

CULTIVATED *in* CHRIST

SIGNIFICANT GROWTH &
REWARDS COME *as we*
REACH UPWARD



THOMAS HOLTON

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Beckoned by Our Loving Lord

I am deeply grateful that our merciful Lord invites us with deep longing to come to Him so that we might eat “the *fruit of the tree of life*” and “*eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely*” (Alma 5:33–34, emphasis added). God is redemptively reaching out to each one of us. He is pleading with us with outstretched arms to repent and be made new. Our Savior is offering us blessings beyond compare. He wants to give us living bread, living water, and eternal joys. This promise goes to all willing to receive His word. When Lehi related his visionary dream of the tree of life, he said he saw “*a man, and he was dressed in a white robe*” who “*bade me follow him*” (1 Nephi 8:5–6). This heavenly messenger interacts like our Savior!

Lehi accepted this invitation to follow. However, this led him to an unknown place and through dark territory. After Lehi traveled for “*many hours in darkness*,” he prayed to God according to the “*multitude of his tender mercies*” (1 Nephi 8:8). God answered this sincere request affirmatively. He blessed Lehi not only with comfort and light, but also tremendous happiness, love, and joy for him and his loved ones. The fruit of the tree was “*desirable to make one happy*,” “*most sweet*,” “*exceedingly white*,” and the eating of it filled Lehi with “*exceedingly great joy*” (1 Nephi 8:10–12).

When Lehi experienced this rich outpouring of joy from God, he eagerly sought for his wife and children to receive the same blessings. Notice that Lehi had to intentionally search for his family (1 Nephi 8:13–17). Sariah, Sam, and Nephi were in a state of confusion. They did not know which way to go and needed guidance. Seeing their need, Lehi motioned to them. He signalled to them to catch their attention. He spoke out loud and instructed them to come to him and partake of joy at the tree of joy. They followed his word and were blessed with joy. Lehi was a beckoning prophet, an inviting servant, a messenger of mercy. As he had been granted light and love, he offered the same opportunity to his family. He encouraged others to come to the source of salvation. He also wanted Laman and Lemuel to come to the tree. He searched for and saw them, and invited them to come, but they would not.

After Lehi awoke from his dream, he did not forget the lessons he learned. His love was deepened, his concern awakened, and his understanding broadened. Lehi was worried for his children. He implored them to seek the Lord of life! (1 Nephi 8:36–38). I love this because I know what it is to feel tender love and regard for a child. He showed loving interest in Laman and Lemuel and wanted them to discover divine mercy. He therefore preached and prophesied to them. His teaching was motivated by true concern! Rather than accepting his dream as the final word, he determined to continue to try to

reach them. Impressively, he bade them to be obedient. He put into practice what he saw himself previously doing in his dream! We can do likewise. When the Lord reveals the future to us in inspiring ways, we can turn that inspired direction into reality. We can act in love toward those our concern reaches. Our feelings and faith may move them to come to God. This is especially pertinent when our loved ones are involved.

THE MEANING OF THE TREE OF LIFE

Nephi prayed to see the interpretation of his Father's vision and saw a similar vision of his own! He also was guided by heavenly messengers. He asked an angel what the interpretation of the tree of life was. Then the angel showed him a vision of the mortal mother of the Son of God and the birth of the Savior into the world (1 Nephi 11:18–23). I approach these beautiful concepts reverently. Notice that the tree of life signifies the love of God. This love does not remain within the heart of God only. Rather it sheds itself far outward into the hearts of God's children on earth. It is key to note that this divine love is manifest in a very specific way. It is revealed through the condescension of the Father to bring a very special child into the world. It is shown in Jehovah's willingness to be born as the Son of the Highest on a fallen temporal earth, to a mortal woman. It is known by a woman who is lifted by the power of the Holy Ghost to experience sublime and sacred destiny. A holy human virgin becomes the bearing vessel for God's tangible gift to the entire world.

