

Chapter 1

AND HE DID INVITE THEM ONE BY ONE

Merrill J. Bateman

A short time ago I received an invitation to speak at the funeral of a fifteen-year-old young woman. Juliett's life was unusual in that she was born a trisomy-18 baby with a life expectancy of a few hours. Kind and loving parents, a skilled doctor, and divine intervention combined to give her a life that lasted years instead of moments. As the parents spoke briefly at the service, I learned how the young woman had become a blessing to her family. She never was able to talk. Her communication occurred through facial expressions and the light in her eyes. She never walked but was carried wherever she went. Because of her needs, she became the center of attention in the family—not only for the parents but also for her four sisters, who assisted in her care.

As I listened to the mother, I knew her feelings of love for her daughter were deep. She spoke of a future day when

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Juliatt would once again wrap her arms about her neck, not ever wanting to let go. The mother, a trained nurse, had used all her skills in providing hours of daily therapy to ease the burden of breathing and make life tolerable. The mother indicated that every breath taken was labored. Except on Sundays, the young woman would awaken in the late morning and retire well after midnight. With other children to care for, the mother slept only a few hours. On Sunday Juliatt always awakened at 6:30 A.M., anticipating church meetings. The early rise gave the mother just enough time to get everyone ready. The mother noted that when her young daughter reached twelve years of age, a joy and excitement entered her life through her associations with the other young women of the ward. A few minutes prior to the start of each Young Women meeting, Juliatt would begin to tremble with excitement as she anticipated being with her friends. The young women in the class were true friends as they greeted her each Sunday and made her part of the group whenever possible.

Juliatt's father was the ward bishop at the time of her death. He is a kindly, caring man who has learned much from his daughter. At the service, he shared a special experience that taught him the purpose of Juliatt's life. On a number of occasions, he had become concerned about the difficulties his daughter encountered in surviving from one day to the next. There were many times when it appeared the young girl would not last through the night, but small miracles preserved her life, and she would carry on. One day when the burden seemed particularly heavy, the father said to himself, "What does life hold for her? What is the purpose of her suffering? Given her limited physical condition, what is she getting out of life?" A few nights later, he had a dream. In the dream, a visitor came and escorted him to a place he had not seen before. As he entered the area, he noticed a long line of people

waiting to greet a person at its head. As he looked more closely, he saw Juliett was the person to whom the people were paying their respects. As he drew closer and could hear the conversation, each person, in turn, was thanking his daughter for the righteous influence she had been in their lives and for the blessings that had come to them through her. The father awoke. He was startled. He now understood why her life had been extended and could see its purpose. Mortal probation is a time to serve, not to receive. In spite of her limited physical abilities, she was blessing others in a simple but profound way.

As I listened, I thought how Juliett had blessed her family and others within her circle of influence. The young woman, through her one-on-one relationships, had been an instrument in the Lord's hands in bringing loved ones to Christ. Juliett's example and the service required to keep her alive had blessed many by deepening feelings of love, increasing patience and long-suffering, instilling peace and joy, expanding faith, and exemplifying meekness and goodness. This wonderful young girl had been the means by which many people experienced the blessings of Jesus' atonement. Family and friends were blessed with the fruits of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23) with Juliett as an agent. Through service to this young woman, those close to her had put "off the natural man [and woman]" and "yield[ed] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit" (Mosiah 3:19).

As one reflects on the blessings received by Juliett's loved ones, one is reminded that the Lord often works through individuals to bring about His purposes (see D&C 1:19-23). Personal progress frequently occurs through one-on-one or "one-by-one" relationships. The father's dream of a long line of people thanking Juliett is a reminder of another great multitude gathered in the Western Hemisphere shortly after the

signs of Christ's death. While discussing the events of the previous weeks, the people assembled heard the Father's voice declaring the presence of His Only Begotten Son. Those present did not fully understand the message even though it was given three times. Following the third declaration, the multitude still believed the personage in their midst was an angelic visitor. As they stood in awe, the Savior plainly proclaimed, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world" (3 Nephi 11:10). The multitude then fell to the earth, reverencing the Redeemer of all mankind. After telling them that He had "drunk out of that bitter cup" (3 Nephi 11:11), He gave this invitation: "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and . . . feel the prints of the nails in my hands and . . . feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world" (3 Nephi 11:14).

Nephi recorded that in response to the Lord's invitation, the multitude went "forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety . . . that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come" (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added).

