

# Chapter 5

## Making our Course in Life Agreeable to God - Becoming Ethical

God has said to all the world, as have his prophets everlastingly and repetitiously, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one. He drills this concept into us. They are one in plan, one in purpose, one in power, one in the possession of the attributes of godliness, and one in every good thing. The whole system of salvation is so ordained that we may become one with Diety. If we do not, we are not like him. In declaring that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one God, the revelations are bearing record that we must be one as they are one. We must go from grace to grace until we inherit an eternal fullness. Bruce R. McConkie<sup>1</sup>

Let our gratitude likewise be expressed by striving to become, attribute by attribute, more and more as Jesus is (see 3 Nephi 27:27). By so living, ours will not then be a mere appreciation of Jesus, nor a modest admiration of Him. Rather, ours will be an adoration of Jesus expressed by our emulation of Him! Neal A. Maxwell<sup>2</sup>

We know that God would always choose the correct solution when faced with what we may consider a difficult ethical dilemma since He has developed His character and attributes to perfection. From Lecture Five of the *Lectures on Faith*, we learn that not only has God the Father reached this stage of development, but so have the other members of the Godhead. As Elder McConkie has said, they *are one in the possession of the attributes of godliness, and one in every good thing*. We read in the scriptures that Jesus grew grace for grace, line upon line, precept upon precept until He was one with the Father, thus, showing us how we can become one with them.

As Saul walked the road to Damascus, he was visited by the Lord. During their conversation, Saul asked the Lord what He wanted him to do (see Acts 9:6) Saul was given some specific instructions but elsewhere in the scriptures we can find general answers as we ask that question for ourselves. For instance, as Jesus was about to leave the American continent after His earthly ministry among the Nephites, He gave the following counsel to the disciples:

*. . . .ye know the things what ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do . . . . What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:21, 27)*

*By striving to become, attribute by attribute, more and more as Jesus is, we enlarge our capacity to behave as God would when confronted with ethical dilemmas. As we become one with Diety, we will make the same decisions in these dilemmas that God would make. However, on our own all of us will fall short in this process. But we can find reassurance in the words of Moroni that Jesus will, through the atonement, make up for our shortcomings.*

*Yea, 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, 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)*

Not only is *the whole system of salvation so ordained* for us to become *one as they are one*, but our worship of the Father and the Son is inextricably tied to the process of achieving these attributes as suggested in the following scripture.

*This is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)*

In Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord quotes from John's record in which John tells of the Savior growing grace to grace until He received a fullness. Then the Lord says in verse 19:

*I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fullness. (D&C 93:19)*

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said the following about worship:

Come worship the Lord! How is it done? Perfect worship is emulation. We honor those whom we imitate. The most perfect way of worship is to be holy as Jehovah is holy. It is to be pure as Christ is pure. It is to do the things that enable us to become like the Father. The course is one of obedience, of living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, of keeping the commandments. How do we worship the Lord? We do it by going from grace to grace, until we receive the fullness of the Father and are glorified in light and truth as is the case with our Pattern and Prototype, the Promised Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

In Lecture Six, we read the following about the importance of knowing if our course in life is agreeable to God:

An actual knowledge to any person, that the course of life which he pursues is according to the will of God, is essentially necessary to enable him to have that confidence in God without which no person can obtain eternal life. It was this that enabled the ancient saints to endure all their afflictions and persecutions, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing (not believing merely) that they had a more enduring substance (see Hebrews 10:34). . . . not only the spoiling of their goods, and the wasting of their substance, joyfully, but also to suffer death in its most horrid forms; knowing (not merely believing) that when this earthly house of their tabernacle was dissolved, they had *a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* (2 Corinthians 5:1). (Lectures on Faith 6:2-3)

For our worship and our own confidence in our relationship with God, we need to know if our daily decisions please God. To know this, we need to be actively trying to acquire the Godly attributes that were discussed in the previous chapter and to be seeking confirmation of our actions.

### *A Process for Acquiring the Attributes*

We frequently find people who appear to be blessed with one or more of these attributes. They may demonstrate an endless capacity to love, possess a keen sense of justice, exhibit honor and integrity in any situation, or treat others as if they were no respecter of persons. These people have been given a priceless gift. The Lord tells us in the Doctrine and Covenants that people are given gifts by the Spirit of God for the benefit of His children.

*seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me. . . every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby. . . And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God.* (D&C 46:8-9,11-12,26)

For most of us, acquiring the attributes is a life-time process. One that requires much effort, diligence, and patience. We should also recognize that people are at different points along the process with every attribute. When we think about what being honest means in context of a given dilemma, the definition will be a function of where we are in the process of acquiring the Godly attribute of truth. For someone who might have developed the attribute to a greater degree than what we possess, the definition might be significantly different. This fact sometimes leads to improper judging of people's character. We can not afford to allow the judging of an act to lead us to also judge the person. The Lord expects us to righteously judge the act but to not judge the person.

*Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. . . And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. (Moroni 7:14-16,18)*

How does one go about acquiring the characteristics of God? Consider the following elements of a process of acquisition.

1. Study
2. Experiment upon the word
3. Record, reflect, and assess
4. Observe and learn from others
5. Serve God
6. Pray

**Study.** The best source from which we can study the attributes of God is the standard works. They provide a detailed description of God. Using the computer as a tool, we can systematically search the scriptures for each attribute. We can choose a different color of marker to highlight each attribute or choose one color to note a passage in which any of the attributes is being discussed. Jerry Wilson describes his experience of using one color to mark all of the attributes. He wrote the following:

Sensing the importance of God's characteristics and attributes for my faith, I decided a number of years ago to choose a color, a light green color, and systematically mark in my scriptures the passages relating to the nature of God. The task was somewhat mechanical at first. I researched each characteristic by using the scriptures on computer, printed a list of that characteristic, and then marked each of the passages in which that attribute was mentioned. After a while, a sensitivity was created in which I began to see on the scriptural pages what the prophets were doing. They were persuading me to come to God by showing me who He was, how His perfections could be trusted, and how He longed to apply every ounce of His nature to bring about my salvation. There are few experiences in my life that have equaled or surpassed the impact this one action has had on my study and my faith.<sup>4</sup>

The Topical Guide and Bible Dictionary are valuable assets in using the scriptures to search topics. The Topical Guide list the following topics under the entry, God, Attributes of:

God, Attributes of (see God, Body of; God, Eternal Nature of; God, Foreknowledge of ;

God, Glory of; God, Indignation of; God, Intelligence of; God, Justice of; God, Love of; God, Mercy of; God, Omniscience of; God, Perfection of; God, Power of; God, Wisdom of). (Topical Guide page 173)

Each entry contains several references that can be used to learn about the nature of God.

There are other sources besides the scriptures to study the attributes. Conference addresses frequently reference one of God's characteristics. The church has put certain fireside and devotional talks on its web site. This web site can be found at <http://www.lds.org/>. Church magazines also contain printed talks and writings of the prophets and others as they discuss the nature of God. A database containing the Ensign and other magazines can be found on the Church's web site. Any topic can be easily searched in this data base.

Study is not enough though when considering the things of God. Elder Dallin Oaks has said,

Despite the importance of study and reason, if we seek to learn of the things of God solely by this method, we are certain to stop short of our goal. We may even wind up at the wrong destination. Why is this so? On this subject God has prescribed the primacy of another method. To learn the things of God, what we need is not more study and reason, not more scholarship and technology, but more faith and revelation.<sup>5</sup>

The scriptures make it clear that we are to include faith in our study.

*No man knoweth of His ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.* (Jacob 4:8)

*The things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God.* (JST 1 Cor. 2:11)

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said:

Of course we believe in the cultivation of the mind, but the intellect is not the only source of knowledge. There is a promise, given under inspiration from the Almighty, set forth in these beautiful words: *God shall give unto you knowledge by His Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost* (D&C 121:26).<sup>6</sup>

**Experiment upon the word.** Alma, in the 32nd chapter of Alma, describes the importance of following up our study by 'doing'—performing acts that will help build on our faith and study. He speaks of conducting an "experiment on the word". The importance of this part of the process in enhancing our faith was discussed in an earlier chapter. But it also can add powerful support to our systematic study of the attributes. Effort always plays an important part of growth.

Joseph Smith teaches the importance of effort in the form of sacrifice in also knowing if our course in life is agreeable to God.