This tree of life is therefore a representation of the light-filled love of both the Father and the Son as revealed in the coming of the holy Son into this world to save all from sin and death. This active and evidenced love is the most wanted of all things and the most joyful when experienced. Thus, the love of God lodges within our souls through the infinite and eternal Atonement of Christ. It finds its most profound and ultimate fulfillment in eternal life—as the children of men are raised to dwell everlastingly in the literal love-filled presence of God. This is deep-seated, majestic, and transformative love that must be felt personally to be comprehended.

In speaking of the birth of our Lord, consider this beautiful Christmas Carol, based on Isaiah 11:1–10:

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,
From tender stem hath sprung.
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As men of old have sung;
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind;
To show God's love aright,
She bore to men a Savior,

When half spent was the night.
O Flower, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispel with glorious splendour
The darkness everywhere;
True man, yet very God,
From Sin and death now save us,
And share our every load.

“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming” was written as a translation of the German words into English by Doctor Theodore Baker in 1894.

The message is that Christ is the rose that blooms from the stem of Jesse. This righteous Rose was born on a cold, dark night to show that God's love is a warm light in the winter of our souls. As roses have thorns, so His ministry would be both painful and beautiful. This flower would bring to the world a sweet tenderness. This dual person, being both man and God, would shine His light upon all humanity. He would rescue all from the otherwise insurmountable barriers of sin and death between us and God. What a tender telling in words of the visionary prophecy of Isaiah about the mortal birth of the Messiah!

I am grateful to know that the rod of iron—the word of God—leads to the tree. Hence:

The word of God leads us to the life of God.

The law of God leads us to the love of God.

The prophet of God points us to the Son of God.

The message of God brings us to the fruitful blessings of God.

The scriptures of God draw us to the family of God.

The messenger of God (the Holy Ghost) guides us to the literal presence of the Almighty God and His perfect Son.

In contrast to this, the mockers in the great and spacious building, the filthy waters, the mists of darkness, the strange roads—all these lead us away from the living love of God to a condition of spiritual death. Disobedience to the voice of God takes us away from all the things that should be the most valuable to us—life, love, blessings, family, God, and His Son. Thankfully, the path to the tree of life leads all those who pursue it to the same destination. It is a symbol of the covenant path which always leads to the Lord of Life!

Nephi teaches us that the Book of Mormon would “*make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father*” (1 Nephi 13:40). Thus, it is made known to all the world—to all the lost and dispersed children of God—that Christ is truly the Lamb of the Father, the Son of the Almighty, the seed of the Highest. It is He that brings men back from the brink. He gathers them into the

covenant of the eternal family. We are rescued from death through the Lamb slain in our place. In His death, we find life.

Nephi further tells us that the Holy Spirit makes Gentiles beautiful by bringing them into the covenant (1 Nephi 13:15). As the fruit of the tree of life is beautiful, so persons touched by God's influence come to radiate light, goodness, and loveliness. There is a renewing effect that comes upon those who enter an abiding covenant relationship with God. The Gentiles would prosper in the promised land through faithfulness to God's covenant. To prosper in a land of inheritance is to enter the great promised land of Zion on earth—and the eternal promised land of celestial heaven in the eternities. That is a land of promise that we never have to leave!

Nor is it just the Gentiles that are to be brought to salvation. As the house was Israel was like an olive tree, so the family of Lehi was a branch broken from that tree (1 Nephi 15:12). Nephi observed that his father Lehi spoke of the seed of the family of Israel. He specifically pointed to the covenantal promises to Father Abraham relating to his children blessing the entire world with the gospel in the last days being fulfilled (1 Nephi 15:18). Hence, the seed of Manasseh was to be remembered and restored to covenant Israel in the latter days. The broken off branch was to be reconnected to the living olive tree. Indeed, the house of Israel—the children of Jacob—would offer covenant salvation to every family that would ever live on this earth. The house (tree or family) of Israel, was to be unified in righteous covenant connection once again. This was to happen through the covenant redemption performed by Christ in a garden of olive trees and on the cross (tree) of calvary. This everlasting covenant was to be made newly available in the last days and brought to full fruition. It would not be broken, wasted, destroyed, or left incomplete. The tree was not to be one of death or dissolution. Rather, it was to be a living tree. Nephi explained to his brothers that the tree of Lehi's dream was a "representation of the tree of life" (1 Nephi 15:21–22). Family life originates with God!

