



Bonnie Gillespie/American Red Cross

We are given vaccines to prevent disease in our bodies; similarly, Heavenly Father gives us the Holy Ghost to sanctify us and prevent spiritual disease in our lives.

“The Unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost”

P. SCOTT FERGUSON

P. Scott Ferguson (fergusons@byui.edu) is a full-time Religious Education faculty member at BYU-Idaho.

.....

Bacteria, viruses, and other germs threaten our bodies every day. Our spirits, like our bodies, are also susceptible to harmful elements. When a disease-causing microorganism enters the body, the immune system mounts a complex defense to fight off the invader.¹ When our spirits come in contact with harmful influences, the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost help us find protection to combat these evil forces. Regarding this spiritual protection, President Boyd K. Packer observed: “Spiritual diseases of epidemic proportion sweep over the world. We are not able to curb them. But we can prevent our youth from being infected by them. . . . We can inoculate them. *Inoculate: In*—‘to be within’ and *oculate* means ‘eye to see.’ We place an eye within them—the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.”²

The goal of the immune system is to prevent illness by destroying a foreign invader before it causes harm. Through the tandem gifts of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we are strengthened in our fight against those forces that would harm our spirits. By observing the way the body combats harmful invaders, we gain spiritual insights into how the Holy Ghost helps us achieve immunity over evil. We can overcome our sinful natures without experiencing

the effects of every sin—the Holy Ghost can teach us “to prize the good” (see Moses 6:55). Through the enabling power of the Atonement, the Holy Ghost “will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

Spiritual Immunity

Our bodies build immunity to bacteria, viruses, and other germs in two ways. The first way in which our bodies build immunity is by coming in contact with a disease, becoming ill, and fighting the invader until we become better. We call this natural immunity. The second means of building immunity is through vaccines. This method, known as vaccine-induced immunity, enables the body to have power over the intruder without having to confront it.

We likewise overcome sin in two ways: First, by coming in contact with sin and experiencing its ill effects, repenting, and being cleansed. We call this redemption from sin. The second way involves the Holy Ghost enabling us to confront carnality in such a way that the sting of sin is ineffective.³

Unlike our bodies, which are usually sick for only a few days, our souls can take much longer to heal. And, in fact, just as physical ailments can kill the victim, untreated spiritual wounds can end in spiritual death. Sin is a wound to both body and spirit—“the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (see D&C 88:15).

Once we have immunity to a disease-causing organism, our bodies are better protected from becoming ill from that pathogen. Likewise, through the repentance process, we are no longer affected by our former sins. In scripture, this is known as justification. That is, in our imperfect but repentant state, we are declared righteous through the blood of the Lamb. “And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true” (D&C 20:30). But what we desire is immunity to all sin as we overcome the natural man. This vaccine, like immunity to the natural man, comes to us through the sanctifying power of the Atonement through the influence of the Holy Ghost. “Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, . . . could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:12). What we truly seek is sanctification, to “look upon sin . . . with abhorrence” and to be clean and pure always.

Through the enabling power of the Atonement, we are fortified against evil to do good works otherwise impossible if left to our own.⁴ As we are sanctified, we are inoculated against the desire for sin. “And we know also,

that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31).

Spiritual Immunity Is Achieved through the Holy Ghost

Resistance develops after we have been exposed to a certain organism. Our immune system mounts a defense to prevent us from getting sick again from that particular type of virus or bacterium. Once we have been exposed to a specific virus or bacterium, the next time we encounter it, these defenses go to work. They immediately react to the organism, attacking the disease before it can develop and spread. Our immune system can recognize and effectively combat thousands of different organisms.⁵

So it is with the Holy Ghost. When we have been cleansed from sin (the equivalent of natural immunity), the Holy Ghost goes to work to remind us of the godly sorrow associated with the sin and strengthens our resolve to stand firm in resisting sin in the future. Through a conscious effort on our part and with the aid of the Holy Ghost, we can stand strong. When we are sanctified, we avoid sin and “touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30), like vaccine-induced immunity. There is sufficient evil in the temptation alone for the Holy Ghost to inoculate us against that evil in the future; and because we qualify, the Holy Ghost triggers a response that enables us to resist the sin because it is abhorrent to us, and we “give place no more for the enemy of [our] soul” (2 Nephi 4:28).

