

Presents Of Mind

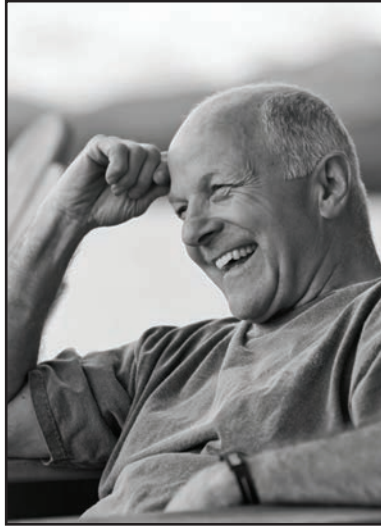
Essays That Have Flowed
From My Pen

Volume Four

Philip M. Hudson

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and
the rational mind is a faithful servant."

(Albert Einstein)



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Acknowledgements

I have attributed quotations to original authors whenever possible, as well as when I have editorialized the thoughts expressed by others. In many cases, however, the language in these essays will naturally reflect the teachings of leaders in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of course, I alone am responsible for the content of these volumes. I hope my interpretation of principles of the Gospel will cultivate your interest to dig deeper into their themes woven into the tapestry of these essays. My only goal is to help you to expand your insights into the foundation truths that are the celestial guideposts embedded within the doctrines of the kingdom.

The list of those who have contributed to these essays is endless. Every teacher, student, classmate, business associate, friend, mentor, family member, priesthood and relief society brother, sister, or leader with whom I have come in contact has influenced me, just as the print and audiovisual media have moved me in equally positive ways.

Well did the poet teach: “No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.” (John Donne).

The Spirit often prompts me to remember the insight of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who wrote: “Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush with the fire of God. But only those who see take off their shoes. The rest sit around picking blackberries.”

If some of the themes within these essays seem frivolous, please forgive me and remember that I have tried to govern myself by this maxim: “Live to learn, learn to love, and love to live.”

Preface

I have learned to love the scriptures, and I often think of St. Hilary, who wrote: "Scripture consists not in what we read, but in what we understand." In these essays, I have consistently tried to find scriptural confirmation as my thoughts have ranged over a wide variety of subjects. It has been exciting to discover that the ideas swirling around inside my head can generally be anchored to and find relevance in scriptures that give me a sense of comfort, coherence, consolation, and constancy. Every time an idea explodes in my brain, it causes me to stop and think: "Somewhere in this, there is a new essay hiding!" Although on a much smaller scale, I feel as Albert Einstein must have when the mathematical equivalents to scripture study crystallized in the maze of his cerebral cortex and he said of the experience: "A storm broke loose in my mind."

I believe the Spirit has the generative power to energize, vitalize, and quicken our axons and dendrites and craft a neural environment that stimulates creative thought. Those who have experienced the illumination of the Spirit know what Einstein meant when he said: "A splendid light dawned on me." My challenge has been to learn how to enlist the aid of the Holy Ghost to assist in understanding, whenever and however I process the world around me.

Every time I proofed an essay (and I did this many times) I found myself scribbling additional notes in the margins and thinking to myself, "Why didn't I see that before." That is precisely what I hope will be your experience when you read my essays, and that in the process you will be prompted by the Spirit to be led in directions that will later prove to be worthwhile.

I would expect that after you have read these essays you will be uniquely impacted and touched differently each time you re-visit them. When I am long-gone, perhaps the considerable thought that went into their production will generate a palpable bond between us that will span the years separating us, and the gulf that then divides us will be bridged by our shared energies to establish the foundation for an eventual joyous reunion.

One of the reasons why I am somewhat preoccupied with writing essays is that I enjoy the rush of endorphins when I uncover wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, and even hidden treasures. The doctrinal themes embedded within each essay are pearls that I have not been able to discern after only a cursory glance. I hope that within these refrains you will find harmonic melodies that catalyze your own quest for greater understanding. I have enjoyed this process and heartily recommend it to you.

I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land many years ago. We stopped, too briefly, at Qumran. There, the Dead Sea Covenanters had lived, and in the ruins of their library, I was able to pause and reflect upon their Eleventh Hymn that had been recovered from scrolls hidden within caves high above their community. "Behold, for mine own part I have reached the intervision," it read, "and through the spirit thou has placed within me, come to know Thee, my God." In a similar fashion, Moses wrote: "But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face." (Moses 1:11).

