

***Forgiveness:  
In the Heart and in the Home***

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*This address was given at the BYU Family  
Expo Conference, April 4–5, 2005.*

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Perhaps nothing in this life is more important than the establishment and enrichment of relationships. How we treat one another—how we act and react, how we speak and listen, how we offend and seek to make amends—determines, to a large extent, the depth of happiness and fulfillment we enjoy in mortality. The world is made up of people, mortal people, frail and faltering people, people who make mistakes, and consequently our human interactions are not always positive, building, and uplifting. Indeed, a significant portion of our time and energy is expended in seeking to make things right with other people.

**On Giving and Taking Offense**

Thirty years ago my family and I moved to the South to assume the direction of the institute of religion adjacent to the university there. I was asked to replace a man who had

become an institution—both among his students and the members of the stake in which he served. He had become one of the most beloved of teachers I have ever known. A few days after our arrival, it became very clear that taking his place would not be easy. A student stopped by my office and, with a frightened look in his eye, asked: “Where’s Brother Jensen?” I answered that he had moved from the area. “Moved from the area? Well, who’s going to take his place?” I meekly admitted that I would try to do so. “Oh, terrific,” he came right back. The overall reception was not exactly cold, but rather a bit guarded. For three weeks students came into the place asking about Brother Jensen, some mourning about his departure, others observing sadly that they had enjoyed institute very much up until now.

My wife, Shauna, and I were asked to speak in sacrament meeting in our new ward. We did so, and I thought it went fairly well. After “Amen” was said, I noticed a man from the congregation walking very quickly to the stand. He reached out his right hand, shook mine, and said: “Hello. My name is Alex Campbell. My family was very, very close to the Jensens. I would like to say that you will never replace Brother Jensen as a speaker or a teacher, but we will try to love you anyway.” I waited for him to smile, supposing that he was teasing or being sarcastic. He did not smile, but simply left the stand and returned to his family. The member of the bishopric conducting the meeting hastened to my side and explained how, indeed, the two families had become very close. When my wife and I got home, I remember going to the bedroom, lying on the bed, and asking in exasperation: “Why won’t they at least give me a chance?” For a day or two, I am ashamed to admit, I had unkind feelings toward Alex Campbell. He was the straw that had broken the camel’s back. It is important that you understand that my family and I came to love that part of the country more than any place we had lived, and, ironically, Alex became one of my dearest and closest friends.

To show you that Alex didn't change a great deal even after we became quite close, I relate the following. About six months after we had moved from the area, Alex and his family came to visit us during the Christmas season in our new home. I opened the door to welcome them and Brother Campbell looked into our home. His opening words were: "I've never cared for artificial Christmas trees!" I came to love him like a brother (and still do), not because all of his comments to me or mine were complimentary, nor because his style or taste or manner was just like mine. No, once I knew his heart, once I knew who he was and how much he cared, I felt no reason to take offense. I knew he had no desire to give offense, and so I chose to love him in spite of himself.

A few years after I had joined the faculty at BYU I had an experience that caused me much pain at the time. A man came to my office and indicated that he had heard that Joseph McConkie and I had published a book on life after death. I nodded. He then said: "I wonder if I might borrow a copy for a few days to see if it's something I might want to buy." I was a bit startled by the request but sheepishly complied and provided a copy of the book for him. Three days later he dropped by, slid the book across the desk, and said: "I've looked it over and decided that I don't want to buy it!" To say that I was hurt would be the grossest of understatements. Most of all I was shocked. And, of course, hurt. But I add quickly that this person and I now have a wonderful relationship.

I have feelings just like the next person. I have been insulted, belittled, put down in front of others. I know what it feels like to be misunderstood, to have my motives or my intentions questioned. In other words, I know what it feels like to be offended. On the one hand, you and I need to be more sensitive, more cautious with people's feelings. We need to do all in our power to keep from excluding others, to keep from making people feel left out. We need to show

respect and dignity to individuals, regardless of their color, their personal beliefs, their religion, or their gender. We are human beings, sons and daughters of God first and foremost; these things we share with every other mortal.

