

INSTRUMENTS OR AGENTS?

Balancing Submissiveness and Anxious
Engagement in Heavenly Father's Plan

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When most people in the English-speaking world use the term *agency*, they might be thinking of a government institution, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, or a business, such as an advertising or insurance agency. But to Latter-day Saints, agency has another, much more spiritually significant meaning—one that seems to be almost exclusive to Mormonism and is not even found in most major dictionaries.¹

The concept of agency as the God-given privilege to choose and act for oneself is so central to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ that President David O. McKay called it “man’s greatest endowment in mortal life.”² He further declared: “Next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God’s greatest gift to man. . . . Freedom of choice is more to be treasured than any possession earth can give. It is inherent in the spirit of man. [It] is the impelling source of the soul’s progress. It is the purpose of the Lord that man become like him. In order for man to achieve this it was necessary for the Creator first to make him free.”³

Our knowledge of the gift and principle of agency enlarges our perspective and gladdens our hearts. As Jacob declared to the people of his day, “Cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for

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yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (2 Nephi 10:23).

And yet, despite its importance in the Father’s plan for his children (or perhaps because of it), the truth about agency or freedom to choose is frequently misunderstood—in the world generally and even among believing Latter-day Saints. This paper explores one element of this misunderstanding: the interplay and seeming contradiction between the meekness, submissiveness, and trust required of disciples of Jesus Christ and the active, bold, assertiveness implied in the principle of agency. Could it be that God wants us to develop both?

INSTRUMENTS IN HIS HANDS

The scriptures use a variety of metaphors to describe different aspects of our relationship with God. The Book of Mormon, for example, compares servants of the Lord to “instruments” in his hands. This term is applied most frequently to Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, who accomplished remarkable things in the work of the Lord but were quick to downplay their own abilities and attribute all of their success to the Lord. For instance, Ammon declared: “I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom. . . . Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, . . . and we have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work” (Alma 26:11–12, 15).⁴

This metaphor emphasizes man’s dependence on God and compliance with his will. An instrument does not act for itself; it cannot make music or accomplish any work of its own volition. It passively and obediently carries out the will of the one controlling it. To cite Isaiah’s related imagery: “Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or 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” (Isaiah 10:15).

This concept of our relationship with God is consistent with several other scriptures:

Cry unto God for all thy support. . . . Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good. (Alma 37:36–37)

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8–9)

[Become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

In fact, the Savior himself has used similar language to describe his relationship with the Father. “I can of mine own self do nothing,” he said. “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). From a young age, and throughout his life, Christ was “about [his] Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). And, most movingly, when he trembled because of pain and “would that [he] might not drink the bitter cup” (DC& 19:18), he humbly said, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

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And yet, interestingly, along with scriptures that encourage meek submission to God’s will, we find passages like these:

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. (D&C 58:26–28)

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed

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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)

When the Lord refers to us as “agents” who act for ourselves and are not acted upon, he seems to be emphasizing our independence and capacity for personal growth. He seems to be encouraging boldness and assertiveness—qualities that feel quite contrary to the meek submissiveness characterized by an “instrument” that is wholly dependent upon God. An agent is one who is trusted to act and make decisions; an instrument, on the other hand, is expected to trust its master and carry out his decisions.

Apparent contradictions like this one can cause confusion in some about the true nature of agency. Some might ask, How are we to be anxiously engaged and do many things of our own free will and yet at the same time counsel with the Lord and be directed by him in everything we do? How can a person use volition and initiative and at the same time submit to and depend upon God? How is it possible to be both a submissive instrument and a proactive agent?

Paradoxes like these should not scare us because the gospel is full of them. Whenever two gospel truths seem to contradict each other, that is simply an indication that our mortal understanding is limited—which is also an indication of an opportunity for more understanding! As John W. Welch once observed, “Because we know that there must be an opposition in all things, LDS thought often harmonizes traditional paradoxes. The world has fought wars over whether we are saved by faith or by works. We peacefully say, ‘Both.’ People argue over whether we come to know by study or by faith. We confidently say, ‘Both.’”⁵ To the question of whether God wants us to humbly submit to his will or actively exercise our own will, we could also say, “Both!”