After explaining these mighty things to his brothers and to us, Nephi explains that he was deeply interested in the salvation of others. He was a loving beckoner, an articulate inviter, a consistent preacher. This he did with great conscientiousness and capacity—"with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed" (1 Nephi 15:25, emphasis added).

Nephi explained that the fruit of the tree represented eternal life and was "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, emphasis added). The tree of life is the great symbol of the Father and the Son. It is the tree of love. It is the unified family of God in time and eternity. To experience this divine eternal family love and life is the greatest blessing we can ever aspire to. We should want nothing more. There is no greater treasure in time and eternity than to be part of the exalted intergenerational family of God.

We can therefore escape all evil only through divine goodness and loving kindness. The loving joy of God protects us from self-imposed tragedy. There is a marked difference between partaking of the exceedingly great joy that follows obedience (1 Nephi 8:12) and the spiritual rebellion which will cause us to be lost (1 Nephi 8:23, 32), ashamed (1 Nephi 8:27), fallen away (1 Nephi 8:28, 34), drowned (1 Nephi 8:32), to lose the opportunity to partake of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:35), and be cast off from the presence of the Lord (1 Nephi 8:36).

This message is elsewhere in scripture. The righteous who seek salvation in the Savior are like unto “a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither” (Psalms 1:3). Also, I love the Messianic Psalm of King David:

THE LORD *is my shepherd*; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he *leadeth me* beside the still waters.

He *restoreth my soul*: he *leadeth me* in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *thou art with me*; thy rod and thy staff they *comfort me*.

Thou *preparest a table* before me in the presence of mine enemies: *thou anointest my head* with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely *goodness and mercy shall follow me* all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the *house* of the Lord for ever. (Psalms 23:1–6, emphasis added)

To me, these verses reflect the vision of the tree of life. I imagine in my mind’s eye that David is a traveler in that vision setting. It is as if Christ is standing beside the tree of life, inviting David to come to the tree. David is familiar with the green grasslands of nourishment and the still waters of peace, where he knows refreshment and renewal. He has walked on the covenant path. However, he also knows the lowlands of dark shadows, the mist of darkness. He knows what it is to have enemies who mock him from the great and spacious building. He knows fear, danger, and dread. He also knows what it is to have the Lord lead him and be with him. He has experienced the comfort of holding to the rod of the word of God and the power of God’s mighty assistance. He knows firsthand of the food and water that come from a divine source. He also rejoices in the good mercy of God to him. Indeed, he talks of the oil of anointing and the house of ordinances and covenants. This clearly refers to the House of Holiness—the temple of our God.

I love the reality that God’s accompaniment is displayed in terms of natural abundance from the throne of Grace. I regard this testimony from David as being like that given by Lehi and Nephi. We are all in this mortal mist of darkness sometimes. We are journeying through a treacherous lone and dreary world, with wolves at our heels. There is darkness and temptation around us. There are snares and pitfalls before us. However, God has foreseen our difficulty and has prepared a course for us to follow. He has given many signs of His refreshing, guiding, warning, and supporting hand along the way. Eventually, if we follow the path of uprightness, we will be able to come out of this trail of tears into a far better land of promise. God discerns our difficulty and sees us as someone worth helping and saving. The purpose of this sojourn is not for God to trick us or derail us—it is to teach us by experience of the profound difference between good and evil, so that we may choose the good. This good is God’s greatest good.

A Good Beginning

Let us now consider the inspiring encounter between the premortal Jehovah and the prophet Moses (Moses 1). This is an illuminating revelation because it helps us to see both God and His servant in their true light. God calls Moses by name. God loves conducting personal one-to-one interviews with His children! He tells him the beautiful truth that he is of divine parentage and lineage. Speaking in the stead of the Father, Jehovah is referring to Moses as a spirit son of God. Moses is also told he is in the similitude—meaning image and likeness—of the Only Begotten. That is to say that Moses and Jehovah are similar. This is powerful because it shows that men can be like God! Moses is like unto the Messiah. Moses has a measure of grace and truth. God calls him a son of God living in a mortal world. God paints a picture for him by showing this son a special and remarkable vision. Moses gets to see this world, this earth, from the divine vantage point. God reveals His children to Moses. This is spectacularly new and impressive to the prophet. This revelation is wonderfully awe inspiring. God is in the business of surprising us! Moses was transfixed on what he was experiencing because this was a divine engagement of epic proportions.