This enabling power is available to us because we resisted evil in the first place. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”⁶ Alma taught, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit” (Alma 13:28).

The Holy Ghost Acts as a Refiner’s Fire

Much as sterilization removes impurities, so the Holy Ghost can purify us. We read in the Bible Dictionary: “The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to have, whenever one is worthy, the companionship of the Holy Ghost. . . . It acts as a cleansing agent to purify a person and sanctify him from all sin. Thus

it is often spoken of as 'fire.'"⁷ The Bible Dictionary also teaches, "The process consists in the application of great heat, . . . hence the term 'refiner's fire.'"⁸ John the Baptist taught, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

Nephi reminds us to "do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; . . . and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:17). The Savior, speaking to the inhabitants of the Americas after his crucifixion, alluded to this fiery characteristic of the Holy Ghost when he taught, "And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 9:20).

The early elders of this dispensation were told to sanctify themselves, that their "minds become single to God" (D&C 88:68) to prepare them for that which lay ahead in the School of the Prophets; and because they were obedient, they received many wonderful spiritual manifestations, including visits from the Father and the Son.

We are, in our day, expected to prepare ourselves for such levels of righteousness. We are best served when the refiner's fire burns in our own hearts. President Brigham Young observed, "Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the House of the Lord, burn in your hearts, like a flame unquenchable."⁹

The Holy Ghost Enables us through the Atonement of Christ

The Holy Ghost helps us to remember past experiences that will aid us in the present and the future: "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 121:26). This promise can be a powerful reminder, strengthening our resolve not to participate in sin when it is presented to us. As part of the instruction given to the Twelve on the eve of the Crucifixion, the Savior taught the role of the Holy Ghost as a teacher and refresher of memory: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, . . . he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" (John 14:26).

Not only does the Holy Ghost remind us of teachings that have faded over time, but he can help us remember the sorrows and joys associated with living or not living those teachings. The Holy Ghost, as our friend and constant companion, also brings to our remembrance sins for which we have yet to

repent, that we might more fully prepare for the Judgment. The Lord taught, "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness" (Ether 12:27).

As powerful as these reminders are, there is yet a greater power available to those who seek sanctification. The Apostle Paul taught the Saints at Thessalonica, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In our day, Elder David A. Bednar described the process of obtaining sanctification:

The gospel of Jesus Christ encompasses much more than avoiding, overcoming, and being cleansed from sin and the bad influences in our lives; it also essentially entails doing good, being good, and becoming better. Repenting of our sins and seeking forgiveness are spiritually necessary, and we must always do so. But remission of sin is not the only or even the ultimate purpose of the gospel. To have our hearts changed by the Holy Spirit such that "we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), as did King Benjamin's people, is the covenant responsibility we have accepted. This mighty change is not simply the result of working harder or developing greater individual discipline. Rather, it is the consequence of a fundamental change in our desires, our motives, and our natures made possible through the Atonement of Christ the Lord. Our spiritual purpose is to overcome both sin and the desire to sin, both the taint and the tyranny of sin.¹⁰

All too often our repentance is limited only to the remission of sin, which is what Elder Bednar refers to as the taint of sin—the equivalent of obtaining natural immunity. More is expected of the Latter-day Saint who has access to the gift of the Holy Ghost. Our repentance should include a desire to be immune from the *desire for sin*, or the tyranny of sin.

Our repentance must be unto sanctification through the vaccine-like aid of the Holy Ghost. The Savior reiterated this teaching when he came among the Nephites following his death and resurrection: "Now this is the commandment: Repent, . . . that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20; emphasis added).