I am continually reminded of Nephi's counsel to press forward with complete dedication and steadfastness or confidence and a firm determination in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope or perfect faith, and charity or a love of God and of all men. If we do this, feasting upon the word of Christ, or receiving strength and nourishment from the scriptures, and endure to the end in righteousness, we shall have eternal life, which is the greatest of God's gifts. (2 Nephi 31:20).

With this in mind, and against the backdrop of the scriptures, I extend to you the invitation to enjoy these essays.

Introduction

These essays are arranged alphabetically (and not topically) beginning with the first volume and ending with the last. The table of contents at the beginning of each volume contains the same comprehensive list of all the essays, referenced by volume and page number to make it easier to find a topic.

The essays are random in their subject matter and sequentially follow no particular pattern. Most are religious in nature, while some are more philosophical, several are theoretical, a few are serendipitous, and one or two are whimsical. If any seem indecipherable, I invite you to recall Albert Einstein's observation: "That which is impenetrable to us really exists. Behind the secrets remains something subtle, intangible, and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion." My own faith offers the promise of an understanding of some of the very things that one of the greatest minds of the Twentieth Century found "subtle, intangible, and inexplicable." Quite simply, these essays do more than scratch the surface of his inquiry; within the context of my religious heritage, they reach beyond the math and plumb the depths and measure the breadth of my understanding of our place in the cosmos.

The various topics were conceived in the same white-hot crucible of thought that is found within each of us, fueled by 10 - 20 billion cerebral cortical neurons, each with 60 dendrites and axons making 60 - 240 trillion interconnections. One of the titles for an essay still under construction is "Before I Lose My Mind." Since eighty-five thousand irreplaceable neurons in our brains die every day, (31 million per year) I'd better get busy. I'll try to remember that the best way to arouse my creative expression is to read myself full, think myself straight, pray myself hot, and let myself go! Then, I can let nature caper.

Numerous essays were generated by "What if...?" questions, and many germinated in conversations with family and friends and during Church meetings when creative juices were flowing. Current events stimulated some, the observation of both disciplined and egregious behavior prompted others, and cultural norms and excesses provoked more than a few. Just as a chef might throw a number of ingredients into a "slow cooker" and let them simmer for hours on the stove, some of these essays found shape and substance over time as they were nurtured in the subconscious recesses of my mind. The reduction sauce of others was the product of the distillation of weeks, months, and even years of contemplation, and yet, now and then, one would quickly sizzle into existence as if the ideas had been thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil.

Whereas Einstein said: "A storm broke loose in my mind" when he recalled the thought processes leading to equations that defined the universe, my own experiences were generally more like the whispers of a gentle breeze. When Handel created "The Messiah" in just 24 days, (259 pages of musical score) the notes came to him so quickly that he could barely keep up as he scratched out the oratorio on whatever paper was handy. After he had written the "Hallelujah Chorus" in a fervor of divine inspiration, he exclaimed that he had "seen all heaven before him." At the end of the manuscript, in acknowledgement of his own puny efforts, he wrote the letters "SDG" - Soli Deo Gloria / "To God alone the glory." On a much smaller scale, we have all had similar experiences with light and knowledge, and I was permitted on more than a few occasions during the genesis of these essays to catch a glimpse of the flurry of activity that takes place beyond the parted

veil. These revelatory experiences that were both nurturing and stimulating sometimes found their way into the grammar of my essays.

Too often, though, our thoughts and expressions can be “carefully disguised with hypocrisy and glittering words.” (Einstein). I fancy myself a wordsmith, and have tried to avoid pedestrian expressions, idle language, and lazy scholarship. (See, for example, my essay entitled “Brevity”). I do not pretend to be an authority on any of the subjects of these treatises, and if their factual tone is sometimes disengaging, the truth is that I typically experienced a deep personal involvement when crafting in words expressions of the principles that illuminate their themes. Powerful emotions frequently framed my thoughts.

There are those among us who can write out pi to tens of thousands of digits. (In 2005, in China, Chao Lu memorized pi to 67,890 digits – a world record). I cannot come close to that, 3.14 being the extent of my knowledge of this irrational number, but I have been blessed with an imperfect ability to grasp concepts and expand them to timely and timeless proportions. There is an endless list of things about which I’d like to write. I want to explore the themes of *Misplaced Keys*, the *Genesis Project*, the *Possibility of Intelligent Life on Earth*, *Doctrinal Dogma*, *Glowing in The Dark*, *Prophetic Priorities*, *Laziness as a Learned Response*, *Great and Spacious Buildings*, *Images and Likenesses*, *Illegal Aliens in Heaven*, and *the Middle of Nowhere*.