God revealed to Moses that he was known to, and seen by, Him. His true nature and identity were apparent to God. His purpose and mission were part of a divine design! Moses also gets to see what God focuses on—His beloved Son, and all the other spirit children created by God, pertaining to this earth. God is an attention-paying being. He sees and knows His children. This was a pivotal revelation to Moses, as he was to be a type of the Messiah who would yet deliver all people. Moses was to teach the Israelites that salvation comes through the blood of the Lamb (Exodus 12:5–7). He was to set the people free from Egyptian bondage. Moses would provide a model for living for millions of people as the great lawgiver of Israel. So much of our legal and moral inheritance is based on the Ten Commandments. As a chosen son of Levi, Moses was of the seed of Abraham. He brought his people out of Egypt (the world) toward the promised land of Canaan. This was a necessary part of God’s design in bringing His people to a holy place on the earth (a great symbol of the ultimate Holy Place in heaven). As he delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so Christ would deliver those who looked to Him, from temporal and spiritual death (Alma 33:19–20, Helaman 8:14–15).

God sees the divinity within us, as He placed it there! He knows our capacity for goodness and our mission of greatness. He notices when we strive to develop further. Restored doctrine teaches two connected ideas in this respect. Firstly, God is good (2 Nephi 9:10). Secondly, you, as a child of God, can have great desires for goodness (Alma

41:3–5).

THE GOODNESS OF OUR GOD

We can see in holy writ that God is good (Psalm 145:5–7) and that the aim of human discipleship is eventually for us to become as good as God is (3 Nephi 12:48). The goodness of God is described as immediate (Mosiah 25:10), supreme (Alma 12:32), exceeding (Alma 60:11), great (3 Nephi 4:33), and infinite (Helaman 12:1, Moroni 8:3). Through Him we can partake of much good (2 Nephi 3:24) and every good (Moroni 7:20–22, 25, 28). The goodness of God is bound up with His nature, character, and identity (2 Nephi 9:8–26). Also, it is a goodness aimed at blessing others. In fact, His great goodness is directed toward you. Yes, you, the reader of this book. You, personally. He is good to you. He is good for you. He is good with you. His goodness is within you!

GOD SEES GOODNESS IN YOU

God's purpose and plan is to see goodness in you. He also aims to enlarge and increase your goodness, far beyond what you presently envision. He sees great potential in you (Doctrine & Covenants 76:5–10). He knows there are hidden treasures in you. He has detected your specialness, observed your uniqueness, seen your capacity, and witnessed your ability. He is completely aware of your life, background, opportunities, difficulties, challenges, circumstances, and possibilities. In truth, He can see elements of His grand goodness in you. He is cognizant of your divine nature and your spectacular capability for truth and beauty. This is a great joy to Him. He rejoices in your goodness and seeks to magnify your virtues, expand your horizons, elevate your vision, and bring to fruition your greatest aspirations (1 Corinthians 2:9).

We know that these things are true by the great revelations to the seer Abraham restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We are told that God “saw” that the noble and great spirits were “good” (Abraham 3:23). Think of that! Even before we were born into this mortal world, we possessed the seeds of divine greatness within us. We were good. And that goodness was seen by the Supreme Being Himself. *He saw goodness in us!* Ponder the significance of that. He saw a measure of His great goodness—in embryo—within us. Now, that speaks volumes about our divine nature and potential. If God Himself views us as good, then surely, we are good! A perspective like that can tremendously boost our sense of confidence in ourselves. This does not cause us to be arrogant, but deeply humble and sincerely grateful.