Until we are first cleansed from sin, and second, inoculated against the desire for sin, we will find ourselves continually repenting of the same sins, saying "I'm sorry" over and over for the same behavior. Why don't we seek this enabling power with greater effort? Why do we allow ourselves to repeat the same sins, especially when we know it is wrong? Could it be that we fear the work and commitment of total discipleship? Do we desire the companionship of the natural man over the companionship of the Holy Ghost? It is through surrendering and seeking the enabling power of the Atonement

that we are able to keep our covenants made at the waters of baptism and in holy temples and are fortified in the battle with sin. President James E. Faust observed: “There is . . . an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift comes undeviatingly by personal revelation to those who strive to obey the commandments of the Lord and to follow the counsel of the living prophets. . . . All who come unto Christ by obedience to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel can thwart Satan’s efforts.”¹¹ As we yield to the influences of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we develop resistance to our natural-man tendencies.

The Holy Ghost Enables Us to Overcome the Natural Man

“The natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). That is, the natural man is at odds with God; he behaves in ways that God would never act. We know that “no unclean thing can dwell with God” (1 Nephi 10:21). Therefore, the natural man within each of us must be subdued.

This is the work of the Holy Ghost, to prepare us and seal us up unto godhood. Our purpose for coming to earth is to acquire and train a physical body. We cannot do the work of the eternities, creating spirit children and earths for them to inhabit, without a physical body. Through the Holy Ghost we are taught and given the power to overcome the natural man.

As mortals, we are naturally inclined to selfishness. We are in a continual search for comfort—food, water, air, love, acceptance, personal happiness, and just plain old feeling good. Weaning the mortal man from selfishness is a complicated matter. (There is a multibillion dollar industry in self-help books and seminars targeted to empower the natural man, including self-assertiveness training, self-love, and securing wealth, to mention just a few.) C. S. Lewis notes this about the weaning process:

The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call “ourselves,” to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be “good.” We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do.¹²

Satan distracts us with counterfeit comforts and pleasures, but participating in his counterfeits leaves us empty, frustrated, and comfortless. The Lord,

on the other hand, is desirous that we have joy (see 2 Nephi 2:25). We receive joy as we yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and [put] off the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19).

King Benjamin’s Formula for Overcoming the Natural Man

In King Benjamin’s address we find the formula for achieving sanctification and happiness in this life and joy throughout the eternities. Unlike our search for mortal comfort, the formula for eternal happiness is not complicated in the least; King Benjamin taught that we must first yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, second, put off the natural man, third, become a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord, and lastly, become as a child—submissive and meek (see Mosiah 3:19). King Benjamin’s formula for conquering the natural man is helpful in assessing where we are in the process (see chart).

Repentance/Redemption— putting off the natural man		Sanctification— putting on the enabling power	
<i>This part of King Benjamin’s formula requires us to heed invitations from the Holy Spirit designed to help us put off the natural man.</i>		<i>This part of the formula requires us to surrender as we seek the enabling power of the Atonement—it comes after we have expended our best efforts.</i>	
Yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit	Put off the natural man	Become a Saint—put on righteousness	Become as a little child—put on righteousness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repent • Feel impressions • Forsake evil • Respond with change • Become spiritually stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to makes greater changes • Seek to overcome addictions • Avoid sins of commission • Actively seek to avoid carnality • Put gospel structure in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively overcome sins of omission • Serve others • Make temple covenants • Serve in the temple • Desire to have temple covenants go deep within self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit to divine tutorials • Seek a divine nature • Find God in the temple • Seek meekness and humility • Do all that the Father asks

