

JEFFREY S. O'DRISCOLL AND HAL B. GREGERSEN

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*Persuasion and Love Unfeigned*  
*The Exercise of Agency, Influence, and Principle*

*I*mprisoned in Liberty Jail in the winter of 1838–39, Joseph and Hyrum Smith must have thought a good deal about how it felt to lose their freedom. During those miserable months, wisdom and revelation poured out of the Prophet about tyrants and oppressors and the damage they do to the human spirit. “The whole earth groans under the weight” of tyranny and oppression, he wrote, lamenting the iron yoke, the strong band, the handcuffs, and the chains, shackles, and fetters of hell (see D&C 123:7–8).

From this experience came the great revelation we now know as Doctrine and Covenants 121, which lays out principles of effective leadership in bright contrast to the methods of those who would lead people by force. History shows that Joseph and Hyrum led their people “by persuasion . . . and by love unfeigned,” as set forth in that revelation (D&C 121:41).

All leaders tilt one way or the other on a scale, with force at one end and loving persuasion at the other. They exercise their influence by example, invitation, enticement, persuasion, intimidation, or downright tyranny. So a key question for leaders—particularly in the Lord’s Church—is what form of influence is the most effective? The most moral? The most edifying? The most likely to honor others’ agency?

Interestingly, at the same time Joseph and Hyrum were in Liberty Jail contemplating these questions, Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s play *Richelieu* opened in London (March 1839). In act 2, Cardinal Richelieu speaks the now famous lines:

*True, This!—  
Beneath the rule of men entirely great,  
The pen is mightier than the sword.*

He meant, of course, that effective leadership depends on persuasion, not on force.

### ***Leading by Persuasion***

Alma tells us that persuasion is always more effective than coercion in leading others. Speaking specifically of “the virtue of the word of God,” Alma observes, “The preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them” (Alma 31:5). For Alma, teaching true doctrine *leads* people to the light and to do that which is just. It does not drive them or force them; it enlightens them.

As we know, force has been Satan’s tool since he “rebelled . . . and sought to destroy the agency of man . . . and to lead them captive at his will” (Moses 4:3–4). Likewise, when we try to compel others by physical force or coercive words, we also infringe upon their God-given agency. When we do this, we move in some measure along the dark, self-centered path of

Satan, who sought even greater glory than God by depriving others of the power to choose.

In stark contrast, Joseph Smith respected the sacred nature of agency—as when he invited Truman O. Angell to build a store for him. Truman later recalled, “I answered that in consequence of being a seventy I was about to go out into the vineyard to preach. ‘Well,’ [Joseph] said, ‘Go ahead,’ and I continued my work.”<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, Joseph accepted Truman’s response and allowed him time to contemplate his actions. “The next day I looked up and saw the First Presidency of the Church together, distant about forty rods,” Truman remembered. “I dropped my head and continued my work. At this time a voice seemed to whisper to me, ‘It is your duty to build that house for President Smith,’ and while I was meditating, I looked up and Brother Joseph Smith, Jr., was close to me. He said, ‘It is your duty to build that house.’ I answered, ‘I know it.’ Accordingly I changed my determination and yielded obedience.”<sup>2</sup>

President Boyd K. Packer explains why the gospel has such divine influence. “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”<sup>3</sup> The doctrine must be true and it must be understood. True doctrine changes attitudes, and then behavior takes care of itself.<sup>4</sup>

Hyrum Smith, as Assistant President of the Church, believed in the persuasive power of true doctrine when he encouraged the elders to trust in the simple message of the restored gospel. “Preach the first principles of the Gospel,” he said, “preach them over again: you will find that day after day new ideas and additional light concerning them will be revealed to you. You can enlarge upon them so as to comprehend them clearly. You will then be able to make them more plainly understood by

those who teach, so that you will meet with scarcely any honest man but will obey them, and none who can oppose.”<sup>5</sup>

We need not compel people to act righteously *if* we trust in God and the power of his message. When King Benjamin taught true doctrine to his people, “they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

In our day the same simple process is just as effective. We are called to “preach [the] gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.” If we try to convey the message by “some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:14, 20).