God loves us all, and, as the scriptures affirm, he is no respecter of persons. Christians do not shun others whose religious or political views are different than their own, any more than the Lord Jesus Christ would shun people. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “There is a love from God that should be exercised toward those of our faith, who walk uprightly, which is peculiar to itself, but it is without prejudice; *it also gives scope to the mind, which enables us to conduct ourselves with greater liberality towards all that are not of our faith*, than what they exercise towards one another. These principles approximate nearer to the mind of God, because [they are] like God, or Godlike.<sup>1</sup>

There is, of course, another side to this story. In order to live in harmony, we must become the kind of people who are not constantly looking to take offense. Each of us could easily waste our lives striving to make our associates offenders for a word. Many times each day we could take offense with the way we are spoken to (or not spoken to), the way we are introduced, the way someone mispronounces our name, or the way we feel we are ignored or overlooked. Our society’s inability to be fully Christian has led to a staggering increase in the number of court cases. Everyone wants to sue someone. We have become a litigious people, a nation that thinks first of justice and later (if at all) of reconciliation or even forgiveness.<sup>2</sup> Our tendency to look for and take offense has made it extremely difficult to function in society, even to the point where individuals are frightened to speak, anxious about saying anything, for fear

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<sup>1</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 147, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> See Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord’s Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 157–58.

that their language or their approach are not “politically correct.” One of the ironic realities of our day—and this is particularly true in modern universities—is that an overmuch dose of multiculturalism and an exaggerated stress on diversity can create a type of ethnicity that will in time contribute to the segregation and disunity of our society. Christians need not fall prey to such trends.

I have come to know that we need not be offended, that one of the most important signs of spiritual growth is a refusal to take offense. We need not be angry or bitter or insulted. We need not make our sister or our brother an offender for a word. It really is not too difficult to look at a person’s heart, to try to understand what they meant to do rather than what they did, or what they meant to say rather than what they said. Sometimes this entails simply looking the other way and assuming the best. Sometimes it requires forgiveness. President Gordon B. Hinckley pointed out that there is no virtue more needed in our day than forgiving and forgetting. “There are those who would look upon this as a sign of weakness. Is it? *I submit that it takes neither strength nor intelligence to brood in anger over wrongs suffered, to go through life with a spirit of vindictiveness, to dissipate one’s abilities in planning retribution. There is no peace in the nursing of a grudge.*”<sup>3</sup> To strive earnestly not to offend is a Christian virtue. To strive earnestly not to take offense is a Christian virtue at least as important. We need both virtues desperately.

Over the years that I have served as a priesthood leader, I’ve been asked many times for my counsel or advice by young people who are approaching marriage. Thirty years ago I would have spent an hour listing the sixty-two vital things to be kept in mind as they approach the marriage altar, but time has brought a bit of realism and hopefully a bit of wisdom with it. The last time a couple asked me for my advice I responded: “Are you sure you want advice from me?”

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<sup>3</sup> *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 228.

Hasn't everyone and their dog offered you some form of advice?" The couple replied: "Yes, but we'd be very interested in knowing what you think." I took a deep breath and said: "This won't take long." And it didn't. I think I may have spent five or ten minutes with them in discussing what I now consider to be one of the most significant pieces of advice that might be offered—I simply suggested that the couple do everything in their power to institute in their relationship and in their individual hearts two principles which were really two sides of the same coin.

I encouraged, as did Mormon, that they pray with all the energy of heart to be filled with the kind of love (Moroni 7:48) that would assist them in making a daily choice not to take offense. Practically speaking, if John comes home from work and greets his wife, Mary, happily, only to be confronted with a biting or painful comment, John will not yield to the natural man who always chooses to take offense. (The natural man within all of us would in this situation say: "Well, so that's how she responds to my loving greeting. I'll show her—I'll slip into the silent treatment and ignore her for the rest of the night. Or I may even choose the right moment to say something sarcastic.")

The man or woman who is truly committed to perpetuating the Spirit of the Lord in their home and who is likewise committed to achieving a celestial marriage will, over time, think the following: "Bless her heart. She must have had a difficult day. I'll quietly move about the house and see where I can help, whether it be picking up the children's toys, doing the dishes, or offering a bit of encouragement where it is needed. I know she loves me, and so I know that she would never do anything to purposely hurt me." This attitude represents the second side of the coin, namely, that happy and enduring marriages are made up of persons who have chosen to assume the best. It does require discipline, but such a discipline is borne of more than dogged determination and will power; once again, it is a fruit of the Spirit, a product of yielding our heart

unto God and allowing Him to conform us to the image of Jesus, the one person who lived above offense and grudge-holding.