In this process of overcoming the natural man, when we yield to the Spirit and put off the natural man, we use the Atonement and the Holy Ghost mostly for reparation—the equivalent of natural immunity. Whereas in the

second half of the chart we see that the act of becoming a Saint and becoming as a child calls upon the Atonement and Holy Ghost as an enabler. We choose, by our willingness to submit, whether the Holy Ghost will act as a purging agent or as an enabling power. The condition of our hearts determines the amount of assistance we receive from the Holy Ghost. Marcus J. Borg, author of *The Heart of Christianity*, noted: “The Bible speaks of this condition [of our hearts] with a rich collection of synonymous metaphors. Our hearts can be ‘shut.’ They can be ‘fat,’ as if encrusted within a thick layer. They can be ‘proud,’ puffed up and enlarged. They can be ‘made of stone’ rather than made of flesh. They are often ‘hard.’ The Greek word for this condition is *sklerokardia*: we have sclerosis of the heart.”¹³

Resistance to the Holy Ghost causes regression toward the natural man and constitutes a rejection of the enabling power. Yielding our hearts to God opens the door to greater instruction and, ultimately, sanctification. The scriptures refer to this as exercising a soft or a hard heart. The greater our desires for righteousness, the less likely we are to experience the effects of the natural man and the enticements of Satan, for “he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion. . . . And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion” (Alma 12:10–11).

A hard heart invites selfishness and sin, thus feeding the natural man. A soft heart seeks and embraces the enabling power of the Atonement, in essence starving the natural man. Alma taught, “Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; . . . if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately* shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34:31; emphasis added). With the Holy Ghost as an enabler, we live with higher purpose—we live as Christ lives, outside ourselves, for others, “for which if ye do, he doth *immediately* bless you” (Mosiah 2:24; emphasis added).

King Benjamin’s four-part formula helps us overcome the natural man. To a degree we all have experienced the ill effects of rejecting the Holy Ghost as we choose to indulge the natural man. If our sin is serious, we may have become “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45). We may have been “taken captive by the devil; . . . this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). Only sincere repentance rescues and reverses the effects of the addiction and captivity that plague the natural man. Even though there are many times in our lives we wish the Holy Ghost would save us from making foolish mistakes, agency

dictates otherwise. The Holy Ghost enters our hearts only by invitation; we need to regularly reinvoke this honored guest into our lives.

Redemption from Sin—Putting Off the Natural Man

King Benjamin’s invitation is for bad people to become good and good people to become better, to give heed to the light of Christ. This part of King Benjamin’s sermon is an invitation to overcome the bad within us. The Lord says, “And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man” (D&C 1:33). These strivings of the Light of Christ should not be mistaken for the enabling power which comes to us through the Holy Ghost. Through yielding to the Spirit and putting off the natural man, we prepare ourselves to receive the enabling power of the Atonement. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Our understanding of the Light of Christ is limited. But we do know . . . that it strives with all men (the Holy Ghost testifies but does not strive) unless and until they rebel against light and truth, at which time the striving ceases, and in that sense the Spirit is withdrawn.”¹⁴ As we yield to the Light of Christ, we are taught how to diminish the natural man. President Joseph F. Smith taught that this Spirit of Christ “strives with . . . men, and will continue to strive with them until it brings them to a knowledge of the truth and the possession of the greater light and testimony of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵

What about King Benjamin’s admonition to [yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit? Is this a reference to yield to the Light of Christ or the Holy Ghost? President Boyd K. Packer reminds us, “The Light of Christ is also described in the scriptures as the Spirit of Jesus Christ (D&C 84:45), ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18; see also Mosiah 25:24), ‘the Spirit of truth’ (D&C 93:26), ‘the light of truth’ (D&C 88:6), ‘the Spirit of God’ (D&C 46:17), and ‘the Holy Spirit’ (D&C 45:57). Some of these terms also refer to the Holy Ghost.”¹⁶

Elder Bednar reminds us that the Holy Ghost will tarry with us to a point. He taught:

