a name, perpetuate a name
To look as if into a mirror’s depth
And see a face and form—though not my own—
Still mine. . . a part of me incipient.

Sugar-maples droop red-fingered leaves to
Earth; magnolias express blood-vibrant
Drops—I give a Blessing-Name to one whose
Breath has bloomed with blood in autumn-time,
Who promises to stay until the Dawn.

To give a name, perpetuate a name,
And breathe upon the coals an infant’s song. . .
Rejuvenate a cooling ember flame.

—MICHAEL R. COLLINGS
“Is it because my dad’s gay?” I’d never even formulated that thought in my own mind, let alone spoken it out loud, but there it was. How did I know that?

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

By Emily Pearson

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. It was the summer of 1983. I was fifteen years old, sitting in a small amphitheater with my family at Aspen Grove Family Camp in Utah, listening to the home evening message of a well-known General Authority: “That’s right, brothers and sisters, I am referring to the mother of all evil, putrid, and vile sins—homosexuality. You know, Satan himself is a homosexual. That is why he so desperately desires the souls of all these young men that have fallen into his grasp.”

I felt sick to my stomach and began trembling with rage. While I had known for several years that my own father was gay, and that his homosexuality had been the cause of my parents’ divorce five years earlier, I had never gotten used to hearing comments about how evil and sinful he was, or that he would be better off at the bottom of the ocean with a millstone around his neck than living life as an openly gay man.

I had been born in Provo, Utah, the oldest of four children to Gerald and Carol Lynn Pearson. Before my birth, my dad had borrowed two thousand dollars to publish a book of my mother’s poetry, and it had sold by the thousands—making my mom a relatively famous figure in Mormondom. I had long been accustomed to crying women accosting her in public and asking me if I knew how lucky I was to have the mother I had. I did know how lucky I was. I still do. My mother has always been a huge presence in my life—her love, her humor, her strength, her talent, her fame. There has been only one person I have ever known that was capable of eclipsing her. My dad. And he did it, every time, in the blink of an eye.

How do I even begin to describe Gerald Pearson? Take all of the attention and adoration that my mom received outside our house, multiply it by thousands, and that was how we all felt about my dad. My mom and my brothers adored my dad, but I . . . I worshiped the water he walked on. My daddy was everything. With the exception of when Mom was being Carol Lynn Pearson, my dad was the center of attention everywhere we went. No matter what the situation was, he entered any room, anywhere, like a comet.

Our family was a normal and happy one. Mornings began with our parents’ voices shouting, “Hugging time!” followed by the sound of feet stampeding into their bedroom. We knew dinner was officially over when the world’s greatest playmate threw his head back, stretched out his arms, yawned, then bolted upright, singing, “Wrestling time!” as he raced from the table.

Dramatic creativity oozed in, around, and out of our house. Family Home Evenings always included dancing, reciting poetry and Shakespeare, sculpting homemade playdough, painting, and performing original, highly experimental piano compositions. And, of course, there were many, many lessons about the gospel, God, and about being honest and Christ-like.

As a little girl, I was devoted to the Church. I loved Heavenly Father with all of my little heart and soul and hungrily digested everything I was taught. I took every talk, every lesson, and every scripture I was read seriously and literally. One Sunday, the lesson was on the signs and events that will lead up to the millennium. “When Jesus returns,” said my teacher (whose white hair had a very distinct bluish hue) in her most cheerful, sing-song voice, “all of the non-members—those are people that don’t belong to our church—will be burned to stubble. That is why it is called ‘the great and dreadful day.’ It will be great for those of us who are righteous and dreadful for those who are not.”

I was horrified. All of my little friends at school who weren’t Mormon were going to catch on fire? I cried and cried while Mom sat with me in the car trying to convince me that it just wasn’t true. But I wouldn’t believe her. It was taught at church—it had to be true. I don’t know why I was willing to believe Sister Bluehair over my mom, but I was.

In 1976, MY parents surprised us with the news that we were moving to California. My dad acted like we’d just won the lottery. His enthusiasm was infectious. Excitedly, we packed up our belongings and said goodbye to our friends.
Dad left early with the moving van while Amtrack transported the rest of us to our new life in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A couple of weeks after we settled into our new house, my dad summoned me into his makeshift office in the garage and we snuggled on one of the large corduroy cushions. “Emmy, you know I love you very much, don’t you? Now that you’re eight, you’re going to be baptized an official member of the Church, and I know what a big deal that is for you.” He cleared his throat. “I am making some different choices about church for myself, and...I’m not going to be able to baptize you. Your Uncle David’s going to do it. Will that be okay, sweetheart?”

My dad wasn’t going to baptize me? No, it wasn’t okay. It wasn’t okay at all. I didn’t understand. I looked at him with confusion, but he didn’t say another word. He just gathered me tighter in his arms and cried as though the world were ending.

From that day on, I became more and more aware that something was changing. My dad had taken a job as a chef for Scott’s Seafood Bar and Grill in San Francisco, so he wasn’t home very much any more. And he looked different. He had always been very good looking but hadn’t seemed to care that much about it before. Suddenly he was getting dressed up and wearing cologne every time he went into the city. My mom, on the other hand, had cut off her long, beautiful, prematurely gray hair, stopped wearing make-up, and looked older and more tired all the time. My dad was coming to life in California, but my mom...wasn’t.

Following the success of her musical play, My Turn on Earth, Mom bought a new house the summer I turned ten. Strangely, no one actually acknowledged the fact that our dad didn’t move to the new house, too. He was made a junior partner at the restaurant and had to close really late every night, so he rented an apartment in San Francisco. He’d only been coming home a couple of days a week anyway, so, weird as it may sound, I was blissfully oblivious to the fact that my dad didn’t live with us anymore.

Later that year, on a cozy December Saturday afternoon, while my little sister Katy was still down for a nap, the boys played a game on the carpet, and I was cuddled in my dad’s lap, Mom walked in with two full plates of chocolate chip cookies.

“Well, kids,” my mom sat on the hearth and took a deep breath, “we have some things we need to talk about. Your dad’s schedule is lightening up at work.”

“Yeah, I’ll be able to come out and spend more time with you. But I’m going to keep my apartment in the city.”

“We’re still a family,” Mom continued, “We’ll always be a family, but there are some changes you need to know about. Your dad and I have decided that we can better support one another, and be happier, as best friends instead of husband and wife.”

“You mean like...a divorce?” The cookie turned to sawdust in my mouth. I couldn’t swallow. My dad held me tighter.

“Yes, Em, like a divorce.”

“But why?” I demanded, “I’ve never even heard you guys fight, not even once!”

And it’s true. I had never heard my parents fight. Divorce only happened to other kids’ parents who yelled and screamed and hit each other, didn’t it? My parents didn’t do any of those things. My parents had always been fine. Hadn’t they?

Eventually the shock began to lessen, but the confusion didn’t. Why were they getting divorced? I needed to know. They wouldn’t give me any satisfactory answers, and it wasn’t fair. At first I thought the world would stop turning without my dad. But he still came out to visit one night a week and most Saturdays. Often he brought new friends with him, and they helped with yard work or stuff that needed to be done around the house. He still cooked gourmet meals for us, and we still had wrestling and tickling time. I had to admit to myself that not really that much had changed, that maybe things were going to be okay after all.
To ensure that we felt like we were still a family, my parents took us on family outings together all over the city—to the Japanese Tea Gardens, Golden Gate Park, Union Square, Fisherman’s Wharf, and Chinatown. One night, we were at the Chinese New Year parade going nuts over the firecrackers, lights, dancing, music, and the colored dragon puppets, when suddenly, right in the middle of the parade, marched a group of men in T-shirts, tight jeans, and very short Caesar haircuts. They were waving rainbow flags.

“We’re here, we’re queer! Get used to it!”
What did that mean?
“We’re here, we’re queer! Get used to it!”
What did queer mean?
“We’re here, we’re queer! Get used to it!”
Who were those men? Suddenly we recognized one of the friends Dad had brought over to our house.
“Dad! There’s your friend! Mom, look! There’s Daddy’s friend!”

But our dad had vanished and was nowhere to be seen. Why did my mom have that look on her face?
“We’re here, we’re queer! Get used to it!”

My eyes burned from the chlorine, the sun felt warm on my wet skin, and my tongue came alive from the sour Jolly Ranchers I’d just popped into my mouth. Nothing’s better than summer vacation. I was twelve years old, and Mimi, a friend of mine since we were babies, was visiting from Utah. We were walking slowly from the corner market back to the swimming pool.

“It just sucks to not know why my parents got divorced, you know? They won’t tell me, and I hate it.”
She was oddly quiet.
“Mimi, do you know why my parents got divorced?”
“No.”

We walked on in silence, kicking gravel out from between our toes. She stopped suddenly and turned to me with tears in her eyes.

“Emily, you’re one of my best friends, and I lied to you. I’m sorry. I do know why your parents got divorced.”

My stomach lurched. I looked at her expectantly, and suddenly I knew. I don’t know how I knew, I just knew. Like I knew that it was summer, or that I had blond hair, or that Mimi’s tongue was green from the candy she was sucking on. It was just there, dropped out of the blue, right in front of my face.

“Is it because my dad’s gay?”
I’d never even formulated that thought in my own mind, let alone spoken it out loud, but there it was.

“Yes.”

My heart pounded. How did I know that? I searched my brain. I’m certain that no one had ever told me. And, I realized with a start, not only did I know then, but somehow I had always known. It was like very old information I’d just forgotten about.

Things began falling into place. My dad was gay. That’s why my parents got divorced. My poor mom. No wonder she was so sad all the time. Well, that explained why he had guy friends with him so often. Wait a minute. That meant they were his . . . boyfriends. Gross. Did he kiss them? Even grosser! I remembered the parade. We’re here, we’re queer . . . Queer must mean gay. Oh! That must be why my mom got so mad whenever I called someone a fag. Oh my gosh, I called my dad a fag while we were wrestling a couple of weeks before. My friends and I said “You big fag!” and “That’s totally gay!” all the time. My friends—what would they think? It wasn’t exactly cool to be gay, even in California. Mimi was still speaking to me, but we’d been friends all of our lives. Would the friends I’d only known for a while freak out? I didn’t want anyone to find out. Ever.

I felt bad that I was ashamed to have a gay father. I mean, he was still my dad. Still my best friend. Most of my friends would probably be okay with it when they found out someday. But what about Heavenly Father? My heart sank.

Heavenly Father must be really, really angry.

Nine times out of ten, the things I was taught at church were good and uplifting, such as when we studied how to be more like our Savior and serve one another. But once in a while, I’d hear a fire and brimstone, Sodom and Gomorrah lesson that reminded me in no uncertain terms that homosexuality was an abomination, that homosexuals were indeed better off dead at the bottom of the ocean, and would, in fact, be burned along with my non-Mormon friends at the last days. I spent hours in tears thinking of how my sinful father would be in a lesser kingdom, separated from me, for eternity.

Trying to juggle my different lives was bizarre. I hung out with my dad and half-naked Castro Street drag queens on Saturday, and with my mom and the correctly clothed, righteous descendants of Mormon pioneers on Sunday. Early morning seminary, baptisms for the dead, and Girls Camp were celebrated right along with Gay Pride parades and festivals. I tried with everything in me to reconcile my two worlds—two worlds that are irreconcilable.

The Mormon Church, which was the same thing as my Heavenly Father, apparently hated my dad. My dad, in turn, hated the Church, and thus my Heavenly Father. I loved both
of my fathers desperately. But I feared doing so would cause either, or both, of them to reject and stop loving me.

I couldn't please, or be loved by, both fathers. It simply wasn't possible. I had to choose. So, of course, I chose my dad. He was immediate, tangible, and bigger and louder to me than anything. Even though it broke me in half, I chose him over everything—God, the Church, my mom. Even myself.

IN MARCH 1984, my parents sat us down and told us that my dad had AIDS. On 19 July of that same year, he died in our home. I was shattered. There was no life for me without my dad, and I fell into a deep depression, begging God every day to let me die, too. I tried to repent. I asked Heavenly Father's forgiveness for not choosing him instead of my dad. I promised that I would never disobey him or put anyone or anything ahead of him again. Righteously determined to do whatever it took to earn back God's love, which I was certain I had lost, I surrendered my life completely back to the Church. Whenever questions arose about something that was taught or said, or something that I didn't agree with, I just focused on my new mantra. "Don't think about it, don't think about it; don't think about it..."

In 1986, my mother's book Goodbye, I Love You (titled after the last words I said to my dad) was published, and once again, we were in the spotlight. At first I was frightened about what others would think and say about my having had a gay dad. And I felt protective of his memory. I didn't want him to be just another "fag who died of AIDS." But my mother handled it beautifully, and we received little to no negative feedback from anyone. Having a book to read about my father—and about my parents when they were meeting, courting, and newly married—was a gift. In many ways, my mom had given me a piece of him back again.

EVEN YEARS LATER, I met Steven Fales. I had been through a series of painfully unhealthy relationships, had just lost the love of my life to cancer, was depressed out of my mind, and more desperate than ever to make sense of things by being obsessively faithful and obedient.

People ask me if I knew that Steven was gay before we got married. I cannot tell you how much I wish I could say no. We had been dating seriously for several months. Besides my having received the necessary spiritual confirmations that he had been dating seriously for several months. Besides my married. I cannot tell you how much I wish I could say no. We were in the spotlight. At first I was frightened about what others would think and say about my having had a gay dad. And I felt protective of his memory. I didn't want him to be just another "fag who died of AIDS." But my mother handled it beautifully, and we received little to no negative feedback from anyone. Having a book to read about my father—and about my parents when they were meeting, courting, and newly married—was a gift. In many ways, my mom had given me a piece of him back again.

I started silently screaming in my head. "Are you freakin' hiding me? Steven is gay? Of course he is! How on earth did I think I could escape having to deal with this again?" All I wanted to do was to run away as fast as I possibly could.

It was pretty much the same story my dad and so many of our friends had told: questions before mission, brief experience after. Then he freaked out, confessed to his bishop, got into therapy, and was now a healed and fervent believer in reparative therapy, which was actually something I had never heard of. He explained to me that male homosexuality was the result of having an overbearing mother and a weak or emotionally absent father, and that once those issues were fully addressed and worked through, the so-called homosexual in question found himself transformed into a full-blown heterosexual.

I listened quietly and felt myself shivering even though the night was still warm. How could I possibly marry him, even if it was what God commanded? I honestly didn't think I could. Steven was very emotional. I just felt cold and tired, and I told him I needed some time.

I was furious with God. I didn't understand why he would require the unthinkable of me. He wanted me to marry a gay man? I wasn't stupid. I knew exactly how it would turn out if we got married. I'd been on Geraldo; I'd been to the Gay Day parades and festivals. They're here, they're queer—I was used to it! Homosexuality couldn't be healed! Or could it?

What if it could be? No. Come on, I knew better than that. I prayed. "Heavenly Father. Do I have to do this?" The answer was instantaneous. "No, you don't have to do this. But if you do, it will heal the deepest, darkest parts of yourself."

I did want that. I had always wanted that. To be healed from life's fractures was something that my soul had yearned for in those same deep dark places that would apparently be healed if I married a gay man. So, if it would ultimately be healing for me to marry Steven, that must mean that homosexuality could be healed. Steven believed that reparative therapy worked. And he believed that with my love, support, and understanding of the complexities of it all, he could absolutely do it. No question.

Maybe God's plan was far bigger than our just getting married. Maybe together we had a "greater-than-us" work to do. Maybe we could marry and actually be successful at it. We could write a book together—a far different book than the one my mother wrote. Our book would show how we conquered successfully what the previous generation had failed miserably to do. Steven and I would be the poster children for reparative therapy.

According to the books on reparative therapy and what we were taught in church, Steven wasn't really gay at all. He was just experiencing some gender confusion and extreme opposition from Satan. And I did believe that with God, all things are possible. It all began to make perfect sense to me. I decided it had been part of The Plan, part of my life's mission, from the very beginning. We were being swept into the middle of something far bigger than either one of us, something beyond our control, and something from which there was no turning back.
On 15 December 1993, Steven and I entered the Salt Lake Temple to be married as husband and wife for time and all eternity. Outwardly I was the beaming and gracious bride. Inwardly, I was melting. As we sat waiting to be led into the sealing room, I excused myself to go to the bathroom several times where all I could do was stare wide-eyed at myself in the mirror. The weight of what Steven and I were undertaking suddenly felt unbearably heavy. It was my job to keep him straight for the rest of our lives. The thought made me want to take a very long nap.

An old college friend of my father's, also dealing with homosexuality, had gone with his fiancée to Salt Lake to speak to a general authority, who looked the fiancée in the eyes and said, "If you are sufficiently feminine, you can save this man." At least I knew better than that. I knew it wasn't a matter of my being woman enough to do it. I knew that our success would have nothing to do with my femininity. It would have everything to do with my faith. Our faith. This was our Abrahamic sacrifice. I wondered if God might send an angel to save us at the last minute, too.

When it was time, we walked hand in hand into the sealing room, which was filled with dozens of our closest family and friends. We requested that the same General Authority who had sealed my parents be the one to seal us—as far as I know, we could have been in the same room, too.