Besides, when I choose to hurt my companion, I am essentially choosing to hurt myself. We have been commanded by the Lord to become one—one in flesh, one in purpose, one in outlook, one in mind and heart. To sin against my companion is to sin against the union, the very institution that God intends to eternalize. This is why Paul wrote that husbands and wives should submit themselves to one another “in the fear of God,” to love one another as Christ loved the Church “and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:21, 25).

It occurred to me a few months ago that other than the great act of Atonement in which our Lord and Savior made forgiveness and cleansing available to all humankind, Jesus was never required to forgive another person for anything they did against Him. Why so? Simply because He never chose to take offense. Is that not a mind-boggling thing to consider? While most all of us have miles and miles to go before we rest (in terms of our spiritual maturity and thus our capacity to forgive in this manner), our Lord holds out the ideal; He models the fact that you and I can find greater joy and fulfillment can see greater purpose to life and can avoid the unnecessary burdens of grudges and unconforted memories by choosing not to take offense. As John MacArthur has written, “If anyone ever had good reason not to forgive, it was the Lord Jesus. He was the ultimate and only true victim—totally innocent of any wrongdoing. He never wronged another individual, never spoke a lie, never committed an unkind or unloving act, never broke the law of God, never had an impure thought. He never yielded to any evil temptation whatsoever. . . . No one was *less* worthy of death than He. Even the evil Roman governor

Pontius Pilate testified repeatedly, 'I find no guilt in this man.' . . . Forgiveness was what filled his heart, not condemnation or revenge."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus ate and drank with sinners. He occasionally companied with those who were considered to be on the lower crust of society. He befriended the underdog and was kind to the castoff. Because there was no insecurity within Him, because He was guided always by the knowledge of who He was and whose He was, He felt no need to put on airs, manage appearances, or be socially selective. When someone spoke to Jesus, surely they had His full attention.

It is so easy for those of us who aspire to Christian discipleship to be driven by what others think, to allow our conversation and our conduct to be determined by less than noble motives. It is so simple to be drawn into duplicity, to become obsessed with whose opinion matters and whose company would bring the most mortal medals. But the lowly Nazarene calls us to a higher righteousness. He bids us to follow where He has led, to become a friend to all. I know what it feels like to be conversing with someone, only to have that conversation interrupted by a man or woman of greater social stature. I know what it feels like for the person with whom I was conversing to then ignore or shun me, to turn his attention to the one who seems to matter most at the moment. I also have been in the presence of persons whose hearts are unconcerned with society's pecking order, men and women who love people, not position. The former category of persons are those who tend to distinguish people in terms of rank and place in society; theirs is a degrading and demoralizing perspective and influence. On the other hand, those who have risen above the temptation to exclude or divide or distinguish in terms of getting ahead make a significant difference in the world. They bless lives.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 31, 32.

### Forgiveness in the Heart

In a modern revelation, the Lord, speaking through the Prophet Joseph, sets forth a fact that we all understand—Joseph Smith, while a prophet of God and the Lord’s appointed spokesman, was not perfect. “There are those who have sought occasion against him without cause; nevertheless, he has sinned; but verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death.” We are then given insight into a deeply significant point—that it is one thing to express forgiveness with the mouth, to say that all is well, to profess that you have moved on—and quite another to forgive our offender *in our hearts*. “My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened” (D&C 64:8). “So many of us are prone to say we forgive,” President Gordon B. Hinckley pointed out, “when in fact we are unwilling to forget. If the Lord is willing to forget the sins of the repentant, then why are so many of us inclined to bring up the past again and again? Here is a great lesson we all need to learn. There is no true forgiveness without forgetting.”<sup>5</sup>

I am very much aware that there are those who have been subjected to much of pain and distress in their lives, to abuse, to neglect, to the agonies of wanting more than anything to live a normal life and to feel normal feelings, but who seem unable to do so. I would say, first of all, that each one of us, whoever we are, wrestles with something. Perhaps it’s things like my weight or height or complexion or baldness or I.Q. Perhaps it’s stuff that passes in time like a phase. Perhaps it’s the torture of watching helplessly as loved ones choose unwisely and thereby close

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<sup>5</sup> *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 230.

doors of opportunity for themselves and foreclose future privileges. And then there are the terrible traumas in our life, those occasions when someone we love does despite to our tender trust and deals a blow that strikes at the center of all we hold dear and all we value about ourselves.