For a man to lay down his all, his character and reputation, his honor, and applause,

his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life also—counting all things but filth and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ—requires more than mere belief or supposition that he is doing the will of God; but actual knowledge, and most assuredly knows that he is doing the will of God; but actual knowledge, realizing that, when those sufferings are ended, he will enter into eternal rest, and be a partaker of the glory of God. For unless a person does know that he is walking according to the will of God, it would be offering an insult to the dignity of the Creator were he to say that he would be a partaker of his glory when he should be done with the things of this life. But when he has this knowledge, and most assuredly knows that he is doing the will of God, his confidence can be equally strong that he will be a partaker of the glory of God. Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation. . . It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life. It is in vain for persons to fancy to themselves that they are heirs with those, or can be heirs with them, who have offered their all in sacrifice, and by this means obtain faith in God and favor with him so as to obtain eternal life, unless they, in like manner, offer unto him the same sacrifice, and through that offering obtain the knowledge that they are accepted of him. It was in offering sacrifices that Abel, the first martyr, obtained knowledge that he was accepted of God. And from the days of righteous Abel to the present time, the knowledge that men have that they are accepted in the sight of God is obtained by offering sacrifice. And in the last days, before the Lord comes, he is to gather together his saints who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice. (Lectures on Faith 6:5-9)

For several years, the authors have used an assignment to help students learn the importance of “experimenting upon the word.” The students are asked to choose an attribute and try ‘abiding by’ or applying it for a period of time such as one week. They are then required to keep a journal and record their observations and effort for the time period. Their journal entries often include such things as: how they selected the attribute; scriptures used to help their study; specific daily actions; and insights gained. At the end of the time period, they are asked to summarize their feelings about the experience. Student response to the assignment has been extremely positive. A significant fraction of the students begin their assignment thinking that it is just another task to do for credit in a course. At the end, they frequently comment that it was one of their more rewarding assignments and many say they want to continue their effort throughout their lives. The following are samples of students’ comments:

Although it was hard to find as much time as I would have liked to put into this project, I feel it was a good experience. My goal in choosing these things to experiment on was to implement them in my life. There is still a lot of work to do and a lot more goal setting to achieve all that I hope to accomplish but this was a good step in the right direction. The Book of Mormon is true and I love the council we receive in reading the experiences that

these prophets had. I love the Doctrine and Covenants and hope to gain a better understanding of the doctrines and covenants. The way we become perfect is to perfect certain characteristics in ourselves step by step. To apply and practice what is taught in the scriptures. This is what the personal application project has meant for me, a way to focus on one thing at a time and improve on that one aspect of my life.<sup>7</sup>

The three weeks I spent working on prayer, integrity, and kindness were very challenging and very rewarding. Sometimes I was discouraged because I continued to make mistakes in each of these areas and not fulfill my goals as well as I would like to. Despite this, when I was able to improve in some way I was excited to be actively moving in the right direction on the straight and narrow path. I may not be going very fast or very far, but I recall that the tortoise did win the race because he just kept going. There are so many things to do and ways to improve that it was very helpful to pick specific things to work on for a specific amount of time. This allows progress to take place without the overwhelming feelings of trying to do everything at once.<sup>7</sup>

This three week application was a very good experience for me. It helped me to focus on one thing at a time, rather than to be stressed out with a multiplicity of things that I need to work on. It helped me to know where to start and then to give the needed area of improvement the proper time and energy to improve on it. I feel like I accomplished a lot of things that I have been meaning to do for a long time, but never found the motivation to do it. This makes you really do those things that you need to. It helped me feel more comfortable with who I am and helped me overcome some shaky situations. I feel closer to my Savior and I feel that I am on the right path. It was a good experience.<sup>7</sup>

In summary of these application experiences, I believe I am a better person and much closer to God. I have changed my attitude about certain things, I am living the commandments better, and I am exhilarated in the expectation of a child. I believe that a conscious effort to import these principles into my daily living has brought about miracles into my life. . . This experience has honestly been the most important and beneficial assignment I have done at school. Not only has it helped me in my life, it has made me a better person and closer to God and His gentle enticings. I hope that everyone will be assigned the opportunity to walk upright before the Lord and report on his progress while in this life. I can't help but to think of the similitude of what it might be like to report our progress at the Judgment Bar of Christ. That thought makes me want to meticulously look at each scriptural principle and practice it until mastered.<sup>7</sup>

**Record, reflect, and assess.** Learning is always enhanced by the process of recording and reflecting on our thoughts and feelings. There is a growing movement in academia to use writing not just as an evaluation tool but as a learning tool. Writing can help people organize, think critically, and assess their thoughts. Those that are proponents of using writing as a tool for learning see it as “the process of an individual mind making meaning from the materials of its experience”.<sup>8</sup>

Not only should we record and reflect on our attempts to learn but we should also have a time when we assess what we have accomplished. We should measure our progress against standards, i.e., the Godly attributes discussed in the last chapter. An excellent time and place for this assessment is the weekly partaking of the sacrament. The sacrament provides an opportunity for both the renewal of covenants and for assessment of our weekly efforts to become more like God.

