

# *The Mission of the Holy Ghost: From Believing to Becoming*

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**T**he Book of Mormon is replete with doctrinal declarations that there is “no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). The question for Latter-day Saints is not whether Christ prepared the way to salvation but whether we, individually, receive Him and His priceless gift. We are taught to study the scriptures and search our souls to realize our complete dependence on His selfless sacrifice and know how to sincerely serve Him. Latter-day Saints believe that such realization officially begins when we enter into covenant with the Lord through baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. However, our heartfelt efforts to come unto Christ do not end there, nor do subsequent efforts make operative the fulness of the Atonement in our personal lives unless they are directed and ratified by the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead.

Leading believers to truth and confirming those truths to them after they have entered the gospel covenant is only the beginning of the Holy Ghost's mission. Through the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Ghost directs us to become more Spirit-filled and Christlike. This paper, grounded in Latter-day Saint doctrine, focuses on how gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit enable us to show our dependence on the Lord's atoning sacrifice and to "be saved in the kingdom of God, . . . for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation" (D&C 6:13).

### *Description of Gifts of the Spirit*

A detailed discussion of gifts of the Spirit appears in three different places in our books of scripture: in a letter by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, in the teachings of Moroni in the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, and in a revelation to Joseph Smith recorded as section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The gifts of healing, faith, tongues, wisdom, knowledge, working miracles, and prophecy are among those listed in these passages and consequently are better known. These are only the beginning, however, of the innumerable gifts of the Spirit.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, an Apostle, explained: "Spiritual gifts are endless in number and infinite in variety. Those listed in the revealed word are simply illustrations of the boundless outpouring of divine grace that a gracious God gives those who love and serve him."<sup>1</sup> Church President Brigham Young suggested more widely received gifts: "The gift of seeing with the natural eyes is just as much a gift as the gift of tongues. The Lord gave that gift and we can do as we please with regard to seeing; we can use the sight of the eye to the glory of God, or to our own destruction. The gift of communicating one with another is the gift of God, just as much so as the gift of prophecy, or discerning spirits, of tongues, of healing, or any other gift, though sight, taste, and speech, are so generally bestowed that they are not considered in the same miraculous light as are those gifts mentioned in the Gospel."<sup>2</sup> In the sense that Brigham Young perceived spiritual gifts, we can use our eyesight and communication, for example, to view and propagate pornography or choose to use those same gifts to discern goodness in each other and invite others to Christ. Musical, artistic,

and intellectual gifts can be used to encourage works of darkness or to invite the influence of heaven into our society. From this perspective, Latter-day Saints believe that all of God's children receive gifts of the Spirit; however, additional gifts with their inherent responsibilities are given to those who come closer to Christ.

Some gifts are readily recognizable, while many more are rarely noticed. Conspicuousness of the gift does not dictate its comparative worth. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "The greatest, the best, the most useful gifts would be known nothing about by an observer."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the Apostle Paul recommended that we bestow "more abundant honour" on the "less honorable" gifts because these less-flashy talents bridge "schisms" in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:22–25). Latter-day Saint Apostle Marvin J. Ashton identified gifts such as asking, listening, being agreeable, seeking that which is righteous, not passing judgment, caring for others, and offering prayer as examples of such schism-healing but less-noticeable gifts.<sup>4</sup>

### *Seek Earnestly for Spiritual Gifts*

In the New Testament, Paul admonished us to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:30); in the Book of Mormon, Moroni invited us to "lay hold upon every good gift" (Moroni 10:30); and in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord counsels us to "seek . . . earnestly the best gifts" (D&C 46:8). Who is included in these invitations? And how can we appropriately respond in order to receive the gifts the Lord desires to grant us?

