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Teachers must help students gain a sound and sure knowledge of the Atonement, look to Jesus as the way, and trust that “there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby they can be saved.”

Helping Students Rely on the Redeemer

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President Boyd K. Packer recently stated, “Everybody is a teacher—the leader is a teacher; the follower is a teacher; the counselor is a teacher; the parents are teachers Therefore, teaching is the center of all that we do.”¹ Because of this universal responsibility to teach, the commission given to seminary and institute personnel “to help [students] understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ”² is relevant to each member of the Church. Consequently, we as teachers must encourage, demonstrate, and invite this reliance on the merciful hand of him who is the “Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:25). In the spirit of President Packer’s declarative that “true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior,”³ this article provides a scripturally substantive look at what must be taught in order for students to come to “rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:6).

Teach the Doctrine from the Book of Mormon

Over the past couple of months, I have had two of my dear friends talk with me about loved ones who have left the Church and “found Jesus” in another

denomination. Interestingly, both of these young men began a “serious study of the Bible,” culminating in their belief and understanding that salvation is in Christ and that this doctrine is somehow at odds with the Book of Mormon. It did not take long for me to show my friends that the Book of Mormon not only verifies this truth but magnifies it.

The students we teach must understand that “the Book of Mormon is the keystone in our witness of Jesus Christ,”⁴ carrying with it the clear and persuasive invitation to “follow the Son” (2 Nephi 31:13) and to “cry out unto the Lord Jesus for mercy” (Alma 38:8), with the understanding that “there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, *only* through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9; emphasis added). Indeed, from the first chapter to the last, the prophetic invitation of the Book of Mormon is to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:32; see also 1 Nephi 1:14), to “have faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4), to “have hope through the atonement of Christ” (Moroni 7:41), to be “sanctified in Christ” (Moroni 10:33), to be filled with “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47), to be made “alive in Christ” (Moroni 8:22), and to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) so that we may one day become “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:33). Thus teachers “need to know how to use the Book of Mormon . . . to show how it answers the great questions of the soul.”⁵ Consequently, this article will draw extensively from the Book of Mormon, showing how it answers “the great question” (Alma 34:4) of salvation through Christ and his Atonement.

Christ-Centered Teaching

A story was told of a man who “had an interview with Elder Joseph Fielding Smith before being hired to teach in the Church seminary and institute program. When Elder Smith asked [the man] what [he] intended to teach, [this man] mentioned several important gospel principles. Elder Smith looked at him lovingly but sternly and said, ‘You teach Jesus Christ and him crucified.’”⁶ What poignant counsel! Whatever other gospel principle we are asked to teach, we must help students “know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26). Because of this commission, we must always ensure that “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, [and] we prophesy of Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26). In this way our students will quickly learn that they must build their foundation on Christ (see Helaman 5:12; Jacob 4:16) because he is “the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which [they] can build” (Jacob 4:16). They will

understand that they were “purchased by the Savior’s blood” and will come to know “Jesus, whom their souls rely on.”⁷

To ensure that the newly organized Church did not, as did the Jews of old, “stumble” in “looking beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14), the Prophet Joseph Smith made clear that “the fundamental principles of our religion are . . . concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁸ In other words, we are to teach the message of the gospel, which the Lord explained to be “that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:41–42; see also 3 Nephi 27:13–17; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4). The very essence of the gospel message is that “salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:18). Indeed, “it is the message of love, hope, and mercy that there is a reconciliation of man with God.”⁹

It thus becomes clear that “our salvation depends on believing in and accepting the Atonement,”¹⁰ and, as a result, every element of our worship and our “labor in the vineyard” (Jacob 5:71) must be calculated to help others to “be reconciled unto [God] through the atonement of Christ” (Jacob 4:11). It is precisely because “His Atonement is the most transcendent event that ever has or ever will occur from Creation’s dawn through all the ages of a never-ending eternity”¹¹ that I ask, with the prophet Jacob, “Why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him . . . ?” (Jacob 4:12). This probing question leads to the premise of this article—we as teachers must help students gain “a sound and sure knowledge of the Atonement,”¹² look to Jesus as “*the way*” (John 14:6; emphasis added), and trust that “there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby [they] can be saved” (2 Nephi 31:21).