Melvin J. Ballard spoke of the importance of this weekly assessment.

I should like to speak of the spirit and body as “me” and “it.” “Me” is the individual who dwells in this body, who lived before I had such a body, and who will live when I step out of the body. “It” is the house I live in, the tabernacle of flesh; and the great conflict is between “me” and “it.” I used to tell missionaries with whom I was identified for many years that it was an excellent thing once a week to go by themselves and examine themselves, find out how the battle was going, who was winning—”me” or “it”; to pass judgment upon one’s self, correct one’s mistakes and weaknesses, set one’s house in order. You do not have to make that kind of an appointment. The Lord has made it for every member of this Church. It comes on the Sabbath day. It is at the sacrament meeting, when you see the emblems of the broken body and the spilt blood being prepared—that is the time for every man and woman to go into secret conference with himself or herself and discover whether or not they are in sin and transgression, whether they have yielded to the tempter, whether there are things that they need to repent of, and if so, to cleanse themselves and purify their souls and make peace with brethren and sisters and with the Lord, lest we should stretch forth our hands and eat and drink of these sacred emblems unworthily.<sup>9</sup>

**Observe and learn from others.** Another thing that will help us learn about the attributes of God, is the observation of examples in the lives of others. There is a danger here. We need to be sure that the example from which we want to learn is a correct example, i.e., the example is truly exhibiting a correct understanding of an attribute. There are wonderful stories within our own family histories, church history, and the lives of people that offer much from which we can learn.

Consider the following examples from the lives of a few of God’s children who appear to have a correct understanding of a specific Godly attribute.

**Truthful and Cannot Lie:** The following is a quote from Karl G. Maeser: "I have been asked what I mean by 'word of honor'. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls - walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground - there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape; but stand me on the floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first."<sup>10</sup>

**No Respecter of Persons:** When Robert E. Lee was a cadet at West Point, a classmate took a violent and irrational dislike to him. The animosity persisted into later life. For many years this fellow officer made malicious attacks on Lee. One day a mutual acquaintance asked Lee what he thought of this individual. To the questioner’s surprise, Lee spoke in the highest terms of him. Then his questioner said slyly, “I guess you don’t know what he’s been saying about you for years.” “You have not asked me,” Lee replied, “for his opinion of me. You have asked me for my opinion of him.”<sup>11,12</sup>

**Merciful and Gracious:** In the course of the Armenian atrocities, a young woman and her brother were pursued down the street by a Turkish soldier, cornered in an angle of the wall, and the brother was slain before his sister’s eyes. She dodged down an alley, leaped a wall, and escaped. Later, being a nurse, she was forced by the Turkish authorities to

work in the military hospital. Into her ward was brought, one day, the same Turkish soldier who had slain her brother. He was very ill. A slight inattention would insure his death. The young woman, now safe in America, confesses to the bitter struggle that took place in her mind. The old Adam cried "Vengeance," and the new Christ cried, "Love". And, equal to the man's good and to her own, the better side of her conquered, and she nursed him as carefully as any other patient in the ward. The recognition had been mutual, and one day, unable to restrain his curiosity, the Turk asked his nurse why she had not let him die, and when she replied, "I am a follower of Him who said, 'Love your enemies and do them good,'" he was silent for a long time. At last he spoke, "I never knew that there was such a religion. If that is your religion, tell me more about it, for I want it."<sup>13</sup>

Love: His store is not a large one. It is not in the super market class. But it is profitable. His customers know him for what he is. They respect his principles, and admire him for holding to them.

He is a man who had been reactivated after a long period of religious inactivity. Previously his store had been open on Sundays, and he had sold beer and tobacco.

"But then I got my eyes opened," he said, "and when I saw the light, I lined up with it. I closed on Sundays and sent all my beer and tobacco back to the wholesalers. They thought I was crazy."

Then he said that he almost thought so himself, for a time, because he lost many of his customers, and as his volume went down, his profits disappeared.

One day he and his family met together to talk about either quitting business or trying to hold on for a while longer. His lovely and faithful wife said, "Why don't we fast and pray as a family, and tell the Lord what we have done and let Him know that we did it for Him. He will inspire us in what to do."

Her advice was followed. Within the next week things began to change. A different class of people started coming into his store. They didn't ask for either beer or tobacco, and none of them mentioned Sunday trade.

Within a month, his losses stopped and his books showed only black figures. At the end of a year his volume was greater than it had been before he made the change. And he knew why.