According to scripture, no sincere disciple of God is ever denied spiritual gifts. In the Book of Mormon we read that "[the Lord] inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; . . . black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). Elder McConkie reiterated this idea: "Where spiritual things are concerned, as pertaining to all the gifts of the Spirit, with reference to the receipt of revelation, the gaining of testimonies, and the seeing of visions, in all matters that pertain to godliness and holiness and which are brought to pass as a result of personal righteousness—in all these things men and women stand in a position of absolute equality

before the Lord. He is no respecter of persons nor of sexes, and he blesses those men and those women who seek him and serve him and keep his commandments.”<sup>5</sup>

Simply knowing that we are each entitled to receive gifts of the Spirit through the grace and mercy of the Lord does not automatically send them our way. Spiritual gifts do not come lightly. Evangelical pastor-teacher Charles Stanley wrote that too often “the Holy Spirit is treated like an errand boy rather than holy God. . . . The Holy Spirit’s power cannot be harnessed. His power cannot be used to accomplish anything other than the Father’s will. He is not a candy dispenser. He is not a vending machine. He is not a genie waiting for someone to rub His lamp the right way. He is holy God.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind, which “bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8), giving manifestation how and when He deems appropriate, rather than waiting for us to decide that we could use some help. God does not bequeath His gifts simply because we ask (see D&C 9:7).

With a voice of chastisement, early Latter-day Saint Apostle George Q. Cannon asked several soul-searching questions in this regard: “How many of you ask the Father in the name of Jesus to manifest Himself to you through these powers and these gifts? Or do you go along day by day like a door turning on its hinges, without having any feeling upon the subject, without exercising any faith whatever, content to be baptized and be members of the Church and to rest there, thinking that your salvation is secure because you have done this?”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the Lord pleads with us to desire His gifts, to pray for them with all sincerity of heart, and to live our lives in a manner that invites the Spirit to abide with us. But the receipt of spiritual blessings is still on His terms.

### *Purposes for Spiritual Gifts*

Why are we given spiritual gifts? How do they contribute to the Lord’s work of salvation for His children? Spiritual gifts help to lead us back to God in at least three ways.<sup>8</sup>

**1. Spiritual gifts enable us to lead others to His assistance.** Shortly after His Resurrection, Jesus Christ promised spiritual gifts as “signs [that] follow them that believe” (Mark 16:17). At baptism, we

covenant to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.” In return, God promises to reinforce that covenant by “pour[ing] out his Spirit more abundantly upon [us]” (Mosiah 18:9–10). Simply stated, God gives us the capacity to be effective ambassadors for Him by sending us the Holy Spirit, bearing His gifts.

Orson Pratt, an early Apostle, emphasized the value of spiritual gifts in spreading the gospel throughout the earth: “We . . . give [honest inquirers] an infallible sign by which they may always know the kingdom of God from all other kingdoms. Whenever the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost are enjoyed, there the kingdom of God exists[;] wherever these gifts are not enjoyed, there the kingdom does not exist. . . . Nothing can be more erroneous than to suppose that these signs were merely given to establish the truth of Christianity, and that when that was once established, they were no longer needed. The signs are as much included in the system of Christianity, as any other blessing that can be named. If the signs have ceased, true Christianity, of which the signs are a component part, has ceased.”<sup>9</sup>

A proper and dignified use of these gifts bears graphic witness to both sincere seekers and believers of a power greater than us all. According to Paul, spiritual gifts are a means to strengthen the collective membership of the Church, which he likened to the body of Christ. He wrote that spiritual gifts are given “that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25–26).

Since spiritual gifts are a clear designation of God’s divinity, those who deny them receive some of God’s harshest condemnations. Denial of His gifts translates to a denial of Him. Both Mormon and Moroni (the last two prophet-leaders in the Book of Mormon) gave similar warnings to those who would live in the latter days. I cite Mormon’s caution: “Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost! Yea, and wo unto him that shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ” (3 Nephi 29:6–7; see also Mormon 9:7–8; Moroni 10:7–8).

What did these ancient prophets see in us that led them to issue this warning in their final written testimonies? Did they see people who would turn their backs on God, who would take God out of schools, who would ridicule the mention of Deity in government dealings, but then, when tragedy hits, would angrily shake their fists heavenward, crying, “Where were you?” In a day when the world accepts any explanation except that which is spiritual, when empirical evidence is the de facto standard, and when shallow imitations of God’s gifts are flaunted on every corner, prophets raise a clarion call.