I don't remember a single word that was spoken during the ceremony. But I did finally relax and feel peaceful. Well, more sleepy than peaceful, but it did the trick. As we approached the altar, everyone watched us kneel down across from one another, take hands and smile. Had those there, including myself, the power to see into the future, we would have seen my soul leave my body, float above the altar, and then lie across it like a sacrificial lamb. We both said, "Yes." The knife plunged. It was done. We were married.

Our wedding day was beautiful. My dress was beautiful. The pictures were beautiful. The reception and string quartet were beautiful. The song that Steven surprised me with was beautiful. We left in a horse-drawn carriage that took us to the perfect inn, where we would spend our perfect wedding night. We had everyone, including ourselves, beautifully and perfectly fooled.

With the romance and drama of the wedding over, it was time to be married. Only, neither one of us knew how. I don't know that other couples get the manual containing all the secrets to marital bliss and we just happened to miss out. But I was raised by a single mom, and Steven's parents' marriage was less than exemplary. We were both clueless, had enormous baggage, and, until we were actually in it, didn't believe everyone who had told us how hard marriage was. But it was hard. It was terribly hard.

I thought that I had married a friend, someone to hang out with, laugh, hold hands, cuddle, play, and do life with. Steven thought he had married a successful, beautiful woman who would act, have a career, help open professional doors for him, and, most important, turn him into a raging heterosexual. We both failed each other miserably.

Within a matter of months, Steven and I went from being as in love as we were capable of being, to being friendly, to being cordial, to being sad, to being angry, to being alone and resigned to the pain and disillusionment of it all. We became highly skilled at the passive aggressive dance we allowed our marriage to become. On rare occasions, we fought, but mainly we just let things stew in silence and I did my very best to ignore the elephant in our house whose name we did not speak and whose presence we would not acknowledge.

The only really honest way to describe our six-and-a-half-year marriage is simply to say it was horrible. For both of us. At some point, the elephant began sitting directly on Steven's chest, and it got harder and harder for him to breathe. He needed therapy, and our bishop agreed to pay for it. Steven started phone therapy with Joseph Nicolosi, the guru of reparative therapy himself, the man who wrote "the" book on the subject and founded NARTH—the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Steven decided to be proactive in his pursuit of total and complete heterosexuality, and he desperately wanted me to be there right alongside him fighting the fight. But I just couldn't. Too many years of resentment and anger had created a Grand Canyon-sized emotional gulf between us. I'd been numb when it came to Steven for years. And when it came to the issue of reparative therapy, I instantly shut down every time it was mentioned. I had to believe in it because it was the only hope for our two children to have an intact family and because my faith told me to believe. But I was unable to look too closely at it. I was terrified I would discover that the emperor really wasn't wearing any clothes after all.

When, in the spring of 2000, Steven finally came clean with me about his extensive infidelity, I was dumbfounded. I always thought, in the back of my mind, that if he ever "acted out," it would be a spur-of-the-moment, oops-sorry-honey-I-couldn't-help-it-I-fell-in-love-with-him kind of thing. It had never once entered my mind that he would take the initiative and go out cruising, let alone allow it to get as out of control as it had gotten. I knew the marriage was over, and Steven knew that I knew it. We had attempted the impossible and had failed.

There were times he begged me, "Emily, we have kids. I know I can do this. I know I can!" The problem was that in the same conversation, he had said, "Em, sometimes I think I could really see myself maybe becoming a gay activist." Steven was too terrified to admit it, but that was what he really wanted, and I knew it better than he did.

I was heartbroken for my children and what they would have to go through. I had been adamant for so long that I would never put them through a divorce—that I would die for them. And it's true, I would. But what good is a dead mother? I was finally clear that what both my children and I needed was for me, and their father, to be alive. Steven and I had never figured out how to do that—to be married to each other and be alive at the same time.

So much has happened in the nearly six years since our divorce. Steven moved to New York, and anyone who has seen his one-man show, Confessions of a...
Mormon Boy, knows the course his life has taken. When I saw his show in Utah, on stage for the first time, I felt like I was being dismembered with an ice pick. If I had been a random audience member with no ulcerated, emotionally wounded connection to every single person and event portrayed, I might have appreciated, if not almost enjoyed, the show. But I wasn’t “random audience girl,” and I certainly wasn’t emotionally disconnected.

The next year, and what felt like several lifetimes later, I saw the show again in San Francisco with my mother, who had chosen not to see it before then, and I had a somewhat different reaction. I was no longer bleeding as I had been from the wounds caused by our marriage and divorce. My heart was healing, and I was strengthened by something brand new coursing through my veins. For years, people had told me that I needed to write a book. My desire to have my life remain private had obviously been blown clear out of the water. And just that afternoon, I had read something that changed everything for me.

I had picked up the San Francisco Examiner and read its review of Confessions. Halfway through the article were the words, “As important as his relationship with his wife is to his story—and as much as his desire to respect her privacy may be commendable—it’s disconcerting how completely she disappears from his ‘Confessions’ between courtship and divorce.”

I was floored. That reviewer had, in one sentence, summed up my entire marriage. I had completely disappeared between our courtship and divorce. Just as my mother, and every other straight woman I knew who had married a gay man, had completely disappeared between courtship and divorce. I read the sentence again. And again. I heard my voice reciting the words over and over in my head, louder and louder, until all I could hear was a scream that swallowed me whole. It was primal, and it was insistent: “It is time!”

I went home that evening and could hardly write fast enough. I grabbed an old notebook and began writing a book that, more than three years later, is finally nearing completion. Sometimes I’ve sat at my computer for hours completely unable to make my fingers stop moving. Other times, I’ve had to walk away for months at a time before facing it all again.

Writing my story has been one of the most gut-wrenching, exhilarating, and cathartic experiences of my life. Sitting day after day, month after month, reliving story of my life after story of my life, over and over and over again, has given me a perspective on many things I would never have gained otherwise.

Marrying Steven did heal deep dark places in me. I wish I would have chosen an easier way to deal with the massive unfinished business I had with my dad and to finally learn that my personal strength and happiness aren’t dependent upon another person. With Steven, just as when I was with my dad, I had erased myself. But I chose to do it the hard way. And because of that, I have learned to look to myself first, to listen to myself first. I now know firsthand what happens when I don’t.

And while I no longer believe that every spiritual experience should be taken at face value, or that every word spoken in every priesthood blessing comes directly from God, if Steven and I had never married, we never would have had the children we had—and a world without them is not a place in which I can imagine living. Bottom line: if I hadn’t married Steven, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I wouldn’t be who I am today. And I really like that person. A lot.


We want so badly to put people, including ourselves, in perfectly labeled boxes, but it just doesn’t work that way. There are gay people, and there are straight people. And under the headings of “gay” and “straight” are about a million variations of human beings. Regardless of our sexual orientation, each of us was greatly influenced by family, friends, religion, school, teachers, neighborhoods, cities, states, and individual life experiences. All of these things influenced who we are sexually—our comfort zones, our hang-ups, our appetites, our desires. Everyone has her or his unique recipe that makes them who they are. It’s rooted in biology and branches off in a billion directions from there.

To me, the issue is not what makes someone straight or what makes someone gay. The right question to ask is why people are not accepted for simply being who they are. Saying that someone shouldn’t be gay is like saying grass shouldn’t be...
green. Saying it shouldn’t be so doesn’t change the fact that it is. It’s time to accept that gay is gay and straight is straight, and move on.

Homosexuality cannot be fixed, nor do I believe it should be. The poster children in the reparative therapy movement will swear on their lives that they have been “healed.” It’s easy to swear by something that gives you wealth and notoriety and very difficult to walk away from hero status and lose your livelihood. It still doesn’t mean that anything has changed on a deep and fundamental level.

Steven worked hard at becoming straight. It didn’t work. My father worked hard at becoming straight. It didn’t work. Decades ago, a surprising number of men underwent electric shock therapy at BYU to become straight. It didn’t work. Handfuls of my friends have worked hard at becoming straight. It hasn’t worked. As one man put it, “Reparative therapy doesn’t work. We all know it doesn’t work. We just say that it does to keep everybody off our backs.”

I know a few couples in which the husband is gay who have chosen to stay married and are actually experiencing a successful relationship. In my experience, this seems far easier to accomplish if the man has been “out” and has immersed himself in and become disillusioned with the gay lifestyle. He is free from all the wondering, the mystery, and the “what ifs?” Certainly, once a couple has married, they have every right to make whatever choices they want for their family. If they mutually want to keep their family together by putting both of their sexual selves’ aside and by being faithful and respectful partners, then they should do so. But it is my very strong opinion that no woman should ever have to be married to a gay man. And no gay man should ever have to be married to a woman. I know that some couples, for several reasons, have chosen such a union. But the difference is that they have chosen it for their own reasons. Not for someone else’s. And if they have found real happiness and true personal fulfillment together, they are the rare exception.

I would ask anyone the same question my mother asked her former bishop when he knocked on her door several years ago asking her to sign a petition supporting Proposition 22 against gay marriage, which the Church in California was campaigning for. “If one of these wonderful young men that you so fervently believe can change came knocking on your door wanting to marry your daughter, would you let him?”

My dad had many dreams about changing the perceptions people have of homosexuals. And not just the perceptions that straight people have. He also wanted to dramatically alter the view gay people have of themselves. “Things will be different one day, Em, you’ll see,” he told me over and over. He was right. They are changing. In the early eighties, we never would have seen a show like *Will and Grace* or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. And, even though one can argue over whether these shows break down or reinforce stereotypes, I think they have been phenomenal steps in the right direction. I recently saw *Brokeback Mountain* with my friends Scott and Walter. What a profound experience that was for me to sit in a movie theater in Sandy, Utah, with a gay couple whom I adore, watching a film my father could only have dreamed of seeing.

My wish is that the day will come when homosexuals will grow up free of shame, without once questioning that they have the same option that heterosexuals take for granted now, which is to one day fall in love with the man or woman of their choice and get to build a life of love, passion, dignity, and personal fulfillment together. My wish is that gay children (and children with gay parents) will never again have to grow up hearing Primary, Sunday School, and seminary lessons about how their only hope for salvation is to kill who they are inside, that who they are is an abomination before God and that they’d be better off dead than gay. And my wish is that the day will come when society and religions will stop colluding to create marriages (and families) that are either doomed to fail from the beginning or continue to create enormous, unnecessary pain for everyone involved.

I hope we’ll get there. I believe we can. It is time. For all of us.
THE WALK TO EDUARDO'S SHANTYTOWN REMAINS vivid to me even after almost a quarter century. I couldn't locate it now, either on a map or on the ground—even in the unlikely chance that it or its immediate surroundings might have survived intact. It was out in the countryside a way, past the last structures (concrete block or adobe) of the lower-middle class, in an undeveloped no-man's land between surrounding cityscape. For the truth is that asphalt and concrete would end and begin repeatedly, the city's interior fragmented by pockets of dirt and poverty whose geography I never completely deduced.

This was Rosario, second- or third-largest city in the Argentine Republic, situated roughly to the north of Buenos Aires in the province of Santa Fe, where it hugs the west shore of the mighty Paraná. From consulting the return address on my letters home, I know that I lived in a pensión or boarding house at Arijón 832, but I don't know the exact corner of the city it inhabited. I have also forgotten the names of the other nearby streets and avenues, or by exactly which route I found my way to that borderland between semi-respectability and social non-personhood. But I can still visualize the place. And that encounter with Eduardo, as real as any other, continues to haunt me.

The picture is clear. I am accompanied by my missionary companion, Grant Phelps, a curly-haired nineteen-year-old from Virginia—a blond and blue-eyed descendant of Mormon pioneer and songster William W. Phelps, author of the hymn “Come, Come Ye Saints.” I am a convert to the faith—a brown-haired midwesterner from Indiana.

There we are, Elders Sanders and Phelps, decked out in standard-clean faces, short haircuts, dark pants, white shirts and ties, armed with scriptures and flip charts. The stretch of road we are walking is bordered by open field to our right and closely adjoining houses to our left. Unlike the houses in richer neighborhoods which have protective exterior walls with shards of glass jutting out on top to discourage access, these houses are totally open to the street. As we reach the farthest extreme of this neighborhood, we can see the shantytown as the merest shadow on our horizon.

Where pavement ends, wilderness begins. What road continues from there is no more than a vague thinness worn in the surrounding grass. A straight line of trees like an arboreal arrow points the way. We walk to its right, open field extending in either direction. At trees' end, as if they had been planted with such development in mind, our path intersects with another that goes on briefly in both directions. That path, on its far side, is lined with makeshift homes, constructed willy-nilly from whatever could be scrounged up: mud, straw, scrap metal, plywood, cardboard, any combination of those basic materials and any others.

On the day in question, in February of 1980, Phelps and I encountered Eduardo at the converging of those paths as we were coming and he was going. We had already baptized four people from that neighborhood: a young married couple (parents of an infant girl) and the mother's own parents, a hard-laboring, sinewy man and an immense woman whose swollen ankles and arthritic knees would not permit her to kneel with us in prayer.

Eduardo, like those young parents, was youthful and slender. He was also exuberant, his attitude cheerful and breezy. He responded warmly to our invitation to hear a message from Jesus Christ. He seemed eager to arrange a visit for another day. While my photographs from that period are lost, I remember him well enough to give a vague description. His skin was the color of caramel, his hair black and wavy, partially covering his ears. More precisely, his eyebrows were trimmed (though I didn’t take note of that upon this first meeting); his pants were tight and low, hugging his hips; the top, which did strike me as rather girlish, left a bare midriff; his voice and mannerisms were also notably effeminate. But those externals I quickly put out of mind, noting instead his “golden” personality and spirit.

Not that it would have changed anything had I dwelled on those externals a bit longer—though I did still give credence to
the biblical notion that homosexual activity of any sort is strictly forbidden. Given biblical injunctions against that and other “sins against nature,” I had not yet questioned the widespread assumption that homosexuality is not a biological given but a sociological perversion of the natural order. Had I immediately acknowledged, then, Eduardo’s rather obvious gayness, I could only have thought of it as something of a theological puzzle. Perhaps he had “caught” this misperception of his most divine nature by growing up in a home with only strong women in it, with no male figure to be seen. Or, if it were something that he truly couldn’t change (for whatever reason might exist within the context of this fallen creation), that God would certainly sort things out favorably in the end. Because there could be no doubt of Eduardo’s deeply spiritual nature. It didn’t occur to me that anyone else within Mormondom could possibly miss it.

EDUARDO’S BAPTISM WAS scheduled for the first Sunday in March, the second of the month. After the regular hours of worship and Sunday School, our moods remained buoyant, oblivious to any slights that might have been received. Had I noticed any, I might have attributed them to the typical reluctance of some Church members to embrace these down-and-outs from the slums, a reluctance that might be worn down with the passage of time and the new members’ continued demonstrations of true devotion. Anyway, there we were: seventeen-year-old Eduardo, eleven-year-old Moisés (the week’s other proselyte), and I in the rest room, adjacent to the baptismal font, changing into simple whites for that ceremony of immersion and re-birth. I might have been remembering my own baptism, as a boy of not quite fifteen; that conversion which had propelled me on this missionary journey to the southernmost margins of the American continents.

As I said, I imagined that Eduardo’s spiritual presence would be evident to anyone who looked—and, hard as it may be to believe, it had not fully registered with me that he was gay. Even had I been sure that he was, I don’t know that I could have foreseen the irruption of furious prejudice that was about to assault him. Nothing that had happened to me since arriving in this mission field fifteen months earlier had prepared me for it.

There the three of us were when the rest room door slammed open and closed again with a single violent shudder. The intruder’s shout was almost simultaneous. He left no time for us to collect our wits. What did Phelps and I think we were doing? he demanded, accusing us of inviting garbage into the Church—cualquier basura, “any old trash”—the only phrase from his tirade that I remember exactly. He then confronted Eduardo directly, asking him if he was homosexual, to which Eduardo answered matter-of-factly that he was. The intruder then demanded that Eduardo be re-interviewed, that he would not have the Church “polluted by all the stray dogs and freaks and perverts”—a phrase I have his fictional counterpart exclaim in an unpublished novella.

In that version of the tale, written a full twenty years closer to the event than this remembrance, I have him grab Eduardo by the shirt, push him up against the wall, shout in his face. This far removed from the event, I can no longer tell whether the scene occurred that way or has been embellished, but my account in that telling captures the outrage I felt over the confrontation. In fact, that incident remains branded so vividly in my memory that I consider it the single point from which I began to disbelieve my faith’s insistent denial of a biological role in same-sex orientation.

At the moment, I was just stunned. I had no chance to soothe Eduardo’s offended dignity before he was hauled out of there in his baptismal whites and submitted to a second screening interview by a neutral elder: a zone leader. He was still found worthy, and I still baptized him, but the joy of the occasion was shattered. His expression was somber, and he did not want to talk. I left him that evening with a promise to visit the next day. It would be evidence of an almost gargantuan—even biblical—faith were he to ever return for another service.

THE MAN WHO had presumed to disrupt Eduardo’s baptism was a member of the ward Eduardo would attend and also of the presidency of the local stake. Neither he nor his companions in that presidency approved of the missionaries’ tendency to recruit new members where they could, including, and in fact more numerous, from among less fortunate social elements, who did not come ready-made to assume leadership responsibilities. As I wrote in a journal entry shortly after the incident, “I think they want us to baptize, first, all the middle class or rich people who will make sure-fire leaders in twenty days, or money back.” In fairness, it should be admitted that this influx of the needy can strain the orderly operation of churches, just as widespread poverty strains the resources of Third World countries. Even so, it seemed to me then, as it still does now, that the primary mission of both religious and political leadership is to raise up and improve the lives of those people. That leaders shy away from that obligation does not relieve them of it. In any case, this dis-
ruption of a homosexual boy's baptism was only the most egregious, but by no means the first, confrontation between this stake and the Mision Argentina Rosario under the leadership of then-president, and later General Authority, Angel Abrea.

