

# Sacrifice and Condescension: Types and Shadows for Latter-day Living

*D. Mick Smith*

Almost any reader of the Book of Mormon is aware of the greatness of Lehi's dream of the tree of life and Nephi's subsequent vision. Yet how many have truly pondered the extent of doctrinal teaching available from an in-depth study of these spiritual experiences? Do we see the Atonement of Christ spelled out in magnificent clarity? Do we grasp the complex yet simple narrative of how the Son would sacrifice and condescend as part of his mission to save us? Do we comprehend how this dream and vision set an example for us to follow as part of our daily personal covenants for latter-day living? Our purposes must be to discover what doctrine is taught through these experiences and how the lessons learned have application in our lives.

The Book of Mormon is a treasure trove of doctrine and understanding for the true seeker of the things of God. Lehi's dream and Nephi's interpretive vision rival Old and New Testament revelations such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image and latter-day Restoration (see Daniel 2:19–45), Jacob's dream of the ladder connecting earth and heaven (see Genesis 28:12–15; John 1:51), and Peter's vision of the gospel going to all nations (see Acts 10).

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*D. Mick Smith is a teacher at Maple Mountain Seminary in Spanish Fork, Utah, and an adjunct instructor of religion at Brigham Young University.*

Nebuchadnezzar's dream helps us understand how the Restoration of the gospel will roll forth and encompass the earth. Jacob's dream helps us better comprehend the ascension of the souls of men to God, and Christ's role as the pathway by which we ascend and descend from God's presence. Peter's vision communicates the importance of carrying the gospel to all of the nations of the earth. In comparison, Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision may teach us the sweetness and joy that can come from partaking of the fruit of the gospel, especially as we gain a greater appreciation of the condescension of the Father and the Son. In other words, each of these great dreams or visions assists us in understanding the relationship our Heavenly Father has with his children and his desires to see his work progress here upon the earth.

The vision of the tree of life provides hidden nuggets of truth that elucidate such basic gospel principles as holding fast to the word of God, staying on the strait and narrow path, avoiding the temptations that seek to cloud our view of eternity, and receiving the consummate reward and joy if we endure to the end and taste of the fruit offered by the Savior. It is this sacred fruit that we all desire and have desired to partake of since the Fall of Adam and Eve brought about our earthly separation from the Father and the Son (see Genesis 3:17–24).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these principles comes the awe-inspiring central theme of all scripture, which is that the Father has sent his Son to ransom and redeem mankind from our lost and fallen state. The depth and majesty of this sacrifice is magnificently expressed in Nephi's portion of the vision when he is asked about "the condescension of God" and the associated principles of sacrifice and service that are so movingly taught as we learn of the Father's and Son's example for each of us (see 1 Nephi 11:16–33). While some may question the "majesty" or "beauty" of sacrifice, those who benefit from the sacrificial offering stand in awe of what was offered, especially by our Heavenly Father and Elder Brother.

### Understanding the Law of Sacrifice and Condescension

To understand the interrelationship between sacrifice and condescension, it may be beneficial to briefly define each word and then apply their meanings to what is discovered from Nephi's vision. The word *sacrifice* comes from the Latin *sacra-* (sacred rites) combined with *facere* (to do, perform), meaning to perform sacred rites or to make something sacred.<sup>2</sup> To condescend is "to

behave as if one is conscious of descending from a superior position, rank, or dignity, or to put aside one's dignity or superiority voluntarily and assume equality with one regarded as inferior."<sup>3</sup> President Ezra Taft Benson taught that condescension "means to descend or come down from an exalted position to a place of inferior station."<sup>4</sup> We may condescend from positions of wealth, knowledge, good health, or any other of life's blessings in order to serve our fellowmen. Parents may condescend as they teach and work with their children on a level that the child will understand or as they sacrifice something they have in order to teach and bless the life of the child. A brother or sister may condescend by helping a younger sibling learn a skill, or by sacrificing something for the benefit of the younger sibling.