This vantage point is not limited to pre-earth life, but it applies to mortality also. Nor is it limited to only prophets and apostles. It is the divine birthright of all who accept the plan of the Father and the appointment of Jehovah as the Great Mediator of all (Abraham 3: 26, Alma 13). We carry that goodness within us to this life. How important it is that we perceive this goodness within us and do all we can to cultivate it to greater heights in this mortal sphere. In this frail world, God's goodness manifest through His children is desperately needed!

Indeed, we are further instructed that God personally conversed with the prophet Abraham in mortality and displayed in loving terms the wonderful gifts of a generous Father to a cared for child. He called him “My son” and “he *put his hand upon mine eyes*, and I *saw* those things which his hands had made” (Abraham 3:11–12, emphasis added). This is a beautiful revelation because it teaches us that God is personally invested in our growth and development. His touch, His words, His kindness, His appreciation, and His desire to bless were all manifest to Abraham in a way that could never be forgotten. In addition, God showed Abraham marvelous works and wonders which astonished and educated him. He could not even have imagined these things unless his eyes had been opened to see spiritual truth in a whole new way. It is likewise with us. We can come to see with new eyes and hear with new ears. We have capacity to open our hearts and catch the great vision of our stunning nature and potential. We are to be taught and trained in the truths of eternity. We are to be given the gifts that surpass all mortal understanding. This is to happen to each one of us, as we become willing and able to see with the eye of faith.

ONE UNIQUE PERSON

It is common to hear references to self-esteem, self-worth, self-development, and self-fulfillment in society. I have listened with intense interest to those who advocate self-help programs or techniques of diverse kinds in helping individuals to achieve inner peace and outward success. While I have benefited greatly from learning about these ideas, the restored gospel, in my view, is uniquely qualified to teach us about self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-actualization, and self-strengthening in deep and lasting ways. The impactful messages of revealed truth have given me unsurpassed insights into my own soul. It is important to see divinity within ourselves as the foundation of our being.

Revealed truth tells us of our unique value. For example, in considering the great worth of a single soul, imagine if Lehi, Nephi, etc. had never been born into this world. Imagine if the Prophet Joseph Smith, Mary the mother of Jesus (Alma 7:10), or indeed Jesus Christ Himself (Alma 7:7) had never taken mortal form. All of us would be impoverished now and eternally by the absence of these spiritual luminaries. Real people accomplish amazing things with the help of God! (Mosiah 16:6–9). The important work accomplished by saints throughout the ages has contributed powerful legacies of faith and redemption to all. The spiritual richness of their individual lives has blessed all of us (2 Nephi 4:15–35). While Joseph Smith was blessed by the nurturing messages revealed to him, these also buttressed him with needed strength to bless others on an ongoing basis. We are greatly blessed by his revelatory teachings even though we never met him in person. Consequently, we do not live only for ourselves, we also live to benefit others!

Self-worth is essentially the value we place upon ourselves. The restored gospel helps us to think divinely about ourselves and enhances self-worth in numerous vital ways. Our self-perception is very important on our spiritual journey through the mortal world because it can either heal or harm us. We may often base our view of ourselves on temporary factors such as our looks, financial status, employment status, nationality, accent, popularity, health, church callings, and even trials we are passing through. However, from scripture we learn that we can see ourselves from the eternal perspective

of our character, divine inheritance, faith, testimony, knowledge, and family relationships. We are shown how to base our view of ourselves on solid, everlasting principles of truth. We can thereby have an optimistic and healthy attitude about ourselves forevermore (Alma 7:25–27). As we learn pivotal truths, we make ourselves and every situation we encounter better.

Sacred scripture gives very strong answers to our most important private questions and robust solutions to our most troubling personal challenges. These revolve around our nature and purpose. The everlasting gospel helps us to realize our most beautiful personal dreams and deeply cherished beliefs. The promises of God to us personally are sure as we come to live gospel principles. The gospel is true for you and me in very immediate ways. The Holy Spirit inspires us to be faithful and loyal to God. He teaches us with lifting power about the eternal worth of true doctrine and our own souls (2 Nephi 32:1–3; 33:1).