The Plan of Salvation

Given the centrality of the doctrine of the Atonement, it is somewhat disheartening that when we bring up “the plan of salvation” (Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; Moses 6:62) in a classroom setting, almost immediately our students myopically envision a large bubble chart stretching across the whiteboard of their minds. How tragic it would be if, in their time in our classes, these same

students did not understand that “the plan of happiness” (Alma 42:16) is also “the eternal plan of *deliverance*” (2 Nephi 11:5; emphasis added), the “great plan of *redemption*” (Alma 34:31; emphasis added), and the “*merciful* plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6; emphasis added). In order to understand and “rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:6) and trust in “this reaching, rescuing, merciful Jesus,”¹³ our students must have a foundational understanding of two of the core doctrines of our faith: the Fall and the Atonement, which indeed compose the very “plan of salvation” (see Moses 6:62).

Perhaps a word of caution would be appropriate here. Because “the fire of the covenant”¹⁴ burns deeply in the hearts of those who are called to teach, and also because of our desires to fan the flame of faith already aglow in the lives of the students, we have a tendency to be too anxious, too worried, and even too zealous. Three simple, yet powerful, scriptural injunctions can help ensure that we are not “shaken from [our] firmness” and thus avoid stumbling “because of [our] over anxiety for [our students]” (Jacob 4:18).

First, the Lord has clearly taught “this is *my* work and *my* glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39; emphasis added). Remember, your students are his “work” and his “glory.” He is never distracted from this effort!¹⁵ Second, “let your hearts be comforted concerning [your students]; for all flesh is in [his] hands; *be still and know that [he is] God*” (D&C 101:16; emphasis added). Remember, the Lord is “able to do [his] own work” (2 Nephi 27:20, 21). He knew and loved these students even before you did; indeed he knows and loves them even more than you do! We must therefore provide moments of stillness and “deliberate pause” wherein the Lord “will supply [his] own ‘evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1).”¹⁶ Third, “[He] must bring forth the fulness of [his] gospel . . . And behold, . . . thou art called to assist” (D&C 14:10–11). Remember, he is the Good Shepherd and knows his sheep (see John 10:14). Our role is simply to be undershepherds. As the Lord put it, you and I are simply “called to assist.” Ofttimes our discouragements and anxieties stem from our unintentional lack of trust in him whose love and concern for our students is manifest in the offering of “his own life” (D&C 34:3). Indeed, the wounds engraved “upon the palms of [his] hands” (1 Nephi 21:16) are everlasting evidence that he will remember us and that he will remember our students.¹⁷ Remember, he has promised to be in our midst as we “are gathered together in [his] name” (D&C 6:32).

The Fall: “Father of the Atonement”¹⁸

President Ezra Taft Benson explained, “Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the fall and its effect upon all mankind. And no other book in the world explains this vital doctrine nearly as well as the Book of Mormon.”¹⁹ It is the doctrine of the Fall that provides the motivational milieu that directs the consuming focus of our “labor in the Church” (D&C 75:28) and our teaching efforts in helping others “be reconciled unto [God] through the atonement of Christ” (Jacob 4:11). Teaching the doctrine of the Fall is thus analogous to pouring the theological footings, ensuring that our students’ understanding of the Atonement is securely grounded, established, and settled (see Ephesians 3:17; 1 Peter 5:10).²⁰ Their foundation thus becomes sure and secure, “a foundation whereon if [they] build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

In order for our students to understand the doctrine of the Fall, they must realize that the scriptures talk about two falls—the Fall of Adam and our own fall.²¹ Additionally, they must recognize that “the Fall had a twofold direction—downward, yet forward.”²² To analyze both the Fall of Adam and our own fall, this paper will explore each using three divisions: (1) the law given, (2) the law broken, and (3) the Atonement made (“the demands of justice” satisfied; Alma 34:16).

The Fall of Adam

Law given: When the Lord created our first parents, he “took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden, to dress it, and to keep it” (Moses 3:15). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the following about the garden:

In that first edenic day, Adam was still in the presence of God, with whom he walked and talked and from whom he received counsel and commandments. (Moses 3; 4.) He had temporal life because his spirit was housed in a temporal body, one made from the dust of the earth. (Abra. 5:7.) He had spiritual life because he was in the presence of God and was alive to the things of righteousness or of the Spirit. He had not yet come to that state of mortal probation in which are found the testings and trials requisite to a possible inheritance of eternal life. As yet the full knowledge of good and evil had not been placed before him; and, what was tremendously important in the eternal scheme of things, he could have no children.²³

In this condition the Lord gave a law to Adam: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:16–17; emphasis added). The law was very clearly stated—if Adam and Eve partook of the fruit they would surely die.