The standard is clear. If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. . . . I recognize we are fallen men and women living in a mortal world and that we might not have the presence of the Holy Ghost with us every second of every minute of every hour of every day. However, the Holy Ghost can tarry with us much, if not most, of the time—and certainly the Spirit can be with us more than it is not with us. As we become ever more immersed in the Spirit of the Lord, we should strive to

recognize impressions when they come and the influences or events that cause us to withdraw ourselves from the Holy Ghost.¹⁷

As we participate in activities that are harmful to our spirits, we estrange ourselves from the influence of the Holy Ghost. I wonder, when the Holy Ghost leaves us, what power and protection do we enjoy in its place? Perhaps the strivings of the Light of Christ coupled with the tarrying of the Holy Ghost are sufficient in aiding us to put off the natural man, but it takes the gift of the Holy Ghost to qualify for the greater assistance needed to become a saint and child of God.

Yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit. When we repent, we are in a position to feel and hear spiritual impressions that before went unheeded. With softened hearts we feel the effects of living in a fallen world; we are still recovering from the spiritual wounds of the adversary's fiery addictive darts (see D&C 27:15).

Healing can be a slow process, but as we build immunity through the repentance process, we find strength over sin, which gives us power to resist evil with greater confidence. Spiritual impressions come more frequently, and to the degree that we act in accordance with these promptings, we gain spiritual strength. We now desire to put off the natural man.

Put off the natural man. Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: "Christ's Atonement . . . involves some arduous isometrics—the old man working against the new spiritual man. That natural man, as you know, will not go quietly or easily. And even when he is put off, he has a way of hanging around, hoping to throw his saddle on us once again."¹⁸ Unlike the father of King Lamoni, who was willing to "give away all [his] sins" (Alma 22:18), we may have only caged the natural man, keeping him alive with the occasional serving of our favorite sins. We fear saying good-bye once and for all because the natural man will not leave without a fuss. C. S. Lewis observed, "The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier."¹⁹

While trying to dismiss the natural man, we may become spiritually complacent. Building immunity to sin through repentance is challenging work, but it is not as hard as the work of seeking the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost to overcome the desire for sin. We want to be sin free, but discipleship does not come easy. We may fear the commitment of discipleship. This hesitancy to enter into greater covenants of discipleship, sacrifice, and

consecration keep us from tapping into the enabling power of the Atonement. "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*" (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added).

Our past repentance and yielding to the Spirit create greater opportunities for service in the kingdom, but this service requires willing hearts and minds (see D&C 64:34). The natural man resists such surrender, and we find ourselves nostalgically longing for our old self. Life was easier then; but living in a self-centered state does not bring joy—it is a shallow existence devoid of lasting satisfaction. Repenting of our sins but failing to become Saints certifies us for a glory that "surpasses all understanding" (D&C 76:89) but falls short of the celestial glory, wherein "we are made equal in power, and in might . . . with God" (D&C 76:95).

The work of allowing the Atonement to change our dispositions, hearts, and natures is a challenging work indeed. But we must not despair; we are readying ourselves to experience the enabling influence of the Atonement to become as a Saint.

Sanctification from Sin—Putting on the Enabling Power

Participation in this part of King Benjamin's formula qualifies us for the enabling power of the Holy Ghost. Yielding and putting off the natural man constitutes "all we can do." But there is still much work to be done. It is in our total surrender and seeking Christ's grace that we become as a Saint and a child. Submission is the fare required to receive the enabling power of the Atonement, and full fare we must pay.