When Phelps and I visited Eduardo on the morning after, he was in low spirits. We found him in the company of his neighbors, Moisés and the four who had been baptized earlier. The mean-spiritedness of the incident had also upset them. They couldn't fathom a spiritual leader treating another human being so spitefully for any reason at all, let alone for a condition of nature that he could not change. In any case, while Phelps remained out front with the others, I retreated with Eduardo to a more private space for talking.

I don't remember our conversation exactly, but I do know that I apologized to him for the hateful episode, for the crude imperfections of those who presume to be holy. I must have assured him of his value as a child of God; perhaps I even recited some appropriate verses from our scriptures. I do know that I was comforted by his assertion that he had always been taught that his sexuality could never be acted upon, that he was already firm in his determination to live a life of celibacy. I was also comforted by his forgiving spirit that allowed him to consider coming back to church. An effect of the Holy Ghost, perhaps, the gift of which Phelps had bestowed on him, by a laying on of hands, after that baptism.

And he did come back. The blows of the first week were countered in particular by the kindness of a counselor in the local bishopric, who, before the next Sunday, had already sent us to Eduardo with a supply of shirts that would be more presentable for him to wear to church. Brother Rodríguez became Eduardo's champion and guide through the maze of personalities and observances that would confront him there. In my journal entry of 31 March—before then, I could not bring myself to write about the incident—I noted Brother Rodríguez's comment to me that “the one who really has potential is that Eduardo, if he keeps coming.” And Eduardo did keep coming, as long as I was there, so long, I wrote, as he could get together the bus fare.

Eduardo's other champion was President Abrea, who as far as I know never met Eduardo in person. While the local stake presidency seemed to resent our liberal reading of the biblical injunction to take the gospel “to every creature,” Abrea vigorously sustained our efforts to preach among any people who would hear us. Among my clearest memories of him is an address he gave at a stake conference. There were no flourishes of speech or self-congratulatory posturings. But I thought I heard more than a hint of impatience in his voice as he answered the condescension of those who preferred a more restricted proclamation of the gospel. His series of barbed questions all centering along the basic theme of “Who are we to determine of whom the Lord might choose to make leaders?” was delivered, with appropriate scriptural allusions, in little more than the space of time that it took Lincoln to deliver his Gettysburg Address.

I have never known what President Abrea's thoughts were about the political crisis of his country at the time (homosexuals and other “deviants” were among those targeted by the military dictatorship), or about the largely acquiescent business community he came out of, but I had no question about where he stood with respect to the downtrodden. And in this case, I discovered, he made no distinction between a poor homosexual and a poor heterosexual. His response to the stake presidency after the baptismal incident was swift and firm. The counselor who had assaulted our proselyte was subsequently meek to Phelps and me, even admitting to us that he had misjudged Eduardo's character.

I DON'T RECALL exactly when I became convinced that, despite my church's many other virtues, its position on homosexuality is seriously flawed—that it is based on faulty science and on an overreading of certain passages of scripture. I cannot say when the realization was complete, but I am sure that the questions began to assert themselves on that evening of 2 March 1980, when an act of spiritual violence was perpetrated on the soul of one homosexual boy who had given no offense to anyone other than the unconscious ones of being poor and a homosexual.
I would love to stand up in testimony meeting in my ward. I guess, technically, it’s not my ward, though. I was excommunicated in 1986, at my own request. When I made that request, I was humiliated, defeated, and angry. I had almost not survived the summer. I let go of my suicide plans after God spoke to me, reminding me that he knew me from “my inward parts” (Psalm 139, RSV), and that he accepted me and loved me. But my relationship with the Church was fatally wounded. I felt betrayed and abandoned by my LDS leaders. It occurred to me that my almost-suicide would have been what the Church wanted me as a gay man to do all along: just die, disappear, go away. Stop being a problem.

Latter-day Saints are the salt of the earth. They are some of the kindest, most loving, caring, self-sacrificing people in the world. I have warm memories from my teenage years of priesthood service projects where all the men in the ward got together to paint a struggling member’s house or worked side by side at the nearby, Church-owned welfare farm. Growing up out east, where church buildings could be quite a distance from home, I received countless rides to seminary, youth activities, and other meetings from members who never thought twice about it, and never even expected thanks. I remember heartfelt priesthood blessings. I remember tasty, warm Relief Society meals prepared for us kids whenever mom was sick. I remember visits to members incarcerated at Attica (I grew up on the outskirts of Rochester, New York) and my dad advocating with the criminal justice system for a member of the ward. If you were really in need, there was nothing a Church member wouldn’t do to help you.

The Mormon brand of love is concrete; it manifests in ways you can see and feel and taste. I’ve never experienced that kind of community in other Christian churches. Non-Mormons are offended by the Church’s missionary program, but they don’t understand. When the Mormons come a-knocking at your door, it’s because they really, truly do care about you.

So how is it that a church so good at loving has so utterly failed its gay and lesbian own? How is it that so many of us are excommunicated, exiled, and silenced? How is it that so many of us have not survived?

Part of the problem, of course, is that there is just no place in the Mormon worldview for gay people. We don’t make the least bit of sense in the grand plan of salvation as it was tidily laid out for us on felt boards, missionary flip charts, or those cheesy 8mm movies we used to love to watch about God’s plan of happiness. It seems inconceivable that God could allow so many of his children, roughly one in ten (if you believe Kinsey), to be born into this life incapable of fitting happily into the divine institution of eternal marriage. If we are gay, it must be our fault. It must be because we masturbated too much, according to the badly mistitled Miracle of Forgiveness. (I’ve yet to meet a soul who wasn’t plunged into a deep depression by that book.) Or because our fathers were too distant. (I was very close to my father, who was just as loving and as actively involved in my upbringing as my mother was.) Or because we’re just plain rebellious, sinful, and hateful. Perhaps we are some of Satan’s minions who somehow sneaked through the veil.

Of course I grew up being taught the same things about sexual immorality that everyone was: that it is the worst sin one can possibly commit after the denial of the Holy Spirit and murder, and that devout Latter-day Saint parents should prefer to see their son or daughter come home in a casket than de-filed by it. But I was made well aware by priesthood leaders that while all sexual sin was bad, homosexuality was clearly ranked as the worst of the sexual sins. The typical rhetoric was consistent with the language used in President Kimball’s Miracle of Forgiveness, where homosexuality was referred to as “an ugly sin,” “repugnant,” “unnatural,” “abominable,” and “hostile to God’s purpose.”1 If you were heterosexual growing up to this rhetoric, at least you grew up assured that somewhere, somewhere, over the rainbow some day, you had the possibility of a fulfilling sexual relationship that enjoyed the Church’s blessing. But there was no such possibility or promise if you were homosexual.

Elder Boyd K. Packer’s talk in the general priesthood
meeting of October 1976, in which he con-
donned physical violence against homosexu-
als, had a huge impact on me. Thirteen at the
time, I came away from that talk believing
that almost any punishment against homo-
sexuals was justified. And to the morti-
tification of my teacher and fellow class-
mates, I said so in my liberal, eastern high
school health class. I understand that at
least through the year 2000, Elder Packer’s
talk was still being distributed by the
Church in pamphlet form, and indeed still
may be.2

But such pronouncements merely add
insult to injury when the believing Latter-
day Saint who also happens to be lesbian or
gay accepts the teaching that salvation is
possible only through marriage. To take this
teaching at face value means we must either
force ourselves into empty marriages of
heartbreak and frustration, or we must
abandon hope of salvation. Or in order to
hold on to hope, we are driven to reject a
church, and a belief system, and ultimately
a God who could be so cruel and unjust as
to require hetero-sex and hetero-marriage of
us in this life in order to be saved, and then
equip us so ill for either.

We who are gay and Mormon have spent
so many pain-filled hours, days, weeks, and
years asking the same questions Church
members ask about us. We share your con-
fusion, but obviously at a deeply personal level. Why do I have
these feelings? Why won’t they go away no matter how much I pray,
fast, study the scriptures, or go to the temple? Why don’t they sub-
side even after I served an honorable mission, giving some of my
prime years to serve others? Some of us even marry against our
inclinations, trusting that this sacrifice will finally be our
Abrahamic moment. Each of us pleads, pleads, pleads with
God to be healed.

My failure to change no matter how hard I tried contributed
to my sense that not only the Church but also God had aban-
donned me. It was that, more than anything else, that prodded
me toward suicide. If I had just one request to make of my het-
erosexual brothers and sisters, it would be simply that they ac-
knowledge, in a spirit of true love, the reality of this dilemma
and undertake the journey to try to understand what it means,
just as we gay Latter-day Saints have. Hear us. Hear our testi-
omies. If we are your brothers and sisters, why would you
leave us to walk this road alone?

In August 1986, in order to survive, I became an exile.

Until that moment, the Church had been my whole exis-
tence. It had been my lifelong refuge of love and meaning,
my safe harbor. And suddenly I stood on the pier, contem-
plating the world outside of its embrace, considering casting
myself adrift on the vast ocean of faithles-
ness. Of course there were other harbors of faith out there, but at the time, I didn’t
know that, and leaving the Church was one
of the most frightening decisions I have ever
made.

And yet, deep in my heart, where I had
been taught since childhood to hear it, the
still, small voice of God whispered: “Go with
my blessing. I am with you now, and I will be
with you always. I have a work for you—and
while you are accomplishing it, I will take
care of your family, and I will take care of you. So go
without fear.” So I went.

So here is the first part of my testimony.
From childhood, I was blessed to have been
taught how to hear and follow the Spirit. It has
been the one guiding beacon in my life no
matter where I have gone, no matter in
what community of faith (or in no commu-
nity of faith) I have been since. I never
would have dreamed, even for a moment,
that that still, small voice could prompt me
to leave the Church. It was a terrible,
Abrahamic leap of faith—following the
voice of God in doing what I never believed
God could command me to do. At the time,
my parents told me I must be confused. It
must be the voice of Satan. But now, more
than ever, I am convinced the Spirit was
leading me. And now the same voice has
led me back.

Why would God lead me to leave the Church and then,
twenty years later, lead me back again? I don’t know, though I
have some suspicions. Because members of the Church were
harming me without knowing it; because their ignorance and
prejudice had so badly wounded me and undermined me spir-
itually that suicide had come to seem the only option for me.
God needed me to get away from all of that in order to survive.
There were people whose lives I needed to touch and be a part
of that I could not have if I had remained forever within the
cozy confines of the Mormon community. One of those people
is the man who has become my partner, my lover, my home,
my soulmate, and my life companion. Perhaps I have been led
to come back because I am like an olive branch that God has
cut from the tree of Israel and grafted into the wild tree so that
I might be strengthened in preparation for that day when God
will graft me back into the tree of Israel to bless it through the
life and vitality I gained from the wild roots. So that some
day we might all be one.

I have a renewed testimony of the restored gospel. I have
come to realize that I am, after all, a Mormon by conviction, if
no longer technically by membership. I have heard the unmis-
takable voice of the Holy Spirit calling me back to the Church.
But why here? Why now?

Why not? We Mormons believe that God works not beyond

Why would God lead me to leave the Church, and then twenty years later lead me back again?
but within history. There is a reason Joseph Smith was called when and where he was. There was a reason the Lord sent the Saints to Missouri and commanded them to build a temple there, even when, in spite of their best efforts, they were unable to fulfill that commandment then. We Latter-day Saints understand the concept of the fullness of time—that the work of God unfolds slowly but surely, sometimes with setbacks and apostasies, and always requiring pain, sacrifice, and commitment. Life in this world is imperfect, and our knowledge is incomplete, but we are committed to learn, to build the kingdom line upon line, precept upon precept. That means we have many things yet to learn.

The plan we agreed to in the council of heaven committed us to learn the lessons we need to learn under a veil of darkness and forgetfulness. Walking by faith means we don’t see clearly, we don’t understand everything right now. It seems that the probation required in order for us to become like our Heavenly Father and Mother demands that we frequently learn to feel our way through the moral dilemmas and challenges we face without clear and absolute answers to every question. In a sense, it demands that we develop a kind of cosmic ethical maturity, that we learn to act rightly without the clarity of God’s immediate presence and guidance. It is eternal life and the knowledge of good and evil combined that will make us “as gods.”

God helps us along as we are ready to take each step. But God does not always move us all at the same pace. The angel appeared to Cornelius the Gentile and commanded him to send a messenger to Peter’s house before Peter received the vision in which God commanded him to partake of the unclean animals (Acts 10). We who are lesbian or gay, who feel the Spirit tugging at our heart, calling us into a fuller fellowship with the Church—perhaps we are today’s Corneliiuses. Many in the Church may not yet be ready for us. Even the prophet may not yet be ready for us. All the same, the angel commands us to set out on the path, to walk toward Peter’s house. Perhaps the canvas has not yet descended from heaven nor the voice of God been heard saying, “What God hath cleansed, do not thou call common.” I believe the vision can come only if we gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints obey the commandment to start walking. I believe it will come, just before we knock. God will cleanse us and prepare us for the work if we believe now, take heart, sacrifice, and obey the Spirit, even before the Church is ready to embrace us.

We gay folks have not yet had our council of Jerusalem. We have not yet had our 1978 priesthood revelation. There has not yet been a single defining moment when the Church has acknowledged us as fully deserving of inclusion in the same sense as every other child of God. In the eyes of the Church, we are still unclean, outsiders, worse than Gentiles. It does not matter. If we know anything from the history of salvation, we know that God rewards faithfulness, even, or especially, among those who have not yet received the promise. It was Abraham’s faithfulness that compelled God to bless him and make him a father of nations. Jacob had to wrestle with an angel to receive his gift. If we are faithful, if we take the risk and walk even in darkness, we too will receive the gift. Those who cannot or do not wish to understand cannot detract from that.

What does it mean to be gay and Mormon and faithful? In the mental world of most Latter-day Saints, those things are mutually exclusive. Since the Church refuses to offer us concrete guidance that makes sense, and since we are generally cut off from participating in Church ordinances, gay Latter-day Saints, more than most, will need to discern and be attentive to the whisperings of the Spirit. But at the very least, I strongly believe that being a faithful gay Latter-day Saint includes honoring and being faithful to our same-sex partners in the same way we expect honor and faithfulness between opposite-sex spouses. We must live with integrity and courage, serve others, and seek reconciliation within the Church and in the larger world community.
As I have sought to do this, I have been surprised by unexpected revelations. I have cried tears of sorrow for my sins: for words spoken or written in anger; for things said and done that have alienated and estranged; for hurts I've caused my parents; for harsh words spoken to my brother; for the times I have failed to honor and love my partner as he deserves; and for holding a twenty-year grudge against God and against the Church. If these were not sins, then I have no way of explaining why, to the extent I have acknowledged them and sought forgiveness, my sense of peace and freedom has increased and my burdens have lightened. I have a renewed testimony of the wisdom in the Word of Wisdom. I have found joy in praying for Church leaders and the missionaries. I have begun to share my joy and my testimony of the gospel with others again.

After I started reading the Book of Mormon again, after I began praying daily again, after I began attending meetings in my local ward, after I had begun to rediscover Mormon piety through SUNSTONE and reconciliations with parents, family and old friends, I had a dream.

In this dream, there was a great homecoming of angels, of which I was one. We were flying back to heaven from earth; millions of angels, the air was thick with us. I was particularly eager to return, so I flew up faster than the rest, though other angels seemed not so happy to see me and were elbowing me and shoving me away. In heaven, I was greeted by Michael, the archangel, with a passionate kiss. It was then I realized I was married to him. I had been exiled for some transgression. While in exile, I had performed low, thankless missions prohibited to members of the heavenly host. But now, I was restored to my old place with Michael. One angel, an elderly, white-haired sister, told me that when she saw how passionately Michael and I embraced upon my return, she realized that, though many angels resented me, this was where I belonged.

I awoke from this dream with a vivid sense that there is a place in the eternities for those of us who love men, and women who love women. Being married to Michael in my dream could have represented the possibility that there is a divinely ordained role for us and our relationships that hasn't yet been revealed but is valuable. In my dream, it became clear to me that the transgression for which I had been exiled was not being gay. It was my anger at the Church and my alienation from it. Yet even in my exile, God had had something important for me to do. My transgression had been a necessary one. My anger had served a purpose. My calling in life did not take me down the path followed by most other angels. Yet it was an indispensable calling. In the end, my suffering had allowed pieces of God's plan to be realized that could be realized in no other way. My pain made my reconciliation sweeter and my glory greater.

This dream crystallized my sense of the role I feel called to with regard to the Church. My deepening sense of the immovability of God's love for me has allowed me to let go of any expectations in relation to the Church. I attend sacrament meeting and Sunday School, I sing the hymns, and I pray. I cry during testimony meeting. Sometimes I am so moved by the hymns, I cannot sing. I focus on listening, rather than talking. I don't take the sacrament; I don't want to cause any scandals. I remember that if I do not have the priesthood, I still have a priesthood. My priesthood is the priesthood of all believers, the same priesthood I share with my LDS sisters, the one that calls us to service, that calls us to pray for healing, that calls us to live humbly and simply, that calls us to speak words of hope and reconciliation every chance God grants us. I try to magnify that priesthood, trusting that if I do, someday I will enjoy greater priesthoods. I find that by listening and being open, I am learning important things about love, peace, and forgiveness—and learning what my brothers and sisters have to teach me. I love being gathered with the Saints. I hunger to go back every Sunday.