The importance of condescension is exemplified by the idea of voluntarily giving up a position of superiority in an act of service to those who may be considered to be in a lower position. Essentially, any act of selflessness that blesses others' lives may be considered a form of condescension.<sup>5</sup> The Father and the Son provide the ideals of condescension by which we learn and follow.

Thus the relationship between condescension and sacrifice is a sacred offering wherein one who is superior does something on behalf of someone else who could not, or may not, have been able to do that thing. This may occur when one condescends to help make someone sacred or sanctified who cannot achieve that level of purity on their own. An excellent example of this is when "the Lamb of God [descended] out of heaven and showed himself unto them," and "because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood" (see 1 Nephi 12:6, 10). In other words, an exalted being voluntarily came down from heaven, manifested himself unto his people, and then sanctified them with his blood. This is the essence of sacrifice and condescension.

### Condescension as Sacrifice

The law of sacrifice was instituted with the Fall of Adam and Eve. Upon being sent forth from the garden, they were commanded to offer sacrifice (see Moses 5:5), and although they initially did not fully understand the meaning or symbolism of the law, they were obedient to its demands.<sup>6</sup> This relationship of sacrifice and condescension was taught when the angel asked Adam, "Why dost thou offer sacrifices?" and then instructed, "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace

and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore" (Moses 5:7–8). Although the angel never spoke the word *condescend*, the act he described would be the condescension of the great Creator Jehovah as Jesus Christ roughly four thousand years later.

This symbolic law of sacrifice (which utilized other items such as animals or harvest fruit as tokens wherein something was substituted in behalf of or as a reminder for another) and consecration was taught to Adam and Eve's children, who were commanded to take the firstlings of their flocks or the first fruits of their fields to make an offering unto the Lord (see Genesis 4:3–4). This same law of sacrifice was then passed from generation to generation (as Noah took seven of each of the clean animals on the ark and subsequently used them to offer sacrifices once they were safely upon the earth again) and continued through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the children of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

The token is a physical reminder of something significant in one's life, and so the sacrifice was a type of Christ, a similitude (the likeness, representation, or imitation) of that which would come, and a shadow representing the actual offering that would be performed in the meridian of time. This idea of a burnt offering is presented to Nephi when the angel says, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!" (1 Nephi 11:21). As Nephi is instructed, and as we understand, "the characteristic rite was the burning of the *whole* animal on the altar (Lev. 1:9; Deut. 33:10)," representing Israel's "obligation to surrender" themselves to God.<sup>8</sup> Thus God's Only Begotten Son, his Lamb, would be the Father's offering on behalf of each of us.

This doctrine is especially significant because it manifests that the Father will condescend and comply with the law he has instituted upon the earth by providing a sacrifice. The Son, as the Lamb, voluntarily submitted himself to be offered upon the cross and overcame death so that he could bring all men unto him. This supreme condescension is that Jesus descended below all things by sacrificing his life so that each of us can overcome the effects of the Fall.

The only time in scriptural passages when it appeared that someone would be required to follow the Father's example in offering his own son was the command that came to Abraham to offer Isaac upon the altar, yet even there deliverance was provided (see Genesis 22:1–14). Although Adam and his posterity offered animals or first fruits in similitude of Jesus Christ, they

were not required to offer their own children. This was not the case in the Father's sacrifice, or in the Son's offering in Gethsemane and Golgotha. There was no ram in the thicket for their deliverance, yet in each of our cases the Lamb has already been offered and redemption is available.

The law of sacrifice was also a significant part of the lives of Lehi and his posterity both during their time in Jerusalem and during their travels to and arrival in the promised land. This law continued to be handed down from generation to generation and was practiced here in the Americas until the time of the coming of Jesus Christ shortly after his ascension in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ fulfilled the law of Moses and halted the shedding of blood but did not put an end to the requirements associated with the law of sacrifice; it just altered the manner by which sacrifice was to be rendered. The resurrected Christ taught this change during his visit to the Americas when he instructed: "And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not" (3 Nephi 9:19–20).