### ***Leading by Patience and Long-Suffering***

Too often when we try to change people, we show a lack of confidence and patience in the transforming power of God’s word and in the critical role of the Holy Ghost. Maybe that’s why “long-suffering” comes right after “persuasion” in the Lord’s formula for effective leadership (D&C 121:20). Sometimes we even start to follow Satan’s plan when we try to force people to change or when we twist the word of God to serve our own ends (and glory) instead of teaching the true doctrine and waiting patiently for the influence of the Spirit to bring about change.

The Epistle of James encourages us to “let patience have her perfect work” (1:4). Occasionally, patience must work its perfect work for quite some time. For example, “Train up a child in the way he should go,” the scripture promises, “and *when he is old*, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6; emphasis added). Sometimes we must wait and trust. We must

not attempt to shortcut this process of influence in our homes, Church callings, or even the workplace, or else we may violate the agency of those we serve.

While some notorious and violent people still want to use force to solve conflicts, most societies today use discussion, debate, and diplomacy in place of the sword, the gun, and the bomb. Unfortunately, however, closer to home we still sometimes fail to grasp how words can slice far deeper than swords. Intimidation, whether verbal or physical, is still force, a violation of the glorious gift of agency. We completely miss the virtue and power of God's method of persuasion when we use cruel words that he would never use.

“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing,” warns James, and adds, “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10). Commenting on this and other verses from James, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland says, “Some things we say can be destructive, even venomous—and that is a chilling indictment for a Latter-day Saint! The voice that bears profound testimony, utters fervent prayer, and sings the hymns of Zion *can be* the same voice that berates and criticizes, embarrasses and demeans, inflicts pain and destroys the spirit of oneself and of others in the process.”<sup>6</sup>

Continuing, Elder Holland cautions:

Husbands, you have been entrusted with the most sacred gift God can give you—a wife, a daughter of God, the mother of your children who has voluntarily given herself to you for love and joyful companionship. Think of the kind things you said when you were courting, think of the blessings you have given with hands placed lovingly upon her head, think of yourself and of her as the god and goddess you both inherently are, and then reflect on other moments characterized by cold, caustic, unbridled words. Given the damage that can be done with our tongues, little wonder the Savior said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth

a man.” A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned. . . . Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be.<sup>7</sup>

In a talk to the women of the Church, President Gordon B. Hinckley denounced the intimidating behavior of some men. “Unfortunately a few of you may be married to men who are abusive,” he lamented. “Some of them put on a fine face before the world during the day and come home in the evening, set aside their self-discipline, and on the slightest provocation fly into outbursts of anger. No man who engages in such evil and unbecoming behavior is worthy of the priesthood of God. No man who so conducts himself is worthy of the privileges of the house of the Lord. I regret that there are some men undeserving of the love of their wives and children. There are children who fear their fathers, and wives who fear their husbands. If there be any such men within the hearing of my voice, as a servant of the Lord I rebuke you and call you to repentance.”<sup>8</sup>

In a different setting, President Hinckley exhorted the men: “Now my dear brethren, . . . I plead with you to control your tempers, to put a smile upon your faces, which will erase anger; *speak out words of love and peace, appreciation, and respect*. If you will do this, your lives will be without regret. Your marriages and family relationships will be preserved.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course these principles are no less applicable to the sisters who are called to serve as leaders, as mothers, as wives. In fact, Elder Holland’s counsel on the teachings of James was not to the men only:

We speak to the sisters as well [as to the brethren], for the sin of verbal abuse knows no gender. Wives, what of the unbridled tongue in *your* mouth, of the power for good or ill in *your* words? How is it that such a lovely voice

which by divine nature is so angelic, so close to the veil, so instinctively gentle and inherently kind could ever in a turn be so shrill, so biting, so acrid and untamed? A woman's words can be more piercing than any dagger ever forged, and they can drive the people they love to retreat beyond a barrier more distant than anyone in the beginning of that exchange could ever have imagined. Sisters, there is no place in that magnificent spirit of yours for acerbic or abrasive expression of any kind, including gossip or backbiting or catty remarks. Let it never be said of our home or our ward or our neighborhood that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . [burning] among our members."<sup>10</sup>