Law broken: After Lucifer enticed Eve, “she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Moses 4:12). Because of this transgression, the Lord said, “Therefore I, the Lord God, will send him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken; for as I, the Lord God, liveth, even so my words cannot return void, for as they go forth out of my mouth they must be fulfilled” (Moses 4:29–30).

Because his words must be fulfilled, “we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence” (Alma 42:14). “Because that Adam fell, we are; and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe” (Moses 6:48). Commenting on this helpless and fallen condition, President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

The fall brought death. That is not a desirable condition. We do not want to be banished from the presence of God. We do not want to be subject forever to mortal conditions. We do not want to die and have our bodies turn to dust [physical death], and the spirits that possess these bodies by right, turned over to the realm of Satan and become subject to him [spiritual death] . . .

But that was the condition; and if Christ had not come as the atoning sacrifice, in demand of the law of justice, to repair or to atone or to redeem us from the condition that Adam found himself in, and that we find ourselves in; then mortal death would have come; the body would have gone back to the dust from where it came; the spirit would have gone into the realms of Satan’s domain, and have been subject to him forever.²⁴

Because of the justice of God, each one of us is caught in the pernicious and perditious “grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body [physical death], and also the death of the spirit [spiritual death]” (2 Nephi 9:10). When we are teaching these eternal truths, it may be helpful to show students scripturally what would happen if Christ were taken out of the plan. Jacob explained that if Christ had not offered his infinite Atonement, “the first judgment which came upon man [‘thou shalt surely die’] must needs have remained to an endless duration” (2 Nephi 9:7). Thus, “this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to

its mother earth, to rise no more And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil” (2 Nephi 9:7, 9). In other words, instead of becoming exalted and divine, our bodies would become fertilizer and our spirits would become devils!

It is clear that “all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual” (Helaman 14:16; see also Alma 12:16, 22, 32; Alma 42:9). Consequently, every person born into mortality becomes “lost, because of the transgressions of their parents” (2 Nephi 2:21) and “would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state” (Mosiah 16:3, 6). Thus, without Christ, both the infant and the infidel would be lost forever as punishment for Adam’s transgression, without deliverance “from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment” (2 Nephi 9:26). An understanding of the helpless and hopeless situation brought on by the Fall contextualizes that which is inextricably bound to it—the Atonement of Christ.

Atonement made: Surely it is in this helpless, fallen, and vulnerable celestial state that we find Adam, firmly anchored with “hope for a better world” (Ether 12:4), offering unto the Lord “the firstlings of [his] flocks” (Moses 5:5). Indeed, as the angel appeared, inquiring as to why he offered sacrifices to the Lord, Adam’s contrition percolates the pages as he humbly yet confidently declared, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). Explaining that “this thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten” and commanding Adam to “do all that thou doest in the name of the Son,” this tutoring seraph then invited Adam to repent and to call upon him who “is full of grace” forevermore (Moses 5:7–8). Delivering hope about the Atonement, the Holy Ghost placatingly proclaimed that “as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will” (Moses 5:9; emphasis added). All mankind. Thus Adam exultantly learned that although “by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people” (Alma 12:22; emphasis added), “the Messiah cometh . . . that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26) and “through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved” (Articles of Faith 1:3; emphasis added).

The scriptures plainly teach that because of the damning effects of the Fall upon mankind, namely physical and spiritual death, nothing short of “an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10) could provide the requisite universal redemption from the grueling grasp of this two headed monster,

“death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:10; see 2 Nephi 9:10–13, 19, 26). Indeed, Samuel the Lamanite taught that Christ “must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and cometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord. Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death” (Helaman 14:15–16; emphasis added). In this way, the Resurrection automatically brings all men back into the presence of God, or overcomes the state of spiritual death caused by the Fall of Adam: “Thus all the effects of the fall of Adam are overcome automatically without condition [by the Atonement].”²⁵

Because of this universal redemption from the Fall, “men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (D&C 93:38). The Lord declared to Adam, “I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt” (Moses 6:53–54), ensuring that “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2). “And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26). Thus, “because of the righteousness of the Redeemer” (2 Nephi 2:3) and through His “merits, and mercy, and grace” (2 Nephi 2:8), men became “agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:56), empowered to “act in doctrine and principle . . . according to the moral agency which [the Lord has] given unto [them], that every man may be accountable for his own sins” (D&C 101:78).

“Our Own Fall”²⁶

Law given: In connection with the liberating truth that “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10) and thus made free to act for ourselves, the Lord has commanded, “Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48). This command leads to the law which, when broken, brings about our own fall—“no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven” (Alma 11:37; see 1 Nephi 10:21; 1 Nephi 15:34; Alma 7:21; Alma 40:26; 3 Nephi 27:19; Moses 6:57).