Why would anyone deny a gift of the Spirit, especially after making covenants with God? Consider the question from a different angle. Why would I deny a tangible gift from an acquaintance? One reason may be the fear of indebtedness to the giver. If I conclude that the appropriate response to the giver is greater than what I want to pay, I may deny the gift and avoid any obligations. When I deny that a talent I possess came as a gift from the Spirit, I can more easily justify disobedience and disloyalty to Christ. If I deny His gifts, I communicate that I don’t need His Atonement.

I could reason that my ability to speak another language fluently is not a gift from God, but a direct result of years of study. I could claim that my latest writing did not come through divine assistance, but from my own brilliant thought processes. In countless ways, we may deny the Spirit’s outpouring of capacity, direction, and knowledge. Whenever we focus on ourselves rather than on the glory and generosity of Christ as a gift is manifest, we deny the gifts of the Spirit. Whenever we jealously guard our gift rather than share it, whenever we reject Christ’s help because we think we can manage alone, whenever we use a gift against the Father’s will, whenever we “confess not [God’s] hand in all things” (D&C 59:21), we deny His gifts. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are specifically warned against claiming that a gift is the fruit of our own accomplishments: “But a commandment I give unto them, that they shall not boast themselves of these things, neither speak them before the world; for these things are given unto you for your profit and for salvation” (D&C 84:73).

On the other hand, whenever we confess God’s hand in our lives—by our talk and by our walk—we signify to others the reality of

a higher Power and Source. As we glorify God through spiritual gifts, we naturally become witnesses for the Lord.

**2. Spiritual gifts offer protection from the adversary and from deception.** Some gifts are specifically given to shield us from destructive tactics of the adversary. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote that the Lord “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; . . . that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:11, 14). As much as we may want to argue otherwise, outside influences shape our thoughts and actions. “If we do not receive gifts and guidance and doctrine and commandments from on high,” Elder McConkie observed, “we shall of necessity receive them from some other source. Others have guidance to offer, doctrine to teach, and commandments to give. We must choose what to believe and elect how we shall live.”<sup>10</sup>

Latter-day Saints believe that their Church leaders are spiritually blessed to discern teachings and practices that will lead the flock from the firm foundation of Christ. The President of the Church is particularly endowed “to be like unto Moses . . . yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 107:91–92).

Closer to home, the bishop (pastor) of each congregation can be inspired to detect false teachings, practices, and gifts. The Doctrine and Covenants reads: “And unto the bishop of the church, and unto such as God shall appoint and ordain to watch over the church and to be elders unto the church, are to have it given unto them to discern all those gifts lest there shall be any among you professing and yet be not of God” (D&C 46:27).

Counterfeit gifts have always plagued the work of God, picking off those not firmly grounded and rooted in the foundation. The Prophet Joseph Smith cautioned, “Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God.”<sup>11</sup> President Boyd K. Packer observed, “I have not known of any case where members who have been misled would not have been protected had they followed the counsel of their

bishop. Invariably they had received counsel but turned aside from it thinking that their inspiration took precedence. I repeat, there is great protection in following the counsel of our local leaders if we are interested in qualifying for spiritual gifts.”<sup>12</sup>

**3. Spiritual gifts repair our imperfections and compensate for our inadequacies.** Mormons believe that the Lord promises every person a gift. Joseph Smith learned, “For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:11–12). Spiritual gifts are typically easier to detect in others than in ourselves. Being surrounded by individuals who are clearly blessed with spiritual gifts can lead us to feel shy on talent and incapable of contribution.

We may be inclined to bury our gift out of fear. Remember the servant in the parable who hid his one talent because of his perception of a harsh God? He justified holding back, saying, “Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, . . . and I was afraid” (Matthew 25:24–25). Through the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord counseled us: “But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man” (D&C 60:2). By focusing so much on our imperfections and weaknesses, we become incapable of receiving and sharing God-given gifts.