I know that the day is coming when all the wrongs, the awful wrongs of this life, will be righted. I bear witness that the God of justice will attend to all evil. And I certify that those things that are beyond our power to control will be corrected, either here or hereafter. Many of us may come to enjoy the lifting, liberating powers of the Atonement in this life and all our losses will be made up before we pass from this sphere of existence. Perhaps some of us will wrestle all our days with our traumas, for He who orchestrates the events of our lives will surely fix the time of our release. I have a conviction that when a person passes through the veil of death, all those impediments and challenges and crosses that were beyond his or her power to control—abuse, neglect, immoral environment, weighty traditions, etc.—will be torn away like a film and perfect peace will prevail in our hearts. “Some frustrations,” Elder Boyd K. Packer taught, “we must endure without really solving the problem. Some things that ought to be put in order are not put in order because we cannot control them. Things we cannot solve, we must survive.”<sup>6</sup>

Our Lord and Master seems to ask of us the impossible—to forgive those who have hurt us so dreadfully. As Bruce and Marie Hafen have observed, “It seems fair to ask why the victims of abuse should be required to do anything to deserve the Lord’s vast healing powers in such a case. Because abuse victims suffer so many of the same symptoms of guilt and estrangement from God as do willful transgressors, the irony that they should need to forgive those who have wronged them is almost overpowering.

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<sup>6</sup> Conference Report, October 1987, 20.

“Still, there lurks between the lines of the scriptures on forgiveness a message of transcendent meaning—not only about abuse victims but about all of us, and about all of the Atonement.”

The Hafens continue: “What are we doing when we are willing to absorb a terrible trauma of the spirit, caused not by our own doing but by one who claimed to love us—and we absorb the trauma even to help the sinner? That picture somehow has a familiar look—we’ve seen all this before. Of course, because this picture depicts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: He took upon Himself undeserved and unbearable burdens, heaped upon Him by people who often said, and often believed, that they loved Him. And He assumed that load not for any need of His, but only to help them.

“So to forgive—not just for abuse victims, but for each of us—is to be a Christ figure, a transitional point in the war between good and evil, stopping the current of evil by absorbing it in every pore, thereby protecting the innocent next generation and helping to enable the repentance and healing of those whose failures sent the jolts into our own systems.”<sup>7</sup>

We are called upon to “work out [our] own salvation.” How do we do that? Is it even possible? No man or woman can save themselves; they simply do not have the power to do so. But note the next verse: “For *it is God which worketh in you* both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13, emphasis added). We do have an obligation to cooperate with God in the salvation of our souls. While the ultimate power of change is in Christ, we can do our part and choose to be changed.

The grace of God is not just that final divine boost into celestial glory that a gracious Father and benevolent Savior provide at the time of judgment. We will, to be sure, require all the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Belonging Heart* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 122–23.

help we can get in order to be prepared to go where God and angels are and feel comfortable there; at the same time, grace is something we have access to every hour of every day of every year. “True grace,” as one writer has explained, “is more than just a giant freebie, opening the door to heaven in the sweet by and by, but leaving us to wallow in sin in the bitter here and now. Grace is God presently at work in our lives.”<sup>8</sup> As we noted earlier, it is through the grace of God “that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, *receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means.* This grace is *an enabling power* that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts.”<sup>9</sup> The Lord provides for His followers a strength, an energy, a living power. It is by this means, by this new life in Christ, that we do what we could not do on our own. Paul taught that “being now justified by [Christ’s] blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the *death* of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by *his life*” (Romans 5:9–10, emphasis added).

I have been inspired over the years in working with those saintly persons who are seeking to recover from abuse, desertion, or betrayal. I have had reaffirmed, from witnessing their vexations of the soul, the eternal verity that mortals can do only so much in their feeble efforts to right the wrongs of this life. I have been deeply touched as I have beheld a miracle in process—their growing capacity to forgive. In our first meeting, there might have been much of bitterness and even of hatred expressed. As time passes, however, and as the Spirit of the Lord begins to work its marvelous wonders in the human heart, I hear the offended one say things like: “Well, I

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<sup>8</sup> John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 32.