Law broken: Brigham Young taught that “the men and women, who desire to obtain seats in the celestial kingdom, will find that they must battle . . . every day.”²⁷ Because we live in a fallen world to which Satan and his

followers were banished (see Revelation 12:4, 9; Moses 4:3), we must battle daily with the “enemy to all righteousness” (Mosiah 4:14) and our own natural “thorn[s] in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Because we grapple with the tendencies of the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19), and because of mortal weakness, we “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Such sins make us unclean and therefore unfit for the kingdom, for if we are filthy, “it must needs be that [we] cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also. But . . . the kingdom of God is not filthy, wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy” (1 Nephi 15:33–34).

We read that “all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made” (Alma 34:9). Indeed, “Satan hath come among the children of men, and tempteth them to worship him; and men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are shut out from the presence of God” (Moses 6:49). “And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice” (Alma 42:14), for “by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off . . . and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:5). Thus we see that “if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience” (Alma 42:11–12).

Robert L. Millet explained that in this fallen state, “we have thoughts that are unclean, feelings that are un-Christian, desires that are unholy, attitudes that are divisive, inclinations that are disruptive to order and decency. We manifest pride and arrogance and too often filter our decisions through the lenses of ego. We are consumed with judgmentalism and tend to look more harshly upon the flaws and misdeed of others than is wise or charitable. We complain and murmur when things do not go as we had hoped or when they go slower than we had anticipated.”²⁸ This is the condition in which we find both ourselves and our students and, if left unchecked, we could erroneously assume that there is no hope, nor balm, to help and heal us.

Perhaps causing more anxiety is the fact that many of us have already felt “the great goodness of the Lord” (2 Nephi 4:17), have been preserved by his providential hand in the storms of our lives (see 2 Nephi 4:20), and have been “snatched” and “redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity”

(Mosiah 27:29). In short, we know that “there is only one way to happiness and fulfillment,”²⁹ yet we continually and foolishly choose some other way. In such a state, our fallen hearts cry out with the prophet Nephi, “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Consider the manifestation of this feeling in the young man who comes into your class with fear in his eyes, the burden of sin on his back, and the Spirit pricking his heart. It is obvious that such a young man needs the treatment that comes only from reliance on the healing hands of “the Great Physician.”³⁰ Thus with this consciousness of our sinful and fallen state must come an impetus to rely “wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 3:19).

Atonement made: “According to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state” (Alma 42:13) and thus the Lord, who laid his life down because of his love for the world (see 2 Nephi 26:24), granted us a probationary state so that we could repent: “Therefore this life became a probationary state; . . . a time to prepare for that endless state which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Alma 12:24).

Understanding the helpless and fallen state of man, Amulek taught that “it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made” (Alma 34:9). The message of the gospel carries with it an invitation to “Come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:32) or, as is so often the case, to “return unto [Christ]” (3 Nephi 9:13). With this invitation comes the promise that those who are hardened can be softened, those who are fallen can be lifted and redeemed, and those who are lost can be rescued and “dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:28), being encompassed in the merciful, safe, and encircling “arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).³¹

Helaman 14 contains teachings from the prophet Samuel regarding two deaths, one resulting from the Fall of Adam, “the first death” (Helaman 14:16; see vv. 15–17), and one in consequence of our own fall, the “second death” (Helaman 14:18; see v. 19). He made clear that because of the Atonement of Christ, all mankind are redeemed from the first death and that the Atonement

“bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:17). He gave further clarification on the “second death” when he explained that the Atonement “bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Helaman 14:18; emphasis added). Thus the second death “is an ultimate or final spiritual death that comes not because of leaving God’s presence to be born into mortality, but comes because of unrepented personal sin.”³² Simply stated, although “a person with unresolved sin cannot remain in God’s presence after he or she is brought back to Him for judgment,”³³ Christ’s Atonement provides the hope that they “may have a remission of [sins] through his merits” (Helaman 14:13) if they will but exercise “faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15).

Our students have been taught that Christ is the “Savior of the world” (D&C 66:1) and that the Atonement provides redemption for “every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21). Additionally, most of them understand that his Atonement was “infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10), providing salvation for all “whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:42). Given that the Father and Son have created “worlds without number” (Moses 1:33), such a redemption is indeed infinite in its scope!