Become a Saint. Having overcome complacency and the fear that is an inherent part of the natural man, we are finally ready to put him or her off. We shift our efforts from putting off to putting on—putting on the full armor of God (see D&C 27:15–18; Ephesians 6:11). We seek a divine nature. Elder Joe J. Christensen said, "It is not only the thoroughly genuine *desire* to live in harmony with the will of God at all times, as guided by the Spirit, but also the *ability* to surrender totally and willingly to this guidance—and thus to *do* that which the Spirit whispers. To be *truly* spiritual is to walk with God."²⁰

Do we fully understand the resource that is available to us through the gift of the Holy Ghost? President Brigham Young taught, "God's people . . . may have the Spirit of the Lord to signify . . . his will, and to guide and to direct . . . in the discharge of [their] duties, in [their] temporal as well as [their] spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect, *we live far beneath our*

*privileges.*²¹ Christ’s “grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to [claim all the blessings and privileges of the Holy Ghost] after they have expended their own best efforts.”²²

By tapping into this enabling power, we approach the final frontier of mortal imperfection, acquiring a new disposition and becoming a Saint. This part of King Benjamin’s formula tests our resolve to forsake the natural man even in the crucible of affliction. Can we act like Christ in the face of life’s injustices, when the natural man cries out for fairness and equity? This is the true measure of our charity. Speaking of this part of the process of perfection, Elder Maxwell observed, “Mortality presents us with numerous opportunities to become more Christlike. . . . Our customized trials such as experiencing illness, aloneness, persecution, betrayal, irony, poverty, false witness, unreciprocated love . . . greatly enlarge the soul.”²³

Our ever-enlarging souls—our saintliness—are not measured best by our standing in the community, church, or workplace alone. Rather, it is measured in our homes, where saintly behavior comes at a higher price. This is where the true cost of becoming as a Saint is dearest. How saintly am I to those with whom I live in closest proximity? It is our intimate relationships that hold the greatest capacity to cater to the natural man or to sacrifice as Saints. And because there is a tendency to gratify the natural man, the more intimate the relationship, the more likely we are to wound one another and to be wounded ourselves. Catherine Thomas notes that it is in family relationships where we unwittingly are provided the opportunity to develop a divine nature:

As in my own experience, many of us carry from our childhood some consequences of our own parents’ spiritual infirmities which we unwittingly visit on our children. Of course, these imperfect family conditions are a function of a fallen world—an imperfect world of ignorance and weakness. Yet in its imperfection, this world provides a perfect learning environment for this phase of our eternal development. Perhaps this is one of the most important views of life to learn—that this life consists, among other things, of tutorials designed to give us experience, to develop our divine nature, and to draw us to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master Teacher.²⁴

Our efforts to become even as a child are measured by our willingness to make our most fragile, intimate relationships our best relationships—the ones we handle with care. To succeed in this endeavor, we need the enabling power of the Atonement. When enabled, charity is possible even in our most challenging roles. Indeed, most marriages can work where at least one partner is charitable. Just think of the possibilities that abound when both pursue this divine gift—exaltation and eternal lives—endless unions!

Become as a child. Actively seeking to change our natures by overcoming personality traits and dispositional characteristics that haunt us into our adult lives is ironically the work of becoming as a child. These acquired characteristics (either premortal or mortal) constitute that part of the natural man that “will not go quietly or easily.” The meekness required of being a Saint in congested traffic or crowded parking lots and long lines, or in submitting to a demanding coworker, oftentimes pales in comparison to the congestion of family life or the demands of a needy spouse or fellow ward member.

A cursory glance at King Benjamin’s list of childlike qualities most certainly highlights the challenges associated with conquering the natural man once and for all—becoming “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things” (Mosiah 3:19). Elder Maxwell taught, “Thus within the discipleship allotted to us, we are to overcome the world.”²⁵ As we submit to our divine tutorials, we become what God intended all along—his sons and daughters, “children of the covenant” (3 Nephi 20:26).

Conclusion

Most of us are familiar with the estrangement from God that results from catering to the natural man. This is an inherent risk of living in a fallen mortal world. The brother of Jared prayed, “We know that . . . we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires” (Ether 3:2).