Because so many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Saints and their families and loved ones are struggling without hope, it is important to point out that everything we know about the plan of salvation has come to Latter-day Saints in flashes. And it has always come in response to specific questions the Saints have brought to God. When Joseph and Sidney Rigdon received the vision of the glories, they had been inquiring about the seeming injustice of applying the same reward to all who are saved and the same punishment to all who are damned. In response, they received a vision of heaven in which they saw as many glories as there are souls worthy of receiving glory. But the flashes of revelation that have inspired us and given us hope and insight into the eternities are by no means a detailed map of the celestial kingdom. When the map we have fades off into darkness, wouldn't it be wise to admit that we just don't know, and that until we do, we should let compassion guide us?

So far, hasn't every revelation the Latter-day Saints have received about the plan of salvation opened visions of God and an eternity that is based on compassion and fairness? Those who died without a chance to be baptized won't be damned for an ordinance they never had a chance to receive. God does not punish us for the accidents, vicissitudes, and messiness of a mortal existence that is broken by sins of others. Given this history, is it any more logical to think that gay people will be damned for not being able to love members of the opposite sex with the same kind of passion with which we love members of the same sex? What kind of God would make us this way or with the same kind of passion with which we love members of the same sex? What kind of God would make us this way or allow that we be made this way, and then damn us for it? Not the God who has revealed himself to us! Not the God worshiped by the Latter-day Saints!

I do not know what it means in the scheme of eternity that I as a man, with every fiber of my being, love a man. Is that a biological fluke? An accident of birth that will be corrected in the next life? When I wake up in eternity, will I suddenly be drawn to women in the way that in this mortal body I am drawn to men? If so, what will happen to the intense love, the gritty commitment, and the soul passion I share right now with my partner of thirteen, going-on fourteen, years? Will the lessons we have learned together be wasted? Will the path we
have begun together suddenly end? Everything I know about the world to come says no. If Joseph taught us one thing, it is that our soul commitments do not disappear at death. And this is not a bad thing. The love I feel for my partner tastes every bit as much of eternity as the love my heterosexual parents who were sealed in the temple appear to feel for each other. And I feel in the root of my soul that, as with Abraham, God will make my faith and the love and commitment my partner and I offer each other a blessing to the nations.

Can Latter-day Saints rule out the possibility that the one in ten of us who love members of the same sex are this way because it is an important and eternal part of who we are? Can we categorically deny that there is not a place of glory in the celestial kingdom reserved for men who love men and women who love women that is every bit as wonderful as the places of glory reserved there for heterosexuals? In the scheme of eternity, might not same-sex families have a role to play in weaving together all our families and the Kingdom of God that is every bit as important as the role heterosexuals play by manufacturing physical bodies for spirit children in this life? Can we be sure that we will be "without increase" in the next life just because we are incapable of creating posterity in this life? Do we have the knowledge of God's mind to claim we know the ultimate answers in relation to these matters?

In the meantime, emboldened by the suffering of so many gay Latter-day Saints and their families, I dare to plead that we ponder the words of Christ as recorded in Matthew 19:12—that we ask what he meant when he said, "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

And what about these words of Isaiah 56?

Every revelation the Latter-day Saints have received so far has opened visions of God and an eternity that is based on compassion and fairness. Do they not hold out hope to those of us for whom marriage and having children is impossible, that we too will receive "a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters"? Until we all have received the light we need on this subject, I choose, like Jacob's wrestling the angel, to demand the blessing described by Isaiah. I choose to live in anticipation of the fulfillment of that promise by keeping God's sabbaths and taking hold of the covenant.

COMING OUT TO my parents was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. I knew they would be devastated. When I was still contemplating and praying about how to break the news to them, I had two dreams. In the first, I was sitting in the living room of the Massachusetts home my parents were living in at the time and talking with my father. I told him I was gay. Without saying a word, he got up and went into the kitchen. When he returned, he had a large kitchen knife, and he chased me out of the house, threatening to kill me.

In the second dream, I was speaking with my mother, and the house was somewhere else. The walls were white, the floor was white, the furniture was white, everything was white except for a bright, blood-red rose in a crystal vase on the end table between me and my mother. From the beautiful white light streaming in through the windows, I realized that we were in the celestial kingdom. I told my mother, "You know, I am gay." She said, "Yes, I know. I have always known." Tears came to my eyes, and I said, "Mother, if you knew, why did you never say anything to me about it?" "I would have," she said, "But I didn't know how to bring it up without embarrassing you." I awoke with tears of gratitude in my eyes.

Those two dreams perfectly symbolized my fears and my hopes in coming out to my parents, to the Church, and to God. I've always wondered about the red rose in the second dream; perhaps it symbolized the inevitable pain, even in the most loving, coming-out scenario.

Unfortunately, I only too well understood the meaning of the first dream. I very nearly didn't survive. Too many gay Mormons haven't. A long period of alienation ensued from my coming out. Then, as my family came to understand my first dream. I very nearly didn't survive. Too many gay Mormons haven't. A long period of alienation ensued from my coming out. Then, as my family came to understand my dreams; perhaps it symbolized the inevitable pain, even in the most loving, coming-out scenario.

Unfortunately, I only too well understood the meaning of the first dream. I very nearly didn't survive. Too many gay Mormons haven't. A long period of alienation ensued from my coming out. Then, as my family came to understand my journey better, it was they who began to experience pain inflicted by thoughtless words spoken from the pulpit or after church, and by the knowledge that given current Church poli-
cies and the state of misunderstanding about the nature of homosexuality, their son and brother might never be reconciled to the church to which they have given their lives.

I S THERE A place in the Church, and in families governed by gospel principles, for gay people? I guess it all depends how we as a people bound in covenant to God understand gospel principles. Are we governed by love or by legalism? Which of these we choose first determines how the other fits after it. I have come to believe this lesson is a reason for the passion and pain of gay people in the Church. I believe it is God’s way of helping us all—gay and straight—to learn the importance of love over law, not just in this life but in all the eternities.

I have met with my bishop, and he made it clear to me that I could not be re-baptized without a “dramatic lifestyle change” (his words). But he also made it clear to me that he loves me, that he welcomes me to attend and to participate, that he will pray for and with me, and that he is with me in my journey. He’s an old-fashioned kind of guy, a bit on the conservative side—not the kind, if you judged him by his exterior, you would expect to understand someone like me. But I love my bishop. I believe he is my friend. I have found other unexpected friends in the ward as well.

This is not an easy place to be, to be denied the status, the priesthood and temple blessings, the roles and callings I once had in the Church. If I felt sorry for myself or held onto some burden of expectations about how the Church ought to change, I could not stand here. If I did not know who I am—a child of God, had I not come to embrace the fearful and wonderful way in which God has made me, a gay man; if I did not have a powerful sense of the mystery and fundamental goodness of the love I share with my partner; if I did not have a palpable sense of the daily presence of the Spirit and an abiding witness of God’s deep love for me and promises to me, I could not stand here. But what I can say is that I am only in the first steps of a journey of many miles, and the blessings I have received are already worth a lifetime.

I wish I could bear my testimony in my home ward. It is painful to be “in the ward but not of it.” Those reading this who have hearts to understand, please pray for us. We are part of your family. We cannot be saved without you, neither you without us.

NOTES


I am gathering true stories to assist me in writing a new book that will appear late this year. The title is No More Goodbyes—Embracing our Gay Family and Friends in spite of and because of Our Religions. My one goal is to assist in healing relationships. I will deal with the tragic and unnecessary goodbyes that arise from

• Family alienation
• Ill-fated marriages based on unrealistic expectations of change
• Suicide

I am looking for true experiences from gay people, parents, siblings, wives/former wives, friends, that involve religion either as a part of the problem or a part of the solution (or both) in terms of the above subjects. To establish the pain of the unnecessary goodbyes, I require stories that show our failures, but I especially want stories that show our successes—families and friends refusing to allow anything, including religion, to come between them and their gay loved ones.

Please email your story to CLP@CLPEARSON.COM. Each email will be acknowledged. Neither your name nor your family’s name will be used without your permission. Due to my deadlines, these accounts need to be received soon, by 15 JULY 2006 at the latest.

SINCERELY,

CAROL LYNN PEARSON

To comment on this article or read comments by others, please visit the Sunstone blog: www.SunstoneBlog.com.
During the 1960s, on the reserve two miles from my hometown in Alberta, members of the Blood Tribe painted their homes peacock blue, sunflower yellow, rose red, and shocking pink. Back then, the Indians added Victorian-sounding first names to their tribal surnames, resulting in such original monikers as Horace Striped Wolf, Adeline Black Rabbit, Veronica Weasel Bear, and Cletus Rides-at-the-Door. As bored teenagers, my friends and I loved to read the phone book for the town of Standoff, on the Reserve, just for entertainment. My buddies jokingly christened me, “Olivia Hair-of-No-Color” because I was such a towhead. Our humor at the expense of the Indians stung me a bit, since my memories of Archer were still so fresh, but in fact, I often instigated the telephone book game, and laughed as heartily as anyone else at the unusual names.

The year I turned fifteen, I hoed sugar beets alongside the Indians, agonizing under the dizzying sun, my youthful back aching, my hands hot and painful inside heavy gloves made of pillow ticking and stuffed with a thin layer of uncarded wool. The Indians’ bare hands, accustomed to manual labor, were the texture of leather and never blistered.

At the end of each row of beets, either my mom or Archer Standing Eagle, her foreman, met us with a communal dipper of water—the battered bottom half of our old, discarded double boiler. I gulped water alongside Cletus and Veronica, raising the metal rim of the pan to my lips, wiping it first, where their mouths had been.

They called themselves “The People” but seldom raised their eyes, never spoke aloud unless spoken to. They muttered constantly in their own language, a low throbbing sound much like the hum of bees when they talked all at once, rapidly. They laughed wholeheartedly at my ineptitude as a beet-thinner, not the least bit shy about offending me. But to my mom, the landowner, they were respectful, polite, mumbling thanks in English as they took their pay in cash each evening after twelve hours’ labor.

On those hot summer evenings, the Indians, exhausted from thinning sugar beets under a blazing sun, got a little drunk and went to the movies, where (for some mysterious reason related more to Hollywood’s manipulations than to rational thought) they cheered for John Wayne and the cavalry during the bloody skirmishes with the Sioux and Comanches.

Back then, the Indians seemed awfully remote—in fact, almost invisible—from our way of life. Aside from the grocery store and the movie theatre, they pretty much kept to themselves. They were ardent hunters, fishermen, and calf-ropers. Nearly all of them were Catholic. The children attended a separate school located on the Reserve—one-roomed, named for a saint, painted a stereotypical fire-engine red, with a small white bell tower perched on the roof. Or was that the church? I may have gotten them mixed up.

I had no father, growing up. My dad had died when his swather tipped over in the coulee on our acreage north of town. I was seven and had no siblings. So there was nobody I could ask for behavioral guidelines relating to people who weren’t like us. It wasn’t the sort of topic my mom was inclined to entertain. She was too busy feeding cattle and raising sugar beets, winter wheat, alfalfa, and flax to be bothered with such silly questions. “They’re just people,” she’d say, shooing me away. “Like you and me, Little Miss Priss.”

I wasn’t even sure if the Indian kids my age were literate or not; I never saw an Indian reading anything. They all dropped out of school at sixteen, when the law allowed, and got jobs as farmhands or mechanics or waitresses, or ran away to who-knows-where. Nobody gave it much thought—except my mother, who exclusively hired Indians as farm labor. Mom always said her foreman of twenty-two years, Archer Standing Eagle, truly lived by the sweat of his brow, did immaculate work, and was the best supervisor she’d ever seen.

I never visit my hometown any more, except for family reunions and burials. My husband’s been back only once in the last twenty years. But we’re here now—for the funeral of my last-remaining Canadian relative, Great Aunt Melba, aged one hundred and four at her death, the oldest woman in the province. All but three of my cousins married Americans and moved to the States years ago.

Following the burial this afternoon, my thirty-eight cousins and I, along with our spouses, assembled at the church to eat...
ham and potatoes-au-gratin with sautéed corn flakes on top (it’s somehow disrespectful to call them “funeral potatoes”), followed by pineapple upside-down cake. The kids got Dilly Bars bought from the Dairy Queen.

After the luncheon, we hung around the cultural hall, fondly recalling Great Aunt Melba camped out on her porch, well into her nineties, sporting pink spongy curlers and a day-glo floral housecoat, armed with the special high-powered hose she used to prevent stray dogs from befouling her prized sweetheart roses and ruffled, purple-throated irises.

Later, with our arms around each other’s waists, the female cousins all posed for snapshots—a chorus line of sagging, aging Rockettes with bifocals and varicose veins. We kissed each other sadly and cried a little, wondering whose death would provide the next occasion to bring us together.

Then I went back to the motel and read the obits, planning to clip Aunt Melba’s write-up to send to a distant cousin in Glasgow. I cruised past basketball scores and gushy descriptions of bridesmaids in filmy chiffon dresses, thinking that nothing in Southern Alberta had changed. But everything had. The unthinkable had happened: the newspaper had started printing obituaries of the Native People.

The first obituary described a man from the Blood Reserve whose Indian name was KAAMATSISTAAWASII, which means “Fortunate to Thrive.” Funeral services were to be conducted at Sacred Heart by the Reverend Steve Stepovich, the old priest who had officiated at every funeral on the Reserve for forty years, except for the summer when he toured Poland, accompanying the Pope’s entourage. According to the obituary, the deceased—Rufus Melting Tallow—“loved his rifles and his pet ferret, retired from hockey after his liver got bad, and read his Book of Mormon every single night.” I was startled to read that but knew immediately how the book of scripture had gotten into the hands of Mr. Melting Tallow.

At the end of each harvest, Mom would hand out a paperback Book of Mormon to every one of her beet-workers, as well as all of the other people she employed, whether it was their first season with her or their twentieth. She bought those books by the hundreds, when she went down to Salt Lake for general conference and kept them in boxes on the shelves behind the ironing board.

She’d advise her farmhands to read carefully, paying special attention to the term “Lamanites.” “Read a ways into the book,” she’d tell them, “and you just might find a little something, a bit of a bonus.” Mom knew the expectation of extra money would keep her workers in the fields throughout all the weeks until harvest was finished, and it worked. Our field hands seldom quit until the last truck was loaded. Either she didn’t know or didn’t care that they simply thumbed through the book until it opened at the fifty-dollar bill in Second Nephi, Chapter Five.

The Alberta Liquor Store always did a booming business the weekend after Mom gave out her harvest bonuses inside paperback Books of Mormon. In those days, fifty dollars was nearly a week’s wages. And Martin Shot-Both-Sides once bragged to me that around the end of harvest time, he generally rescued thirty or more of those books from the big green trash bin behind the silos. Coincidentally, every year around the middle of October, the LDS bookstore located at the back of the dry goods store had an overstock sale of dog-eared, medicinal-smelling, used Books of Mormon. The seminary teacher picked them up for a song and kept them at the back of his classroom for the use of those who had forgotten their own scriptures.

Mom didn’t care. “Thirty books in the trash?” she’d say. “So what? I’ve given out close to forty of them every single October since the year I got married, and at least a few of them must’ve ended up in somebody’s hands. Don’t forget, Olivia, if you...
should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father.”

I have no idea if any of Mom’s workers ever got baptized, but years ago, at her funeral, there were nearly eight hundred people crowding the stake center, completely filling the chapel and cultural hall, spilling out into the foyer, the halls, even the Relief Society room. At least a quarter of them were from the Blood Reserve—those who remembered her kindness to them and admired the way she, as a woman, had successfully kept the farm going with no one to help her except Archer Standing Eagle and a passel of seasonal farmhands.

NUCE, WHEN I was eleven, we went to town to pick up some baling wire and harnesses, and I needed new socks, so Archer—in an odd reversal of roles—walked down to the dry goods store with me while Mom did the other errands. Archer was a towering figure—six-foot three, two hundred and thirty pounds, with a well-kept braid reaching nearly to his waist. A former Golden Gloves Canadian champion, he had won his share of bar brawls before he gave up drinking. He was forty-seven years old and had never married. When I asked him why not, he said in a serious tone, patting his slight pot belly, “A wife would make me too fat.” But it was common knowledge that he spent every weekend at the home of Mrs. Felicity Manyberries, whose husband had been killed a few years earlier when a tractor tipped over on him. Felicity, who was childless, was rumored to have a hefty widow’s pension, a big feather bed, a cupboard full of copper cooking utensils, and a secret recipe for the flakiest pie crust in the province.

I knew the store clerk at the dry goods store. She lived in the Third Ward, in that stone house across from the bakery, with her ancient parents who were both confined to wheelchairs, and Mom said she was an old maid. She wore deep purple lipstick the color of bruises and had perfectly square, perfectly white teeth—and too many of them for her mouth. She wore a purple patent leather purse. In a frail, quavering voice, she said, “Look at this one. Hair like sandpapery fingertips, as though she were reading Braille, and the tips of her eggplant-colored fingernails. As the bell over the door tinkled to signal our exit, Archer glanced back at the woman who was standing with one hand on her hip, the other one covering her mouth, her fingernails curved under on the ends like talons.