Perhaps such essays will do little more than further denote and define quirks in my personality. Each of us is different, and many things, including our family and friends, the quality of our education, and our own personalities, inspire our expressions. I would like to think that all of these influences have been encouraging, affirmative, and constructive. “The Parable of The Pencil” touches on this when it speaks of the preservation of the sum of our experiences and of the record of that which has influenced us for good.

Most of these essays weave and wobble their way to a conclusion, although finality has not been my objective, and many subjects may leave the reader with disquieting loose ends with which to deal. As a thinker, writer and teacher who values careful scholarship, I would rather leave the door ajar to allow shafts of the light of knowledge to creep in as the dawning of recognition awakens the interest of others in particular subject areas. I would hope that I have built into the pages of these essays enough latitude to allow for divergent opinions and independent ideas, not to mention constructive criticism. If the essays ask more questions than they answer, and if, as I laid down my thoughts in hundreds of pages of text, I misstated myself now and then, (or flat-out got it wrong) I ask the indulgence and correction of the reader. There are roughly 900,000 words in 275 essays, and I am certain that I bobbed the ball more than a few times.

I find that no matter how often I have re-read an essay, I continue to come up with different ways of expressing myself. The ink on the page would barely have dried before I would be busy at work on a significant revision. There is no way to complete the process, and I have given up trying to do so. Even these printed volumes are works in progress. I think of them as living and breathing entities because, even in their imperfection, they have the generative power to stimulate my intellectual, philosophical, imaginative, and spiritual thought processes. Their real value, I hope, is to provoke a similar inquiry in the minds of others who read them.

Volume One

“Spray From The Ocean Of Thought”

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”

(Henry David Thoreau)

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and carried along in the quickening currents
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“Chance favors the prepared mind.”

(Louis Pasteur)

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“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift
and the rational mind is a faithful servant.”

(Albert Einstein)

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The Rapids Of Life

I hope that each of you will have the opportunity to serve the youth of the Church. Positions in the Young Men and Young Women programs are especially challenging. They are exciting because of the great potential of the youth, and also because of the circumstances surrounding their weekly activities where many memorable events spontaneously occur.

On one occasion, when I was serving as Priest Quorum Advisor, we planned an activity that involved the three Aaronic Priesthood quorums. We organized a canoeing trip down the Little Spokane River, from Colbert Road to Pine River Park. Necessary preparations were made, half a dozen canoes were secured, and off we went, three to a canoe. The weather was warm, the water was pleasant, and soon we were involved in splashing each other with our paddles. Canoe races followed, with bumping and pushing at every opportunity. Soon, one canoe capsized, then another, and yet another, and we found ourselves bobbing around in the water. Of course, every individual had a life vest, and there was no danger.

Because the swamped canoes moved much more slowly than the current, the group in the water became scattered, and one young man in particular was carried swiftly downstream. We waved to him as he bobbed along in his life vest, receded from our view, rounded a bend in the river, and was gone from our sight.

After righting the canoes, bailing water, and counting noses, we continued on our way. In an hour or so, we arrived at Pine River Park, where we were greeted by the young man who had earlier been carried downstream. He was lying on the bank sunning himself, and his life vest was drying at his side.

As we portaged the canoes to waiting vehicles, the young man remarked to me how much fun it had been to float down the river all by himself, secure in his life jacket, particularly because he did not know how to swim! I just about had a heart attack on the spot.

My thoughts have since turned to another young man with whom I was well acquainted. He was on the swim team at the University of Southern California and worked during the summers as a lifeguard at the beach. He was at home in the water, and loved all aquatic sports.

He especially enjoyed white water rafting, and in the summer after his junior year in college he had the opportunity to go to the Rogue River in Oregon, which is well known for its challenging rapids. Such outings, full of spills and thrills, are exciting for the youth, especially when they are potentially dangerous and destructive. Common sense should prevail, and basic equipment, when shooting rapids, includes the raft, oars, a swimsuit, a helmet, and a life vest. These are generally adequate to insure a safe experience without compromising a fun time. But for some reason, on that warm summer day in Oregon, my young friend left both his helmet and his vest on the beach before shoving off into the river. By the time his companion in another one-man raft had noticed this breach of safety rules, my friend had been caught by the current, and was out of sight in the rapid's foam and spray.

His companion then anxiously shot the same rapids, straining his eyes for a glimpse of his friend. When he reached calm water a mile or so downstream, all he found was an empty raft floating upside down, and two scattered oars. The cold and lifeless body of my young friend wasn't found for four days, lodged in brush several miles downstream from the scene of the tragedy.