The combined effect of these elevating truths upon our souls is that we perform good works in our especially talented way. We also accomplish our assigned mission on this earth. And the people whose lives we touch for good will also spread truth and light out into the world. This is no small matter, especially in these turbulent times when there is much confusion about who we really are. To build a strong self-image we need to build our lives on the foundational truths that God has majestically presented to us clearly, regularly, and emphatically. We can nullify pessimism in our lives by promoting revelation-based hope. We can improve our personal strength one small step at a time, one decisive breakthrough at a time, and one courageous determination at a time.

SEEING YOUR SOUL

I believe that spirituality is the most crucial factor in ennobling our view of ourselves. To be spiritually minded is to be able to see who we really are through all the mists of darkness in this fallen world. We can dispel doubt about our personal value through the inspired education that comes in God's word. We need to see our own soul.

Our Father in Heaven is a being who knows what He is doing because He has already achieved the perfect state we are aiming for. God is the ultimate master of self-awareness and self-control. He loves the beauty of holiness. He is free to live, love, and be loved because He knows His own divine nature. He is a being of majestic benevolence. Our spiritual, moral, and ethical standards derive from our doctrinal understanding of the magnificent nature of God. Our basic understanding of the meaning and deepest purposes of life stem from the reality that God is a being of eternal fullness and He shows us the way to Him if we want to be led. We can know that divine directives bless both our eternal spirits and our eternal (temporal and resurrected) bodies. There are no vain or useless commandments from God (2 Nephi 26:24).

I have pondered much on the teaching that we are the children of God, created in His divine image. This is stunning doctrine! It conveys the idea that we are literally the spirit children of the Supreme Being. We are therefore endowed with capacities that are divine in nature. Our ability to reason, choose, love, serve, plan, forgive, create, and endure are just some of the attributes that mirror God's marvelous greatness. We are designed with intelligence, potential, gifts, and capabilities that reflect His ultimate light, His perfect

knowledge, His amazing love, and His stunning power (see parable of the talents, Matthew 24:14–30). There is a spark of marvelous majesty in us.

Our mortal bodies are created in the form and likeness of the Almighty. This is a powerful insight. We look like God. We are therefore tangible evidence that a personal God lives. We display a portion of His grandeur. We are living embodiments of His reality. Our mortal body is a testimony of God. It is a temple of divinity. In this life, we can also be spiritually born again. We can become sons and daughters of Jesus Christ through holy ordinances and sacred covenants (see Mosiah 5). Thus, we become partakers of the divine nature and obtain the mind of Christ while still living in mortality. This is significant. We receive the image of Christ in our countenance (Alma 5). This is further evidence of God's present living reality. Being born again to a newness of life is real. I know because it has been happening to me. In the eternities, we will take upon us a glorious body through resurrection, if we choose righteousness as the essential pattern of our lives in mortality. This is literal and eternal (see Alma 40–42). This sublime gift will make us more fully like the God we worship.

The simple truth is that every beautiful idea, every kind tendency, every wonderful word, every act of courage, and all good things in life bear testimony of the living reality of the Fatherhood of God. In profound reality, we are His offspring, His treasures, His loved ones. He is feeling after us, watching over us, guiding us, and preparing us for a glory beyond description. Every wonder that causes us to bow in humility before His tremendous character is evidence that God is at work in this world. Lovely art, heavenly music, and moving literature inspire us to look to Him as the perfect creator.

Let us remember who we truly are, whose we are, and who we can become. We are children of glory, sons and daughters of destiny, and inheritors of a precious promise that God will watch over us in sunshine and rain. We sometimes need to look in the mirror, open our eyes, open our hearts, come to ourselves, and see the deep magnificence of these sobering things. We are children in God's image with the opportunity to become all that He designs for us to become—fully mature, grown adults with everlasting perfection within us.

We are each like God in appearance and characteristics and are therefore far more than mere animals (Mosiah 27:25, Alma 18:34; 42:23). These fundamental doctrines provide inspirational meaning in our lives. These stunningly beautiful universal truths can be fixed in our minds and rooted in our hearts always. They have a tremendously empowering effect upon us in shaping the way we see everything in this world.