“I’ll pick you up Friday at closin’ time, lady,” Archer said, laughing in that silent way he had, that made his belly shake.

He snorted and coughed with his hand over his mouth when I asked, “Did you want a date with that lady, just to make Felicity Manyberries jealous?” All the way back to the harness store, he kept his hot palm on my head, as though he were piloting me along the sidewalk.

Archer attended Alcoholic Anonymous meetings four times a week, and stayed sober until he ruptured his aorta, trying to heave a massive irrigation pipe, single-handedly, into the bed of Mom’s old GMC pickup truck.

After his funeral, despite the protests of the priest, five be-feathered brothers (Horace Striped Wolf’s boys) performed a hoop dance around the hole in the ground where the coffin sat suspended on ropes, and then as Archer’s last will and testament had specified, Bishop Jenks dedicated the grave. I stood in my best dress—a sheer lavender nylon with ruffly lace sleeves and a poufy peticoat—holding a tiny basket of purple asters. I felt conspicuous and out of place—more like a flower girl in a wedding party than an official mourner.

Felicity Manyberries gave me a peck on the cheek and a tight squeeze. Her mascara had puddled in the hollows beneath her eyes, and her eyelids were nearly swollen shut from crying. Three of Archer’s old aunties clucked their tongues when they saw me and bent to kiss my cheek, muttering in their own guttural language. One of them had a black wig with strands dangling at her nape and peeking out below her ears. It reminded me of the tightly curled, ponytailed wigs the Queen’s Counsel wore when they argued cases on BBC mystery shows. The bewigged auntie reached out, stroked my hair with her sandpapery fingertips, as though she were reading Braille, and said in heavily-accented English, “Look at this one. Hair like clouds. Archer always say this one have curls white as a palominos mane.”

Throughout the graveside service, the aunties wept aloud, making no attempt to muffle their dramatic, heart-rending sobs, while Mom sniffled and dabbed at her pink-rimmed eyes and I kept wiping my cheeks with the back of my hand. After the “Amen,” by pre-arrangement, I gently balanced the basket of asters on top of the coffin, and then whispered the only Blackfoot word I knew—KUAYTIMUTSIN—meaning “I’ll see you again.” Archer had said that to me every Friday, before paying his weekend visit to Felicity Manyberries.

I made Mom stay there by the grave with me until everyone else had gone home—even Felicity. We sat on the brown folding chairs for nearly an hour, both thinking of Archer and of my dad. Finally, Mom stood up, fussed with her pillbox hat, blew her nose, then stuffed her rumpled hanky inside her black patent leather purse. In a frail, quavering voice, she said, “Olivia, sweetie, you and I are the unluckiest females in this entire world, losing the two finest men we’ll ever know, in two
rapid blinks of an eye, and there's not a damn thing we can do about it.” Although my mother worked in the fields and in the corral for more than forty years, alongside foul-mouthed farmhands, branding crews, and itinerant combiners, that was the one and only time I ever heard her swear.

When I got home from Archer’s funeral, there were four distinct lipstick prints on my cheek, from the aunties and Felicity: one pink, two red, and one orange. They overlapped at one corner, just beneath my cheekbone, and fanned out like the little cardboard color samples Mom had brought home to help me choose the paint for my bedroom. I had opted for a pale shade called French Ice because it was so subtle, so totally foreign to the brilliantly hued paint jobs on the Reserve. And besides, it matched the color of my nearly cloud-white hair. I realized, even then, that my blondeness would be the reason people would continue to single me out and say, “Look at this one.” At that moment, my hair was the only thing in my pitiful orphan's life that made me happy.

Of course, we never even dreamed of submitting Archer's death notice to the local newspaper. Any obituaries of the Natives would have been given orally, in the Gladstone Memorial Hall on the Reserve or at the Sacred Heart Church, overseen by Reverend Stepovich, and soon forgotten except by the old aunties rocking and chanting on their porches, cataract-glazed eyes able to discern only the brightest colors, such as peacock blue, sunflower yellow, rose red, and shocking pink. I often wondered if The People were oblivious such as peacock blue, sunflower yellow, rose red, and shocking pink. I often wondered if The People were oblivious to the creamy beige granite of the Alberta Temple, two miles away, high on a hill, its Western windows glistening in the setting sun.

I CLEANED UP, FINANCIALLY, selling every acre of the Allsop land to one of those big, automated agri-businesses that rotates their crops by computer. And now that Great Aunt Melba is gone, I’ll never again have any ties to this place, whatsoever. The cemetery would be the only place I'd care to visit.

Yesterday, on what would have been Archer's ninety-fifth birthday (the first day when I no longer required permission from his next-of-kin), I accompanied my husband to the temple where he acted as proxy for Archer's baptism, endowment, and sealing to his parents: Gertrude Goodstriker and her husband, Lionel Standing Eagle. I sincerely hope that Archer approved of the work and accepted it. Who knows—in a few years, I may even do Felicity Manyberries's temple work, in case she and Archer might like to be sealed someday.

But don't start thinking I'm one of those saintly people who sacrifices herself in the service of others. Anyone who knows me would tell you I’m stubborn, intolerant, and shallow. I don’t like coming back to my hometown. It makes me feel superior and inferior, both at once.

Today, at the cemetery, after they lowered Great Aunt Melba's coffin, I laid chrysanthemums on the graves of my father and mother, my grandparents, and Archer Standing Eagle. I pictured myself in that lavender nylon dress, and found myself repeating the only word he ever taught me in Blackfoot: KUAYTIMUTSIN.

That one word sums up everything I comprehend about eternity. It's the word I commissioned Jonathan Wéasel Bear to carve on the back of Archer's headstone, after I came into my inheritance. It was my way of telling him, “I know I'll see you again, Archer, surrounded by all of those we love.”

I suppose the real reason I felt the urge to do his temple work, and to buy his headstone, was because even though I was so fond of Archer personally, I have never loved or understood his people enough, or embraced them as my brothers and sisters. No matter how things have changed otherwise, you might say I am still wiping the metal edge of that dipper pan before pressing it to my own lips.

Still, every time I see a father with his daughter, I recall the way Archer kept his hot palm on my head, as though he were piloting me along the sidewalk, back to the harness store. Strangely enough, it was a good two years before I realized that store clerk was being facetious when she asked if I were Archer's little girl. It hadn’t registered on me that no one—not even a horsey-toothed sales clerk who was no Einstein—would ever have mistaken Olivia Hair-of-No-Color for a member of the Blood Tribe.

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MY SKIN

My skin turns dark in the springtime sun as I work their gardens and fruit trees.
The flax-haired youths look at me with intrigue, their skin reminding me of melting wax at St. Francis's.
They mouth the word Lamanite as I work the garden.
Should I cry out this is not my identity?
I do not speak the language mastered by their missionaries.

Yet they try to coax me into their chapels, into a waiting pool.
They send their tagged young men to speak words I do not comprehend. Jesus Christo, they say, as they cradle their black bound books.
Their look of pity meets me and my skin made dark by the sun.
Do they not see in me my mother's German eyes; sense her light hair?
No, they see only Lamanite, whose skin will lighten someday, if only I will accept their book, their pity, and their waiting pool.

—JOHANN DE LA ROSA
My Relief Society president came by the other day, after you gave me a ride home. Someone saw your car there. So she had to come by. “Express concern.”

PECULIARITIES

TEMPS

By Eric Samuelsen

CAST
ALEXIS . . . Mid-twenties, married
JASON . . . Mid-twenties, single
RITA . . . Mid-forties, office manager

CHARACTERS

Peculiarities was first presented at the Villa Theatre, Springville, Utah, mid-October 2002. It was directed by Tony Gunn. The original cast for the “Temps” portion was:

ALEXIS . . . Diane Rane
JASON . . . Jeremy Selim

EDITOR’S NOTE: “Temps” is the second of five storylines from Eric Samuelsen’s play, Peculiarities, that SUNSTONE has agreed to run serially. The first installment, “Tahoe,” was published in the December 2005 issue.

In that issue, we also launched an effort to raise $10,000 in order to create a film version of Peculiarities. We are pleased to announce the completion of that fundraising as several benefactors stepped forward as project patrons. Through their generosity as well as that of all the actors and crew members who are donating their time and talents, filming has begun, and at the time this issue is going to press, more than half of the storylines have been shot.

We are also pleased to announce that the film will premiere on Saturday, 12 August, at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium.

The following is the screenplay version of the “Temps” storyline, in which the action occurs in an office setting. In the play version, all the scenes took place in Jason’s car, and the character, Rita, was never seen nor heard. In the film version, Rita makes brief appearances in this as well as another storyline about a Mormon bishop trying to have romantic evening at home, which was written specifically for the film.

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his fourth play published in SUNSTONE (Accommodations, June 1994; Gadianton, July 2001; Family, March 2005). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally.
NOTE ON SCRIPT
A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (…) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

NOTE ON LOCATION
The play takes place inside an office building.

SCENE ONE
(JASON and ALEXIS are kneeling in front of a supply cupboard. They’re pretending to look for paper for the copy machine, but their heads are together, and they’re sharing a laugh.)

JASON: Okay, Evil Dead, right?
ALEXIS: You know how much I love the Evil Dead movies!

JASON: The great Bruce Campbell. (A sound. We hear someone walk by. JASON quickly dumps some paper clips on the floor. Big mess. ALEXIS quickly figures it out, plays along.)

ALEXIS: Dang it, Jason! All over the floor!
JASON: Sorry, sorry. (The shadow of RITA rests over them. They quickly pick up paper clips.)

RITA: Wasting paper clips.

JASON: Sorry.
RITA: Get those picked up now. Office supplies don’t grow on trees, you know.

JASON: We will. (RITA leaves. ALEXIS giggles.)

ALEXIS: (Quietly.) Actually, paper sort of grows on trees.

JASON: You've got to be kidding.
ALEXIS: She totally does, and then she'll be all, “You were six minutes this morning, and nine this afternoon. . . .”

ALEXIS: You've got to be kidding.
JASON: You're a gem. (She gets up, heads for her computer.)

ALEXIS: Clocking someone's bathroom breaks.
JASON: She doesn't really.

ALEXIS: She totally does, and then she'll be all, like, “You were six minutes this morning, and nine this afternoon. . . .”

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ALEXIS: Clocking someone’s bathroom breaks.
JASON: She doesn’t really.

ALEXIS: She totally does, and then she’ll be all, like, “You were six minutes this morning, and nine this afternoon. . . .”

JASON: You’ve got to be kidding.
ALEXIS: Not even. Especially women, you think she’s bad with men, you should see how she treats. . . .

JASON: Well, that motivates me. To, like, work . . .
ALEXIS: That’s what I’m saying! (They look around again.)
ALEXIS: Anyway, you said you had something to show me.

JASON: Well, like I said, I know you have this Bruce Campbell thing.
ALEXIS: Okay, sure.
JASON: Found a website. Evil Dead memorabilia—still, posters, action figures.
ALEXIS: They didn’t do action figures!

ALEXIS: No way! What’s the URL?
JASON: Here, I wrote it down. Was gonna email it, but you know. . . .
ALEXIS: For sure, they totally monitor our email. Thanks, Jase,
(JASON and ALEXIS sit together in the break room. They're both eating brown bag lunches.)

ALEXIS: Okay, my turn. Five non-Star Wars Mark Hamill movies.

JASON: Oh, man, this is a hard one. Uh, Corvette Summer. (She rolls her eyes dismissively.)

ALEXIS: Everyone gets that one.

JASON: The Big Red One? With, like, Lee Marvin?

ALEXIS: Good.

JASON: Um. The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia?

ALEXIS: I'm impressed.

JASON: No, that's it.


JASON: Mutronics? Seriously, do you ever see anything without, like, zombies?

ALEXIS: Mutronics was great! I even know who directed it: Screaming Mad George.

JASON: Well, we're all familiar with his oeuvre.

ALEXIS: It's great! Not so much a zombie movie as a mutant movie. Big difference. (They both laugh at this; everything's funny now.)

(SCENE FIVE)

(ALEXIS and JASON sit in her cubicle. He’s in an office chair he’s scooted over by her desk. Shadows are falling; the office is getting darker.)

ALEXIS: And I just feel terrible about it. But what are we gonna do?

JASON: No, it’s a real dilemma.

ALEXIS: We’re just not making it. Steve’s got that lab assistant job, but. Rent the first of the month. Groceries.

JASON: Totally.

ALEXIS: And so. You know? Just like we said we’d never do.

JASON: Put the kid in daycare, and there I am.

ALEXIS: Pretty good I think. This lady from the ward. She’s got like nine in there, and it’s pretty small, but she seems to do okay. She has activities and stuff.

JASON: That’s good.

(SCENE SIX)

(ALEXIS sits at her desk. She’s working. She leans back. JASON comes by.)

JASON: Ten to five.

ALEXIS: Thanks. (She sits back, stretches. He perches on the edge of her desk.)

JASON: You need a ride home?

ALEXIS: No, Steve was gonna pick me up on his way home. (Checks her watch.) In like half an hour.

JASON: You try to stay on the clock, Rita’s gonna throw a fit.

ALEXIS: I know. (She gestures to her computer.) Thought I’d go for my high score in Tetris. Get this: Rita said it was okay.

JASON: What, she didn’t try to get some work out of you off the clock? She must be slipping.

ALEXIS: Seriously.

JASON: I could keep you company.

ALEXIS: Listen, that’s not necessary. I’m fine, really.

JASON: Okay. I could clock us both out. (She looks at him quizzically.)

ALEXIS: Okay, thanks.
ALEXIS: But.
JASON: Oh sure.
ALEXIS: You have no idea. I mean, little Bryony: “Don’t go, Mommy.” clingy. I’m in tears before I get out the door.
JASON: That must be hard.
ALEXIS: You have no idea. You have no idea. (She stares out the window. JASON looks at her face, mostly in shadow by now.)
ALEXIS: I really gotta go, he said five thirty and it’s already . . . .
JASON: I understand.
ALEXIS: What time is it now, five twenty-five?
JASON: Five twenty-three.
ALEXIS: I really gotta go.
(She looks away from him, leans back in her chair. He can’t get enough of her, the line of her neck, just a tiny bead of sweat.)

SCENE EIGHT
(ALEXIS and JASON sit by her desk.)

ALEXIS: Okay, so, we’re temps. I mean, that’s true, we’re temps. That doesn’t mean, she doesn’t have to treat us like we’re nothing. You know?
JASON: I totally know what you’re saying. (She crosses to the office window.)
JASON: You okay?
ALEXIS: Just seeing if Steve’s car’s there.
JASON: Can you see it from here?
ALEXIS: Usually, yeah, he always parks in the same place. (He looks at her by the window, framed in it.)
ALEXIS: My Relief Society president came by yesterday.
JASON: Okay . . .
ALEXIS: The other day, when you gave me a ride home. Someone saw your car there. So she had to come by.
JASON: I was there for, like, two minutes.
ALEXIS: I know. (She moves away from the window.)
ALEXIS: I don’t see him.
JASON: You okay? I mean, the Relief Society stopping by. . . .
ALEXIS: I’m fine. Ward gossip, you know how it goes. (She sits by her desk again.)
JASON: He said five-thirty?

ALEXIS: Sometime before six.
JASON: So is he gonna call, or. . . .
ALEXIS: His cell is on the fritz. Again. I said I’d keep an eye out.
JASON: Do you want to, you know, wait, outside?
ALEXIS: If I’m a little late, he’s always got a book, research. For the thesis. (Pause. She looks pensively out the window.)
JASON: So. Wanna race? (She stares back at him, surprised.)

SCENE NINE
(They scoot on office chairs past the water cooler. She’s a little ahead. They’re both giggling.)

SCENE TEN
(ALEXIS is sitting in RITA’s office. She sits in RITA’s chair, twirls it around. JASON sits on one of the other chairs.)

ALEXIS: I can’t believe we’re in Rita’s office. Her private sanctum.
JASON: And I am your slave. (She laughs briefly. Twirls again. She looks away from him.)
JASON: You okay? (She nods. Abruptly.)
ALEXIS: You know, we don’t even have a TV. JASON: Really?
ALEXIS: We had one, my sister gave me hers when she moved.
JASON: But Bryony was having a tantrum and kicked it and it hasn’t worked since.
(She looks straight ahead, close to tears.)
ALEXIS: Steve and I, we have dinner. And then he’s straight into the bedroom and working on the computer. The thesis. And I have to keep her quiet or it wrecks his concentration. So no radio, or CDs. I can’t even read, because then Bryony goes just nuts, wants attention. I mean, evenings, I sit and count the minutes. I’m staring at the clock counting the minutes. Watching time pass.
JASON: That’s awful.
ALEXIS: And, like, everything costs so much money, a movie or . . . anything. And that’s my life.
JASON: That’s so wrong.
ALEXIS: I mean, I actually love my job. In comparison. Lousy temp job working for Rita, and it's so much better than . . . that little living-room prison.

(JASON sits there staring at her in shadow, trying to think of something he could say.)

ALEXIS: And you and me, Jason. You get who Bruce Campbell is. We like the same movies and we can sit and . . .

JASON: We're friends.

ALEXIS: Well, yeah.