The infinite and atoning sacrifice had been completed. The Father had offered his Only Begotten as his Lamb upon the altar. The Savior had willingly submitted to the will of the Father by allowing himself to be taken and offered as the Lamb. The bloodshed of animals would not be required "until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" (D&C 13) as part of the dispensation of the fulness of times. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that this latter-day offering would include an animal sacrifice, and some people also believe that the sacrifice is conversion to the gospel and acceptance of God's ordinances as found in the temple.<sup>10</sup> In place of animal sacrifice, all who would now be willing to make a sacrificial offering before the Lord would be expected to do so with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

### **Appreciating Sacrifice and Condescension through Nephi's Vision**

Many have taught how the law of sacrifice is associated with the condescension of God by emphasizing the Son's mortal ministry and experience

as he descended below all things as a willing sacrifice for each of us.<sup>11</sup> For example, Jesus suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind, . . . sicknesses, . . . death, . . . their infirmities, . . . [and] the sins of his people” so “that his bowels may be filled with mercy” and “that he might blot out [our] transgressions according to the power of his deliverance” (Alma 7:11–13). Many have also pondered the Father’s condescension and willingness to create with the chosen Mary to bring forth the Only Begotten Son.<sup>12</sup> Yet, even in considering these two realities, some may have never considered how the lessons taught through Nephi’s vision of the condescension of the Father and the Son provide examples for us to follow in making the law of sacrifice and condescension an active and vibrant part of our daily lives.

Nephi’s vision shows us that Jehovah would become the Only Begotten by being born of a mortal mother and would dwell here among the sons and daughters of God (see 1 Nephi 11:15, 20–21). The Creator of all things is one of us. In so becoming, he set an example of sacrifice and condescension that each of us could emulate during our mortal experiences. Although his capacity to overcome was greater than ours due to his immortal parentage, more was required and expected of him in his mortal sojourn. He was baptized and the Holy Ghost came upon him, but he also suffered pain, afflictions, and temptations (see 1 Nephi 11:18, 27) above that which we can suffer. Nevertheless, we can follow his example by receiving the ordinances as he did and taking upon ourselves his name. We can then do as he did in going among those who are less fortunate, and we can “bear one another’s burdens, . . . mourn with those that mourn, . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9).

Nephi learned that the Lamb of God was the Father’s sacrifice. Under the Mosaic law that Nephi obeyed, the lamb was supposed to be an offering of the firstling of the flock. The sacrifice was also a type or shadow of the Atonement of the Lamb that would be offered for each of us. Nephi’s vision helps us see a union of the Mosaic law of Old Testament times with the law of Christ that we would be bound by today. The Lord “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (see 2 Nephi 2:7). Consequently, we are no longer required to offer an animal sacrifice but are expected to “offer a sacrifice unto the Lord” (D&C 59:8), namely “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). We should understand that the principle of being willing to condescend in servitude and consecration is perfectly exemplified in the sacrifice and condescension of the Father’s Only Begotten Son.

The sacrifice of the Son was in no way self-serving but rather self-sacrificing. Therein we are taught that in following Christ, we must be willing to do as he did and submit our wills to that of the Father. Moreover, as we gain a greater understanding of sacrifice and condescension, the clarity and beauty of the angel's seemingly simple question, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Nephi 11:16), will enlighten our hearts with the fruits of the gospel and fill our souls with the joy spoken of by Lehi (see 1 Nephi 8:10–12). As the Spirit reveals these truths to our heart and mind, we begin to realize that much of what Nephi saw was a visual depiction of ways that Jesus's exemplary sacrifice was a pattern for us to follow by condescending and sacrificing.