Now with his present philosophy, he has peace of mind as well as a good living.

"It all depends on how much you think of the Lord," he said again, "and I just happen to love Him."<sup>14</sup>

**Serve God.** A line from a popular hymn contains the following words, "And our talents improve by the patience of hope and the labor of love."<sup>15</sup> The implication of these words for the process that we are discussing is, that as we are in the service of God, we will be able to develop and improve the attributes that we are pursuing. This is frequently observed in the lives of young men and women who lose themselves in missionary service for their fellow brothers and sisters. President Gordon B. Hinckley has commented on the value of missionary service.

I know that our young men are under a great obligation to qualify themselves through education to fill positions of responsibility in the world. Their time is precious. But I do not hesitate to promise that the time spent in faithful and devoted service as a missionary; declaring the Master, will only add to their qualifications for positions of responsibility in the future. Regardless of the vocation they choose to pursue, they will be better qualified in their powers of expression, in their habits of industry, in the value they place on training, in the integrity of their lives, and in their recognition of a higher source of strength

and power than that which lies within their native capacity.<sup>16</sup>

Every man or woman who goes forth in [missionary] service blesses the lives of all he teaches. Furthermore, his or her own life is enriched by this selfless labor. Who has not witnessed the miracle of a missionary who has grown in a wondrous way while engaged in the work of the Master? Priesthood leaders and fathers and mothers should begin while a boy is very young to point him in the direction of missionary service.<sup>17</sup>

**Pray.** In the instruction that Jesus gave to the people as He visited them on the American continent after His death, He gave this counsel

*And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. (3 Nephi 18:20)*

As we begin a process of acquiring the attributes of God, we need to seek His help. He has promised us that if we would but seek and knock, the door would be open for that help. Prayer is an instrumental part of the process of becoming like God.

All of us will fall short in our attempts to develop the attributes to perfection. Consider the attribute of love. Moroni wrote that charity, the pure love of Christ, is ‘bestowed’—given as a gift—upon those who have given their all.

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:48)*

All of the attributes are given in their perfect state as a gift from God. For this reason, Moroni suggested that our prayers include not only a plea for help in developing an attribute but also a plea to make up the difference between the ideal and where we are at, or as in the above example, that *we may be filled with this love*. The Savior’s atonement is what can make up this difference as we seek for an application of His grace. Because of the importance of the role of His grace in helping us acquire the attributes and ultimately becoming like God, it will be discussed separately in the next section.

## *The Role of Grace in the Process*

In his book, *The Broken Heart*, Bruce Hafen discusses two applications of grace and mercy in the plan of salvation. The first application is how the Savior’s atonement satisfied the demands of justice relative to the transgression in the Garden of Eden and to our own transgressions and shortcomings. The second application is described by Hafen in the following extract,

A second application of mercy may be seen in the grace-filled bestowal of endowments that perfect and purify us in the process of growing spiritually toward a divine and sanctified nature.<sup>18</sup>

This is illustrated in the Savior's life. In Hebrews, we read,

*Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (Hebrews 5:7-9)*

The Father's grace was extended to the Son to make Him perfect like His Father. The Son, having lived a perfect life was able to work out the atonement but, to achieve perfection like the Father, He needed His Father's grace to complete the process. This gift of the Father's grace to His Son is also described in the Doctrine and Covenants.

*And I, John, saw that he received not of the fullness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fullness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fullness at the first. And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son. And I, John, bear record that he received a fullness of the glory of the Father; And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. (D&C 93:12-17)*

Once we have paid the price of repentance, sought forgiveness for our transgressions, and entered the path of righteousness, we have met the requirements for the first application of grace and are ready for the second. The Lord described those that inherit the celestial kingdom with these words,