JASON: Good friends.

ALEXIS: I mean, don't get me wrong. I love Steve. I love my daughter.

JASON: Of course. That goes without say . . .

ALEXIS: I mean when I kneeled across from him in the temple. It was the single most important moment of my, you know, life.

JASON: This too will pass.

ALEXIS: What? (She looks at him like she's finally seeing him for the first time. But his expression is carefully bland. She relaxes.)

ALEXIS: Oh, sure.

JASON: This too will pass. For me, it's like church.

ALEXIS: How?

JASON: Boring meetings. Stretching into eternity?

ALEXIS: Totally. They'll be a talk and they'll be droning on. And I'll start wishing, like, that Freddie Krueger or zombies or, like, the alien from the Alien movies could burst in the door. Take out the bishop, the deacons, big bloodbath.

JASON: Like the scene in the gym in Carrie.

ALEXIS: Yeah! Wouldn't that be awesome? Blood everywhere, and Sissy Spacek all drenched. And I'd think, hey, something interesting!

(JASON laughs. They laugh together. Then she's serious.)

ALEXIS: But, but see—that's only one day. This is my life. Every day.

JASON: No, I understand that.

ALEXIS: And I just think; it's going to be my life. Bryony will grow up, and the other kids, if we have 'em. And still. Nights in a living room with nothing to talk about.

JASON: But you will have a TV. (She stares at him. He's trying to be funny again, and that mood's passed.)

ALEXIS: (Drily.) Yeah, there's that.

SCENE ELEVEN

(ALEXIS and JASON sit in RITA's office. ALEXIS's face is half-mottled in the shadows. Her eyes are closed. A quiet love song plays on the computer.)

ALEXIS: I love this. What is it?

JASON: (Modestly.) Well . . .

ALEXIS: Wait a minute. This isn't your band, is it?

JASON: Uh . . . (She sits up, excited.)

ALEXIS: It is!

JASON: Well, that's me on bass. (She looks at him, eyes shining.)

ALEXIS: This is awesome.

JASON: Well. We're not that great.

ALEXIS: I remember you said you were in a band. You guys are great. This is so mellow. (She listens, eyes closed. The song ends.)

ALEXIS: That was great.

JASON: Okay, this next song is one I wrote.

ALEXIS: You write the songs!

JASON: Some. Our singer writes some, too. (She lies back again. Listens.)

ALEXIS: I love this. Sometimes, you want stuff you can just listen to, lie back. Close your eyes. And just . . . float.

JASON: That's why I wrote it. (ALEXIS has her eyes closed. Her hand is very close to JASON's. He looks at it. He wants to take her hand, hold it. He knows he can't. He closes his eyes, too.)

JASON: Let Rita melt away.

ALEXIS: And Steve and his thesis. Bryony and her tantrums. (He reaches over and very gently nudges his hand against hers. She lets him. He tries to take her hand. She quietly pulls it away, just a little.)

JASON: Just float away. Listen to the music. (She keeps her eyes closed, completely absorbed.)

SCENE TWELVE

(ALEXIS and JASON. Her head is on the desk, her cheek resting on her hand. His hands reach towards her hair. She slowly pulls it away, but smiles apologetically as she does.)
ALEXIS: He's gotta to be down there by now.
JASON: It's nearly six.
ALEXIS: Gotta get home. Dinner. I've got to cook dinner.
JASON: That doesn't sound so bad.
ALEXIS: I hated that when I was single, never was any good at it. Top Ramen and mac and cheese. *(She stands, straightens her clothing.)*
JASON: Nothing wrong with mac and . . .
ALEXIS: I'm supposed to cook. Because I'm the wife. And I never have a clue. I go shopping and I buy cans of mushroom soup because you're supposed to be able to make casseroles with it, only I don't know how to make any casseroles with it, so I've got all these cans of that crap in my pantry.
JASON: I'll bring some recipes by next week. For things you can make with mushroom soup. *(She laughs.)*
ALEXIS: In just about one minute, I've got to get downstairs, and out to my husband's car, and home so I can cook his dinner.
JASON: Or not. *(He looks at her. Is he serious?)*
ALEXIS: What do you mean?
JASON: Maybe you don't. Have to. *(She starts to leave. He reaches out, puts his hand on her arm, stops her.)*
JASON: Don't. Just . . . stay here. *(Their eyes meet. He tries to turn it into a joke.)*
JASON: I'll make you dinner. Something Italian.
ALEXIS: Well, that's tempting. I can boil spaghetti, you know.
JASON: I'll cook you something better than that. *(Another long exchange of glances. She laughs shakily.)*
ALEXIS: You're such a kidder.
JASON: I am. *(She smiles back, heads for the door. He lets her go.)*
ALEXIS: Seriously. This was great.
JASON: Say hi to Bryony for me.
ALEXIS: I will.
JASON: And Steve.
ALEXIS: Yes.
JASON: Any time you need to talk. Call it a Jason specialty.
ALEXIS: I think Jason is very special. *(She reaches over to pat his hand. He takes her hand. She doesn't pull away. They look at each other for a long time.)*
ALEXIS: Okay. *(But she still doesn't pull her hand back. She's looking at him intensely. He can't let go.)*
ALEXIS: That dinner's not gonna cook itself. *(She does now pull her hand away. She looks at him strangely. Heads for the door. He follows.)*
JASON: So. Do you need a ride again. Monday?
ALEXIS: Yeah. Maybe so. *(He turns away. She makes a decision.)*
JASON: Monday for sure. I'll need a ride, it's Steve's day for the car. *(JASON looks at her. She looks back at him. Their eyes lock.)*

SCENE THIRTEEN

*(JASON and ALEXIS still holding their look.)*
JASON: Monday then. *(ALEXIS goes out the office door. He watches her go.)*

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APRIL 2006
The following is excerpted from an email exchange I had with Kevin (not his real name) over several weeks.

KEVIN: Thank you so much for your columns about "Borderland" Mormons. I have a couple of questions. First, does your Borderland Mormon idea assume that this person no longer gives or participates in blessings?

JEFF: By definition, a Borderland member is trying to fit in the best he or she knows how. If he or she is worthy to participate in the giving or getting of blessings, all the better.

KEVIN: What about temple recommends, callings, etc.?

JEFF: Same answer. I currently hold a temple recommend, and I have been called as a Church service missionary. Yet I consider myself fully in the Borderlands. In my view, Borderlanders can participate in almost every activity and receive every calling if they are faithful, supportive, and try to live Christian principles. I'm really enjoying my service mission and have been impressed by the competence and dedication of the employees I work with at the Church Office Building in downtown Salt Lake City.

KEVIN: What advice can you give to a person who basically lives the lifestyle but whose beliefs do not include Jesus Christ? Is that even possible?

JEFF: The concepts and meanings related to Jesus Christ are numerous and broad. Are you questioning Christ as the Son of God? As the literal Savior of mankind? As a resurrected being? As a teacher of life-enhancing precepts and behavior?

I've never met a person who disbelieves every possible claim about Jesus Christ. Some Borderlanders (like me) don't have all the answers about him, but most accept him at least as a divine "teacher" or "savior" even if they redefine that for themselves as "saving me from unhappiness when I follow his prescriptions for living," or something like that. And not having a sure belief in some specific aspect of Christ is not the same as disbelieving. We can simply "not know." That is where faith comes in.

KEVIN: What does the Borderlands approach say about tithing and the Word of Wisdom?

JEFF: Your views on the seeming intolerance for dissent and diversity will most likely soften as time goes by. Right now it could be that you're feeling some anger which is causing you to read a few cases of extreme rigidity as the norm and blocking your view of the diversity among members’ and leaders’ views that really is present.

KEVIN: One thing I find interesting is the big difference my wife and I see in the gospel with regard to its rigidity. I grant that, as you say, people have a rainbow of beliefs about the gospel. But in my life in the church, it has always seemed that no matter what your personal belief, it is "their way or the highway". There is "a right and a wrong" way, and the line is abundantly clear. My wife, surprisingly, has a different opinion. She thinks that there is a lot of room for personal belief. I guess in the overall view, I agree with her (otherwise, I wouldn't stay on this journey). But I think that there is a strong orthodoxy in the Church that controls everything and smashes dissent.

JEFF: Your views on the seeming intolerance for dissent and diversity will most likely soften as time goes by. Right now it could be that you're feeling some anger which is causing you to read a few cases of extreme rigidity as the norm and blocking your view of the diversity among members’ and leaders’ views that really is present.

KEVIN: What is your view about tithing and the Word of Wisdom? Have you met people who are Borderlanders, have temple recommends and callings, but who don't follow the "rules?" I don't have an urge to go out and
I received the following interesting and useful comments from someone who reads this column yet considers himself a “core member” instead of a Borderlander.

I want to share some thoughts I’ve had about your November article in SUNSTONE, “Developing an LDS-Compatible Personal Religion.” I sense your sincere desire to offer hope to those who struggle with doubts, questions and distance from full activity in the Church. I realize I could be out of line with the following comments since I’m not as close to the challenge these people have as you are. But I’m sending them to you anyway to give you another perspective from a member of the church who considers himself to be part of the group you call “core members.”

In the sidebar to that article, you suggest, among other things, that those living an LDS-compatible personal religion “seek to change Church programs that [they] believe can be more beneficial.” To me, a personal religion that would be more compatible with the “official Church model” would be one that seeks to find harmony, understanding of, and compliance with “the program” until a spiritual confirmation or affirmation can be obtained. I believe this will require some trust and faith in God and Church authority from the beginning.

I like the section about motivations—how one man had created misunderstandings in his own mind (made assumptions) about how God felt about him, that God was “displeased” with him. I understand this because I have done similar things, as have countless others I know of. This is part of the learning and growing we all do in this life, don’t you think? I believe the truth is, if we trust the decisions of God—that they are ultimately in our best interest, and not about our qualifications—we will be better off in the long (eternal) run. And if we would do this, we probably would have no problems with depression, because we would realize how truly pleased God is with us, even with all our imperfections, no matter what calling we have in the Church, and no matter what we think we need to be.

You suggested Borderlanders might “eventually move away from guilt and fear” as a motivator. To me, moving through guilt and fear (as well as mistrust), no matter how “unfounded” such may be, would be more effective in eventually completely removing obstacles that are in the way of the more satisfying motivations.

The following is excerpted from a handwritten letter from another reader whose prose style reminds me a bit of Joseph Smith’s.

Your article in the March 2005 issue professed the thesis that there are quite possibly many more “Borderland” members of the Church than anyone wants to admit. This evoked deep and serious reflections, even profound contemplations, as to whether or not I consider myself a “Borderlander.”

I have come to the fortuitous and serene conclusion that I am, in point of fact, a “Borderlander.” This expatriation to the Borderlands has come about, not so much as a result of any conscious free will, but rather has been involuntarily imposed upon me [by various outside forces]. Notwithstanding, for my part, this imposition is gladly embraced with no shame, no regret, no consternation, and no disquietude.

The Gospels are replete with the most profound and penetrating testaments of how good and gratifying it is for all members of the church to dwell together in unity, striving together for the faith of the gospel of Christ (Psalms 133:1; Philippians 1:27).

With regards to the premise that there are, in reality, many members of the Church who would be properly categorized as “Borderlander,” I offer the following reflections:

First, I find no sin, transgression, vice, or shame in being categorized as a “Borderlander.” However, there are, I fear, far too many worthy and righteous members who would, and do, debase this group. Man was divinely and inherently created to question, to probe, to investigate, to scrutinize, to study, to query, and to examine thoroughly. This quest, which appears to be a fundamental credo of a “Borderlander” and “Sunstoner” is authoritatively addressed in holy scripture John 16:13; Moroni 10:5; John 8:32; D&C 93:36; Proverbs 15:14; Matthew 7:7-8; and others.

Second. My association with other Borderlanders, vicariously experienced through your column, has bestowed upon me a keen sense and acute appreciation for the abundant, abiding, and sincere manifestation of charity, which seems prevalent in, and consistent with, a Borderlander’s disposition and immutable soul.

NOTES

1. In my first column (this is No. 20), I introduced the Borderland member as one who may have an unusual but LDS-compatible outlook on life, a distinctive way of thinking about faith, belief and testimony, a different view of LDS history, some open questions about a particular aspect of the Church, reduced or modified activity, or feelings of not meeting Group 1 acceptability criteria. See the figure. Copies of former columns are available on the Sunstone website, www.sunstoneonline.com.

2. See D. Jeff Burton, “Personal Experiences in the Borderlands.” SUNSTONE, December 2003, 67-69. To receive a free download of the latest version of For Those Who Wonder, please email me at jeff@eburton.com.

Please send me any of your experiences or tales from life in the Borderlands.

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CELEBRATING THE BACKSLIDER

FRANK WINDHAM AT FORTY

By Cherie Woodworth

WHEN I REALIZED, last year, that 2006 would mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of The Backslider, I began thinking about my own history with the book. I first read The Backslider when I was nineteen, as a student at BYU, right after it came out. Tom Rogers, one of my literature professors, recommended that I read the book—an enthusiastic recommendation that was hard to resist. My husband read the book first, and he told me not to read it—or rather, to read it but to skip over some parts. “You’ll know what parts I mean,” he said. He was concerned that I would be shocked. And he was right.

When I read it, I was shocked and appalled—moved, yes, somewhat by Frank’s carnality, with his very male nature. And so I reserved my enthusiasm, and when I ran into Gene England at a reception not long after, I rehearsed to him my objections to the book. He listened to me patiently, carefully, charitably, and then, not the least bit cowed, reserved my enthusiasm, and when I ran into Gene England at a reception not long afterward, I rehearsed to him my objections to the book. He listened to me patiently, carefully, charitably, and then, not the least bit cowed, said, “Well, what you say is all true”—Frank is sinful, Frank is carnal—but it’s still a great book. You’ll get over all that.” He urged me to read it, and he promised, “You will appreciate the real value of the book.” And he was right.

I have read The Backslider many times since then. There is scarcely a passage that I don’t recognize immediately if I pick up the book and start reading at any page. But even as I read it again and recognize it, I also read it in a different way. I have spent all my adult life with this book, and as I’ve renewed my acquaintance with it, I have been exposed to it over decades, the book has affected me profoundly.

This novel is not just a personal read, but it has created a community of readers. The experience of reading and thinking through this novel and its relation to the Mormon experience is naturally something I’ve wanted to share. I have passed it on to non-Mormon friends as well, and the response I got to my most recent "missionary" effort to a non-LDS friend was, “This is a great novel!”

JOE Jorgensen’s essay on comedy in The Backslider, published in this issue of SUNSTONE, kicks off a Festschrift—a “writing celebration”—to mark the novel’s anniversary. We hope more essays will follow.

As Jorgenson explores in more detail, this is a funny novel—though my first time through, I didn’t find it funny because I was apprehensive about the darker undercurrents. At that time, I was disturbed not only by Frank’s struggle with his carnal nature but about carnal nature itself. Now, each time I read it, it gets funnier, but, paradoxically, the threat hanging over Frank also gets stronger.

At nineteen, I was appalled by Frank’s perversions. Now when I read it, I envy Frank his eternal youth, his passion. At nineteen, I thought Frank’s perversions were physical and sexual; he seemed to be wallowing in sin. I was ready to fall in with Frank’s own assessment of himself. Now I believe Frank’s real perversions are his view of God. Though it is funnier upon each re-reading, it is also more horrifying because I feel more strongly what Frank has it in him to do.

Although this comparison will make Levi Peterson uncomfortable, he reminds me of the great cowboy novelist Cormac McCarthy. Of all the great writers of literature of the southwest, McCarthy is the author who wins the crown for public and critical acclaim. Although he sets his stories in the same glorious landscape as The Backslider, in my reading, McCarthy’s view of humanity is bloody and dark, dispiriting and exhausting. His novels do not draw me back in. The Backslider hints at this same bloody, damned human nature, but is perhaps even more horrifying because the world is not a godless one but one where God himself—possibly—demands blood atonement. But knowing this possibility, Peterson pulls away from this conclusion, because despite the possibility that the world and mankind are irreversibly damned and fallen, Frank is redeemed at the end. And it is not an easy redemption.

So while others defend other, more renowned books, I will defend The Backslider. Great literature is hard; it bears re-reading. It wrenches your soul. This book does that for me. I will pass it on to my friends and say, “Read it. And if it doesn’t affect you the way you feel it should, you are missing something.”

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE BACKSLIDER. Send us your responses, ruminations, and personal essays about your experience of reading The Backslider or some aspect of the novel that you feel deserves attention. How has The Backslider affected the way you understand faith, life, or anything else?

PLEASE SEND YOUR submissions to Cherie Woodworth, executive director of The Backslider Festschrift project, at CHERIE.WOODWORTH@GMAIL.COM. Perhaps your essay will appear in a future issue of SUNSTONE.

CHERIE WOODWORTH has a Ph.D. in Russian and medieval history and is a research affiliate at Yale University. She is co-editor of book reviews for SUNSTONE and the executive director of The Backslider Festschrift project.
CELEBRATING THE BACKSLIDER

STILL LAUGHING WITH THE BEST
COMIC MORMON NOVEL SO FAR

By Bruce Jorgensen

ILL CONFESS THAT The Backslider got me into a little trouble in 1987. As the awards chairman for the Association for Mormon Letters back then, my practice was to find someone to serve as a judge in each category. I put the bite on one of my colleagues and said, “I want you to judge the novels from 1986.” Mostly unbeknownst to me, she convened a committee, and I never knew who the members of the committee were, except for possibly one other person. At the awards luncheon that year, I read the citation her committee had composed. To this day, I don’t know whose words were which in that citation. Before reading the citations, I explained how I had left the judging up to the judges and that I wrote none of the citations though exercise some editorial liberties with some of them. Afterward, someone from Signature Books asked me if they could quote from the citation for The Backslider in an ad. I said sure, and I think I reminded him that I was not the author of the citation.