Why had he left these most essential pieces of equipment behind? Why had he not at least taken the simple precaution of putting on the life vest, and securing it snugly in place? These unanswered questions haunted his grieving family and friends for some time.

Heavenly Father knows us quite well, and has provided for our care as we shoot the rapids of life. Our life vest is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the genuine article, a U.S.C.G. Approved P.F.D.. It is authorized with priesthood support, direction, and inspiration.

But we must read the instructions relating to the use of the vest, in order to know how to benefit from its careful design. We have been provided with the scriptures, and with Relief Society, and Melchizedek Priesthood Quorum Personal Study Guides, with Priesthood Purposes, with Young Women Values, and The Proclamation On The Family. Ultimately, we have the influence of the Holy Ghost and the gift of discernment, true 24/7 "Help Lines."

Before embarking on any perilous adventure, charting our course in advance and reconnoitering the potential dangers is a good idea. It helps to preplay before we replay, to rehearse how we would react to perilous situations, to know the river, to know where the rocks and rapids are, to know how large the cataracts are, how deep the holes are, and where the shallow pools of quiet sanctuary are, where we can regroup to clear our heads before the next challenge presents itself. We are fortunate in the Church to be led by "river-rats" who are seasoned by life and have been blessed with the ability to see the rocks and rapids before they come into our view on the swiftly flowing river of life.

As we push off from the shore and embark on life's river-rafting experience, the programs of the Church permit us to progress through the Primary while we are still in relatively calm water. As the current quickens, the Young Men and Young Women programs shepherd us through rougher and rougher water. Then, the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society organizations shelter us from direct frontal assaults of towering waves, paralyzing cataracts, and fearsome holes. During the journey, we are continually blessed with the aforementioned river guides who have shot the rapids many times. These old geezers have a wealth of experience and are anxious to impart their knowledge to the novice river runners who follow their course. We should listen to them as if our very lives depended upon it, as in fact they do.

It is important to adjust the fit of the life vest so that it is snug without chafing, binding, or inhibiting, but not so loose that our freedom of movement renders it deceptively dangerous and ineffective. When we choose to be obedient to printed and verbal instructions, we necessarily limit our options, but in doing so we avoid the need to accept the consequences for inappropriate behavior. For example, the Gospel is truly the perfect law of liberty, but only because those who choose to be obedient are given the freedom to stretch to their divine potential, uninhibited by the restraints and limitations that accompany poor choices.

Embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is akin to putting on the life vest. Scripture study, personal prayer, firesides, seminary, quorum and class instruction, and youth and adult activities are equivalent to wearing the properly adjusted vest.

We cannot avoid the rapids of life, nor would we really want to. Avoidance of risk is contrary to the Plan of Salvation and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The only places where we can lead stress free lives with maximum security are either in prison or attached to life support machines in hospital intensive care units. We must stretch in order to grow. Mortality is a risky undertaking, but the reward makes the effort worthwhile. Besides, Heavenly Father has left us with adequate means to deal with the challenges we face.

In the Ward, each of us is assisted by individuals working within organizations ideally suited to meet our needs. We are effective when we focus on our own stewardship responsibilities, and when we magnify our callings in the service of others. This creates an interdependence that is really the highest level of human interaction. The Lord has urged each of us to stand fast in our offices. (D&C 54:2). He has confidence to find us at our posts at all times, doing our duty. If we see that a friend has neglected to secure his or her own life vest, He expects us to go to them, encourage them to wear it, help them to do so, and determine never to abandon them with inadequate preparation to the rapids of life.

Discipleship demands unswerving devotion to our friends and neighbors, for we have covenanted in the name of Jesus Christ to be our brothers' keepers. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Lord's inspired program to shepherd us through the exciting rapids of life. Although we cannot avoid the white water that lies ahead, we would not choose to do so even if we were able to, because we know that we will be prepared to deal with whatever the river might throw at us, as long as our life vests are securely in place.

The Recipe For A Successful Church Address

“Read yourself full, think yourself straight,
pray yourself hot, and let yourself go!”

(J. Douglas Gibb)

Inspiration

We seek divine direction, and learn how to focus the powers of heaven in our behalf. Because we are on the Lord’s errand, we take advantage of every opportunity to be cast off into a stream of revelation as we are carried along in the quickening currents of direct experience with God. We find opportunities to support the thesis of our message from the conduct of our daily lives, from others, in what we have observed and read, in answer to prayer, and from our Church experiences. We recognize and act upon moments when the Spirit leads us, remembering that President Kimball said: “Seeking the spectacular, we often miss the constant flow of revealed communication that comes.” (“Church News,” 1/5/1974).