### ***Hyrum Smith—A Model of Godly Leadership***

A great example of the power and effectiveness of the leadership principles Joseph Smith taught was his brother Hyrum. At Joseph's side for so long, sharing the same prison experience, Hyrum both learned and embodied the revealed doctrine of influence through persuasion and love unfeigned. In 1835, after a conflict arose between the Prophet and his younger brother William, Hyrum patiently communicated with both, bringing about reconciliation between them. Of his older brother's efforts, Joseph notes in his journal, "I could pray in my heart that all men were like my brother Hyrum, who possesses the mildness of a lamb, and the integrity of Job, and in short, the meekness and humility of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

Seven years later, while Joseph was hiding from persecutors, Hyrum came to comfort him in the middle of the night. "Oh, may the eternal Jehovah crown eternal blessings upon your head, as a reward for the care you have had for my soul," Joseph wrote to him. "O how many are the sorrows have we [*sic*] shared together, and again we find ourselves shackled with the unrelenting hand of oppression. Hyrum, thy name shall be written in the Book of the Law of the Lord, for those who

come after thee to look upon, that they may pattern after thy works.”<sup>12</sup>

Among the travails that bound Joseph and Hyrum together, the hardships of Liberty Jail were among the greatest. Their letters show that they learned together the same lessons about suffering trials patiently—and about the bitterness of losing their freedom. “O God! where art thou?” Joseph pleaded in his letter, now canonized as scripture. “How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens, the wrongs of thy people, and of thy servants, and thy ear be penetrated with their cries? Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened towards them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion towards them?” (D&C 121:1–3).

A few days before Joseph wrote his epistle, Hyrum had also recorded a prayer in a letter to his wife. “O God, how long shall we suffer these things?” he wrote. “Will not thou deliver us and make us free? Still, thy will be done, O Lord. May the Lord bless you [Mary Fielding Smith] and give you strength to endure all these things. O Lord God, wilt thou hear the prayer of your servant?”<sup>13</sup>

Surely the brothers spent sleepless nights sharing thoughts, discussing doctrine, and strengthening one another.<sup>14</sup> Further insight came when the Lord told Joseph, “Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes” (D&C 121:7–8). And despite his sufferings, Joseph received the promise, “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

About the same time that the Prophet received this counsel from heaven, Hyrum wrote to his beloved companion, speaking of another Joseph who was imprisoned in ancient Egypt and who “was patient in tribulation and hastened to that redeeming power that saves the righteous in all ages of the world.” Hyrum



continued, “Bonds and imprisonments and persecutions are no disgrace to the Saints. It is that that is common in all ages of the world since the day of Adam. . . . The same things produce the same effect in every age of the world. We only want the same patience, the same carefulness, the same guide, the same grace, the same faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . And without this we cannot be saved in the Celestial glory.”<sup>15</sup>

These shared experiences forged bonds of empathy between the brothers and provided insights into the power of love and the nature of tyranny. On March 15, 1839, Joseph expressed sentiments very similar to those which had been described by his older brother. To a friend, Joseph confided, “[Trials] will only give us that knowledge to understand the minds of the Ancients. For my part, I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered. All things shall work together for good to them that love God.”<sup>16</sup>

Five days later, on the same day that Joseph was recording the inspired counsel of Doctrine and Covenants 121, Hyrum wrote to his wife, “Our sufferings will only call to mind the sufferings of the ancients—Daniel in the lions’ den, the Hebrew children that were cast into the fire or furnace and the deprivations of the saints when they took joyfully of the spoiling of their goods at the time of the persecution at Jerusalem when the saints were scattered from that place. . . . God sits to judge both quick and dead . . . and we must be patient in tribulation and wait. The will of God be done. I have no fears of my salvation. God is my Judge.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Leadership by Principles of Righteousness*