When the ad appeared in a Salt Lake newspaper a day or two later, it had a brief quotation from the award citation, attributed to me. Part of what it said was that The Backslider was “a helluva good read”—which is true, and which I agreed with. I called Signature Books and reminded them those were not my words and I would rather not be cited as a source of words I did not write; the quotation was, to me, anonymous. I said, “I don’t know who wrote those words, but they are not mine.” They apologized, and I thanked them and said they need not publish a retraction.

A day or so later, a high-level BYU administrator called me to ask about the ad, and I explained how it had happened. Did I think I should ask for a public retraction? No, because that would just make it a bigger deal than it was, and I was satisfied with Signature’s apology to me. If there was more to the incident, I never heard. It was brief trouble, it was less than a tempest in a teacup, or a teaspoon, but it might be informative of something or other.

THE BACKSLIDER WAS, and still is, “a helluva good read” (I now publicly endorse that judgment, and own it), as I learned again last summer re-reading about two-thirds of it to prepare for a panel discussion. I laughed a lot, laughed out loud, because The Backslider is funny and fun. Or at least readers who like it think so. There is a differential response, and it’s not just dichotomous, it’s probably trichotomous or hexachotomous or something. Even readers who have complicated reactions to the novel, reactions differently complicated from mine—like my old friend and Mormon literary-critical fencing opponent, Dick Cracroft—even some of those readers will admit it is fun. Like Samuel Johnson (and after him, Virginia Woolf), “I rejoice to concur with the common reader.”

I began my reading life (back when Frank Windham was in his early teens) as a common reader, and I think I remain one, though now I’ve compromised my amateur status by becoming some sort of professional reader, who has to try to explain to himself and his friends and students what’s going on when he’s having his fun reading. But that need not spoil the fun, and never does, at least for me.

The Backslider is fun because it’s meant to be; it’s made to be fun, if a reader will join in—and that’s huge if, I know. The first paragraph is fun; it’s why you go on, if you do:

“At three-thirty on a May morning Frank Windham got out of his bunk and said his prayer. . . .

What’s the most clichéd way to open a story known to mankind? Somebody Wakes Up. The first rays of the morning sun penetrate or filter or slant through the etc., etc. Writing teachers do get bored with that one. Well, here’s a Somebody Wakes Up opening like no other I’ve read:

“At three-thirty on a May morning . . .”

Oh, on a May morning. Oh my, part of that first line is like hearing an echo of the first line or the refrain of an old ballad. “Frank Windham got out of his bunk and said his prayer.” His prayer, not “his prayers” but “his prayer.”

He reminded God of their bargain, which was that if God would give him Rhoda, he would live up to every jot and title of the commandments.

If you’re not having fun by the end of that sentence, I’m sorry, your heart ain’t in the right place; you’re not quite reading.

Actually, it was Frank’s bargain, . . .

It’s endearing in Frank, as this narrator presents him, that Frank is this self-aware: it’s his bargain,

. . . God never having confirmed it.

That was the way with God.

Now we’re fully into the mode of “free indirect discourse.” Sorry for the jargon (that’s part of being a professional reader): our third-person narrator here is close to Frank, is friendly with him, and is “identifying” with Frank’s consciousness. These could be Frank’s words (minimally “translated” into third person, with the necessary adjustments of verbs and pronouns or nouns): That was the way with God. He never offered Frank any signs, he never gave him any encouragement.

BRUCE JORGENSEN teaches literature and writing at BYU. His current Mormon literary anxiety is that he has turned up as a character in Levi Peterson’s new autobiography. An early version of this paper was presented as part of a panel discussion at the 2005 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (tape SLO5–236), which was also broadcast as the first installment of the MormonLit podcast.
He left him penned up with his own perversity like a man caught in a corral with a hostile bull. Well, that's fun, it's true-to-life fun, too-true-to-my-life fun, and readers who like it are liking it right from the get-go because they're having complicated and very nourishing and encouraging and transformative fun.

A lot of the sentences in _The Backslider_ are fun. The characters in the book are fun; even the minor ones, even in their names. There's Rendella Kranpitz, only peripherally alluded to in this novel (though she's a major character in Peterson's earlier story, "The Christianizing of Coburn Heights"). Or there's Dr. Washley at the state hospital, or Mr. Woorbeck from the College of Southern Utah. Names which Smollett or Fielding or Dickens might have made up, or Henry James on an amused afternoon. Any of these characters might have walked out of Chaucer, or out of Shakespeare, at least out of his gallery of clowns and secondary characters, and talked right through southern Utah, maybe Tropic, maybe Salina. (Though my hometown is a very sober town, and we're very normal in Salina. I promise you, I knew no one in Salina like these folks, starting with my mother and me.) Right out of Chaucer or Shakespeare or Dickens and through Southern Utah and into the pages of this book.

I'll indulge myself from page two and read a bit about Clara Earle, the wife of Frank's rancher boss for the summer, and the mother of Marianne, whom Frank will meet before Chapter One is over. Clara is serving breakfast at the ranch to Frank Windham and Wesley Earle, her husband:

> Clara had the shape of a tripod: fat thighs, big buttocks, narrow shoulders, a little head. She had tartarred teeth, ruddy checks, and cheerful eyes, and this morning she wore a blue kerchief over her uncombed hair. She was the sweetest, most motherly person on earth, and Frank wouldn't have traded her for six of Wesley.

Well, neither would I, and I wouldn't trade Wesley for six of a whole lot of people.

PETERTON’S plotting in _The Backslider_, which I've always envied, is grand comic fun. Moment to moment, right down inside of scenes, it's fun. It's kind of quiet—it's not as belly-laugh fun as some of the sentences and things in scenes.

In Chapter One, "Marshalled in the Ranks of Sin," on that May morning, Frank has a complicated itinerary. In Howell Valley, at the other end of the state, he would deliver the three mustangs and take on a load of nine milkgoats. The next day, coming back, he would stop at the Trailways bus station in Salt Lake and pick up Marianne, Wesley's and Clara's elder daughter. He would also buy three fancy tablecloths for Clara to donate to the Lutheran church in Richfield, and he had to go to a building supply and get five cans of creosote for Wesley. Of course before he left Salt Lake, he would run his own little errand and have a talk with Rhoda.

Frank’s itinerary becomes our own itinerary through the chapter, but after the fuel pump diaphragm on his truck splits outside of Payson and the breakdown delays Frank a day, his multiple errands generate comic surprise after surprise. One of the mustangs is a mare in heat, and while Frank is having his talk with Rhoda and getting his heart broken, "a bunch of frat rats on a toot" ransack the mare to play a prank on another house, and Frank contrives to turn a handsome profit when he finds her. And then, and then, and then. You read that chapter and (if you're liking the story) jump into the next one thinking, "Man, this guy knows how to do comic plotting."

"Plot is the representation of the action," Aristotle says. The action of _The Backslider_, though it includes at least one tragic deed (Jeremy Windham's self-mutilation), is fundamentally comic. The action here is how Frank Windham gets married, or begins to be fully married, to Marianne Earle. In 1956, the year this novel begins (we can date it by 30 June 1956, and to the second Eisenhower election campaign), Frank is twenty; he had to go to a building supply and Clara's older daughter. He would also buy three fancy tablecloths for Clara to donate to the Lutheran church in Richfield, and he had to go to a building supply and get five cans of creosote for Wesley. Of course before he left Salt Lake, he would run his own little errand and have a talk with Rhoda.

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EVERYTHING I’ve said here so far about The Backslider is summed up in a scene like this final one. Or if, having put a cart before a horse, I back up a third of the way into the novel, to Chapter Seven, it’s summed up in the scene where Frank, having made love with Marianne and gotten her pregnant, though he is certain he does not love her, proposes to her. He was alone in the room. A gold-faced German clock ticked on the piano. From the radio came a calm, quiet voice advertising suits at Auerbachs in Salt Lake. A Belgian rug with a thick wooly nap lay in the middle of the room. Over the fireplace hung the head of a trophy desert ram; under it was a twelve gauge shotgun. This scene makes me wonder if all weddings are shotgun weddings. One way or another, someone feels like: “Damn, I gotta do this.” Do it or die.

Marianne stood in the doorway, her bare feet peeking from beneath her pink flannel nightgown. She said, “I didn’t want you to come here.””

“I’ve got to say one more thing. It isn’t decent for that little kid not to have a name.”

“It can have my name,” she said. “It’s been okay for me.”

“I can’t just walk off on that little kid.”

“You aren’t going to get to,” she said. “Dad’s planning on having a little talk with you about child support.”

“He’s already mentioned it,” Frank said. “You bet, I sure will make payments.”

“All right, now go home.” She leaned against the door jamb. “Please, Frank, leave me alone.”

“You hate me,” he said. “You wouldn’t want to marry me.”

“That’s right. I hate you a lot. You don’t want to marry me either. You never did want to.”

“That’s true. I never did.”

“Well, then, that about takes care of things, doesn’t it?”

“What if we got married for about a year?” he said. “We could live together like a brother and sister. We’d treat each other like Christians, like God wants us to do. Then when the baby has been here for a while and things are all settled down and people aren’t paying much attention, we’ll just get us a divorce. I’ll keep paying support money and maybe once in a while you’d let me come see the little critter so it’d know it had a daddy somewhere in the world.”

Marianne crossed the room and sat on the sofa, curling her feet under herself and adjusting her nightgown. She shook her head. “That is about the dumbest idea I ever heard in my life.”

I rest my case.

To comment on this essay or read comments by others, please visit the Sunstone blog: www.SunstoneBlog.com.
UP DATE

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY REFLECTS ON HIS LIFE, CONDEMNS RACISM

IN HIS FIRST GENERAL CONFERENCE FOLLOWING surgery to remove a cancerous growth in his colon, LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke candidly about his life and years of service in the Church, in addition to delivering a strong condemnation of racism.

“I now face the sunset of my life,” said the nonagenarian leader as he closed the Sunday morning session. “As many of you know, I recently underwent major surgery. It is the first time in my ninety-five years that I have been a patient in a hospital.” He then quipped, “I do not recommend it to anyone.”

In his remarks, Hinckley shared entries from his 1953 journal which highlighted joys in his association with Church leaders of that era. He also reviewed his extensive traveling around the world: “I have lifted my voice on every continent, in cities large and small, all up and down from north to south and east to west across this broad world—from Cape Town to Stockholm, from Moscow to Tokyo to Montreal, in every great capital of the world. It is all a miracle.” According to the 2006 Church Almanac, since 1995, Hinckley has spoken to hundreds of thousands of members in more than sixty countries.

In what some have speculated is a reference to lingering cancerous cells in his body, President Hinckley referred to “residual problems” but refused to characterize his talk as a farewell speech. “I trust that you will not regard what I have said as an obituary,” he said with a smile. “Rather, I look forward to the opportunity of speaking to you again in October.”

During the Saturday priesthood session on 1 April, President Hinckley delivered a vigorous condemnation of racism and hatred—perhaps the strongest ever heard during a general conference. According to an Associated Press story, Hinckley was originally scheduled to open the Saturday morning session but decided instead to save his energy for later. Prefacing his remarks by referring to the 1978 revelation that lifted the ban on blacks holding the priesthood, Hinckley said that “no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ.”

“Throughout my service as a member of the First Presidency, I have recognized and spoken a number of times on the diversity we see in our society,” he added. “[Diversity] is all about us, and we must make an effort to accommodate that diversity. . . . There is no basis for racial hatred among the priesthood of this Church.”

Observers have speculated about the timing of President Hinckley’s remarks. In an 15 April story, Salt Lake Tribune columnist Paul Rolly suggested that the current immigration debate might have served as a catalyst for his choosing to speak about racism at this time. Rolly recalled a 2004 controversy in which a Utah anti-immigration group suggested that since the Articles of Faith require Mormons to uphold the law, undocumented LDS immigrants should be banned from

Mormon temples (SUNSTONE, March 2004, 75–76). Rolly also mentioned a recent attempt in Utah to repeal the state law that allows children of undocumented workers to pay in-state tuition at colleges or universities.

“There has been a sense of racism, not only in that repeal attempt, but in recently passed legislation to replace driver licenses with restrictive I.D. cards for undocumented workers and in the numerous attempts to pass hate-crime legislation aimed at protecting various minority groups from targeted violence and harassment,” wrote Rolly. “That’s why Hinckley’s remarks, at this time, have political significance.”

CHURCH BACKS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON MARRIAGE

AFTER YEARS OF REFRAINING FROM EXPLICITLY ENDORSING a constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriage, the LDS Church has joined a coalition of conservative religious leaders to call for an amendment that would define marriage as “the exclusive union of one man and one woman.”

The statement was signed by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve. Nelson’s signature appears along with those of fourteen Catholic archbishops; four Episcopal bishops; and Baptist, Jewish, Lutheran, and Presbyterian leaders. A press release posted at LDS.org confirms the move and urges those who participate in public debate “to be respectful of each other” and to foster “an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect.” (A copy of the statement is available at religiouscoalitionformarriage.org).

President George W. Bush first proposed a constitutional amendment in February 2004 when some judges and city mayors began to allow gay and lesbian couples to be legally married. BYU professor and World Family Policy Center manager Richard Wilkins enthusiastically supported the amendment, which he deemed “the only sure way to restore order to this venerable and surpassingly important social institution.” LDS leaders, however, refrained at that time from officially endorsing the proposal (SUNSTONE, March 2004, 72–73).
Days after the Church announced support for the amendment, the executive committee of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons issued a statement opposing the amendment. “Affirmation . . . believes that the United States Constitution should remain a testament to civil liberty and equality for all people, and that discrimination has no place in it,” they wrote. “Encouraging committed relationships, not fighting against them, will bring about a stronger and more just society. Understanding and love have never been achieved by isolating one group of citizens for attack.” Affirmation leaders have often pointed to the irony that the LDS Church would endorse the constitutional amendment after its staunch efforts in the nineteenth century to resist the federal government’s attempts to regulate marriage in Utah.

The same irony was observed two decades ago by Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve: “There is an irony inherent in the Church’s taking a public position opposing homosexual marriages,” wrote Oaks in 1984. “In [Reynolds v United States], in which the United States Supreme Court sustained the validity of the anti-polygamy laws, the Court defined marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman. The court’s stress in that case was on one. The modern relevance of the Reynolds opinion is in its reference to marriage as being between a man and a woman. The irony would arise if the Church used as an argument for the illegality of homosexual marriages the precedent formerly used against the Church to establish the illegality of polygamous marriages.” (The complete text of Oaks’s statement is available at www.ldspapers.faithweb.com)

First Presidency Weighs In On Nuclear Waste Plan

On 4 May, the First Presidency Stepped into the Public Policy Arena Once More, This Time in an “Official Comment” About a U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s Proposal to Have High-Level Nuclear Waste Pass Through Utah, and More Specifically for Developing a Train-to-Truck Transfer Site in Utah’s Tooele County.

The Full Statement Reads: “The transportation and storage of high-level nuclear waste create substantial and legitimate public health, safety, and environmental concerns. It is not reasonable to suggest that any one area bear a disproportionate burden of the transportation and concentration of nuclear waste. We ask the federal government to harness the technical and creative power of the country to develop options for the disposal of nuclear waste.”

Though the statement can be read as simply a plea of “not in our backyard,” the First Presidency’s encouragement for new technologies and options for disposing of nuclear waste perhaps represents something broader.

A Salt Lake Tribune story about the statement noted that this is only the fourth time in the past half century that the LDS Church has spoken out on something not typically deemed to be a “moral issue.” The other instances cited by the Tribune are the Church’s 1981 statements about the MX Missile and comments made in the 1960s about communism, reappoionment, and the John Birch Society.

Claremont Chair in Mormon Studies Moves to Next Level

A 28 April Signing Ceremony at the Home of Claremont Graduate University President Robert Klitgaard Officially Launched the Fundraising Campaign for the Howard W. Hunter Chair in Mormon Studies. More than $1 million dollars has already been pledged toward a total fundraising goal of $6 million, which would provide funding for the post into perpetuity, as well as provide for the creation of a facility to house a center for Mormon studies and the chair.

Organizers expect to announce within the next six months a search to fill the position and expect to have completed the hire in time for the Fall 2007 semester. When the post is filled, Claremont will be the first secular university in the United States to have a dedicated faculty position in Mormon studies.

In an interview with the Deseret Morning News, Armand Mauss, a member of the Claremont Council for the Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who has also been teaching courses on Mormonism at the southern California school for the past two semesters, said that the documents outlining the chair’s creation are designed to “make sure the teaching and research done is legitimate academic research and not something in support of the LDS Church’s mission.”