Preparation

We are clear about our purpose. We “make no small plans, for they have no magic to stir our souls.” (Daniel Burnham). However large or small our invitation, we do it well, remembering the words of Abraham Lincoln, who declared: “I will prepare myself, and someday my chance will come.” We emphasize the positive aspects of our message, and never make excuses for a lack of preparation or inability. We don’t shirk our responsibility or leave the success of our address to the whims of fate. We all know about those four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. An invitation to speak in Sacrament meeting had been extended, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would prepare well ahead of time. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did. Somebody got angry about it because, although it was Everybody’s responsibility, he thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that not Everybody would take it seriously. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. (Anonymous).

Confidence

We believe in our message and that what we have to say is significant. Winston Churchill reminisced: “I remember the old man who said on his deathbed that he’d had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.” We know that worry is interest on a debt that never comes due, so we are optimists who sees opportunity in every difficulty, rather than pessimists who sees difficulty in every opportunity.

Virtue garnishes our thoughts, so that our confidence is strong. We are sure that the doctrine of the priesthood will distil upon our heads as the dews from heaven, the Holy Ghost will be our constant companion, and power to accomplish our assignment will flow without compulsory means. (D&C 121:45-46).

Because we are focused and disciplined, we will experience success similar to that enjoyed by The Sons of Mosiah, who “waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.” (Alma 17:2-3).

Teaching

The college portals in Moorish Granada (1300 - 1492) were inscribed with these lines: “The world is supported by four things: the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good, and the valor of the brave.” (Mohammed). Over 500 years later, the Lord was moved to observe of the Saints in Zion that they were “truly humble and (were) seeking diligently to learn wisdom and to find truth.” (D&C 97:1). Because we have the sacred responsibility to teach others, we should approach our commission with equal humility.

Written in an era of limited resources, the first issue of the Times and Seasons contained a lead editorial to the elders: “Be careful that you teach not for the word of God, the commandments of men, nor the doctrines of men. Study the word of God and preach it and not your own opinions, for no man’s opinion is worth a straw.” We have been repeatedly counseled to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not unto our own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5). This is why “B.H. Roberts said after a coherent and vigorous presentation that he loved books; indeed, that in some degree books had made him. But then, in a most vehement way, he said ‘But I am not dependent on books. I am dependent for what I really know and really trust, on the direct experience of God.’” (Truman Madsen, “Defender of The Faith” p. 374).

It is our teaching, with all of its wonderful resources, that brings those within the sphere of our influence into that realm of direct experience with God. In fact, “we save ourselves by our teaching, and we save those who will get in tune with the same Spirit that we have, when we teach those truths.” (Bruce R. McConkie, “The Foolishness of Teaching”). We remember the wise counsel of Paul to Timothy: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Enthusiasm

We make sure that we choose to speak of things about which we feel strongly. Everyone wants to hear what we have to say about the subject, so we make generous use of our own thoughts, words, and experiences. Anyone can go to LDS.org to read what others have to say about the same topic.

We adapt the responsibility of the priest to our own circumstances. It is his duty “to preach, teach, expound (and) exhort.” (D&C 20:46). We “preach” by introducing the principle. We “teach” by bringing it into focus and illustrating it in a meaningful way. We “expound” upon the principle by expanding upon it as our listeners embrace it with increasing understanding. Finally, we “exhort” others by including our own personal witness and testimony in validation of its worth.

Behavioral commitment

In the best of circumstances, an effective Church address is encouraging and motivating, and catalyzes the desire to change behavior. It widens our perspective, creating the desire to make or renew binding commitments and especially to strengthen our testimony of Jesus Christ, of the power of His Atonement, and of the Plan of Salvation. Accordingly, we think of the example of King Benjamin, who “thought it was expedient, after having finished speaking to the people, that he should take the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments.” (Mosiah 6:1). Everyone in his audience beyond the age of accountability was given the opportunity to make a commitment to the Lord. “And it came to pass that there was not one soul, except it were little children, but who had entered into the covenant and had taken upon them the name of Christ.” (Mosiah 6:2).

We remember that Joshua had drawn a similar line in the sand a thousand years earlier in the Promised Land of Israel. “Fear the Lord,” he said, “and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15).

We know that choice is at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that an effective Church address has the power to nudge us off the comfortable cushion of complacency directly onto the hot-seat of personal accountability. “There are many called, but few are chosen,” wrote Joseph Smith from Liberty Jail. “And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set...upon the things of this world.” (D&C 121:34-36). Our successful Church address will strengthen spirituality by promising the peace that accompanies the righteous exercise of our agency as we follow the Plan of Salvation.