The multitude totaled 2,500 souls (see 3 Nephi 17:25). If each person were given fifteen to twenty seconds to approach the Lord, touch the open wound in His side, feel the marks in His hands and feet, and express a brief thanks, at least eleven to twelve hours would have been consumed.

Nephi later recorded that the Savior "took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them" (3 Nephi 17:21; emphasis added). The scriptures do not indicate how many children were in the multitude, but one

surmises a few hundred. Again, blessing each child individually would have taken hours to complete.

What was the Savior's purpose in inviting each individual to stand in His immediate presence, to feel the wounds in His hands and feet, and to thrust a hand into His side? Why did He bless each child rather than offer a collective pronouncement? Was the personal, one-by-one relationship established between the Savior and each individual more efficacious than seeing and hearing Him from a distance? The answer was given by the Savior when He said: "And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world" (3 Nephi 18:25).

I believe the Savior's reference to the words *feel* and *see* imply more than physical touching and seeing. If you had been in Bountiful that day and experienced the one-by-one relationship with the Lord, I believe you, too, would have fallen at His feet. You would have known and felt that He had "drunk out of that bitter cup" for you. You would have felt some responsibility for the prints of the nails in His hands and feet and of the sword that pierced His side. You might have seen the engraving of your image in "the palms of [His] hands" (1 Nephi 21:16). If you had been present, a spiritual cleansing and renewal would have been your blessing into the eternities. Some writers have noted that the Savior's appearance to the Nephites produced a season of peace that lasted two hundred years. The truth is that His appearance and the one-by-one relationships He established had an infinite and eternal impact in the lives of those present as well as in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

The Savior's one-by-one invitation and command that we follow a similar pattern in dealing with the world is consistent with the principle that salvation is an individual matter.

Although we are all children of our Heavenly Father, salvation is essentially a one-by-one process. Individual agency gives each person the right to choose his or her destiny. "Opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11) provides alternatives from which one chooses. Spiritual growth is the result of the individual choice to come to Christ, to exercise faith in His redeeming power, to repent of one's sins, to be obedient to elevating principles, and to know Him by living as He lives. Although the highest exalting ordinances are administered "two by two" and by family, saving covenants are administered one person at a time and form the foundation for spiritual development. In the final analysis, we enter the gate one by one, with the Lord judging us "according to [our] works, according to the desire of [our] hearts" (D&C 137:9).

Many aspects of the gospel plan, prepared before the foundation of the earth, take into account the individual nature of the choice process. The creation of an earth separate from our earlier estate, the veil over our minds, opposition, the Fall, and the Atonement all reflect and make possible agency and individual progress. The Lord organized the Church so that each person is blessed with opportunities to serve and grow. The family is the key unit in which one-on-one relationships are formed. The following explores some of the ways in which the gospel provides for each individual's needs and spiritual growth.

THE CREATION AND THE FALL

In discussing the Council in Heaven with Abraham, the Lord told about the decision to create an earth separate from the heavens where the Father's spirit children would each have an opportunity to obtain a physical body, choose between good and evil, and prove themselves. The revelation notes that agency existed in the heavens and that some did not make wise choices and therefore did not qualify for earth

life. On the other hand, those who kept their first estate were added upon (i.e., given a body and further opportunities for growth), and those who keep their second estate will be added upon forever (see Abraham 3:22–26).

Once the earth was finished, Adam and Eve were placed in the garden with the gift of agency, with opposition between the forbidden fruit and the tree of life, and with accountability for their actions (see 2 Nephi 2:15–16). In the garden, opportunities for progress were limited. Adam and Eve chose to partake of the forbidden fruit so that they could enter mortality, have children, and fulfill the measure of their creation (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25). Adam's transgression brought the Fall, which introduced both physical and spiritual death. Knowing the consequence of our first parents' choices, the Father's plan called for a Messiah who would redeem men and women from the fall of Adam and provide a way for each person to overcome his or her sins.

Although the basic elements of the gospel plan are the same for everyone (i.e., a "strait and narrow path" defined by principles and ordinances; 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18), no two individuals are the same. However, the plan makes provision for individual differences through the Atonement and through the trials and tribulations people encounter. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written and stated on numerous occasions that the Father is a tutorial God who customizes the lessons people experience to meet their needs and shape their progress. Sometimes the lessons involve trials, tribulations, and even chastening by a kind and loving Father (see Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19). He is "a loving God . . . who wants His children to be truly happy and to come home."¹

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Lessons from Laman and Lemuel," *Ensign*, November 1999, 7.