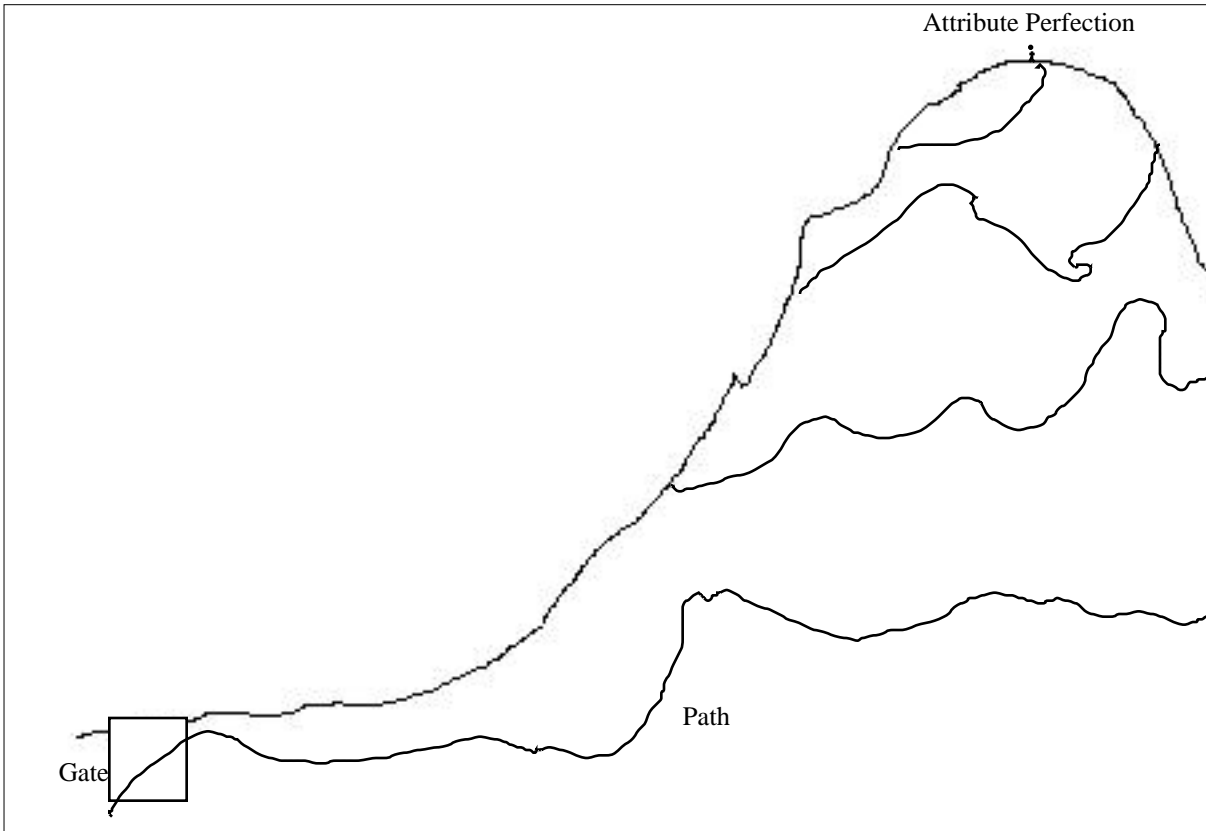
*These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. (D&C 76:69)*

We are first made *just* by the Savior's paying for our sins and then made *perfect*, also by His atonement. The role of grace is vital in the process of our becoming like the Father.

To illustrate this process further, consider the metaphor of us entering a gate at the bottom of a mountain to begin a climb to reach a difficult goal at the top of the mountain as illustrated below.

When we finally reach the top of the mountain, we find that the goal hovers in the air just out of our grasp. Think about some of the following aspects of the metaphor.





- to begin the journey to the top, we had to pass through a gate
- sometimes we can't see the top from where we are
- frequently we fall down and have to make up some ground
- we get tired
- some of us climb at different rates
- some have a harder time climbing than others
- people are at different positions on the path
- some get discouraged looking at the goal and some get discouraged with the climb
- we can take different paths to reach the top and the goal
- we frequently come around a corner and see that we have farther to go than what we thought
- some parts of the path are so steep that we need help just in overcoming that part of the path

To begin the climb up the mountain, we first had to enter a gate. That gate represents the ordinance of baptism and the remission of sins which is the first application of the Savior's mercy and grace. The climb represents the process of acquiring the attributes of God. This process coupled with the ordinance of baptism is referred to in the scriptures as the plan of salvation, or the great plan of happiness. The climb is fraught with challenges and contains places where we need assistance to keep making progress. These places represent moments of discouragement and loneliness, of pondering shortcomings in our abilities, or of dwelling over our failures in making

mistakes along the path. Each of these moments require the Savior's grace to help us reach our destination. Once we have reached the top of the mountain, we are still left short of our goal. The only way for us to reach the goal is for Him to help us once again.

In his gospel, Mark provides some insight into this application of grace. Mark writes about a rich man with much means to offer to the kingdom and a poor widow who, materially, had little to offer.