Encouragement

If our words figuratively paint a portrait of a turtle on a fence post, the congregation will know one thing for certain. He had help getting up there. They will unconsciously draw upon the power of their covenants and have a desire to rely upon the Savior and His Atonement as our message is crafted to positively influence outcomes. On the other hand, if we dilute the message, it will be like putting roller skates on an octopus; no-one will have any idea in which direction it is headed. By focusing our message, then, everyone who carefully listens will visualize the Gospel Plan materializing before their eyes. They will reach out to firmly grasp it, and then “press forward through mist(s) of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they (come) forth and partake of the fruit of the tree” of life. (1 Nephi 8:24).

As the congregation is encouraged, it will be energized to know that although “the stars fade away, (and) the sun himself grow dim with age and nature sink in years...they shall flourish in immortal youth, unhurt amidst the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds.” (Joseph Addison, “Cato” Act 5, Scene 1).

Conclusion

When the Spirit prompts us to do so, at the close of our address we bear testimony that what we have presented has made a difference in our own life. Rather than weakly observing that we hope everyone can do better, we make a powerful positive statement that through personal effort, we have experienced self-improvement by having practiced what we have preached. What we are will scream so loudly in the ears of our listeners, that they will barely hear what we say. (Emerson). We think again of King Benjamin's address. At its conclusion, all the people "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. And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things. And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do rejoice with such exceedingly great joy." (Mosiah 5:2-4).

We know that principles embody an ideal standard to which all should strive, and that if our address is founded on principles rather than on values, it will bridge the cultural, economic, political, and social boundaries that might otherwise segregate the congregation. Principles speak to the spirit because everyone is entitled to guidance from the Light of Christ. Teaching principles provides immunity to conventional wisdom and resistance to the twisted influence of private interpretation.

We rely upon the Holy Ghost, Who is a facilitator whose mission is to bring out the best in every member of the congregation, because principles encompass the torch of truth, as would a homing beacon. We trust that He will help us to avoid being "caught in the bind of building a church and killing the articles of its faith, or permitting form to triumph over spirit. The Church and kingdom of God is built by the ardor and conviction of its members." (Alvin R. Dyer, "A Foundation for Education").

The strength of our successful address is its vitality when it is alive with interactive communication with God. "These currents and many more are part of the flowing fountain of the Church. If we do not drink, if we die of thirst while only inches from the fountain, the fault comes down to us. For the free, full, flowing, living water is there." (Truman Madsen, "Christ and The Inner Life" p. 31). Quickened by the Spirit, members of the congregation who listen to our address will recognize the source of the life-giving water that is offered and will gratefully accept inspired insight from its sincere and humble words.

The Sabbath

“It would be as difficult to enumerate the blessings we receive from the Christian Sabbath as it would be to take an inventory of the benefits the world receives from sunshine.”

First it was called the Holy Sabbath, then the Sabbath, then Sunday. Now, it is called the Weekend. Nevertheless, holy days must never be confused with holidays. “Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man should glorify God.” (J.S.T. Mark 2:26-27). The Lord has given us the Sabbath to help us to have the Spirit more fully in our lives.

The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew, meaning “day of rest.” “And on the seventh day God...rested...from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work.” (Genesis 2:2-3).

Later, God made the seventh day of the week a holy day for Israel, and incorporated into the Decalogue the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work.” (Exodus 20:8-10).

The Nephites also “observed to keep the Law of Moses and the Sabbath day holy unto the Lord.” (Jarom 1:5). Following the ministry of Christ among the Nephites, after members of the Church “had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ who was the author and the finisher of their faith. And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls. And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.” (Moroni 6:4-6).

To commemorate the Resurrection, the first day of the week was made the Sabbath in the Lord’s Church: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.” (Acts 20:7).

The Lord has reaffirmed the observance of the Sabbath in the Last Days. In a revelation given through Joseph Smith, in Zion, Jackson County, Missouri, August 7, 1831, He told the Saints: “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day. For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High. And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart.” (D&C 59:9-11 & 13).

Blessings are always associated with obedience to specific eternal laws, and observance of the Law of the Sabbath is no exception. “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicted. And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” (D&C 130:20-21). The blessings associated with the Sabbath day are described in the Doctrine

and Covenants: "And inasmuch as ye (keep the Sabbath day holy) with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances...the fulness of the earth is yours...even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come." (D&C 59:15-15 & 23).