The adversary, of course, would like us to get this wrong and err on one side or the other. This is one of his more effective tactics—if he can’t convince us to accept false doctrine, he might just persuade us to take a true doctrine to an extreme. The result is the same. So, for example, if we depend solely upon God to run our lives, we run the risk of decisional paralysis, apathy, or indolence. And if we rely too much on our own flesh and understanding, we run the risk of pride and self-absorption and serious errors of judgment. Both of these extremes on the agency pendulum can

lead to deception, bitterness, resentment, and anger. Over the life course, ours is the responsibility to find the right balance in any given moment.

The key to solving this paradox is in overcoming two faulty human tendencies. One is the tendency to resist commandments because we feel that they limit our agency. The other is the tendency to resign too easily to what we perceive as a predetermined fate that we cannot control.

IS OBEDIENCE TO COMMANDMENTS A SURRENDER OF AGENCY?

We live in a world where many people see commandments or rules as shackles that limit and restrict our freedom. Evidence of this attitude is ubiquitous—it's almost impossible to grow up as a practicing Latter-day Saint and not hear, at least once during the teenage years, something to the effect of, "What? Mormons can't [insert behavior that is contrary to Church standards]? Your Church gives you no freedom! I'm free to do whatever I like, but you aren't!" Perhaps it hits closest to home when we're a little older, raising teenagers of our own, and they react to family rules with an objection like, "Dad [or Mom]! You're taking away my agency!"

When Elder Dallin H. Oaks was president of BYU, he used to hear arguments from students about the honor code or dress and grooming standards. The complaints went like this: "It is wrong for BYU to take away my free agency by forcing me to keep certain rules in order to be admitted or permitted to continue as a student." "If that silly reasoning were valid," Elder Oaks said, "then the Lord, who gave us our agency, took it away when he gave the Ten Commandments. We are responsible to use our agency in a world of choices. It will not do to pretend that our agency has been taken away when we are not free to exercise it without unwelcome consequences."⁶

The fact is that no one can take away our agency. God gave it to us as part of the condition of mortality. As President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "This great gift of agency, that is the privilege given to man to make his own choice, has never been revoked, and it never will be. It is an eternal principle giving freedom of thought and action to every soul. . . . There could be no satisfactory existence without [it]."⁷

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In reality, when God gives us a commandment, he is really giving us an opportunity to *exercise* our agency, by either obeying or disobeying, by either turning to or away from God. Those options are not available to us if we do not have commandments. Agency can be exercised only when alternative choices are both possible and enticing and opposition is present (see 2 Nephi 2:16; D&C 29:39).

Thankfully, we are not left to our own devices, unaided and wandering on our own. We have the Spirit to guide us, we have the scriptures and teachings of apostles and prophets, and we have examples of holy men and women who can instruct us as they exemplify righteous living. “God has sent mortal servants who can, by the Holy Ghost, help us recognize what He would have us do and what He forbids,” President Henry B. Eyring taught. “God makes it attractive to choose the right by letting us feel the effects of our choices. If we choose the right, we will find happiness—in time. If we choose evil, there comes sorrow and regret—in time. Those effects are sure.”⁸

Here’s how Lehi explained it to his family: “If ye shall say there is no law [which is exactly what many people are saying today], ye shall also say there is no sin. [Does this sound like moral relativism?] If ye say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. [If *nothing* is wrong, then how can we claim credit for choosing the right? Nothing is right or wrong.] And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. . . . [You can see how this is spinning out of control for the moral relativists.] And if these things are not, there is no God” (2 Nephi 2:13).

How so? Because all power operates by law. Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained it this way: “It is by the operation of laws that things happen. By using or obeying a law, one can bring about a particular result—and by disobedience, the opposite result. Without law there could be no God, for He would be powerless to cause anything to happen.”⁹

Indeed, choice as well as opposition are necessary for us to grow and progress. We cannot be faithful and true unless we have been confronted with the opportunity to be faithful and true. Similarly, we cannot be moral, merciful, kindhearted, or forgiving without having conquered circumstances which could have produced an opposite reaction. There can be no righteousness unless there is wickedness; thus all attributes of godliness have their opposite. We develop the attributes of godliness as we freely choose righteousness.