Commenting on the trials and tribulations people face, President Boyd K. Packer stated: "Some are tested by poor health, some by a body that is deformed or homely. Others are tested by handsome and healthy bodies; some by the passion of youth; others by the erosions of age. Some suffer disappointment in marriage, family problems; others live in poverty and obscurity. Some (perhaps this is the hardest test) find ease and luxury. All are part of the test, and there is more equality in this testing than sometimes we suspect."²

The linchpin of the Father's plan is the Savior's atonement, which is both infinite (i.e., never-ending, all-encompassing) and eternal (i.e., godlike). The eternal nature of the atoning experience in the garden and on the cross allows for differences and provides a foundation for the customized tutorials, equitable testing, and righteous judgment. To understand better the personal nature of the Atonement, we now turn to its infinite and eternal aspects.

THE ATONEMENT

One of the great sermons on the Atonement was given by Amulek to the Zoramites. In the sermon, Amulek stated that the "great and last sacrifice" could not be the sacrifice of a man or an animal or any manner of fowl because it had to be "an infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10). He then stated that only the Son of God, an infinite and eternal being, was capable of completing the process (see Alma 34:14).

What is meant by his statement? Can one differentiate between the infinite nature of the Lord's sacrifice and its eternal qualities? Ultimately, the infinite and eternal come together just as faith turns into repentance and repentance into baptism. But like the first principles, an appreciation of

2. Boyd K. Packer, "The Choice," *Ensign*, November 1980, 21.

the differences increases one's understanding of the great plan of redemption and the Lord's redeeming power. We come to appreciate the vastness of the Atonement as well as its intimate effects. We begin with the infinite nature.

THE INFINITE ATONEMENT

The word *infinite* means "having no limit or extending indefinitely." There are a number of ways in which the Lord's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and the sacrifice on the cross are infinite. The first is that Christ Himself was an infinite being in that His Father gave Him unending life (see Hebrews 7:16). In speaking to the Jews, Jesus said, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26).

On another occasion, Jesus declared: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:17-18).

Jesus had the capacity to live forever through the inheritance from His Father. He had the seeds of immortality within Him, and death was not mandatory. For Him, death was a choice. On the other hand, His maternal inheritance allowed Him to lay down His life. Through the power received from the Father, He could take it up again. In a way not understood by finite minds, His infinity made possible the never-ending aspects of the Atonement.

Second, the Atonement is infinite through time. The Savior's atonement covers the sins of God's children throughout the eternities. It is timeless. All of God's children born before the meridian of time as well as after are beneficiaries (see John 6:51; 12:32; D&C 19:1-4).

Third, the Atonement is infinite across space. There are

many earths created by the Father through the Son. Speaking of these creations, the Lord revealed to Moses: "And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten" (Moses 1:33).

Under the direction of the Father, Jesus created worlds without number. What happens to the inhabitants on other earths? Who atones for their sins? How are they redeemed? In a revelation entitled "The Vision," Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw Christ on the right hand of God and heard a voice bear record "that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:24).

Through the power of Christ's atonement, the inhabitants of other worlds become "begotten sons and daughters" of God—i.e., the saving procedures are the same for them as they are for us. The infinite reach of the Atonement is stated even more clearly in poetic form by Joseph Smith in a letter written to W. W. Phelps.³ The expanse of the Atonement required the capacities and power of an Infinite Being. The suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the sacrifice on Golgotha, and the empty tomb embrace not only the billions who have lived on this earth but the numberless sons and daughters of God who have lived elsewhere.

Fourth, the Atonement is infinite in that it covers all forms of death and all manner of sin. As Alma indicated, Christ voluntarily suffered death in order to "loose the bands of death which bind his people" (Alma 7:12). Through the fall of Adam and Eve, death came upon all creatures. Not only God's children but also plants, animals, and nature itself

3. Joseph Smith, "The Answer," *Times and Seasons* 4 (1 February 1843): 82-85.

entered mortality through the Fall. Even the earth became subject to death through Adam's transgression.