How do we determine what it means to keep the Sabbath day holy? Because individual circumstances differ, it is best to follow general principles rather than specific rules for every conceivable situation. We should follow scriptural guidelines, listen to the promptings of the Spirit, and ask questions such as: "Are my actions holy, or of service to God? Are my actions doing good? Do they keep me unspotted from the world? In my actions, am I honoring the Lord?"

Specifically, He has promised, "If thou turn away...from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and (instead) call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father." (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Those who honor the Sabbath follow Isaiah's counsel: "Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." (Isaiah 55:1-3). The Lord's formula is not complicated. If we draw near to Him, He will make binding promises with us.

"A Favorite theme of Brigham Young was that the dominion God gives us is designed to test him and enable us to show to ourselves, our fellows, and all the heavens just how we would act if entrusted with God's power." (Hugh Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," p. 89-90). Our agency allows us to do with the Sabbath as we please. But we are not left without guidance, and we are not as a ship without a rudder, for the commandment has been reiterated: "Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it." (Isaiah 56:2).

Alternatively, there is a curse associated with polluting the Sabbath. "Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you; every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 31:14-15).

Today, we no longer put to death those who violate the Law of the Sabbath, yet we die spiritually when we deliberately alienate ourselves from God's influence, because our actions put a halt to our eternal progression. "Broad is the gate, and wide they way that leadeth to the deaths; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law." (D&C 132:25). God has prepared the Sabbath as a "work release program" for us, to see how we will behave if we are left on our own, after having received instruction regarding what we ought to do.

“That which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men.” (D&C 46:7). “This life (after all, is) a probationary state, a time to prepare to meet God.” (Alma 12:24). It is a time of testing, for the Lord has said: “I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant.” (D&C 98:14).

On the Sabbath Day: “We should perform no labor that would keep us from giving our full attention to spiritual matters.” (Gospel Principles Lesson Manual). Our focus sanctifies the Sabbath. “Reverence (for the Sabbath day) embraces regard, deference, honor, and esteem. Without some degree of it, therefore, there would be no courtesy, no gentility, no consideration of others’ feelings, or of others’ rights. It is the fundamental virtue in religion. If there were more reverence in human hearts, there would be less room for sin and sorrow, and increased capacity for joy and gladness. Reverence for God and sacred things is the chief characteristic of a great soul.” (David O. McKay, C.R., 10/1956, p. 6-7).

It is our responsibility to make the Sabbath Day the most special day of the week, when we can renew ourselves through the ordinances of the priesthood, partake of the spirit in our meetings, and mutually edify and strengthen each other in our exhortations. But “we must not be caught in the bind of building a church and killing the articles of its faith, or permitting form to triumph over spirit. The church and kingdom of God is built by the ardor and conviction of its members. We must be alert to the expansion of its assets at the cost of lost conviction. When buildings or institutions grow bigger and bigger, let us be fearful lest the Spirit will thin out.” (Alvin R. Dyer, “A Foundation for Education).

Rather than enslaving us in good habits, Heavenly Father repeatedly gives us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to covenants of obedience to true and eternal principles, as we receive the Sacrament every Sunday. This is one of the most important reasons why the Sabbath day, Church membership, and faithful attendance at our meetings is vital to our spiritual well being. In so doing, we expand our awareness, rededicate ourselves, magnify our efforts, and realize our potential. By developing the qualities and attributes of our Heavenly Father, we “keep our second estate,” and we are rewarded with the opportunity to have glory added upon our heads forever.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “The Sabbath is such a precious thing. The Lord wrote concerning the sanctity of the Sabbath when His finger touched the tablets of stone on Sinai: ‘Keep the Sabbath day holy.’ And that commandment has been reiterated in modern times as set forth in the 59th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Let us (therefore) be a Sabbath-keeping people. Now I do not want to be prudish. I do not want you to lock your children in the house and read the Bible all afternoon to them. Be wise. Be careful. Make that day a day when you can sit down with your families and talk about sacred and good things.” (“Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley,” p. 559-560). In so doing, the Sabbath will become a day of renewal and a day of fortification against the affronts to spirituality that constantly assault us. It will be a day to look forward to with joyful anticipation, for, as the Savior promised, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28).

The Sacrament

“The road to the Sacrament table is the path of safety.”