*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22)*

*And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. (Mark 12:41-44)*

The rewards the Father has for His children are available to all who would come unto Him. The only requirement is that we are willing to offer *all* that we are able. Nephi wrote:

*For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)*

The young rich man was not willing at that point in his life to offer his all to the kingdom but the poor widow, whose heart was prepared, was willing. After offering our *all*, the Savior is willing to extend His grace to us so that we can reach the goal of becoming perfect in the attributes like Him and His Father.

## *How Do We Know How Well We Are Doing?*

Since it is important for us to know if our course in life is agreeable to God, we should be able to measure how we are doing. Some possible measurements are: learning about ourselves to

determine if we are willing to pay the price necessary to become like Him; measuring our effort and contribution against standards provided in the scriptures; and developing good fruits from our labors such as the feeling of happiness and the feeling of being at peace with our decisions and subsequent actions.

**Learning about ourselves.** In a Brigham Young University devotional address, Truman Madsen spoke of an experience that he had with the apostle Hugh B. Brown.<sup>19</sup> Once touring together in the Holy Lands, they came to Mount Moriah, the site of Abraham's offering of his son, Isaac, for a sacrifice at God's request. As they contemplated what must have been a heart-wrenching experience for Abraham, Madsen asked the apostle why Abraham was asked to go through that experience. After some moments of pondering, Elder Brown responded that Abraham needed to learn something about Abraham. Abraham needed to know if he really had the heart to obey God's every command. We, too, need to learn this about ourselves. The Lord has said, in speaking about the Missouri Saints and the trials that they experienced,

*Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.* (D&C 101:4-5)

The Lord also told Joseph Smith in the Liberty Jail that the trials that he and the saints were experiencing were for their growth and development:

*. . . know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.* (D&C 122:7)

Moroni speaks of the learning and growth that comes after the trial of our faith:

*. . . wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.* (Ether 12:6)

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, Joseph Smith taught in the *Lectures on Faith* that people come to know that their actions are pleasing to God when they are willing to sacrifice all earthly things.

**Measuring our effort and contribution.** We have many examples of service in the scriptures. These include: Ammon and his brothers performing missionary work to the Lamanites; the parable of the good Samaritan; Ruth as she served her mother-in-law; and Hyrum Smith as he accepted a call to replace Oliver Cowdery which eventually led to his martyrdom with his prophet brother, Joseph. A good measure used repeatedly in the scriptures is the status of our heart. An example of this is found in the following account from Deuteronomy. In the passage, Moses recounted unto the children of Israel the experience of receiving the commandments and reminded them of their expressed desire to follow God. However, God knew their heart and knew they

wouldn't follow through with their commitment.

*And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. . . . Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it. And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them (Deut. 5:23-24, 27-29)*

Well might we ask ourselves, where are our hearts? Do they measure up to the standard that God expects from a committed people?

**Developing good fruits.** A third way of knowing if our course in life is becoming agreeable to God is to examine the fruits that are yielded from our works. The following passages of scripture are representative of the connection that God and His prophets have taught between works and fruits.

*And may God grant, in his great fullness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works. (Hel.12:24)*

*. . . wickedness never was happiness . . . all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state . . . are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness. (Alma 41:10-11)*

*But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. (D&C 59:23)*

*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matt.7:15-20)*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal.5:22-23)*

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (James 3:17-18)*

*. . . .the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life,*

*whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (1 Nephi 15:36)*

*And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations—Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances. He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances. And again, he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you. And again, he that is overcome and bringeth not forth fruits, even according to this pattern, is not of me. Wherefore, by this pattern ye shall know the spirits in all cases under the whole heavens. (D&C 52:14-19)*

*Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven. And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men. For I remember the word of God, which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also. For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good . . . Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil. Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. (Moroni 7:3-6, 10-13)*

From these passages, the fruit associated with good works consists of things like happiness, joy, peace, love, gentleness, meekness, easy to be intreated, contrite spirit, and edifying language. Contrast these words with others such as hatred, envy, malice, anger, crude, unrest, lust which characterize Satan's ways and the fruit of his works. In the paragraphs that follow, we shall concentrate on peace—the peace of mind that comes with knowing that we have chosen and acted wisely when faced with tough ethical dilemmas.

True peace can not be duplicated by Satan because it is earned by those who keep the commandments of God. Modern day apostles have said the following regarding this peace.