Although Nephi's vision highlighted the significant points in the life of Christ (see 1 Nephi 11:13–31), the focus was on a particular event. Nephi records that he witnessed that the "Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world" and that "he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (see 1 Nephi 11:32–33). He was our offering, and his voluntary willingness to sacrifice himself was the fulfillment of the Father's plan of salvation for each of us. Therefore, we must also be willing to offer up all that we have to further the Father's work upon the earth.

Immediately after Nephi's view of "a virgin, most beautiful and fair" (1 Nephi 11:15), the angel asks, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (v. 16). In this question, Nephi's subsequent answer, and the follow-up instructions, we gain our first lesson of the importance of this sacrifice. Nephi states, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (v. 17). Nephi understands that God loves us, but he does not quite understand what the "condescension of God" implies. Would we answer any differently? The angel then shows and instructs Nephi about multiple facets of the condescension of God: "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh" (v. 18).

Here we find our first understanding of the condescension of God the Father, and Jehovah, his Firstborn. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles elaborates, "'The condescension of God,' of which the scriptures speak, means that the Immortal Father—the glorified, exalted, enthroned ruler of the universe—came down from his station of dominion and power to become the Father of a Son who would be born of Mary, 'after the manner of the flesh' (1 Nephi 11:16–18)."<sup>13</sup> We also understand the condescension of Jehovah. As President Benson instructed, "When the great God

of the universe condescended to be born of mortal woman, He submitted Himself to the infirmities of mortality to ‘suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death’ (Mosiah 3:7).<sup>14</sup> This special parentage would allow him to experience all of the pains and suffering associated with mortality and to voluntarily lay down his life and then take it up again in the Resurrection.

The Father’s act of bringing his Son into mortality sets in place the ultimate sacrifice of the Father offering his Lamb upon the altar. The Father teaches us a very important principle regarding obedience to the law of sacrifice as he willingly offers his Son to redeem all mankind from the Fall. This Son was “the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:21). Our Heavenly Father would not expect our obedience to the law of sacrifice unless he first demonstrated his own willingness to obey the same law that he initiated.

We might be inclined to ask if this is merely a doctrine without an accompanying expectation of adherence. Would we ever be asked to sacrifice our own child as the Father has shown us? Is this example something we may be expected to follow?<sup>15</sup> In this mortal existence we do not have the capacity to pay for sins or redeem our fellow men through some sacrifice of our own, but we may sacrifice our time and become saviors on Mount Zion by doing temple work for those who are in need on the other side of the veil. Similarly, it would seem unrealistic to think that the Father would require any of us to sacrifice one of our children as a redemptive offering for others, first because it is impossible for us, but second because that is not part of his plan. Nevertheless, we may be required to offer all that we have for the gospel’s sake.

The great plan of happiness will only require one infinite and atoning sacrifice. This is especially poignant to consider when we contemplate that “the Lamb of God . . . was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and . . . he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (see 1 Nephi 11:32–33). The ultimate sacrifice of the Savior became evident as the Creator and Judge of the world was taken, judged, and crucified by those who were lower than him—without question a supreme act of condescension.

The Father’s sacrificial offering of his Lamb upon the altar is a beautiful manifestation of his love for us and his willing condescension to submit his sacrifice as payment for our sins and transgressions. It is an impossible



sacrifice that we are unable to duplicate or imitate. Not only had the Father brought his pure and sinless Son to the earth, but he also knew that this Son would be sacrificed in a most cruel and inhumane manner.

This sacrifice of the Father allows us to better understand the condescension and sacrifice of the Son. Whereas the Father created a Son to be born upon the earth, the Son would be that being who would fulfill the will of the Father, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Nephi introduces us to the Savior’s condescension when he sees in vision the “child” in the arms of Mary (see 1 Nephi 11:20), followed by his “going forth among the children of men” (1 Nephi 11:24), and then we see that the “Redeemer of the world . . . went forth and was baptized” (1 Nephi 11:27) and then “went forth ministering unto the people, . . . and they cast him out from among them” (1 Nephi 11:28). This brief treatise on the life of Christ beautifully describes how his condescension into mortality provides him with the understanding and compassion necessary to fulfill his role as our Righteous Judge.<sup>16</sup> He has lived a mortal life, was obedient to gospel law by being baptized, and then went about for the rest of his life fulfilling the will of his Father.