<sup>9</sup> LDS Bible Dictionary, 697, emphasis added.

don't hate him (or her) any more. I don't want to be his closest friend, but I don't hate him. I can't." Then later I hear the following: "I am still troubled by what happened, but I no longer have bitter feelings toward this person." And then I hear: "I hope things work out for him. I deeply hope he can get his act together and straighten out. I want him to be happy." What a stunning illustration of a rebirth of the soul. Darkness and despair are replaced by light and peace. Doubt is replaced by confidence. Rancor is replaced by tenderness and magnanimity. Such a power, the power to take away the pain, turn away the anger, and put away the past—such a power is not of this earth.

The Cosmic Christ who creates and redeems worlds without number is the same gentle and Good Shepherd who goes in search of one wandering sheep. He who holds all things in His power is the same who stills the storms of the human heart by a healing touch. But we must be willing to open ourselves to that tender touch. "Jesus never met a disease he could not cure, a birth defect he could not reverse, a demon he could not exorcise. But he did meet skeptics he could not convince and sinners he could not convert. Forgiveness of sins requires an act of will on the receiver's part, and some who heard Jesus' strongest words about grace and forgiveness turned away unrepentant."<sup>10</sup>

We have never been promised a life of ease or an existence free from strain and anxiety. We have not been promised that we would be spared the bitter potions of this life. We have been assured that we are not alone, that if we trust in and rely upon His mighty arm, we will be empowered and comforted in our trials, delivered eventually out of bondage (Mosiah 24:14). Truly, "The Lord . . . gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalms 147:2–3).

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 174–75.

For me, one of the most haunting verses of scripture is the verse that follows what we quoted above from the 64<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Savior continues: “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for *there remaineth in him the greater sin*” (D&C 64:9; emphasis added). How could this be? What if, for example, one of my daughters was raped and murdered by a vile and vicious man? What if he came to me and begged my forgiveness for what he had done, expressing deep contrition in his heinous deed? On the other hand, what if he sneered at me, laughed about what he had done, and mocked the sacredness of what he had stolen from me and my wife? How do these two situations differ in terms of my propensity to forgive? Obviously we are much more prone to forgive one who is repentant and a little more eager to extend forgiveness and fellowship to one we sense is fully humble and broken and repentant. But what if he is not? The fact of the matter is, and this is the difficulty associated with forgiveness, from the Lord’s vantage point it makes no difference. “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds” (D&C 64:10–11).

No thinking person would suggest that forgiveness of any kind is easy, especially when the offense visits tragedy and trauma upon individuals and families. Our Lord, however, does not expect us to solve this dilemma on our own, to conjure up some inner resources that would enable us to forgive. Rather, the only way we can come to forgive from the heart is to have what might be called a “blood transfusion”: we must trust in the power of the blood of Christ and allow it (through the power of the Holy Spirit) to transform our minds and our hearts (Romans 12:1–2), our thoughts, and our feelings. Forgiveness from the heart is an act that takes place

because of a divine infusion of grace, a product of being empowered beyond our own abilities and capacities. As one prominent Christian leader observed, “If we keep in perspective how much God forgave, and how much it cost Him to forgive, we will soon realize that no transgression against us can ever justify an unforgiving spirit. Christians who hold grudges or refuse to forgive others have lost sight of what their own forgiveness involved.”<sup>11</sup>

The German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has reminded us of the Master’s call for Christian soldiers to deny themselves of ungodliness and take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23). “The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest,” Bonhoeffer observed. “Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. . . . While it is true that only the sufferings of Christ are a means of atonement, yet since he has suffered for and borne the sins of the whole world and shares with his disciples the fruits of his passion, the Christian also has to undergo temptation, he too has to bear the sins of others; he too must bear their shame and be driven like a scapegoat from the gate of the city. But he would certainly break down under this burden, but for the support of him who bore the sins of all. *The passion of Christ strengthens us to overcome the sins of others by forgiving them. . . . My brother’s burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share.*”<sup>12</sup>

### **On Forgiving Ourselves**

There is a sense in which life and death are defined in terms of one another. In a way, we must die as pertaining to premortality in order to be born into mortality. We must die here as

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<sup>11</sup> MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 29–30.