During the sanctifying tutelage which Joseph and Hyrum experienced in Liberty Jail, and after much conversation about those experiences, they began to be taught several essential principles of righteous leadership. Through the Prophet Joseph, the Savior shared what may be the most powerful teachings on

influence, agency, and leadership since his ancient invitation, “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). The Lord began by asking why people so often fall short of their leadership potential. Then, answering his own question, he explained, “Because their hearts [that is, *our* hearts] are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:35–36).

Note that the scripture declares we can access these powers only upon the principles of righteousness. There really is no other way. Mixing the powers of heaven with the desires of this world shuts off the powers of heaven.

Sometimes we dismiss this warning as applying to “unrighteous others,” not to ourselves. But the following verse makes it clear that the Lord is talking to the leaders of his Church and the leaders of families—to holders of the priesthood in particular. Speaking of the rights of the priesthood, he continues, “That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” (D&C 121:37).

President Gordon B. Hinckley expounded this verse: “Brethren, let us be worthy of the priesthood which we hold,” he encouraged. “Let us live nearer to the Lord. Let us be good husbands and fathers. Any man who is a tyrant in his own home is unworthy of the priesthood. He cannot be a fit instrument in the hands of the Lord when he does not show respect and kindness and love toward the companion of

his choice. Likewise, any man who is a bad example for his children, who cannot control his temper, or who is involved in dishonest or immoral practices will find the power of his priesthood nullified.”<sup>18</sup>

Again, the qualification of righteousness is emphasized and the consequence of unrighteousness defined—“Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.” If we are unrighteous, we have no priesthood. There is a built-in withdrawal clause that is based on our actions. Of such men, the Lord declared, “Ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God” (D&C 121:38).

In another revelation to Joseph, the Lord reemphasizes the necessity of using the Lord’s power righteously. “Wherefore,” the Lord explained, “as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business” (D&C 64:29). On the Lord’s errand, we must act according to his will, not our own. The challenge for all leaders is to avoid the folly of exercising unrighteous “control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men.”

### *Honoring Divine Principles of Agency and Influence*

Hyrum Smith understood the absolute necessity of avoiding compulsion. When laboring as a missionary in Springfield, Pennsylvania, Hyrum demonstrated this understanding. “About December 1832, Elder Hyrum Smith, brother to the prophet, came to our neighborhood,” Daniel Tyler later wrote. “My father told him that his daughter, who was present, was bent on being baptized into his church, stating at the same time, that the Elder who baptized her would do so at his peril.” From Hyrum’s biography we understand, “Hyrum’s unflinching response was courageous and respectful. Honoring both the father’s paternal authority and the daughter’s moral agency,

Hyrum adroitly said, ‘Mr. Tyler, we shall not baptize your daughter against your wishes. If our doctrine be true, which we testify it is, if you prevent your daughter from embracing it, the sin will be on your head, not on ours or your daughter’s.’” Daniel recalled, “This remark pricked [my father] to the heart. He therefore decided to counsel his daughter in the matter and then permit her to exercise her free agency.” When Daniel’s sister reaffirmed her desire for baptism, their father “took her on an ox-sled to Lake Erie, a distance of two miles, where, after a hole was cut through three feet of solid ice, she was baptized and confirmed into the Church by Elder Hyrum Smith.”<sup>19</sup>

By honoring the divine principles of agency and proper influence, Hyrum strengthened and preserved the sacred bonds of the Tyler family and let the Lord work on the father. Hyrum set aside his own desires—even the noble aspiration of baptizing one of God’s children—in deference to the father’s stewardship.