While it is necessary for our students to know and believe in a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, it is also important for them to understand and trust that he is “omniloving”³⁴ and that “it is his good will to give [them] the kingdom” (D&C 29:5). The scriptures abound with examples of how the Atonement is both infinite and intimate. For example, Alma the Younger movingly taught that Jesus would go forth, suffering pains, afflictions, temptations of every kind, sicknesses, death, the sins of his people (see Alma 7:11), and that he “will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12; see Hebrews 2:18; 4:15; D&C 62:1). Indeed, “he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . ; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4–5), physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Thus, while the Atonement is the means by which we are forgiven, cleansed, reconciled with God, and ultimately exalted, it is also the catalyst

through which we receive the Savior's succoring aid.³⁵ Stephen E. Robinson commented on this truth:

All the negative aspects of human existence brought about by the Fall, Jesus Christ absorbed into himself. He experienced vicariously in Gethsemane all the private griefs and heartaches, all the physical pains and handicaps, all the emotional burdens and depressions of the human family. He knows the loneliness of those who don't fit in or who aren't handsome or pretty. He knows what it's like to choose up teams and be the last one chosen. He knows the anguish of parents whose children go wrong . . . He knows all these things personally and intimately because he lived them in the Gethsemane experience. Having personally lived a perfect life, he then chose to experience our imperfect lives. In that infinite Gethsemane experience, he lived a billion billion lifetimes of sin, pain, disease, and sorrow . . . Thus we owe him not only for our spiritual cleansing from sin, but for our physical, mental, and emotional healings as well, for he has borne these infirmities for us also. All that the Fall put wrong, the Savior and his atonement puts right. It is all part of his infinite sacrifice—of his infinite gift.³⁶

Our students must understand, believe, and rely on what the Apostle Paul taught when he said that because Christ “was touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” people can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that [they] may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16). The young man who is cut from the basketball team, the young woman who is not asked to homecoming, the fourteen-year-old who moves to a new school at the beginning of her ninth-grade year, and the young man who is caught in the middle of his parents' nasty divorce must know that they can “come boldly unto the throne of grace” because Christ “has the power to become intimately acquainted with each of us.”³⁷ When considering the sufferings of Gethsemane and Calvary, Elder Merrill J. Bateman taught that “instead of an impersonal mass of sin, there was a long line of people, as Jesus felt ‘our infirmities’ (Hebrews 4:15), ‘[bore] our ‘griefs, . . . carried our sorrows . . . [and] was bruised for our iniquities’ (Isaiah 53:4–5). The Atonement was an intimate, personal experience in which Jesus came to know how to help each of us.”³⁸

It is experiencing this matchless love that will warm the hearts and buoy up the spirits of the seedling Saints that we are called to “[nourish] by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4). As they feel this love, our students will understand that “He rejoices in our genuine goodness and achievement, but any assessment of where we stand in relation to Him tells us that we do not stand at all! We kneel! . . . Indeed, we cannot teach Him anything! But we

can listen to Him. We can love Him, we can honor Him, we can worship Him! We can keep His commandments, and we can feast upon His scriptures! Yes, we who are so forgetful and even rebellious are never forgotten by Him! We are His ‘work’ and His ‘glory,’ and He is never distracted!”³⁹

Salvation by Grace

The Book of Mormon summarizes the expediency of the Atonement when it says, “Since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins” (Alma 22:14). Because “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), we “all depend upon the same Being,” and must therefore call on his name, “begging for a remission of [our] sins” (Mosiah 4:19–20). Thus, in response to the question of how we are saved, our students must understand that “there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9; emphasis added; see also Acts 4:10–12; 2 Nephi 9:41; 25:20; 31:20–21; Mosiah 3:17; 4:6–8; 5:7–8; Alma 38:9; D&C 18:23–25).⁴⁰

When considering all that the Savior has done, is doing, and will do for our salvation, it is sacrilegious for anyone to think or profess that their own works will save them. For, as the scriptures say, “by grace are ye saved . . . not of yourselves . . . lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). For “shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood!” (2 Nephi 20:15).