A secondary feature of Jesus Christ’s condescension is explained in the following verses as Nephi observed: “I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out” (1 Nephi 11:31). The Savior went among those who were the cast off and afflicted of the earth; he ministered unto them, thereby setting an example for us to follow. Yet, even in providing this example, the depth of his offering was beyond that which we can comprehend.

Amulek, a great testator in the Book of Mormon, explains, “For 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. For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:9–10).

Bishop Richard C. Edgley expounded upon Amulek's words as he clarified: "It had to be infinite, covering all transgression, all suffering, and it had to be eternal—applying to all mankind from the infinite beginning to the endless end. No, it could not be a sacrifice of man, beast, or fowl. It had to be a sacrifice of a God, even God the Creator, God the Redeemer. He had to condescend from godhood to mortality, and in mortality to sacrificial lamb. His gift of redemption, through His condescension, necessitated His suffering, exquisite pain, and humiliation."<sup>17</sup> All that he did was in subjection to the will of the Father, not out of requirement but out of obedience, love, and humility. The Son desired that the Father's will would become his own and the glory would be his Father's.

The Son of God condescended from his throne on high to come to the earth in order to serve all mankind, but even more to sacrifice and consecrate all that he had to his Father and to each of us in need of spiritual and physical deliverance. Jesus went to the sick, afflicted, diseased, and possessed, and he delivered them from their various forms of suffering. He delivers us from the sting of the grave and from the pains of sin, affliction, temptation, and sickness (see Alma 7:11–13). His example establishes that if he who is our Lord and our King would descend from his place of glory and honor and would condescend to be judged and crucified by us, all in order to serve and save us, we should be willing to do the same for our fellowmen. Part of the mark of discipleship is that we look beyond the outward appearance and serve in a similar manner as the Savior served us.

Prophetic instruction helps us to gain a partial understanding of the depth of the sacrifice and condescension that was made on our behalf. In *Lectures on Faith*, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that one reason Jesus Christ is called the Son of God is because he "descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be."<sup>18</sup> Isaiah further explained: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3–5). We may be smitten, bruised, or wounded for the

cause of Christ, but we are not suffering for someone else's sins. We still have the Savior and the Father on our side, whereas Christ suffered alone for us and because of us.

Bishop Richard C. Edgley helps us realize that Jesus' offering for us was born of his love for us:

His condescension is an integral, necessary, and inseparable part of the Atonement. The Atonement itself was predicated upon His willingness to descend and suffer. His condescension, as part of the Atonement, is probably as essential to the redemption of mankind as was His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane or on the cross. His Atonement was a free gift to all mankind—a gift that could be obtained no other way. It resulted from His willingness to descend. He descended not because of obligation, nor for glory, but only for love. His condescension to redeem us through the Atonement was the price He paid to provide salvation and exaltation.<sup>19</sup>

Nephi's vision of the tree of life, more especially of the Savior's life, helps us to see and understand what it means to condescend and sacrifice in fulfillment of a covenant. The Father's plan provided for a Redeemer, and fulfillment of the covenant in that plan comes in the form of Jesus Christ. The sick, afflicted, diseased, and possessed "were healed by the power of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 11:31). Jesus ministered to those we might be inclined to shun because of their afflicted state. We then see that even after blessing these infirmed "he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world" and was then "lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (vv. 32–33). He was not guilty. He had not committed any sin. He was perfect, pure, and undefiled, yet in the very act of serving and saving he was judged as a thing of naught, cast aside, and crucified.