This is where commandments come in. Far from limiting our choices, commandments make it clear what our choices are. As the Lord told the early Saints: “I give unto you a . . . commandment, that you may understand my will concerning you; or, in other words, I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation” (D&C 82:8–9). This is how God views his commandments: as a revelation to us concerning his will. Without commandments, we are in the captivity of ignorance about God’s will. This is what the commandments save us from.

And this is what gave Jesus Christ his power—the fact that he obeyed God’s laws, perfectly, always. A doctor who understands and follows the laws of human biology has the power to heal a person from physical illness. An organist who understands the laws that govern how to manipulate the sounds that come out of the Salt Lake Tabernacle organ has the power to make beautiful music with that instrument. Someone like me who does not understand those laws has limited freedom to make anything other than irritating sounds with that organ. But I could learn those laws, and if I did, my freedom in that regard would be enhanced.

Similarly, a follower of Christ who understands the laws of God has the power to become like God. “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). That is ultimate freedom, and it is the essence of the Father’s plan for our eternal growth and happiness.

Satan has the opposite goal. He wants us to receive less and less light and truth, keeping us in ignorance of God’s laws, which will make our range of choices narrower and narrower until we are completely in his power—in darkness. As Alma explained, “They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). That is ultimate captivity. This is why the Savior said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). Again quoting Elder Christofferson:

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The beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it pours knowledge into our souls and shows things in their true light. With that enhanced perspective, we can discern more clearly the choices before us and their consequences. We can, therefore, make more intelligent use of our agency. . . . As our understanding of gospel doctrine and principles grows, our agency expands. First, we have more choices and can achieve more and receive greater blessings because we have more laws that we can obey. . . . Second, with added understanding we can make more intelligent choices because we see more clearly not only the alternatives but their potential outcomes.¹⁰

Similarly, when we choose to submit our will to the Father's by obeying his commandments and directions, we are not *surrendering* our agency but *expressing* it—in the highest, noblest way possible. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, this kind of submission “is not resignation or a mindless caving in. Rather, it is a deliberate expanding outward. . . . [It] is not shoulder-shrugging acceptance, but, instead, shoulder-squaring to better bear the yoke.”¹¹

So when the Savior said, “Not my will, but thine, be done,” he was not giving up, he was rising up! He was not abandoning his own will but aligning it—as he had done since premortality and throughout his life—to the will of his Father. This is what God wants from us as well: not to throw our own will away and passively accept his but to change our will until we actively, passionately, eagerly desire what he desires. It is appropriately described in the scriptures as a “wrestle”—not with God but with ourselves, to bring our will in line with his (see Enos 1:2; Alma 8:10; Genesis 32:24). We need the strength and power that comes from this wrestle. It is the only way we will be strong enough to cling to and defend his will in the face of intense opposition—it must become our will too.

It was this eternal truth that inspired C. S. Lewis to write these words: “A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for his higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.”¹²

HOW MUCH DOES GOD MICROMANAGE OUR LIVES?

While sometimes we resist commandments because we mistakenly think our agency is being limited, at other times we seem to have the opposite problem—we too readily resign our agency because we mistakenly overestimate what is out of our control. This attitude manifests itself, for example, in a self-defeating attitude in which we seek to blame our circumstances or our genes or other people for our choices.

Often our favorite target for this blame is the adversary himself. And ironically, he probably gladly accepts that blame, because if we believe that the devil can cause us to sin, then it is an easy task to convince us that we are powerless to improve ourselves. This direct contradiction to God's declaration, "The power is in them" (D&C 58:28), is one way Satan attempts to "destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3).

We are here in mortality to volitionally choose righteousness, without coercion or force. The truth is that the devil cannot compel us to choose evil, just as God will force no one to heaven. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed: "Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. The devil cannot compel mankind to do evil, all was voluntary. Those who resist the Spirit of God, are liable to be led into temptation, and then the association of heaven is withdrawn from those who refuse to be made partakers of such great glory—God would not exert any compulsory means, and the Devil could not; and such ideas as were entertained [on these subjects] by many, were absurd."¹³ In all the commands and expectations of God, as well as in the enticements of the adversary, we are free to act for ourselves and freely choose.