In 1834, as Hyrum led a branch of Zion’s Camp, he again showed the power of leading by persuasion and brotherly kindness. When camp members complained that some were not pulling their weight, Hyrum kindly and wisely intervened, not with a stick, but with insights into the pain the men were causing each other. “We had cast reflections and hints,” wrote Elijah Fordham, the camp historian, “[and] we were astonished at the consequences when we were informed of them by Bro. Smith. We saw the evil, felt humble, and readily confessed to each other and to God and with uplifted hands covenanted to forget and forgive all that had passed and [to] do so no more.”<sup>20</sup> Lyman Littlefield, another member of the camp, later wrote, “Our company . . . learned to love and honor Hyrum Smith because of his dignified and upright course and correct teachings.”<sup>21</sup>

These examples from Hyrum’s life lend support to what leadership researchers call “self-determination theory.” This

theory holds that successful leaders are the ones who respect and honor the autonomy or agency of those they lead. Such leaders help others acquire and develop new competencies and build better relationships. A leader who practices self-determination can answer yes to the following questions: Has the autonomy (or agency) of my people increased because of my influence? Has their competency increased? Has our relationship improved? If so, then those within our circle of influence are more self-determined or self-directed than before.<sup>22</sup> When we influence others in this way—honoring their agency, nurturing their competencies, and strengthening relationships—all are edified. In contrast, coercive leadership undermines the independence and growth of others.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes, especially as parents—sometimes, too, as spouses—we think that compelling someone to do what we perceive to be right will ultimately prove to be in the best interest of the one we want to influence. We simply hope that the ends of our efforts will justify the means. Yet compulsion is a form of influence to actively avoid. So we should think hard as a mother, a father, a bishop, or a leader in the workplace when we find ourselves saying, “You need to do it *this way*, because I am the boss and I say so.” President Kimball put it simply: “We have heard of men who have said to their wives, ‘I hold the priesthood and you’ve got to do what I say.’ Such a man should be tried for his membership. Certainly he should not be honored in his priesthood.”<sup>24</sup>

Whenever we use our position or authority to force others to do as we say, we have stepped out of the bounds the Lord set. “We have learned by sad experience,” the revelation explains, “that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:39). Unrighteous dominion is clearly defined—it is any influence by any other means than these: “persuasion, . . . long-

suffering, . . . gentleness and meekness, . . . love unfeigned, . . . kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death” (D&C 121:41–44).

If we try to influence people in ways other than these, we have immediately begun to exercise unrighteous dominion. So we should ask ourselves if our efforts to persuade—to influence, to lead, to reprove—leave people feeling as though their souls have been enlarged or belittled. Have we respected their agency? Is our faithfulness to them now stronger than the cords of death?

### ***Righteous Influence Inspires Loyalty***

Joseph’s influence left many people feeling voluntarily bound to him by cords of friendship. General Moses Wilson of the Missouri Militia was ordered to take the Prophet to Jackson County and put him to death. In 1874, Elder George A. Smith reported:

I heard General Wilson, some years after, speaking of this circumstance. He was telling some gentlemen about having Joseph Smith a prisoner in chains in his possession, and said he—“He was a very remarkable man. I carried him into my house, a prisoner in chains and in less than two hours my wife loved him better than she did me.” At any rate Mrs. Wilson became deeply interested in preserving the life of Joseph Smith and the other prisoners, and this interest on her part, which probably arose from a spirit of humanity, did not end with that circumstance, for, a number of years afterwards, after the family had moved to Texas, General Wilson became interested in raising a mob to do violence to some of the Latter-day Saint Elders who

were going to preach in the neighborhood, and this coming to the ears of Mrs. Wilson, although then an aged lady, she mounted her horse and rode thirty miles to give the Elders the information.<sup>25</sup>

Joseph inspired faithfulness that was indeed far stronger than the cords of death. In October 1838, when that same Moses Wilson tried to compel Lyman Wight to betray Joseph under threat of death, Lyman replied, “Shoot, and be damned.”<sup>26</sup>

Again we ask, when we are in a position to lead others, do they feel edified, strengthened, and encouraged by our influence? Do they feel their agency has been honored and expanded? Or do they feel belittled, bullied, manipulated, compelled, coerced, intimidated, discouraged, browbeaten, trapped, or even obliged? In short, do the people with whom we interact feel better or worse about themselves and their assigned tasks after our encounters? Are they moved to action only to avoid further unpleasantness from us or because they genuinely desire to do what they now understand to be right and necessary?