Christ's atonement and resurrection made temporary the separation of body and spirit. The Savior told the Jews that everyone would be resurrected. He said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). Paul stated the same truth to the Corinthians: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

As part of the plan, all creatures will be resurrected. Even the earth, which was baptized with water, will be baptized with fire and eventually die. Through the atonement and resurrection of Christ, this physical earth will be changed into a paradisiacal state and eventually become an exalted sphere.⁴ Not only are all forms of death covered by the Atonement but all manner of sin (see Isaiah 53:6; 1 John 1:7; Alma 34:8; 3 Nephi 11:14).

An understanding of the infinite nature of the Atonement increases one's appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We stand in awe as we contemplate the magnitude of its reach and the dimensions of His suffering.

THE ETERNAL ATONEMENT

The eternal or godly nature of the Atonement makes possible Christ's invitation to cast one's burdens on Him: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give

4. See D&C 29:22-25; 88:25-26; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 1:73-89.

you rest" (Matthew 11:28). It is the eternal or redemptive side of the Atonement that is personal and intimate.

"Eternal" is one of the names of Deity (see Moses 7:35). Although the word *eternal* is sometimes used to mean endless, it is often used in the scriptures to describe godlike attributes or principles. For example, the kind of life God lives is called eternal life. It is the type or quality of life lived by God. The punishment meted out by God to transgressors is called eternal punishment, a name referring to the type and not the duration of the penalty imposed.⁵ Whereas the term *infinite* refers to the outward dimensions of the Savior's life and sacrifice, the term *eternal* refers, in part, to the inward quality of His being and the qualitative changes in mankind's spirit and body made possible by Gethsemane and Golgotha. What are the eternal aspects of the Atonement?

First, the Atonement was performed by an eternal or godly being. Christ, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, was a God before coming to earth and preserved His divine nature by complete obedience to the Father (see John 1:1, 14; 1 Peter 1:18-20). Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life on earth. This was accomplished in spite of being exposed to temptations and sufferings of every kind (see D&C 19:18).

Second, the atoning act gave Him power to redeem all mankind, to overcome the fall of Adam, and to make possible a spiritual cleansing and sanctifying of each person. Peter, the chief Apostle, stated that Jesus' "divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Not only did Jesus receive the power to overcome physical death, but He also received the power, eternal in nature, to overcome spiritual death (i.e., the power to cleanse the faithful

5. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 233-39.

from sin) and the power to lift covenant-abiding women and men to a state of godliness and heal their spiritual wounds along the way. These are godly powers with eternal consequences—the power to forgive, the power to cleanse, and the power to make “holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33).

The personal nature of the redemptive process is described by various prophets. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would bear “our griefs, and [carry] our sorrows” and that He would be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4–5). Alma stated that the Lord would not only experience our sins but also our pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities. The prophet indicated that this would occur so the Lord would know us in the flesh and “know according to the flesh how to succor” us (Alma 7:12). Paul, in writing to the Jewish members of the Church, stated that Jesus “should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Is it any wonder that He knows how to comfort us in time of need, how to bring peace to our souls in times of turmoil, and how to succor us so that life and death may be sweet? (see D&C 42:46). These prophetic statements clearly infer that Jesus knows His brothers and sisters intimately, one by one.

This intimate relationship is further supported by the teachings of Abinadi and Isaiah. The two prophets stated that when Christ’s “soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed” (Mosiah 15:10; see also Isaiah 53:10). Abinadi explained that His seed are the righteous, those who follow the prophets (see Mosiah 15:11). In the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, Jesus not only became acquainted with sin but also with an infinite number of people as He experienced their deepest feelings and comprehended the effects of their pains and afflictions. Moses’ experience with the Lord and the vision given to him is instructive in this regard. The scriptures state:

"And it came to pass, as the voice was still speaking, Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God. And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not; and he discerned them by the Spirit of God; and their numbers were great, even numberless as the sand upon the sea shore" (Moses 1:27-28).

If Moses was able to discern all the inhabitants of the earth through the Spirit, the God of this earth can discern our deepest feelings, the effects of our pains and sufferings, and the consequences of our sins—thereby knowing how to heal each person. As Isaiah declared, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29). The greatest miracle of the Atonement is the power Jesus has to change lives if people come to Him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. He has the power to make the faithful completely whole, to heal from within as well as from without. As the Apostle Paul informed the Jews, the Savior has a "feeling [for] our infirmities" in that He "is compassed with infirmity" (Hebrews 4:15; 5:2).

CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND THE ONE-BY-ONE PRINCIPLE

Finally the Lord organized the Church in a way that provides opportunities for every person to build a relationship with Him and the Father. First, He invites all to come directly to the Father through Him in prayer. There are no intermediaries between Deity and the individual.