Interestingly, however, just as we may give the devil too much blame for our sins, we may also place upon God too much of the responsibility for our salvation.¹⁴ As such, Latter-day Saints do not believe in fate or in predestination. We are not locked in to a pre-programmed response or destiny. We make choices all along the way that can forever alter our course. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains the Latter-day Saint perspective:

Fate, as usually interpreted, is the antithesis of self-determination and responsibility. Latter-day Saints reject on scriptural grounds all appeals to precausation whether as "fate," "the stars," "blind chance," or even the

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predestination of man by God. Fate in these forms implies a precaused outcome of one's life. Instead, man is seen as having innate autonomies and capacities—the gift of agency—that the divine will guarantees all men: “I the Lord God make you free, therefore ye are free indeed: and the law also maketh you free” (D&C 98:8; cf. 2 Ne. 2:25–27; Alma 12:31; Moses 4:3). People are free to choose obedience or disobedience, good or evil, and most other aspects of their lives, and they are accountable for their choices. The belief that all is fated, stifles, discourages, and hinders the progress and growth possible for the children of God. . . . The gospel of Jesus Christ opens to all mankind the opportunity to rise above chance fate in this life and choose eternal life with God.¹⁵

The Apostle Paul taught that God “will render to every man according to his deeds” and that “there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:6, 11). Likewise, we are to “look unto [God] in every thought” (D&C 6:36), because we cannot save ourselves or earn our salvation. But neither can God redeem anyone without that person's effort and collaboration. All are free to accept or reject God's help and powers of redemption.¹⁶ For this reason, there is danger in saying “everything happens for a reason” or “it was all part of the plan” because that could imply that everything that happens is according to God's will. But that is not consistent with scripture, doctrine, or personal experience. All is not decided for us.

Our Father is a God of order. He created systems and structures and principles that govern the laws of nature. He does not have to command the sun to rise each morning or decide where and when it will rain every moment of each day. Certainly God can and often does intervene in world and personal events.¹⁷ But often he chooses not to, leaving us to make choices and deal with the natural consequences of our actions, both good and bad. If he were to manipulate every detail of our lives, he would interfere with our moral agency and our eternal growth.

This does not mean, however, that God is distant or distracted or uncaring. In fact, it is truly amazing how much our Father interests himself in the small and simple moments of the lives of his children. “God's personal shaping influence is felt in the details of our lives—not only in the details of the galaxies and molecules but, much more importantly, in the details of our own lives,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell testified. “Somehow God is providing

these individual tutorials for us while at the same time he is overseeing cosmic funerals and births, for as one earth passes away so another is born (see Moses 1:38). It is marvelous that He would attend to us so personally in the midst of those cosmic duties. . . . Be assured that God is in the details and in the subtleties of the defining and preparatory moments of discipleship.”¹⁸

Yes, those who are observant can see God’s hand in our lives in very personal, customized ways. But he doesn’t wave a giant magic wand or utter some magical word to accomplish his purposes. Rather, when he does intervene, he does so within the framework of our agency, and his purpose in doing so is to give us enhanced opportunities to exercise our agency. He intercedes to teach, reprove, inspire, warn, comfort, and encourage us—not to control us. He is not the Great Micromanager, controlling and determining each moment and every event of our lives. He is so dedicated to our personal growth and happiness that he leaves much of the decisions and work up to us. Righteousness must be freely chosen.¹⁹ C. S. Lewis wrote:

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. . . . If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings—then we may take it it is worth paying.²⁰

This truth has important implications when we are faced with difficult decisions. Consider this true story of a couple who had been trying for years to decide whether or not to move from their current home. Every time they had made a decision, in a few weeks or months they began to have doubts and decide to do nothing. They had come close a few times but could never quite make a final decision to move. One time they had purchased a residential lot, hired an architect to draw up house plans, and

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made plans to build. But again, in a few weeks and months they pulled back and decided to wait and think about it some more. They sincerely prayed and sought the Lord's counsel; they fasted and went to the temple regularly to seek guidance; they just couldn't seem to make a final decision and go forward. Why did it seem the Lord was not responding? If we are to counsel with God in everything, they thought, why couldn't they get a confirming witness of what they should do and then make a final decision? Were they not living righteously enough to be granted heavenly guidance? Or, could it be that God didn't really care whether or not they moved or built a new home?