### Applying Christ's Example of Sacrifice and Condescension

The preceding perspectives of the condescension of Christ are masterful examples that each of us can strive to follow, except for taking upon ourselves the sins and suffering of others. Everything we have comes from God, so we are all equally dependent upon the mercy and grace of the Father and the Son. We are not their equals; they obviously are superior to each of us. Yet

they serve us! And now, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must learn to serve others as Christ served us.

Jesus' example of serving others is one everyone can follow to some degree. We can sacrifice the things of the world for the things of God and we can submit our will to his, but it must be voluntary on our part. King Lamoni's father expressed part of our offering quite succinctly when he said, "I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:18). Elder Neal A. Maxwell similarly taught, "The submission of one's will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar."<sup>20</sup>

We may sacrifice one to two years of time with our children as they (or we) serve missions. We may give up family relationships as we accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and choose to leave families behind. Leaders of the Church have sacrificed their lives in the service of this latter-day work. Someone may even give up their life to save the life of another, as exemplified by "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). As we willingly sacrifice for others, our insights increase and we better comprehend the sacrifice of Christ.

Elder Quentin L. Cook taught, "The Savior also emphasized love and unity and declared that we would be known as His disciples if we have love one to another. In the face of the eternity-shaping Atonement He was about to undertake, such a commandment requires our obedience." He further explained, "We manifest our love for God when we keep His commandments and serve His children. We don't fully comprehend the Atonement, but we can spend our lives trying to be more loving and kind, regardless of the adversity we face."<sup>21</sup> We see that there is an expectation that if we are true disciples of the Savior, we will serve Father's children, even in the face of our own personal adversity and challenges. In striving to be more loving and kind, our very actions manifest that we are trying to emulate the Savior as much as is humanly possible. Elder Maxwell taught, "The only true veneration of Jesus is emulation of Him."<sup>22</sup> To venerate is to worship, revere, respect, and admire, and to emulate is to imitate, follow, or copy. In other words, as disciples of Christ, our daily actions indicate the depth of our admiration for him.

When we consider the Savior's life while applying the lessons of sacrifice and condescension in our life, we see that in his invitation to become his disciples and to take his name upon ourselves, we are then expected to act as he would act. When we become his disciples, we must then be willing to "bear

one another's burdens," "mourn with those that mourn," "comfort those that stand in need of comfort," and "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death" (see Mosiah 18:8–10). As disciples of Jesus Christ, even in our weakest conditions, we too may offer all that we have in the service of others because of our love for our Father and for his children.

Elder Maxwell further helped us to understand the principles of sacrifice, condescension, and consecration when he taught: "Consecration is thus both a principle and a process, and it is not tied to a single moment. Instead, it is freely given, drop by drop, until the cup of consecration brims and finally runs over. Long before that, however, as Jesus declared, we must 'settle this in [our] hearts' that we will do what He asks of us (JST, Luke 14:28)."<sup>23</sup> Our willingness to follow the Savior is a process, and during the course of our lives what we do on a daily basis is the manifestation of the level of consecration and sacrifice we maintain. In our service to others, we also manifest our own willingness to condescend to whatever level may be required by the Father or the Son.

Elder Cook continued this explanation of discipleship:

The Savior's charge to His disciples to love one another—and the dramatic and powerful way He taught this principle at the Last Supper—is one of the most poignant and beautiful episodes from the last days of His mortal life.

He was not teaching a simple class in ethical behavior. This was the Son of God pleading with His Apostles and all disciples who would come after them to remember and follow this most central of His teachings. How we relate and interact with each other is a measure of our willingness to follow Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

We should notice by now that if we are true disciples of Christ, our willingness to follow him in all that we do is a manifestation of our offering our wills upon the altar. We may not be able to offer ourselves as an offering for sin but we can surely provide relief and succor to those who are facing the challenges of life, even at the peril of our own life.