Second, all ordinances are administered one by one with the exception of the sealing ordinance. Even those who have passed beyond the veil have ordinances performed for them on an individual basis. Some time ago, while I was serving as a stake president, a couple suggested to me a way in which temple ordinances could be made more efficient. The proposal

was to use an ordinance for more than one deceased person. They did not appreciate the importance of ordinances and the singular nature of the blessings associated with each person making his or her own set of covenants and receiving his or her own ordinance. In the exalting ordinance of marriage, individuals are not only making covenants with the Lord but also with each other. Consequently, the act involves more than one person. The point is that every person has the opportunity to come to Christ through the ordinance process.

Third, the Lord has organized the Church with lay leaders and a lay priesthood. The "royal" priesthood is given to every worthy male, and all worthy men and women participate in the blessings of the priesthood. The result is that each person in the Church has access to the blessings of the priesthood and can be ministered to by priesthood and Church leaders. Moreover, every family is assigned home teachers and visiting teachers to watch over and assist them in times of need, to "visit the house of each member, exhorting them to pray" (D&C 20:51). A lay Church also provides opportunities for each individual to serve. Spiritual growth comes through serving others. The ward family is small enough that everyone is needed.

Fourth, the distribution of spiritual gifts ensures that "to every man [and woman] is given a gift by the Spirit of God" (D&C 46:11). The Church organization of wards and stakes ensures that most, if not all, of the gifts are present so "that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of [the Lord]" (D&C 46:9). Since each person has at least one gift, everyone has something to share. Each person has a special talent with which he or she can serve and bless others. The gifts of the Spirit include faith, love, testimony, healing powers, tongues, wisdom, the working of miracles, the power of discernment, plus the gifts to know differences of administration and

diversities of operations (see D&C 46:12–25). "And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God" (D&C 46:26). I pray daily for the gift of wisdom that I may be equal to the challenges that are given me. Sometimes that gift comes through another person who is blessed to see more than I can see or understand.

Fifth, missionary work and the conversion process work on the one-by-one premise. Although we send missionaries two by two, they teach one by one—an individual or a family. A few years ago, while I was serving in the Asia North Area presidency, I read in the Tokyo newspapers about Billy Graham's visit to Japan. The announcement indicated that he would appear in the Tokyo Dome on three consecutive evenings. He would speak to 15,000 people each evening. The purpose was to increase the faith of those in attendance and convert them to Christ. I contrasted his efforts with those of approximately 1,500 missionaries who were walking the streets of Japanese cities, knocking on doors, and teaching in one-on-one conversations.

Sixth, every person is entitled to his or her own spiritual witness of Christ's divinity, of the restored gospel, of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and of God's work on the earth. Christ's invitation to seek Him and to know Him is extended to everyone. In Moroni's words: "I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

Seventh, the family is organized in a manner that allows each individual to grow and develop both spiritually and temporally. The shepherding ratio of parents to children ensures adequate resources to teach each child. The rate at which

children are born allows for individual attention and caring. The family is intended to be an eternal unit, and it is the fundamental organizational unit of the Church.

These seven ways in which the Lord has organized life on earth to allow for individual growth are not exhaustive. It is instructive to know, however, that the Lord's plan is consistent not only in terms of doctrine but also in terms of organization.

Let me close with a short story that illustrates the one-by-one process. A few years ago, in a Saturday evening session of a stake conference, a young sister bore her testimony. She shared her feelings as a recent convert, regarding the conversion process. She stated: "When the missionaries knocked on my door, I saw the smiles on their faces and felt the firm grip of their handshakes. They said they wanted to share a message with me that would bring happiness into my life. At the conclusion of the first lesson, they turned to Moroni's promise. I was surprised. They weren't just asking me to believe their words. They were asking me to find out for myself through the Holy Spirit. Later, as I listened to the missionaries explain the plan of salvation, I suddenly felt a confirming witness that I was more than a speck in the universe. My life was important not only to me but to a loving Heavenly Father and His Son. They knew me! There is a purpose to life; they have provided a plan for me to achieve that purpose. I could never feel worthless again."

It is my hope that we may appreciate the intimate effects of Christ's atoning power in our lives and that we may be worthy of His redeeming love. May our faith be sufficient to make us whole as we accept Christ's one-by-one invitation is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.