To those of us who fear that our weaknesses get in the way of our ability to stand as witnesses for God, we need to remember that God gives spiritual gifts as the means to overcome weaknesses. Almost a century ago, George Q. Cannon taught: “If any of us [is] imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections. . . . They are intended for this purpose. No man ought to say, ‘Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.’ . . . Every defect in the human character can be corrected through the exercise of faith and pleading with the Lord for the gifts that He has said He will give unto those who believe and obey His commandments.”<sup>13</sup>

Overcoming imperfections through the righteous exercise of spiritual gifts empowers us to accomplish whatever the Lord asks. Echoing



sentiments similar to those of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, one Book of Mormon prophet recorded the Lord's statement: "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27).

Clearly, gifts of the Spirit follow sincere believers of Christ. They direct us back to God. They empower us as disciples to lead others to find God. They provide protection from false teachings and practices. They facilitate the repair of our imperfections and compensate for our inadequacies. Taken alone, however, as remarkable as they are, these gifts will not lead us to salvation. Gifts of the Spirit are a powerful means, but not a guarantee, of receiving eternal life. Only when these gifts lead and assist us to bear the fruit of the Spirit are we promised God's greatest gift.

### *Fruit of the Spirit*

In his epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul supplied a list of "works of the flesh" that follow the natural man: "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Galatians 5:19–21). Juxtaposed to such fruits of darkness, Paul classified the "fruit of the Spirit" as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" with an attached admonition, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22–23, 25).

Parley P. Pratt, an early Church leader, described the influence of spiritual fruit. He wrote, "It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens and gives tone to the nerves. . . . It is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole thing."<sup>14</sup>

Much more than what we do, the fruit of the Spirit witnesses what we become. Millard J. Erickson, an Evangelical scholar, appropriately explained that being filled with the Spirit "is not so much a matter of our getting more of the Holy Spirit. . . . It is, rather, a matter of his possessing more of our lives."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus taught that His disciples would be known “by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16; see also 3 Nephi 14:16), not by their gifts. While spiritual gifts are tools that aid in the operation and dissemination of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit is the product created by our personal application of the gospel.

We therefore stand on dangerous ground when we assume that possession of any gift of the Spirit is evidence that our daily lives are in complete harmony with God’s will. Robert L. Millet suggested that one can receive gifts of the Spirit while remaining a poor example of Christlike attributes. He explained, “There are people who are wonderful speakers but horrible Christians. We can have one and not have the other. There are people who do remarkable things in the classroom and do sad things outside the classroom.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, fruit distinguishes true disciples of Christ from those who merely profess belief. I was thrilled to discover this analogy by Evangelical scholar John Stott: “The Christian should resemble a fruit-tree, not a Christmas tree! For the gaudy decorations of a Christmas tree are only tied on, whereas fruit grows on a fruit-tree. In other words, Christian holiness is not an artificial human accretion, but a natural process of fruit-bearing by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

What does all this mean in our modern world? How would society change in the company of Christians bearing fruit of the Spirit? Charles Stanley is right on target with this stirring challenge: “Today, our world desperately needs to see men and women whose lives transcend the norm. The world needs to see husbands and wives who really love each other. The world needs to see Christian businessmen and businesswomen who put honesty before profit and integrity ahead of a paycheck. This generation needs to see teenagers and college students who haven’t just said, ‘No!’ to drugs but who have said, ‘Yes!’ to a life of purity. Our world needs to see some fruit. Real fruit. The kind that remains.”<sup>18</sup>

In that same spirit, I would add other evidences of a Spirit-filled life for Latter-day Saints. We would progress beyond being known for merely abstaining from tobacco and alcohol to earning a widespread reputation for being compassionate neighbors, courteous drivers, and honest business dealers. We need men and women who care more about

justice for all than about saving face; who are ready to really repent, including freely admitting mistakes and making sincere restitution rather than hiding behind legalese; in short—we need members who are committed “to *serve Him* at all hazards.”<sup>19</sup>

Further understanding of the fruit of the Spirit reveals that becoming kinder and gentler in a harsh and selfish world is not the end result of this process. The Spirit is not merely interested in leading us to become better citizens than the natural man. His mission is to help us to become like Christ. The Savior opened our vision with His challenge: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you*” (John 13:34; emphasis added), not simply as ye love yourselves. He lifted our sights to the highest peak when He commanded, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). And through His mercy, merits, and grace, He provided the means to make this a transcendent reality. Those means include granting us the Holy Spirit, who may always be with us.