*Peace can never come to the transgressor of the law. Commitment to God's laws is the basis for peace. Peace is something we earn. . . . Never will peace and hatred be able to abide in the same soul. . . . Feelings of enmity and malice can never be compatible with feelings of peace. . . . Inner peace is the prized possession of God's valiant. . . . Peace will never be the possession of those who participate in vulgar conversations and behavior.*

. . . . True peace must not be dependent upon conditions or happenings. Peace must stem from an inward contentment built upon trust, faith, and goodwill toward God, fellowmen, and self. It must be constantly nurtured by the individual who is soundly anchored to the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . There can be no peace in sin and disobedience.<sup>20</sup>

Is there a valid case for virtue in our world? It is the only way to freedom from regret. The peace of conscience which flows therefrom is the only personal peace that is not counterfeit.<sup>21</sup>

We sometimes refer to the Spirit of Christ as our conscience. If we follow its promptings, we can be free of sin and filled with peace. If we do not, but instead let our carnal appetites control us, we never will know true peace.<sup>22</sup>

The feelings of peace are given to us by God in the form of revelation. When Oliver Cowdery was trying to receive a confirmation regarding the restoration of the gospel, the Lord reminded him of an earlier experience that he had in trying to obtain an answer to a prayer.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? (D&C 6:22-23)*

Peace can also come in a revelation from God to confirm a choice involving a difficult dilemma. The Lord explains a process of making choices in the scriptures.

*. . . you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (D&C 9:8-9)*

Receiving revelation to confirm our choices needs to be a vital part of our daily living. Boyd K. Packer discussed the importance of this in a talk entitled, “The Candle of the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> In a Brigham Young University devotional address, Gerald N. Lund provided additional insight to the revelatory process in which he posed the following three questions:<sup>24</sup>

1. What is the voice of the Lord like?
2. How can I distinguish between true and counterfeit revelation?
3. What can I do to enhance my ability to hear, recognize, and follow the voice of the Lord?

The scriptures teach us the answer to Question 1. Elijah looked for the voice of the Lord in the wind, an earthquake, and a fire but found it as a *still small voice* (1 Kings 19:12). The Lord in the latter-day revelation told us:

*Thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things.*



perfection is beyond our reach. We have previously discussed the role of grace in realizing the perfection of attributes but some still feel hopeless when faced with the seemingly overwhelming daily tasks of life. It is in these times that we must believe the Savior when He says that He can help us overcome our faults and shortcomings. In spite of His words of comfort, many still ask how they can ever become perfect in this life knowing their failings. The prophet Joseph Smith commented on this when he said:

When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.<sup>26</sup>

Other brethren have discussed this same theme.

We do not look for absolute perfection in man. Mortal man is not capable of being absolutely perfect. Nevertheless, it is given to us to be as perfect in the sphere in which we are called to be and to act, as it is for the Father in heaven to be pure and righteous in the more exalted sphere in which he acts. We will find in the scriptures the words of the Savior himself to his disciples, in which he required that they should be perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect; that they should be righteous, even as he is righteous. I do not expect that we can be as perfect as Christ, that we can be as righteous as God. But I believe that we can strive for that perfection with the intelligence that we possess, and the knowledge that we have of the principles of life and salvation.<sup>27</sup>

Salvation does not come all at once; we are commanded to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. It will take us ages to accomplish this end, for there will be greater progress beyond the grave, and it will be there that the faithful will overcome all things, and receive all things, even the fulness of the Father's glory. I believe the Lord meant just what he said; that we should be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. That will not come all at once, but line upon line, and precept upon precept, example upon example, and even then not as long as we live in this mortal life, for we will have to go even beyond the grave before we reach that perfection and shall be like God. But here we lay the foundation.<sup>28</sup>

Elder Bruce R. McConkie spoke these comforting words which add meaning to the words of Amulek found in Alma 34:34, *for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.*

What we do in this life is chart a course leading to eternal life. That course begins here and now and continues in the realms ahead. We must determine in our hearts and in our souls, with all the power and ability we have, that from this time forward we will press on in righteousness; by so doing we can go where God and Christ are. If we make that firm determination, and are in the course of our duty when this life is over, we will continue in

that course in eternity. That same spirit that possesses our bodies at the time we depart from this mortal life will have power to possess our bodies in the eternal world. If we go out of this life loving the Lord, desiring righteousness, and seeking to acquire the attributes of godliness, we will have that same spirit in the eternal world, and we will then continue to advance and progress until an ultimate, destined day when we will possess, receive, and inherit all things.<sup>29</sup>

Personal perfection is not required in this life. However, we must be earnestly seeking and striving to overcome the world, come to Christ, and develop the attributes and characteristics of God. Our hearts and minds must be single to the glory of God. This condition is not only important for our exaltation in the future but also for us to be able to respond correctly to ethical dilemmas that we face in mortality.

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