<sup>12</sup> *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 98–100.

pertaining to sin and evil in order to be born unto righteousness. We must die as pertaining to mortality in order to be born unto immortality and eternal life. We must be born. We must die. That is the plan. “Know ye not,” the Apostle Paul wrote, “that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” That is to say, to be baptized unto Christ is to participate in and incorporate His Atonement by symbolic action. We go down into the watery grave and come forth unto new life, new life in Christ. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3–4). The Messiah needed to die before he could be quickened (John 12:24). So too with us. We must put to death the old person of sin in order to be transformed, to be quickened by the power of God. Then we walk in newness of life.

“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death,” Paul continued, “we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5). Another translation of this passage renders it: “For if we have become *identified with him* in his death, we shall also be identified with him in his resurrection” (The Revised English Bible, emphasis added). Truly, in the life to come we will come forth from the grave as Christ the First Fruits has shown us. In addition, those who come unto Christ with full purpose of heart in this life, who “offer [their] whole souls as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26), who sacrifice the natural man on the altar of redemption, are quickened, made alive to the things of the Spirit. In summary, the execution of the will of our Lord and Master in our lives requires the execution of our old selves and the birth of a new person.

“The more you obey your conscience,” C. S. Lewis stated, “the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and

worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, ‘live for others’ but always in a discontented, grumbling way. . . .

“The Christian way is different: harder and easier. Christ says ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: *I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it.* No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. *Hand over the whole natural self,* all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. *I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.*”<sup>13</sup>

To have *put on Christ*, to have come unto Him, is to have put off the natural man and to have opened ourselves to a new creation. This is, in fact, what is meant by the word *baptism*. The words *bapto* or *baptizo* did indeed have to do with immersion, but, more specifically, what something is like after it has been immersed. Thus if we immerse a white cloth in scarlet dye, we say that the cloth has been baptized; it has been immersed and has come forth with a new identity. It is like a new cloth.

We do not dwell on what or who we once were, for we have been changed. We are a new creation, a new creature in Christ. “This one thing I do,” Paul wrote to another group of Saints, “*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:13–14, emphasis added).

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<sup>13</sup> *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 169, emphasis added.

We as mortals simply do not have the power to fix everything that is broken. Complete restitution, as we know it, may not be possible. President Boyd K. Packer explained that “sometimes you *cannot* give back what you have taken because you don’t have it to give. If you have caused others to suffer unbearably—defiled someone’s virtue, for example—it is not within your power to give it back. . . .

“If you cannot undo what you have done, you are trapped. It is easy to understand how helpless and hopeless you then feel and why you might want to give up, just as Alma did.

“The thought that rescued Alma, when he acted upon it, is this: *Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.*

“When your desire is firm and you are willing to pay ‘the uttermost farthing’ (see Matthew 5:25–26), the law of restitution is suspended. *Your obligation is transferred to the Lord. He will settle your accounts.*”<sup>14</sup>

The story is told of a woman who visited President Joseph Fielding Smith. She had been guilty of serious transgression but had fully repented and now just wanted to find her way. She had great difficulty forgiving herself, even though she had complied with the laws and principles of repentance. President Smith asked her to read to him from Genesis the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Lot’s wife being turned to a pillar of salt. He asked her what lesson was to be learned. She answered, tearfully: “The message of that story is that God will destroy the wicked.” “Not so,” President Smith told this repentant woman. “The message for you is: *‘Don’t look back!’*”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Conference Report, October 1995, 22–23, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Boyd K. Packer, “The Fountain of Life,” 1992 BYU fireside address.

I am afraid that too often we are much harsher judges of our actions and deeds than the Almighty would ever be. It seems to me that we need to pray without ceasing to be endowed with the spirit of mercy, with that spirit that would cause us to see our brothers and sisters—and ourselves—as God sees us. We need to pray without ceasing to be filled with charity or the pure love of Christ, so that we may feel toward our brothers and sisters—and ourselves—as God does. We need to pray, as we suggested earlier in this work, that God will bless us to feel what we ought to feel. I certainly don't want to feel any more guilt than I should, but then I don't want to feel any less, either. Truly, “if our heart condemn us, *God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*” (1 John 3:20, emphasis added). We need to learn to trust God's elevated perspective and His judgment more than we trust our own. In time, and through the quiet but steady workings of the Holy Spirit, our condemning heart will give way to mercy, will open itself to holy love, will enable us to see and feel things as they really are.