The Holy Spirit’s role in transforming us into Christlike beings is outlined in the eight Beatitudes. The first four teach how we go from being poor in spirit to being “filled with the Holy Ghost.”

1. **Blessed are the poor in spirit.** I first recognize that I am lacking the Spirit, bankrupt in the Spirit, or *poor in Spirit*. Considered alone, lacking the Spirit is not a blessing. The Book of Mormon, however, provides the missing piece in Christ’s instruction: “Blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*” (3 Nephi 12:3; JST Matthew 5:3). Only when I come unto Christ with my realized need can I hope to eventually be filled with His Spirit.
2. **Blessed are they who mourn.** Turning to Christ when I lack the Spirit illuminates weaknesses and sins that caused the Spirit to depart from me in the first place. That discovery causes me to mourn. Feeling “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10) because my shortcomings bring pain to the Savior encourages me to sincerely repent. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord communicates when my repentance and mourning have been accepted, and I am *comforted* by Christ’s forgiveness.

3. **Blessed are the meek.** Having newly tasted of His grace, I become *meek* and teachable. In this state, I am desirous to obey the Lord in whatever He asks. I will gladly go where He asks me to go, cheerfully say what He asks me to say, and have the faith to become whatever He tells me I am capable of becoming.
4. **Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.** That spirit of obedience leads me to *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, a desire that is answered with the very gift I longed for from the beginning: I am *filled with His Spirit* (see JST Matthew 5:3–6; 3 Nephi 12:3–6). Notice again that I am filled with the Spirit only after I recognize my need for the Spirit's presence in my life, sincerely repent of subsequently illuminated shortcomings, and become meek in willingness to accept and do whatever the Lord may require.

Now “filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6), I am in a position to change and become more Christlike. The fruit of the Spirit can now develop in me, enabling me to reflect the light of the Savior in everyday living. The fruit is thereby identified in the concluding four Beatitudes.

5. **Blessed are the merciful.** Filled with the Spirit, we naturally feel merciful toward those around us. We have just experienced the Savior's mercy and we want to show that *mercy* to people who frankly don't deserve it any more than we did. As an example, we will graciously allow a driver to bulldoze her way into our lane of the freeway without taking offense or feeling a need to retaliate. In short, we feel a natural inclination to show kindness whatever the circumstance when we are filled with the Spirit.
6. **Blessed are the pure in heart.** Our *hearts are so pure* when we are filled with the Spirit that we *see God* everywhere we look. We not only see Him in nature but in neighbors and coworkers, people whose weaknesses and faults are all too apparent. Being filled with the Spirit, we find ourselves treating them with respect and reverence. We listen more attentively, show consideration for their responsibilities and

- time constraints, and express genuine appreciation for their contributions to the overall good of the family or company.
7. **Blessed are the peacemakers.** We become *peacemakers*, or as Isaiah described them, those who “publish peace” (Isaiah 52:7; see also Mosiah 15:14–18). We want to share the glorious good news so that others can be filled with the selfsame Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, we are “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us]” (1 Peter 3:15).
  8. **Blessed are all they who are persecuted for my [God’s] name’s sake.** Finally, we can withstand any manner of persecution that the adversary may inflict upon us (see Matthew 5:7–12; 3 Nephi 12:7–12). Being filled with the Spirit, we cannot be offended even when others intend evil against us. We respond with genuine kindness, turn the other cheek, and “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Completing this cycle once does not immediately make us like Christ, but it does bring us closer. We know more about the Spirit and can discern sins and shortcomings that were not apparent in our lives before, and then the cycle repeats. With such divine tutelage and a willingness to endure to the end, we are gradually becoming like our Savior! We are changing from the inside out! We are learning to love as He loved—to receive the greatest fruit of the Spirit, charity, “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47).