Our students must also remember, however, that the gospel is a covenant and that a covenant involves the participation of both parties. Dr. Millet explained, “We know without question that the power to save us, to change us, to renew our souls is in Christ. True faith, however, always manifests itself in faithfulness. Good works evidence our faith, our desire to remain in covenant with Christ. But these good works, though necessary, are not sufficient.”⁴¹ Does God expect us to “shew . . . [our] faith by [our] works” (James 2:18)? Absolutely! For if we only believe, we do well: “the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). As Elder Dallin H. Oaks asks, “Can man in and of himself overcome the spiritual death all mankind suffers from the Fall, which we bring upon ourselves anew by our own sinful acts? No! Can we work out our own salvation? Never, worlds without end!”⁴² But because God has commanded that we become perfect, even as he is (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi

27:27), we must “offer [our] whole souls as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26; see 3 Nephi 9:20).⁴³

Elder Bruce C. Hafen explained that “even when we utterly spend ourselves, we lack the power to create the perfection only God can complete. Our all by itself is still only almost enough—until it is finished by the all of Him who is the ‘finisher of our faith.’ At that point, our imperfect but consecrated almost is enough.”⁴⁴ This truth is succinctly summarized in the final verse of the hymn “Reverently and Meekly Now,” which says, “At the throne I intercede; for thee ever do I plead. I have loved thee as thy friend, with a love that cannot end. Be obedient, I implore, prayerful, watchful evermore, and be constant unto me, that thy Savior I may be.”⁴⁵

When we recognize that we need him every hour,⁴⁶ his grace provides the enabling power that can be manifest in our daily walk and talk. We experience graceful living as we “come unto him and partake of his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33), experience a “mighty change in [our] hearts” (Alma 5:14), become “new creatures” through him (Mosiah 27:26), and then rely “wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19), following him “with full purpose of heart” (2 Nephi 31:13).⁴⁷ In this way he enables us to be faithful and to “lay hold upon every good gift” (Moroni 10:30), including especially the gift of “eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7). For, as Elder Hafen explained, “If we do our part, Christ makes us ‘at one’ with God, overcoming whatever separates us from Him. He is with me, with you, not only at the end of our lives but every day of our lives.”⁴⁸ Perhaps this is why C. S. Lewis poignantly taught, “If you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way.”⁴⁹

Many of our students’ salvational anxieties stem from a misunderstanding of the doctrine of grace. They often focus so much on the “all we can do” phrase of 2 Nephi 25:23 that they fail to understand that, in reality, “all we can do” is to “repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain” (Alma 24:11) “relying wholly upon the merits” (2 Ne. 31:19), “and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Thus, as we “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:32), we are “captained by Christ,” and “men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ”⁵⁰ and be led to “trust in his redeeming blood, and try his works to do.”⁵¹

Our students must understand that while their insecurities, inadequacies, weaknesses, and worries may make them feel unclean and incomplete, as they

are consumed in Christ they “are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10). As they stagger and struggle in their development of faith, they will look to Jesus, “the author and finisher of [their] faith” (Hebrews 12:2). As they see their stains of sin and feel the weight of imperfection, “their garments [will be] washed white through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13:11) as they are “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (D&C 76:69).⁵²

Conclusion

In conclusion, may I become more personal and add my own witness of the reconciling and redeeming power of Christ? Indeed, having personally felt “the pure mercies of God” and being made “alive in him because of his mercy” (Moroni 8:19), “this poor tongue now seeks to speak in praise and testimony of our Divine Redeemer.”⁵³ Although I “have felt to sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26), because of my mortal limitations, “I cannot say the smallest part which I feel” (Alma 26:16).

I am the father of three small, rambunctious boys. One day, our four-year-old took things a little too far when he was wrestling with his little brother. After paying his debt to society by going to time-out, he looked up at me, and with all the sincerity and commitment that a repentant four-year-old could muster, resolved, “Daddy, I promise I will never do that again!” After enjoying his commitment for about twelve minutes, I heard a scream coming from their play room. Running to them, I found that there had been a dispute over a toy, resulting in a grueling brotherly battle. As I pondered this experience, I thought of how many times I, like my son, had gone to the Lord with an absolute commitment of allegiance, promising that I would never commit a certain sin again. How soon I forget! How sincere my commitment but how weak my resolve! And yet, how great is his grace! Indeed, “I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me, confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.”⁵⁴ Because I have felt this redeeming grace, I desperately strive to repay the Lord through consecrated discipleship; and yet “He doth immediately bless [me]” for my efforts, and I therefore remain an unprofitable servant (see Mosiah 2:21, 24). Thus, if I achieve anything in this life worthy of emulation, I am left to cry out, in praise and humility, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

When the day comes that I will be “judged according to the holy judgment of God” (2 Ne. 9:15), surely I cannot “rush forth eagerly to show Him

[my] mortal medals,”⁵⁵ expecting him to be impressed with my relatively insignificant contributions. Indeed, the scriptures cited within this article have made clear that because of my fallen condition I “[can] not merit anything of [myself]” (Alma 22:14; see also 2 Nephi 9:7–9) but must rely “alone upon the merits of Christ, who [is] the author and the finisher of [my] faith” (Moroni 6:4; emphasis added). Thus, while “[smiting] upon [my] breast,” I am left to cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Perhaps it is at this moment that my advocate with the Father will come forth, “pleading [my] cause before him—saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; wherefore, Father, spare [this] my [brother] that believe[s] on my name, that [he] may come unto me and have everlasting life” (D&C 45:3–5). Thus the love, mercy, and grace of “the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8), who is “Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2), is my “one bright hope”⁵⁶ for salvation.