We could ask ourselves these questions about our interactions at work, in Church, or at home. In particular, fathers and husbands might well contemplate these questions or even discuss them with their wife or children. If our spouses or children seem reluctant to answer directly, we might take that as a sign we need to examine ourselves more deeply.

Elder H. Burke Peterson suggested fathers ask themselves the following questions to discern whether they are approaching “the borderline of unrighteous dominion” (see D&C 121:39).<sup>27</sup>

- Do I criticize family members more than I compliment them?
- Do I insist that family members obey me because I am the father or husband and hold the priesthood?

- Do I seek happiness more at work or somewhere other than in my home?
- Do my children seem reluctant to talk to me about some of their feelings and concerns?
- Do I attempt to guarantee my place of authority by physical discipline or punishment?
- Do I find myself setting and enforcing numerous rules to control family members?
- Do family members appear to be fearful of me?
- Do I feel threatened by the notion of sharing with other family members the power and responsibility for decision making in the family?
- Is my wife highly dependent on me and unable to make decisions for herself?
- Does my wife complain that she has insufficient funds to manage the household because I control all the money?
- Do I insist on being the main source of inspiration for each individual family member rather than teaching each child to listen to the Spirit?
- Do I often feel angry and critical toward family members?<sup>28</sup>

These principles can also prove effective in the workplace, as demonstrated by comments from the CEO of a major international company. Though not familiar with modern prophets or revelation, he recently confided to a friend, “After years of not really listening to my wife, I finally grasped that there was an element of truth in everything that she was saying. From that moment forward I learned to truly listen. Listening and respecting her truth has profoundly changed our relationship. Now I not only connect better at home but I also ask other members of my senior management team if they are really listening to their spouses. If they aren’t, I worry not



only about their relationships at home but their effectiveness at work.”<sup>29</sup>

In the home, Hyrum and Jerusha Smith struck a delicate and enviable balance in their family relationships. Mary Ann Stearns and her mother lived with Hyrum’s family for a time in Kirtland. Mary Ann later wrote, “Sister Smith was a kind, motherly woman, gentle and sweet in all her ways. She never tired of doing that which would bring peace and happiness to those around her.”<sup>30</sup> Little Mary Ann was not quite four years old when she moved into Hyrum’s home, but she long remembered, “He was very kind in his family but very firm in the principles of his belief.” She forever thereafter considered Hyrum one of God’s “pure spirits.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***Leading with Pure Knowledge***

Virtues like kindness and gentleness are easy to understand, but the Lord also instructs us that “pure knowledge” is another component of effective leadership (D&C 121:42). This is a little more enigmatic. Obviously, knowledge enhances leadership, especially knowledge of the feelings and perspectives of those whom we are called to lead.<sup>32</sup> But how do we gain *pure* knowledge?

The answer may be found in the following verse. We are to reprove “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:43). Brigham Young explained: “When people come to me, I look at them to see them as they are, though I am not yet perfect in this. I have not yet the eyes I wish to have, nor the wisdom. Do I wish to know how they look with man, or to my brother? No, but how they appear before the God of heaven. If I can gain that knowledge, if I can know precisely how an individual appears to my Father in heaven, and be able to look at him with the same kind of eyes as do the Holy Ghost and holy angels, then I can judge the good or evil in the person, without further trouble.” Brigham concluded, “That is the method by

which I settle so many difficulties. . . . Look at people as the Lord sees them, and then deal with them accordingly; and be honest with that man, woman, or neighbour.”<sup>33</sup> No doubt Hyrum and Joseph knew the importance of seeing others as the Lord sees them when they asked John Taylor to sing “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief” twice before the Martyrdom. This hymn delivers a powerful doctrinal message about learning to see others through God’s eyes, not our own.<sup>34</sup>

Just as the Holy Ghost carries the word of the Lord into hearts and converts souls, he helps us lead effectively by peaceful persuasion, patience, and long-suffering.<sup>35</sup> If we are unworthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost or fail to trust in him, we will fail as leaders. Conversely, with the Holy Ghost as our “constant companion” (D&C 121:46), we can become moral, ethical, effective leaders in both the means we use and the ends we achieve.