(Melvin J. Ballard)

We must recognize the truth in that statement, for Satan surely does. If he can convince us that the ordinance of the Sacrament is not essential to our spiritual well being, or that it is foolish, or if we have lost the wonder of its powerful effect, or if we no longer sense its significant stimulation of our spiritual security, he will have won a major victory. If he can pacify us, and lull us into complacency, so that we remonstrate: “All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well,” he will have scored a major victory as he cheats our souls and leads us “away carefully down to hell.” (2 Nephi 28:21). He will move us from white, through every subtle shade of grey, to black, and in the process, make us believe we are gaining something, when we are really losing. Perhaps it is because it is easy to get out of focus, lose our grip on the iron rod, and wander from strict obedience to our covenants, that we are commanded to regularly and repetitively participate in the ordinance of the Sacrament.

By doing so, we draw closer to God. Bruce R. McConkie noted that the Sacrament is not an “empty, passive ritual; rather, it binds us to receive the promises and blessings of the Gospel by means of a covenant of action between ourselves and the Lord.” (“Doctrinal Commentary on The Book of Mormon,” 4:319). The Sacrament attests to His nature, illustrates that His Church is founded on unchanging principles, and confirms that the requirements for obtaining salvation are the same for all.

The emblems of the Sacrament represent the “flesh and blood of Christ.” (Moroni 4:1). Officiating at the table are elders or priests who “kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ.” (Moroni 4:2). The specific words of the prayer, delineated in scripture, attest to the importance of the ordinance. “The priest’s duty, based on the foundation principles and ordinances of the Gospel, is to “administer the sacrament” without the slightest deviation or error. (D&C 20:46).

It makes sense that the same exactness typifying the Baptismal Prayer epitomizes the Sacramental Prayer, for the Sacrament is a renewal of the baptismal covenant. At the Last Supper, the Savior taught His disciples: “For this is in remembrance of my blood of the new testament, which is shed for as many as shall believe on my name, for the remission of their sins.” (J.S.T. Matthew 26:24). In other words, His Atonement was for the remission of sins, and the emblems of the sacrament are to be tokens in remembrance of that sacrifice.

Spiritual preparation prior to receiving the Sacrament readies us to complete the process of repentance. However, we do not partake of the Sacrament in order to receive a remission of sins, but rather to recommit ourselves to the promises we made at baptism, and to receive by covenant the Spirit of God so that, in the future, we might more securely hold fast to the iron rod.

No one should partake of the sacrament unworthily, without proper prior personal preparation. The scriptures caution: “If any have trespassed, let him not partake until he makes reconciliation.” (D&C 46:4). “We do not need to be perfect before partaking

of the sacrament, but we must have the spirit of repentance in our hearts.” (“Gospel Principles Lesson Manual,” p. 156).

The powerful covenant helps us to remember the Savior and to follow Him. Our “witness” before God is a promise to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, remember Him, and keep His commandments. His part of the covenant is to grant us the Holy Ghost to help us to do our duty. Members of the Church are blessed with the greater light of the Holy Ghost because they have a sacred responsibility to be true to their baptismal covenants. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.” (D&C 82:3). Since we will be judged by the law to which we were responsible, we will vary in the degree to which we are accountable. As the Savior said: “That servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke 12:47-48).

The Sacrament helps us to remember the sacrifice of the Savior. “During its administration, we should dismiss from our minds all worldly thoughts. We should be prayerful and reverent, think of the Atonement of our Savior, and gratitude should fill our hearts. We should examine our lives and look for ways to improve. We should also renew our determination to keep the commandments.” (“Gospel Principles Lesson Manual,” p. 154).

It is the practice of the Church that only worthy members partake of the Sacrament. Of non-members it is not required, because only those who have entered into the covenants have made sacred promises before altars and before God to take upon themselves the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments. When those who are not yet members of the Church attend Sacrament meetings, they are not forbidden to partake of the Sacrament, but when they do, it is of no effect, since no prior covenant relationship has been established through baptism. The Savior taught that partaking of the Sacrament “shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember (Him)” and the covenant that had been made with the Father. (Moroni 18:7).

With one serious limitation, Jesus told the Nephites that they should deny the Sacrament to no one. He instructed the Twelve who were to preside over Church services, and who were common judges in Israel: “Ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it. For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul.” (3 Nephi 18:28-29). “Nevertheless,” the Savior continued, “ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name.” (3 Nephi 18:30). He clarified that He was speaking of those who were not yet members of the Church, when he further explained: “If it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood.” (3 Nephi 18:30). Evidently, partaking of the emblems of Christ without having first experienced the steps of conversion prior to baptism, namely developing faith unto repentance, blocks the channels through which spiritual power flows. The damnation referred to by the Savior might represent self-imposed roadblocks in the progression of those who have hearts that have not yet been softened to be receptive to the “glad tidings of great joy.” (Alma 13:22). His caution may apply to