The chair is named after the only LDS Church president to have lived in California. President Hunter’s widow, Ines Hunter, still lives there, in San Clemente, Orange County. One son, John Hunter, will serve as president of the Howard W. Hunter Foundation, the non-profit entity that will administer the funding for the chair and other Mormon studies programs and conferences at Claremont. Another son, Richard Hunter, is also a member of the Foundation’s board of trustees.
BYU News

HUNDREDS PROTEST BYU POLICIES TOWARDS GAYS

SPEECHES, A RALLY, A MARCH, AND A DRAMATIC “die-in” marked pro-gay demonstrations held at Brigham Young University 10–12 April. With the participation of some gay and straight BYU students, the events were sponsored by Soulforce, a national gay and lesbian organization that describes itself as fighting religious and political oppression through nonviolent resistance.

The protest at BYU was one stop on a tour by thirty-three Soulforce members to protest the anti-gay climate prevalent in several religious and military colleges across the U.S. After conducting a survey of some 110,000 students in 2005, the Princeton Review ranked BYU among the ten colleges with the lowest acceptance of gay people.

On 10 April, some two hundred demonstrators held a rally in Kiwanis Park, adjacent to the BYU campus. One of the speakers was Matt Kulisch, a 23-year-old BYU student and returned missionary who identifies himself as gay.

“My church has always taught me the principle of standing for something true,” said Kulisch. “My integrity demanded this message of God’s love for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people be told in its entirety. Others have died because they did not receive this message. If I can’t put my life on the line in their memory, then I’m not being who I should be.”

On 11 April, Kulisch and other BYU students joined a march that ended on university property. The marchers were arrested, beginning with Kulisch. Before being arrested, the demonstrators staged an hour-long “die-in” in memory of twenty-four gay Mormons who had committed suicide in part because of conflicts between their homosexuality and Church teachings. Each participant waited while the biography of the person he or she represented was read, then, carrying a lily, walked to a field and collapsed on the grass.

Lauren Jackson, who is straight, was one of the BYU students arrested during the “die-in” event. “I’m not advocating a gay lifestyle,” said Jackson. “I’ve known people who have come out to me and who have struggled within the Church. An anti-Christlike attitude exists among many Church members.” Jackson was joined by her boyfriend Alex Liberato, who recently returned from serving an LDS mission in Chile.

BYU student Emil Pohling did not participate in the march but told the press he will leave BYU because he constantly worries he will be disciplined under BYU’s Honor Code.

“I’m constantly in fear of doing something that would have some repercussions,” said Pohling. “The counselor I spoke to said any implicit or explicit act or show of homosexuality is subject to investigation or review by the Honor Code Office. I’m worried that anything I do, including this interview, may be considered implicit or explicit behavior.”

BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins told the Deseret Morning News that BYU has been preparing for the demonstrations since January. Preparations included a rare mass email to faculty, staff, and students, communication with the police forces of other colleges on Soulforce’s itinerary, and advice from LDS Public Affairs and Church security.

Some of the decisions BYU made in order to minimize the chance for negative pictures included dressing its police force in suits and ties rather than uniforms and not using handcuffs to arrest trespassers.

Early on, Soulforce had contacted BYU with a list of activities they wanted to carry out on campus. “We told them we could not accommodate them,” said Jenkins.

Termination protest. Some two hundred BYU students participated in a rally to protest the termination of Todd Hendricks, an adviser to the student association who called for “greater transparency” in student elections. Hendricks says that during the past three years, student candidates were disqualified by a committee of administrators and ten anonymous students in a process that plays favorites.

Ashley Sanders, one of the rally organizers, says the protesters see Hendricks’s termination as part of a larger problem with academic freedom and administrative transparency on campus.

Institute renamed. BYU announced the renaming of the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART) to the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. According to BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson, “This change firmly sets the future direction of the institute, which is to promote profound scholarship supporting the restored gospel of Jesus Christ—something Elder Maxwell cared about deeply.”
CHURCH STATEMENT ENCOURAGES LDS DEMOCRATS

CAN YOU BE A DEMOCRAT AND A GOOD MORMON? A recent official statement by the LDS Church suggests you can. “Principles compatible with the gospel may be found in the platforms of all major political parties,” said the letter, read from LDS pulpits across Utah on 19 March. “While the Church does not endorse political candidates, platforms or parties, members are urged to be full participants in political, governmental and community affairs.”

The letter, similar in language to others Church leaders have sent in the past, came only days before political caucuses were to meet in Utah neighborhoods, and some believe the letter had an encouraging effect on Mormon Democrats who otherwise would not have participated in their caucuses.

“I don’t think I would have been here if [Church leaders] hadn’t said that,” said Byron Adams, from Woodland Hills, during what is believed to be that Utah town’s first-ever Democratic caucus. “It is a great hope of mine that people realize [being a Democrat] is not akin to being a Mormon who owns a liquor store.”

Veteran Utah political pollster Dan Jones believes the statement is very important. “There are those who truly believe you cannot be a good Mormon and a Democrat, and I think this really dispels that notion,” said Jones. “I think there are many Democrats in the Legislature and in public office at all levels that have encouraged the Church to put out a statement.”

For an encouraging word prior to this latest statement, Mormon Democrats could look to a January 1998 Salt Lake Tribune interview given by Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the First Quorum of the Seventy in which he stated that the Church needs members to be in both political parties and that the lopsided Mormon Republican dominance in Utah hurts both public policy and the Church (SUNSTONE, August 1998, 82–87).

In a 2004 survey, 61 percent of Utahns claimed Republican affiliation while 24 percent said they were Democrats.

Solar Flare

THEATER WARNS MOVIEGOERS THAT LDS FILM IS “NOT CHRISTIAN”

A SAN DIEGO MOVIE THEATER SPARKED OUTRAGE AMONG MORMONS WHEN THEY LEARNED ITS STAFF WAS issuing a warning to moviegoers that Richard Dutcher’s film States of Grace is a “Mormon,” not a “Christian,” film. The staff of the Horton Plaza 14 Theaters said that they began giving the warning because people had complained that they were induced to see the film on false pretenses.

More than thirty supporters of the film gathered in San Diego to protest the theater and reaffirm that Mormons are Christian. With signs that read, “Grace is for Mormons, too” and “Mormons (heart) Jesus, too,” a small group protested by the theater while a larger group gathered in a nearby hotel.

Dutcher attempted to minimize the incident, urging supporters not to let things get out of hand. “I asked them to see if they could counter the accusations about not being Christian by doing something that is Christian—by turning the other cheek,” Dutcher told a Deseret Morning News reporter. “It was just an ill-informed, ill-advised effort on the part of a few overzealous employees. And the theaters, for the most part, have been very supportive of the film.”

States of Grace explores themes of faith and redemption in the lives of a group of people whom Mormon missionaries encounter as they preach in the streets of Los Angeles. To hear a podcast interview in which Dutcher talks about his new film, visit SunstoneBlog.com.
**Deceased.** CAROL JEAN CLARK OTTESEN, 76, on 19 March, in Mapleton, Utah. Ottesen taught English and Native American Studies at BYU and English at Cal State Dominguez Hills, and Shandong Medical School and Beijing University in China. She was the author of three books and several times won SUNSTONE writing prizes, most recently for her Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest memoir, “Murky Ponds and Lighted Places” (SUNSTONE, July 2003).

**Married.** ELDER RUSSELL M. NELSON, 82, of the Quorum of the Twelve, to WENDY LEE WATSON, 56, in the Salt Lake Temple. “Open your eyes, man!” said Nelson in a dramatic speech delivered during the April 2006 General Conference. “Can’t you see? Pay attention! Your wife loves you! She needs you!” Five days later, he took his own advice to heart as he married Watson, a popular LDS author and BYU professor with degrees in nursing, psychology, marriage and family therapy, and gerontology. Nelson’s first wife, Dantzel White Nelson, died 12 February 2005. By marrying Watson, Russell joins fellow apostles L. Tom Perry and Dallin H. Oaks, who also have two wives sealed to them for eternity.

**Placed.** On the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list, WARREN JEFFS, 50. Jeffs, the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, is wanted in connection with charges of sexual misconduct with a minor and other crimes. He has not been seen by anyone outside the FLDS community for two years. Jeffs’s brother, SETH STEED JEFFS, 33, pled guilty on 28 April to a federal charge of harboring a fugitive. Jeffs was arrested last October following a traffic stop near Pueblo, Colorado. He was in possession of a large amount of cash, as well as numerous cell phones, letters, and other items intended for his older brother. Jeffs told police he didn’t know his brother’s whereabouts and wouldn’t tell them if he did. Sentencing for Jeffs is set for 14 July.

**Defensive.** Mormon U.S. Representative JOHN DOOLITTLE (R-Roseville, California), after the indictment of close friend and disgraced Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Doolittle recently sent an email to Sacramento-area Mormons blasting news coverage about his association with Abramoff and reaffirming his innocence. “I have done nothing to bring shame to myself, my family, or my church,” he wrote. According to a story in the *Sacramento Bee*, Doolittle may have received as much as $140,000 in perks and gifts from Abramoff.

**Running.** For Utah Senate, transgender activist and former LDS high councilor JENNIFER LEE JACKSON, 54. Born Ken Prince, Jackson served a mission in New York state, married twice, fathered six children, and served as a Sandy councilman. Three years ago, Jackson began to transition into a woman, legally changing her name and undergoing sex-reassignment surgery. In recent months, Jackson has received wide media attention, appearing in stories by the Deseret Morning News, the Salt Lake Tribune, and National Public Radio.

**Awarded.** Olympic silver medal, to former BYU student and bobsled driver SHAUNA ROHBOCK, 27, in the 2006 Torino Winter Olympic Games. Rohbock and teammate Valerie Fleming completed their four runs down the 19-curve track just .71 seconds behind the gold-medal-winning German team. Other Mormon Olympians who competed in Torino include TORAH BRIGHT (snowboarding, Australia), MICHELLE DESPAIN (luge, Argentina), WERNER HOEGER (luge, Venezuela), and STEVE NYMAN (Alpine skiing, USA).

**Threatened.** With excommunication, BUCKLEY JEPSON, 57, after marrying his partner MICHAEL KESSLER in Canada, where same-sex marriage is now legal. Jepsson, a lifetime Church member, said that for several months, his stake president in the Washington D.C. area has been encouraging him to voluntarily resign his membership. Jepsson had been quietly attending LDS meetings as an openly gay man for years, having been welcomed to worship by his branch president. But when the
branch was combined with other units to form a ward, Jeppson’s new bishop felt the need to consult with the stake president, who determined to act.

In a podcast interview for MormonStories.org in March, Jeppson claims he does not dispute the Church’s right to excommunicate him if it so determines, but he believes that since it isn’t his choice, the leaders should act rather than ask him to resign. “It’s not going to be my choice to deny my heritage and my faith.” Jeppson’s story became national news when it was picked up by the Associated Press. The story was judged newsworthy because it is the first time a Latter-day Saint in a legal same-sex marriage has been threatened with Church discipline.

The Safe Space Coalition, a grassroots group of Mormons who support Jeppson, has launched a website at www.ldssafespace.org. The coalition is raising funds to send flowers to Jeppson’s stake president and promote the message that “many are ready for a more inclusive paradigm that has safe space for all within the LDS Church.”

Madeover. KATHRYN KNUDSEN, on the 28 April episode of the popular TLC fashion program, What Not to Wear, Knudsen, an artist and active Mormon from Provo, Utah, was flown to New York City, where she consulted with the show’s two hosts and was given $5000 to makeover her wardrobe. “In my religion, I need to be covered, and there are certain sorts of guidelines for that,” Knudsen said. But by show’s end, she decided the multiple-layered look she’d previously favored was too extreme. Of some tighter-fitting clothes she’d chosen, Knudsen mused: “It does make you feel a little more connected to your soul... to see your body and your brain at the same time.” (Knudsen’s artwork can viewed at kathrynknudsen.com.)

Reported. To his stake president. MATT LIVINGSTON, a 17-year-old intern with the Southern Utah News, after criticizing Kanab, Utah, mayor KIM LAWSON for passing a resolution that calls marriage between a man and a woman “ordained by God.” Unhappy with Livingston’s remarks, Lawson sent a letter to the teen’s stake president expressing “concern” for him. Days later, the Utah Press Association awarded Matt Livingston a $500 Super Journalist Scholarship at its annual meeting in St. George.

This story really began with the Kanab city council’s unanimous 10 January 2006 adoption of the “natural-family resolution,” a nonbinding statement which touts marriage between men and women as “ordained of God” and conceives of homes as “open to a full quiver of children.” It also promotes young women becoming “wives, homemakers, and mothers” and young men growing into “husbands, home builders, and fathers.” The resolution is sponsored by the Sutherland Institute, an independent, Utah-based non-profit public policy group, which had sent the resolution to small cities throughout the state. Kanab was the only city that chose to adopt it.

Unshaken. Filmmaker RICHARD DUTCHER, after a blaze destroyed his new offices in Mapleton, Utah. Although the flames burned valuable prints of Dutcher’s God’s Army and States of Grace, the negatives are safely locked in California. The fire was deemed accidental. “I don’t like to see people walking around like some horrible tragedy just happened,” Dutcher told the Deseret Morning News. “It’s a setback for sure, but that’s it. Nobody was inside, none of the firefighters got hurt, so it’s just stuff [we lost]. I’ll just have to build a better office somewhere else.”

Featured. Mormon historian D. MICHAEL QUINN, 62, in an 6 April story on the front page of the Wall Street Journal. The article was about the influence of religious believers on hiring for university positions where the scholar’s subject touches upon that faith tradition. Quinn was used by reporter Daniel Golden as an example of someone who, though eminently qualified as a historian and teacher, is effectively unhirable because of his research on controversial aspects of the Mormon past. Though the article addressed the phenomenon of undue donor influence on university hiring within the wider academy, the majority of the piece focused on Quinn and Mormon studies.

In telling Quinn’s story, the article shared information about the scholar’s personal finances which prompted a group of friends to start a support fund. For more information, visit www.helpmikequinn.net.

Stumped. All the contestants on the 16 December episode of Jeopardy! by the $1200 clue in the category, “Mr. & Mrs. Smith.” The “answer” read: “A book called In Sacred Loneliness documents thirty-three of the Mrs. Smiths in his life.” In giving the answer, host Alex Trebeck said, “That would be Joseph Smith—Mormon.” In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith was written by LDS historian TODD COMPTON.
THE FINAL JUDGMENT is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.

A parable illustrates this understanding. A wealthy father knew that if he were to bestow his wealth upon a child who had not yet developed the needed wisdom and stature, the inheritance would probably be wasted. The father said to his child:

"All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I have I can easily give you, but that which I am you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours."

NOW is the time for each of us to work toward our personal conversion, toward becoming what our Heavenly Father desires us to become. As we do so, we should remember that our family relationships—even more than our Church callings—are the setting in which the most important part of that development can occur. . . The conversion we must achieve requires us to be a good husband and father or a good wife and mother. Being a successful Church leader is not enough. Exaltation is an eternal family experience, and it is our mortal family experiences that are best suited to prepare us for it. . . .

I hope the importance of conversion and becoming will cause our local leaders to reduce their concentration on statistical measures of actions and to focus more on what our brothers and sisters are and what they are striving to become. . . .

ALL of this helps us understand an important meaning of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, which the Savior gave to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like (Matt. 20:7) . . . . At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard gave the same wage to every worker, even to those who had come in the eleventh hour. When those who had worked the entire day saw this, "they murmured against the goodman of the house" (Matt. 20:11). The owner did not yield but merely pointed out that he had done no one any wrong, since he had paid each man the agreed amount.

Like other parables, this one can teach several different and valuable principles. For present purposes its lesson is that the Master’s reward in the Final Judgment will not be based on how long we have labored in the vineyard. We do not obtain our heavenly reward by punching a time clock. What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to become something. For some of us, this requires a longer time than for others. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors. Many who come in the eleventh hour have been refined and prepared by the Lord in ways other than formal employment in the vineyard. These workers are like the prepared dry mix to which it is only necessary to "add water"—the perfecting ordinance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that addition—even in the eleventh hour—these workers are in the same state of development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard.

This parable teaches us that we should never give up hope and loving associations with family members and friends whose fine qualities (see Moro. 7:5-14) evidence their progress toward what a loving Father would have them become. Similarly, the power of the Atonement and the principle of repentance show that we should never give up on loved ones who now seem to be making many wrong choices.

Instead of being judgmental about others, we should be concerned about ourselves. We must not give up hope. We must not stop striving. We are children of God, and it is possible for us to become what our Heavenly Father would have us become.
Laura Hamblin's poems roam widely and notice everything, and sometimes a witch speaks them; the poems convince us that a truth-telling wise woman's voice is just what we need to hear. She alone can name the hates we keep "in a shoe box, buried / in the back yard / under a tree," or remind us that in our raging loneliness, each of us can become a "midnight hag." And because she recognizes prettiness for the lie it is, she can the more plainly show us beauty: the goddess of wisdom, Sophia, "singing the song she teaches, / in a language I never heard, / in a language I never knew."

—Lisa Bickmore, author of Haste
(Best Poetry Award, Utah Arts Council)
Spiritual growth unfolds as we have direct experience of the Divine and an increasingly intimate relationship with God. This experience and relationship awakens the Divine within; increases our ability to make conscious, loving choices; and nurtures unity within ourselves, with God, and with others. We develop emotional honesty; a calm, appreciative spirit; an increased capacity to love; and freedom from conditioned perception and response. Both Eastern and Western spiritual texts refer to this state as “awakened.”