In the spirit of offering “one more strain of praise,”⁵⁷ I now close by sharing a recent personal experience. My wife and I were awakened shortly after midnight by a loud scream followed by weeping (not a unique experience with three small children). I ran into my son’s bedroom to find him gasping for air between shrieks. My wife ran in, gathered him in her arms, and took him outside, hoping that the cool air would help clear him up. As she sang to him on the front porch, she was eventually able to get him to sleep. However, within about ten minutes he was awake, and the deep wheezing coupled with screaming continued. We went back inside, and as my wife ran to find his medicine, I held him in my arms, trying to comfort him. He looked up at me with tear-swollen eyes, and between the screaming, gasping, and wheezing, he cried out, “Daddy, I need Jesus to help me!” As I choked back my own tears, I thought to myself, “Never before have I seen faith in its most simple and pure form” (see 3 Nephi 19:35). To a humbled father, our tutoring and merciful Lord brought to mind the pleading phrase of Alma, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me” (Alma 36:18), and coupled it with the innocent utterance, “I need Jesus to help me.” That night not only did I learn what true faith was, but I truly felt what it means to need, to trust in, and to rely on Jesus. As our students come to understand the doctrine of the Atonement in this way, I know that they too will come to rely on the Savior for mercy and grace. Thus they will feel to “sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26) and “shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ne. 31:13). **RE**

Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer and L. Tom Perry, “Principles of Teaching and Learning,” *Liabona*, June 2007, 54. President Monson taught the same idea when he said, “We are all teachers in some respect, and we have a duty to teach to the best of our ability.” “Examples of Great Teachers,” *Ensign*, June 2007, 106.
2. Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion,” S&I Educators: Teachers and Administrators of Seminaries and Institutes, accessed June 22, 2011, <https://lds.org/si?lang=eng>.
3. President Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1986, 20.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, January 1992, 5.
5. Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1988, 5.
6. C. Richard Chidester, “Christ-Centered Teaching,” *Ensign*, October 1989, 7.
7. John Newton, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 46.
8. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 30.
9. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, in Conference Report, April 2007, 100.
10. James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 18.
11. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1985, 9.
12. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1985, 9.
13. Jeffrey R. Holland, in Conference Report, October 2006, 113.
14. Brigham Young, *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, September 28, 1846, 5.
15. Neal A. Maxwell, “O, Divine Redeemer,” *Ensign*, November 1981, 8.
16. Neal A. Maxwell, “Teaching by the Spirit—‘The Language of Inspiration,’” paper, CES Symposium on the Old Testament, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, August 15, 1991, 4.
17. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, in Conference Report, April 2006, 72.
18. Bruce R. McConkie, “Three Pillars of Eternity,” devotional, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, February 17, 1981.
19. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1987, 106.
20. While these words are taken from scripture, their marriage is taken from Neal A. Maxwell, “Grounded, Rooted, Established, and Settled” (devotional, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, September 15, 1981).
21. See Gerald N. Lund, “The Fall of Man and His Redemption,” *Ensign*, January 1990, 26.
22. Orson F. Whitney, in *Cowley and Whitney on Doctrine*, comp. Forace Green (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 287.
23. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 268.
24. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:122.
25. *The Book of Mormon Student Manual, Religion 121–122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996), 29.
26. Lund, “Fall of Man and His Redemption,” 26.

27. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, comp. G. D. Watt, E. L. Sloan, and D. W. Evans, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Depot, 1854–86), 11:14.
28. Robert Millet, *The Vision of Mormonism: Pressing the Boundaries of Christianity* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 2007), 39.
29. Lawrence E. Corbridge, in Conference Report, October 2008, 36.
30. Thomas S. Monson, "The Way of the Master," *Ensign*, January 2003, 7.
31. For other references to his arms of mercy, safety, and love, see Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 16:12; 29:20; Alma 5:33; 29:10; 34:16; Mormon 5:11; D&C 6:20; 29:1.
32. *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, 284–85.
33. *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, 285.
34. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 6.
35. "Succor means 'to go to the aid of one in want or distress' or 'to relieve.' Fortunately, the Savior succors those 'who are tempted' so they will not commit sin, and if they should sin, he will succor them if they repent." Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 1:330.
36. Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 122–23; emphasis added.
37. Merrill J. Bateman, in Conference Report, October 2005, 77.
38. Bateman, Conference Report, 77.
39. Neal A. Maxwell, "O, Divine Redeemer," *Ensign*, November 1981, 8–9.
40. Lawrence E. Corbridge recently summarized, "There is only one way to happiness and fulfillment. Jesus Christ is the Way. Every other way, any other way, whatever other way is foolishness." In Conference Report, October 2008, 36.
41. Robert Millet, "After All We Can Do: The Meaning of Grace in Our Lives," in *May Christ Lift Thee Up: Talks from the 1998 BYU Women's Conference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 54; emphasis added.
42. Dallin H. Oaks, "Sin, Crimes, and the Atonement," address to CES religious educators, Temple Square Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City, February 7, 1992.
43. In this way we become lively, consecrated members of the Church. Elder Maxwell once said, "It would change the entire Church if in every ward, we could have just three or four more families who became truly consecrated disciples of Jesus Christ instead of just being active in the Church." Quoted in Bruce C. Hafen, *Spiritually Anchored in Unsettled Times* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 23.
44. Bruce C. Hafen, in Conference Report, April 2004, 101; emphasis in original.
45. Joseph Townsend, "Reverently and Meekly Now," *Hymns*, no. 185.
46. See Annie S. Hawks, "I Need Thee Every Hour," *Hymns*, no. 98.
47. There is a dangerous tendency to view grace as simply being "that increment of goodness, that final gift of God that will make up the difference and thereby boost us into the celestial kingdom, 'after all we can do' (2 Ne. 25:23)." Robert Millet, "After All We Can Do," 54. While we certainly will need the grace of God during those final moments at the judgment bar, "true grace is more than just a giant freebie, opening the door to heaven in the sweet by and by, but leaving us to wallow in sin in the bitter here and now. Grace is God presently at work in our lives." John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel according to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 32, quoted in Millet, "After All We Can Do," 54. We need look no further than the Bible Dictionary for scriptural substantiation, as it states that it is "through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of

- Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts." Bible Dictionary, "Grace," 697; emphasis added.
48. Bruce C. Hafen, "A Disciple's Journey" (devotional, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, February 5, 2008); emphasis in original. Brigham Young taught that "the salvation we are seeking is for the present, and, sought correctly, it can be obtained, and be continually enjoyed. If it continues to-day, it is upon the same principle that it will continue to-morrow, the next day, the next week, or the next year, and, we might say, the next eternity." Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:131.
49. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 131.
50. Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," *Ensign*, July 1989, 4. He further explained "Their will is swallowed up in His will. (See John 5:30.) They do always those things that please the Lord . . . Enter their homes, and the pictures on their walls, the books on their shelves, the music in the air, their words and acts reveal them as Christians. They stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places. (See Mosiah 18:9.) They have Christ on their minds, as they look unto Him in every thought. (See D&C 6:36.) They have Christ in their hearts as their affections are placed on Him forever . . . In Book of Mormon language, they 'feast upon the words of Christ' (2 Ne. 32:3), 'talk of Christ' (2 Ne. 25:26), 'rejoice in Christ' (2 Ne. 25:26), 'are made alive in Christ' (2 Ne. 25:25), and 'glory in [their] Jesus' (see 2 Ne. 33:6). In short, they lose themselves in the Lord and find eternal life." Benson, "Born of God," 5.
51. Cecil Frances Alexander, "There Is a Green Hill Far Away," *Hymns*, no. 194; emphasis added.
52. Elder Dallin H. Oaks declared, "We are all dependent upon the mercy God the Father extended to all mankind through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ . . . The reality of our total dependence upon Jesus Christ for the attainment of our goals of immortality and eternal life should dominate every teaching and every testimony and every action of every soul touched by the light of the restored gospel. If we teach every other subject and principle with perfection and fall short on this one, we have failed in our most important mission."
53. Maxwell, "Divine Redeemer," 8.
54. Charles H. Gabriel, "I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, no. 193; emphasis added.
55. Maxwell, "Divine Redeemer," 9.
56. Gordon B. Hinckley, "My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 135.
57. George Manwaring, "Sing We Now at Parting," *Hymns*, no. 156.