Our desires to surrender and embrace discipleship qualify us for the enabling power of the Atonement. Again, it is from one of the great disciple-leaders of this dispensation, Elder Maxwell, that we are taught, “[As] you submit your wills to God, you are giving Him the *only* thing you *can* actually give Him that is really yours to give.”²⁶ As we submit to the dual influence of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we are enabled through the Atonement of Jesus Christ with greater spiritual power to become a Saint and as a child. This is one of the central messages of the Book of Mormon. Consider a few of the many examples found in the Book of Mormon such as Enos, who sought forgiveness of sins and was granted the desires of his heart (see Enos 1:5, 27); Alma the Elder, who was sealed up unto eternal life (see Mosiah 26:20); those who were sanctified to the point they found sin abhorrent (see Alma 13:12); the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who buried their weapons deep in the earth so they would never repeat former sins (see Alma 25:15–19);

Nephi, the son of Helaman, who was “blessed forever” and granted the sealing power (see Helaman 10:4–7); and the brother of Jared and Moroni, who saw Christ face to face and were sealed up unto eternal life (see Ether 3:6–13, 38–39). Moroni adds, “And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong . . . who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad” (Ether 12:19).

Whether it is groups like the people of Ammon or individuals like Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, we are taught in the Book of Mormon by principle and example that we can experience “a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). It is Moroni, our final tutor and prophet of the Book of Mormon text, who teaches us with a series of *if-then* statements how this is accomplished:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and *if* ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, *then* is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and *if* by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, [*then*] ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, *if* ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, *then* are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33; emphasis added)

It is through the cleansing and enabling power of the Holy Ghost that we overcome, “yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26) **RE**

Notes

1. See http://www.riversideonline.com/health_reference/Infectious-Disease/ID00023.cfm.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “The One Pure Defense,” address to Church Educational System religious educators, February 6, 2004, Salt Lake City.
3. A vaccine is designed to get the body to recognize an attack from an intruder before it causes an illness. In our fallen and mortal state, we brush against evil every day. I propose that as members of the Church who possess the gifts of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, our encounter with and resisting of evil does two things: first, we avoid the ill effects of participating in the particular evil; second, in our brief encounters with temptation, there is sufficient germlike evil for the Holy Ghost to teach us and vaccinate against future encounters. There are many sins which are simply not appealing to us because we have participated in the process of spiritual vaccination. The Holy Ghost uses these moments to build immunity to future temptation. This is why it is so important that we resist sin in the first place. When we give into

temptation, we use the Holy Ghost not as a vaccinator but as a purifier—a fuller’s soap. When we resist sin, the Holy Ghost serves as a vaccinator or a refiner.

4. Bible Dictionary, “grace,” 697.
5. See http://www.riversideonline.com/health_reference/Infectious-Disease/ID00023.cfm.
6. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 60.
7. Bible Dictionary, “Holy Ghost,” 704.
8. Bible Dictionary, “refiner,” 760.
9. Journal History, September 28, 1846, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
10. David A. Bednar, “Clean Hands and a Pure Heart,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 81–82.
11. James E. Faust, “The Forces That Will Save Us,” *Ensign*, January 2007, 9.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 167.
13. Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 151.
14. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 209.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 67–68.
16. Boyd K. Packer, “The Light of Christ,” *Ensign*, April 2005, 8.
17. David A. Bednar, “That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with Us,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 30.
18. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Holy Ghost: Glorifying Christ,” *Ensign*, July 2002, 56–61.
19. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 167.
20. Joe J. Christensen, “Toward Greater Spirituality: Ten Important Steps,” *Ensign*, June 1983, 6.
21. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 32; emphasis added.
22. Bible Dictionary, “grace,” 697.
23. Neal A. Maxwell, “Apply the Atoning Blood of Christ,” *Ensign*, November 1997, 22.
24. M. Catherine Thomas, “A Parent’s Love and Fear,” *Ensign*, July 1993, 21.
25. Neal A. Maxwell, “Plow in Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 59.
26. Neal A. Maxwell, “Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 46.