We are personally special to God as we are valued for who we are as unique children (2 Nephi 33:3). Each soul is catered for comprehensively and purposefully as part of His logistically staggering and deeply personal plan (Alma 39:17). Thus, we each have God given gender, talents, gifts, roles, and opportunities. The love of God for us is perfect and everlasting. We can love Him too (see 1 Nephi 8; 11). To know that God loves us can fill us with kind regard for ourselves and others. Imagine what would happen in this world if everyone had this divine love for both themselves and others—we would have a Zion on earth, a new paradise, a second Eden. Scripture shows that we can build heaven on earth and gives us a hopeful glimpse of that possibility (3 Nephi 11–18).

My journey in the religious life has allowed me to feel spiritual closeness to God. I have received experiential knowledge and power to help me throughout my entire life. I am forcibly struck by the gracious nature of God and overwhelmed by what He does for

me and all His children. The gift of sacred truth is phenomenally life changing in that it moves me to grow beyond worldly conditioning. I am touched, moved, and comforted. This gives me assurance, resolve, and determination to move forward. The wondrous possibilities offered to each of us are far beyond what we could ever envisage for ourselves. God believes we are worth all His time and effort. The restored gospel shows us a pathway to a life filled with spiritual riches.

As we labor in the work of God, we come to know our true divine selves—the everlasting part of us. All faithful priesthood holders and saints were, are, and will always be like the Son of God in their general appearance (Ether 3), countenance (Alma 5), behavior (3 Nephi 12–18), and ministry (Alma 13). Sensing this allows us to then know a warm closeness to God. It is through the priesthood ordinances, covenants, and blessings that we gain access to the full blessings of the Atonement. This journey gives fully rich meaning to the concept of the worth of a soul, as we come to sense that we are the treasures that belong to God (Mosiah 18). When we willingly accept revelatory doctrinal principles, we make steady and certain progress forward and that tastes good to our souls (Alma 32).

A GREAT WORTH

Worth is a concept with various meanings. Some define worth in purely economic terms, such as in the financial worth of a piece of art, whereas others may see it primarily aesthetically, such as the beauty of a sculpture. Some may see it in educational terms—such as the insights contained in a composition of majestic literature, others the use to which something can be put—such as a piece of jewelry at a dinner party. Music can be valued for its emotional impact on us even if we know little or nothing about who created it or how. Whether we are looking at something in terms of intrinsic worth or instrumental worth makes a difference to how we perceive it. A car is of little use without gasoline to run it if our interest is in using it for travel purposes. A piece of art can be appreciated visually but has little value if we are hungry for food. Music is wonderful for listening to but cannot build our physical muscles. The worth of temporal objects is limited as they can be stolen, lost, become redundant, or be broken. The worth of so many things can alter over time if we view them from worldly perspectives only—looks fade, status is temporary, fame disappears, prominence lessens, achievements are forgotten, talents diminish, and abilities reduce.

However, divine worth is a different matter. We have a wonderful worth from the divine perspective of God—“Remember the worth of souls is *great in the sight of God*” (Doctrine & Covenants 18:10, emphasis added). I am struck by God’s perspective! He sees our worth as significant from His point of view. That is remarkable. If a mortal being regards someone’s worth as great, then that may well be impressive. However, if the Supreme Being regards someone’s worth as great, that is a far better and surer guide to their worth. How precious therefore is each individual soul! We are known, loved, and valued one by one. We are seen as personally important to the Supreme Being. This gives us each a personal purpose, an eternal value, and a deep sense of meaning.

In our world, where value often seems to revolve around status, beauty, wealth, education, strength, popularity, notoriety, etc., it is exceedingly easy to feel that we

cannot possibly amount to much. On the worldly scale of measurement, where comparisons with others are the order of the day, it is entirely understandable that we may view ourselves to be worth little or nothing. Others may have low opinions of us. How this reality contrasts with the view that the restored gospel of God offers us! We are starkly and consistently reminded that our worth, value, and importance transcends such temporary and relatively insignificant descriptors such as wealth, etc. Transitory fads and fashions are as a dark shadow compared to the revealed light of eternal truth.