As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has encouraged us, “when God has forgiven us, which He is so eternally anxious to do, may we have the good sense to walk away from those problems, to leave them alone, to let the past bury the past. If one of you has made a mistake, even a serious mistake, but you have done all you can according to the teachings of the Lord and the governance of the Church to confess it and feel sorrow for it and set it as right as can be, then trust in God, walk into His light, and leave those ashes behind you.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Life is too short for us to pout and ignore and tolerate. Life is too short for us to allow unhappy dealings or grudges to fester and canker the human heart. “Life is too short,” Elder

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<sup>16</sup> *Trusting Jesus* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 86.

Holland observed, “to be spent nursing animosities or keeping a box score of offenses against us—you know, no runs, no hits, all errors. We don’t want God to remember our sins, so there is something fundamentally wrong in our relentlessly trying to remember those of others.”<sup>17</sup>

As Christians, we have a responsibility, not just to deal with those toward whom we feel unkindly but, more poignantly, with those whom we know who have hard feelings toward us (Matthew 5:23–24). We may be tempted to say cavalierly, “Well, that’s their problem!” In fact, it is our problem too, inasmuch as we are the object of their bitter feelings. We must do all we can do to make things right, to alleviate bad feelings, to settle the matter. At the same time, Elder Boyd K. Packer pointed out that “Some frustrations we must endure without really solving the problem. Some things that ought to be put in order are not put in order because we cannot control them. Things we cannot solve, we must survive.

“If you resent someone for something he has done—or failed to do—forget it.

“Too often the things we carry are petty, even stupid. If you are still upset after all these years because Aunt Clara didn’t come to your wedding reception, why don’t you grow up and forget it?

“If you brood constantly over a loss or a past mistake, look ahead—settle it.

“We call that forgiveness. Forgiveness is powerful spiritual medicine. To extend forgiveness, that soothing balm, to those who have offended you is to heal. And, more difficult yet, when the need is there, forgive yourself! . . .

“Purge and cleanse and soothe your soul and your heart and your mind and that of others.

“A cloud will then be lifted, a beam cast from your eye. There will come that peace which surpasseth understanding.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Trusting Jesus*, 87.

The longer I live the more I become concerned about what might be called “the sins of the heart,” such matters as jealousy, pride, arrogance, self-seeking, and envy. These are bitter enemies of the soul and, though seemingly small and indiscernible, are major roadblocks to deeper spirituality. They block the channel of divine grace, pollute the ground on which we walk, and stifle the righteous influence we might have on others. Similarly, one who refuses to forgive—knowing, as we have observed, how very difficult this may be—is one who denies himself access to the cleansing, sanctifying, and soul-inspiring love of God, a love that purifies us and prepares us to be with Him and like Him who is the embodiment of charity (Moroni 7:48).

The antidote to abuse and betrayal and mistrust is charity. The antidote to bitterness and anger is charity. The antidote to an unwillingness to forgive is charity. That pure love of Christ is not something we merely work on. Rather, we must ask for charity. We must plead for it. We must pray, as Mormon counseled, with all the energy of heart, that we might have it bestowed upon us (Moroni 7:48). As we do so, there will come moments of surpassing import, sublime moments that matter, moments in which we know that what we are feeling for God and His children is akin to what God feels for us. This Christ-centered love settles the hearts of individuals. It provides moral courage to those who must face difficult challenges. It unites and seals husbands, wives, and children and grants them a foretaste of heaven. It welds quorums and classes and wards and stakes into a union that is the foundation for Zion, the society of the pure in heart. And, once again, it comes from that Lord who is the Source of all that is godlike. It is thus to Jesus Christ that we look—in this endeavor, as in all others—to obtain charity, “the

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<sup>18</sup> Conference Report, October 1987, 20.

highest pinnacle the human soul can reach and the deepest expression of the human heart.”<sup>19</sup>

And, as the Apostle Paul testified, there is a sacred sealing, a binding tie associated with that love. “I am persuaded,” he wrote to the Romans, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

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<sup>19</sup> Howard W. Hunter, Conference Report, April 1992, 85.