For example, the Apostle Peter taught us of servitude and discipleship by saying, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps*" (1 Peter 2:21; emphasis

added). Mormon similarly taught, “If it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, *following the example of our Savior*, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment” (Mormon 7:10; emphasis added). In each of these examples, there is an expectation that discipleship will lead to obeying and following the example of Christ, not merely expressing lip service.

### Latter-day Lives of Consecration and Sacrifice

Although we are incapable of literally placing ourselves on the altar as an offering for sin, we can present ourselves before the Lord by voluntarily offering our will to him. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained: “The submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar. The many other things we ‘give,’ brothers and sisters, are actually the things He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God’s will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give! Consecration thus constitutes the only unconditional surrender which is also a total victory!”<sup>25</sup> The sacrifice of self is manifested by following his example and by becoming as he is (see 3 Nephi 27:27).

It is in the act of consecration, by which we dedicate all that we have, or are, to the Lord and to furthering his work here upon the earth, where we display how devoted we are to doing what the Lord requires of us. Interestingly enough, to consecrate is to give to,<sup>26</sup> yet in the giving we often receive a stewardship over what we have just given and what we are now using. If I have given my life to Christ, I understand my stewardship in doing all that I can to further his work here upon the earth. In other words, I do as he did and submit my will to his. In contrast, to sacrifice is to give up,<sup>27</sup> and generally we will no longer have the thing we have sacrificed. The Lord truly expects us to be willing to enter into covenants to do both, sacrifice and consecrate.

It may be necessary for us to sacrifice all that we possess (see 1 Nephi 2:2, 4), even our families (see Matthew 10:37; see also D&C 122:6) or our lives (see Mosiah 18:10; see also D&C 122:7) in pursuit, or defense, of the cause of Christ. Or, we may be required to consecrate our lives in furthering the cause of Christ against those who may fight against “the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 11:34–36), “Zion and the covenant people of the Lord” (2

Nephi 6:13), or “God and the people of his church” (2 Nephi 25:14). Whether it be sacrificing or consecrating, we may even find ourselves condescending into circumstances of poverty, pestilence, or plague where we normally would never think to pass (as missionaries in the mission field do on occasion) in order to demonstrate our devotion to emulating the example of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Consider this powerful promise from President Lorenzo Snow: “Our future is glorious. We could not desire more for our happiness than has been prepared for us. Those who endure unto the end shall sit upon thrones, as Jesus hath overcome and sat down upon His Father’s throne. All things shall be given unto such men and women, so we are told in the revelations we have received. In view of these prospects, what should we not be willing to sacrifice when duty requires?”<sup>28</sup> Bishop Keith B. McMullin similarly taught, “As the literal offspring of God and being born of a mortal mother, the premortal Christ became the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. Though the fullness of His majesty, messiahship, and godhood came not at first, He ‘continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness,’ and so can we.”<sup>29</sup> As these quotes suggest, we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and in doing so we may be “joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17). It is through this process of learning about his sacrifice and condescension and following his example that we may receive all that the Father has, even as Jesus Christ has done.

Essentially, Nephi’s vision of the tree of life teaches us important truths that pertain to our desire to become disciples of Jesus Christ. We must be willing to do all that the Lord would ask of us. We must voluntarily walk in whatever paths Jesus would have us go. And we must be willing to condescend and sacrifice to whatever levels he would ask of us in order to manifest that we truly desire to follow him. We must ultimately strive to be “perfect, even as [he], or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48). This is possible because he who “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6) has also made it possible to ascend above all things and to become even as He is.

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## Notes

1. For Adam and Eve’s partaking of the fruit, see Moses 4:23–31; for the consequences of partaking of the fruit, see Moses 4:28–31; 1 Nephi 15:22–36; 2 Nephi

2:18–25; Alma 12:21–26; 42:2–6; Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14; for our renewed partaking of the fruit, see Alma 5:62 along with our understanding in 1 Nephi 11:25 that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

2. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=sacrifice&searchmode=none>.

3. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/condescend>.

4. Ezra Taft Benson, “Five Marks of the Divinity of Jesus Christ,” *New Era*, December 1980, 45.

5. The United Nations, World Health Organization, International Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, Mormon Helping Hands, and Amnesty International are a small sampling of worldwide organizations that help relieve suffering.

6. Moses 5:4–7 helps us understand that Adam and Eve were separated from God’s presence and the subsequent offering that they made was a test of their obedience to what they had now been commanded to do, especially in view that they had previously received commands in the garden and had chosen to transgress the law of God.

7. For a few of the many times the people offered sacrifice, see Genesis 7:2–3 and Hebrews 11:4 (Abel and Cain); Moses 6:3 (Seth); Genesis 8:20 (Noah); Genesis 12:7–8; 15:8–17; 22:2–13; and Hebrews 11:17 (Abraham and Isaac); see also Abraham 2:17–18 for Abraham’s offering that the famine could be taken from his people and the land; Genesis 31:54; 35:1, 7 (Jacob), 46:1 (Israel); Exodus 10:25; 20:24–26 (Moses and the children of Israel); Leviticus 1; 1 Chronicles 6:49 (Aaron and his sons); Joshua 8:30 (Joshua); 1 Samuel 14:35 (Saul); 1 Kings 9:25 (Solomon); Numbers 23:1–2 (Balak and Balaam).

8. See LDS Bible Dictionary, “Sacrifices,” 766.

9. See 1 Nephi 5:9 (Lehi upon the safe return of his sons from Jerusalem); 1 Nephi 7:22 (Lehi and Ishmael and their families upon joining together on the journey); Mosiah 2:3 (King Benjamin).

10. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 172–73; Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations on the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 120; Joseph Fielding Smith, “Restoration of Blood Sacrifices” (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–63), 3:94.

11. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 69–71; Neal A. Maxwell, “Plow in Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 59; David B. Haight, “The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, November 1989, 59.

12. See Richard C. Edgley, “The Condescension of God,” *Ensign*, December 2001, 16; Bruce R. McConkie, “Behold the Condescension of God,” *New Era*, December 1984, 35; Richard D. Draper, “The Book of Mormon on Christ’s Role as Redeemer,” *Ensign*, January 2000, 7; Robert D. Hales, “In Remembrance of Jesus,” *Ensign*, November 1997, 24; Merrill J. Bateman, “A Season for Angels,” *Ensign*, December 2007, 10–15; and D&C 88:6.

13. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 111.

14. Benson, “Five Marks,” 45.

15. Jesus set an example by being baptized by John and then taught that all men must be baptized in order to enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:5). He also instructed his disciples that they should go into all the world and preach his gospel as he had done



(see Mark 16:15; see also Mormon 9:22). The expectation was that they would follow his example.

16. See Alma 7:11–13 for further scriptural evidence of how the mortal life of Christ endowed him with power over and comprehension of the trials, temptations, and adversity we would each face as part of our own mortal experience.

17. Richard C. Edgley, “The Condescension of God,” *Ensign*, December 2001, 16.

18. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 59.

19. Edgley, “Condescension of God,” 16.

20. Neal A. Maxwell, “Insights from My Life,” *Ensign*, August 2000, 9.

21. Quentin L. Cook, “We Follow Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 84.

22. Quoted in “Elder Neal Ash Maxwell: A Promise Fulfilled,” *Ensign*, September 2004, 12.

23. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 22.

24. Cook, “We Follow Jesus Christ,” 84.

25. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” 22.

26. “Consecrate: *dedicated to a sacred purpose*,” <http://mw4.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consecrate>; emphasis added.

27. “Sacrifice: an act of *offering to a deity something precious; . . . something offered in sacrifice; . . . something given up or lost*,” <http://mw4.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrifice>; emphasis added.

28. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, October 1898, 55–56.

29. Keith B. McMullin, “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 33.