Often, in a surge of obedience, we wish Heavenly Father would simply tell us what to do and we would gladly do it. But perhaps this desire is inspired not only by a willingness to obey but also by an unwillingness to choose for ourselves and accept responsibility for our choices. God, we discover, wants proactive, initiative-taking agents as much as he wants submissive, obedient instruments.

When it comes to missions, marriage, parenting, career choices, or a host of other decisions large and small all along life's pathway, we are to study it out and do our research, ponder and pray and seek the guidance and peace of the Lord, and go forward. Some choices are made quickly and easily, while others take much time and serious deliberation. Some good choices need to be made and remade many times during a lifetime. Sometimes we seem to get an answer that is clear and immediate, and other times no answer seems to come at all. It could be that no answer is *the* answer—perhaps he either lets us figure it out, or it doesn't matter all that much, or it's simply up to us.

President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Usually the Lord gives us the overall objectives to be accomplished and some guidelines to follow, but he expects us to work out most of the details and methods. The methods and procedures are usually developed through study and prayer and by living so that we can obtain and follow the promptings of the Spirit. Less spiritually advanced people, such as those in the days of Moses, had to be commanded in many things. Today those spiritually alert look at the objectives, check the guidelines laid down by the Lord and his prophets, and

then prayerfully act—without having to be commanded “in all things.” This attitude prepares [us] for godhood.²¹

And therein lies the answer to the paradox, “Does God want his children to be submissive instruments or proactive agents?” It should not surprise us that the answer is “both.” He wants his children to become as he is, and that requires that we acquire the attributes of both a trusting instrument and a trusted agent. In other words, he wants us to eagerly and anxiously exercise our agency, of our own free will, to choose to meekly submit to and adapt to his will. He wants us to humbly and willingly learn from our experiences in the hands of the Master so that we may one day be masters ourselves.

NOTES

1. Multiple definitions of *agency* are given in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003); the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971); and the *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. (2000), but none of them fully captures the idea of the right or privilege to make one's own choices or act for oneself. Interestingly, when the word *agency* is used in Latter-day Saint scriptures (primarily the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price), it is often translated into non-English languages as a word that means something closer to “free will” or “independence” than to the common English word *agency* (Spanish: *albedrío*, not *agencia*; German: *Selbstständigkeit* or *Entscheidungsfreiheit*, not *Agentur*; French: *libre arbitre*, not *agence*).
2. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1953), 299.
3. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, 299, 301.
4. See also Mosiah 27:36; Alma 2:30; 17:9, 11; 26:3; 35:14. Alma's father, Alma the Elder, also refers to himself as an instrument in God's hands in Mosiah 23:10.
5. John W. Welch, “Thy Mind, O Man, Must Stretch,” Brigham Young University forum, May 17, 2011, 7, speeches.byu.edu.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, “Weightier Matters,” Brigham Young University devotional, February 9, 1999, 2, speeches.byu.edu.
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 2:20.
8. Henry B. Eyring, “A Priceless Heritage of Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 24–25.

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9. D. Todd Christofferson, "Moral Agency," Brigham Young University devotional, January 31, 2006, 2, speeches.byu.edu.
10. Christofferson, "Moral Agency," 2.
11. Neal A. Maxwell, "Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father," *Ensign*, November 1995, 23–24.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 52.
13. Entry for Sunday, May 16, 1841, in "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]" (bracketed explanation added), third volume of "Manuscript History of the Church," Church History Library, josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842.
14. We need to be clear here: we are saved through the grace of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace we are saved after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). The Book of Mormon adds "all that we could do [was to] repent of all our sins" (Alma 24:11). Lehi also taught, "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).
15. Gerald E. Jones, "Fate," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:502–3. See also *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 18–21.
16. For an insightful explanation of how God and humanity are working together for the salvation of souls, see Robert L. Millet, "The Perils of Grace," *BYU Studies* 53, no. 2 (2014): 7–19.
17. A full and thorough discussion about the degree to which God actively intervenes in day-to-day events is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say here that much of the time he forbears out of respect for our agency.
18. Neal A. Maxwell, "Becoming a Disciple," *Ensign*, June 1996, 17, 19.
19. See Richard W. Cracroft, "We'll Sing and We'll Shout: A Mantic Celebration of the Holy Spirit," Brigham Young University devotional, June 29, 1993, speeches.byu.edu.
20. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52–53.
21. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1965, 121–25.