### *Charity—the Quintessential Fruit*

Both the Apostle Paul and the prophet Mormon underscore charity as the essential, quintessential fruit of the Spirit: “and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2; see also Moroni 7:44, 46). No matter what other virtues we may have or good deeds we have performed, if our motive for serving does not reflect charity, we are as “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). The Book of Mormon describes charity as “the pure love

of Christ,” a love that endures forever; “and whoso is possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

Elder Bruce C. Hafen explained how this love is different from any other: “The purpose of charity . . . is not merely to cause a proper motivation for charitable acts toward other people—though that is of course one important result. The ultimate purpose is to make Christ’s followers like him: . . . We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving. If our vertical relationship with God is complete, then, by the fruit of that relationship, the horizontal relationship with our fellow beings will also be complete. We then act charitably toward others, not merely because we think we should, but because that is the way we are.”<sup>20</sup>

While Paul called charity “a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31), Moroni gave us a hint as to how we receive the excellent way: “It was by faith that they of old were called after the holy order of God. Wherefore, by faith was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way” (Ether 12:10–11).

Moroni’s insight that “the more excellent way” comes only by the gift of God’s Only Begotten Son is even more profound when accompanied by commentary by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. He taught:

The greater definition of “the pure love of Christ” . . . is not what we as Christians try but largely fail to demonstrate toward others but rather what Christ totally succeeded in demonstrating toward us. True charity has been known only once. It is shown perfectly and purely in Christ’s unflinching, ultimate, and atoning love for us. It is Christ’s love for us that “suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not.” It is his love for us that is not “puffed up . . . , not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” It is Christ’s love for us that “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” . . . It is that charity—his pure love for us—without which we would be nothing, hopeless, of all men and women most miserable. Truly, those found possessed of the blessings of his love at the last day—the Atonement, the Resurrection, eternal life, eternal promise—surely it shall be well with them. . . . With that divine gift, that redeeming bestowal, we have everything; without it we have nothing and ultimately are nothing.<sup>21</sup>

This same truth emerges in Christ's parable when we discover that *He* is the good Samaritan. Christ meets us where we are—stripped, wounded, and half dead. He has compassion on us and binds our wounds using oil and wine, substances that symbolize His healing power and blood. Finally, He pays our debts and promises to return again to bless us even more (see Luke 10:33–35). Whenever someone calls us a good Samaritan because we approximate the love of Christ when we help them, if we are truly honest, we know that such an appellation is not accurate. Why do *we* feel nurtured, comforted, and embraced when we reach out to ease someone else's burdens? As we show kindness to others, why do *we* feel greater kindness shown to us? In trying to be like the good Samaritan, the Savior heals us right along with the one we are seeking to assist. With His gift of charity, our meager capacity is transformed to echo His all-encompassing light. As John testified, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

### *Conclusion*

Clearly, "no flesh can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah," as a Book of Mormon prophet testified (2 Nephi 2:8). Undeniably, Paul taught eternal truth when he wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). But Latter-day Saints believe we must show the Redeemer that we reverence His gift. Through our daily repentance and our striving to always keep His commandments, God will grant His Spirit to be our constant companion. Through that Spirit we receive various gifts that enlarge our capacity to obey and become. Through that Spirit, the grace of the Lord, and our faith in the Atonement of Christ, our lives begin to be transformed to more fully reflect the Savior's perfect love.

Why does the Lord do this? What is His purpose? The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "where faith [in Christ] is, there will the knowledge of God be also, with all things which pertain thereto—revelations, visions, and dreams, as well as every necessary thing, in order that the possessors of faith may be perfected, and obtain salvation; . . .

And he who possesses it will, through it, obtain all necessary knowledge and wisdom, until he shall know God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has sent—whom to know is eternal life.”<sup>22</sup>

## *Notes*

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 371.

2. Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 254; *Deseret News Weekly*, August 27, 1956, 2.

3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 246.

4. See Marvin J. Ashton, in Conference Report, October 1987, 23.

5. Bruce R. McConkie, “Our Sisters from the Beginning,” *Ensign*, January 1979, 61.

6. Charles Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 114.

7. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of George Q. Cannon*, ed. Jerred L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 1:195–96.

8. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Spiritual Gifts,” *Ensign*, September 1986, 72.

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