Consider the plain and profound meaning of this one verse in terms of the great worth we have to God (Doctrine & Covenants 18:10). It is laced with edifying doctrine:

The first word “remember,” is a very significant word to the Lord. He wants us to remember what really matters. For example, the sacrament prayers speak of remembering Christ, His death and sacrifice for us (Doctrine & Covenants 20:77–79). We are to always remember Him. Alma teaches us to remember the mighty power of the Savior in delivering captive souls from the chains of hell (Alma 5). We are prone to forget our own worth and that of others—hence the Lord specifically asks us to remember our worth. We are to reflect, ruminate, and dwell on it so that we might lodge it permanently into our lives. Otherwise, we are liable to forget and become distracted from our identity and destiny. If the Lord asks us to remember something, it must be because the risk in forgetting it is indeed grave.

What of the word “worth”? I think of value, preciousness, importance, dignity, and respect. We matter to God—we are His jewels, His very work and glory (Moses 1:39).

What of the word “souls”? I am reminded that soul is defined as body and spirit combined (Doctrine & Covenants 93). The physical, mortal body is important to God. The word of wisdom is a wise doctrine regarding the treatment and use of the mortal body, which is designated as a temple of God (Section 89). We are all spirit sons or daughters of God—children of God for whom He has divine, perfect, everlasting love. The redemption of the soul is therefore found in both forgiveness of sin and resurrection of the body. The soul as combined spirit and body is eternally precious to God and should be to us also. I also reflect on the idea that if one soul is precious to God, then many souls are very precious to God. God is interested in each and every soul. He is concerned about all souls.

What of the word “great”? I believe it means significant, important, and material.

What of “sight”? It refers to view, perspective, opinion, regard, vision, or knowledge. His vantage point is certainly one deserving acknowledgment and merit.

What of “God”? He is our goodly and generous Father. He is the Supreme Being, our ultimate benefactor, the perfect soul.

It is evident that in the opinion of the greatest being in the universe, we, as individuals, are deeply significant and eternally important. How stunning is that? How poignantly remarkable! It is awe-inducing to me. I am shocked, inspired, and comforted

by it. This is a simple yet deep doctrine that is profound in its ramifications and soul soothing in its implications. It has the power to transform our view of ourselves and to lift us to a higher place. Oh, how wonderful is the quality, longevity, and impact of God's divine love in our lives!

Think of the other key themes in this section:

The Savior suffered pain and death willingly for a pure purpose—to provide repentance and resurrection so that all people would come to Him willingly (Doctrine and Covenants 18:11–12).

His joy is great when we repent—our change, improvement and development give Him happiness and purpose (verse 13).

We can cry repentance to others. I believe this is an emotional and spiritual reality—like Nephi whose eyes watered his pillow by night for his people (2 Nephi 33:2–4), or like Alma who sang the song of redeeming love to others (Alma 5). We can have a genuine concern for the well-being and salvation of our families, friends, and enemies.

To work all our life and bring one soul—or many souls—to God will bring lasting joy to them and us! This eternal joy is worth any and every personal price we might pay in so doing. The spending of our precious time, talents, and resources in saving even one soul is a very successful endeavor.

It is abundantly clear that each person is precious and uniquely important. Each person is capable of magnificent feelings, great thoughts, deep experiences, and meaningful contributions. Each soul can catch the vision of this personal worth and turn their life to great purposes. Each can achieve true greatness. The most important type of greatness is moral and spiritual greatness. True greatness is defined by the degree to which our lives come to reflect the teachings and example of our Savior.

Although we are the spirit children of God, we know that all children eventually grow up. They become more than what they once were. This is how we become more than we presently are. In the beginning, we were made in God's perfect image. However, we did not stop there. We grew more into His likeness through learning and development even in the premortal world. In this mortal life, we need to be remade—again and again—in His image and likeness. We are eternal in nature and purpose, so post-mortality is a further opportunity for us to learn important lessons. We need not define ourselves by limiting worldly standards and viewpoints, but rather by powerful revealed truths. We are truly capable of marvelous things when we deeply embed this transcendent knowledge in our minds and hearts.

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