“I remember Joseph Smith speaking to me upwards of thirty years ago,” recalled John Taylor in 1872. “Says he: ‘Brother Taylor, you have received the Holy Ghost. Now follow its teachings and instructions. Sometimes it may lead you in a manner that may be contrary almost to your judgment; never mind, follow its teachings, and if you do so, by and by it will become in you a principle of revelation, so that you will know all things as they transpire.’”<sup>36</sup> Learning to recognize the prompting of the Holy Ghost and patiently complying with it—these are the keys to effective leadership.

Just weeks before the Martyrdom, Joseph and Hyrum wrote a joint letter to a wayward soul. The letter shows all would-be leaders the right way to use their influence. “Feeling an ardent desire for the salvation of the souls of men,” they wrote, “we take pleasure in feeling after you: and therefore would, in the sincerity of men of God, advise you to be rebaptised . . . that you may again receive the sweet influences of the holy Ghost, and enjoy the fellowship of the Saints.” To their invitation, they

added this timeless counsel: “Patience is heavenly; obedience is noble; forgiveness is merciful; and exaltation is Godly; and he that holds out faithful to the end shall in no wise lose his reward. A good man will endure all things to honor Christ, and dispose of the whole world and all in it to save his soul.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Pure Means of Influence*

If we hope to lead souls to Christ, we must work toward pure means of influence—means that honor the agency of others. Indeed, Joseph taught, “If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way.”<sup>38</sup>

*How* we lead must forever be influenced by *why* we lead. In the letter from Liberty Jail, from which portions are now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 121, the Prophet counseled:

A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination beware of; because the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.<sup>39</sup>

### *Notes*

1. Mark L. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph: Personal Recollections of Those Who Knew the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 49.
2. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph*, 49.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “Little Children,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 17.

4. Conversely, leadership research has also shown that new behaviors can also foster new attitudes (see, for example, Bruce Rind and David Kipnis, “Changes in Self-Perceptions as a Result of Successfully Persuading Others,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 1 [1999]: 141–56). In this paper, however, we choose to focus on the power of words to influence attitudes and behavior.
5. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 6:323.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 16.
7. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels,” 16–17.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 68.
9. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Slow to Anger,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 62–66; emphasis added.
10. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels,” 17.
11. *The Papers of Joseph Smith, Vol. 2: Journal, 1832–1842*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:111.
12. *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:416.
13. Hyrum Smith to Mary Fielding Smith, March 16, 1839, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
14. Though Joseph’s epistle was clearly a revelation—the most personalized portions of it are now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 121–23—it was also an open letter written over a period of days. In the excerpted portions he frequently used plural pronouns, and it was signed by Joseph, Hyrum, and their three fellow prisoners. The impetus for the revelation and the revelatory process itself came in some measure from their *shared* predicament. One powerful example comes from the lines preceding the widely quoted Doctrine and Covenants 121:7. “We received some letters last evening—one from Emma, one from Don C. Smith, and one from Bishop Partridge—all breathing a kind and consoling spirit. We were much gratified with their contents. We had been a long time without information; and when we read those letters they were to our souls as the gentle air is refreshing, but our joy was mingled with grief, because of the sufferings of the poor and much injured Saints. And we need not say to you that the floodgates of our hearts were lifted and our eyes were a fountain of tears, but those who have not been enclosed in the walls of prison without cause or provocation, can have but little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is; one token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling; it brings up in an instant everything that is passed; it seizes the present with the avidity of lightning; it grasps after the future with the fierceness of a tiger; it moves the mind backward and forward, from one

- thing to another, until finally all enmity, malice and hatred, and past differences, misunderstandings and mismanagements are slain victorious at the feet of hope; and when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers, My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:293).
15. Hyrum Smith to Mary Fielding Smith, Quincy, Illinois, [ca. 1839], Church History Library.
  16. Joseph Smith Jr. to Presendia Huntington Buell, March 15, 1839, in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 387; punctuation standardized.
  17. Hyrum Smith to Mary Fielding Smith, March 20, 1839, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, Church History Library.
  18. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reaching Down to Lift Another,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 52.
  19. Jeffrey S. O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith: A Life of Integrity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 72–73.
  20. Elijah Fordham, “Journal of the Branch of the Church of Christ in Pontiac, . . . 1834,” 2–3, Church History Library.
  21. Lyman O. Littlefield, “Reminiscences, The Prophet Joseph Smith in Zion’s Camp,” *Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 2 (January 15, 1892): 56.
  22. Edward Deci and Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation* (New York: Penguin, 1996). See also Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, “The ‘What’ and ‘Why’ of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior,” *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (2000): 227–68.
  23. Mogens Agervold and Eva Gemzoe Mikkelsen, “Relationships between Bullying, Psychosocial Work Environment, and Individual Stress Reactions,” *Work & Stress* 18, no. 4 (2004): 336–51; Lynda Sagrestano, Christopher Heavey, and Andrew Christensen, “Perceived Power and Physical Violence in Marital Conflict,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 1 (1999): 65–79; Charles Berger, “Power, Dominance, and Social Interaction,” in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Mark L. Knapp and John A. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 450–507.
  24. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 316.
  25. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1875), 17:92–93.
  26. Lyman Wight, “Testimony of Lyman Wight,” in Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:446.
  27. H. Burke Peterson, “Unrighteous Dominion,” *Ensign*, July 1989, 7.

28. Peterson, “Unrighteous Dominion,” 7.
29. Personal communication with Hal Gregersen, June 13, 2007.
30. Mary Ann Stearns Winters’ reminiscences, 2–3, Church History Library.
31. “My First Sacrifice,” *Juvenile Instructor*, December 15, 1898, 845. The author of the brief article is identified only by the initials M.A.W. (Mary Ann Stearns Winters, b. 6 April 1833).
32. Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 46.
33. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:290.
34. James Montgomery, “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 29.
35. Leadership research consistently shows that influencing others through persuasion (teaching principles) is one of the most powerful mechanisms for generating long-term commitment to a course of action. More precisely, the “softer” the influence attempt, the more “freedom a person has to yield or resist the influence attempt” (see, for example, Jan Bruins, “Social Power and Influence Tactics: A Theoretical Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 1 [1999]: 7–14). If leaders seek more than simply doing what is “asked” (often authoritatively asked for), softer influence tactics—ones that honor others’ agency—are far more likely to produce higher levels of commitment, extra effort, creative ideas, and so forth, at work, home, or church. In other words, “hard” tactics that reduce others’ autonomy in their response are far more likely to produce compliance (or doing whatever is necessary to get by or stay out of trouble). The opposite or “soft” tactics (similar to those positively framed in Doctrine and Covenants 121) yield far more impact in terms of engaging others’ hearts at work, home, or church and seeing such engagement translate into positive, extraordinary outcomes for individuals and organizations. The following research articles capture some of these key leadership dynamics: Chad A. Higgins, Timothy A. Judge, Gerald R. Ferris, “Influence tactics and work outcomes: a meta-analysis,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 24, no. 1, (2003): 89–106; Kurt Dirks and Donald Ferrin, “Trust in Leadership: Meta-analytic Findings and Implications for Research and Practice,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87, no. 4 (2002): 611–28; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, November 2005, 4.
36. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:366–67.
37. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 580–81; punctuation standardized.
38. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:499.
39. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:29.