

Conversion to the Will of God

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Our personal conversion includes the responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world.

I am grateful for President Russell M. Nelson's powerful prophetic call to missionary service and President M. Russell Ballard's and Elder Marcos A. Aidukaitis's inspiring missionary messages today.

A missionary assignment to Great Britain late last year allowed me to reflect on the precious spiritual events that were foundational to my decision to serve as a missionary.¹ When I was 15 years old, my beloved older brother, Joe, was 20—the age of eligibility then to serve a mission. In the United States, because of the Korean conflict, very few were allowed to serve. Only one could be called from each ward per year.² It was a surprise when our bishop asked Joe to explore this possibility with our father. Joe had been preparing applications for medical school. Our father, who was not active in the Church, had made financial preparations to help him and was not in favor of Joe going on a mission. Dad suggested that Joe could do more good by going to medical school. This was a huge issue in our family.

In a remarkable discussion with my wise and exemplary older brother, we concluded that his decision on whether to serve a mission and delay his education depended on three questions: (1) Is Jesus Christ divine? (2) Is the Book of Mormon the word of God? and (3) Is Joseph Smith the Prophet of the Restoration? If the answer to these questions was yes, it was clear that Joe could do more good taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world than becoming a doctor at an earlier date.³

That night I prayed fervently and with real intent. The Spirit, in an undeniably powerful way, confirmed to me that the answer to all three of these questions was yes. This was a seminal event for me. I realized that every decision I would make for the rest of my life would be influenced by these truths. I also knew that I would serve a mission if given the opportunity. Over a lifetime of service and spiritual experiences, I have come to understand that true conversion is the result of the conscious acceptance of the will of God and that we can be guided in our actions by the Holy Ghost.

I already had a testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. That night I received a spiritual testimony of the Book of Mormon⁴ and the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith Was an Instrument in the Lord's Hands

Your testimony will be strengthened when you know in your heart through your prayers that the Prophet Joseph Smith was an instrument in the Lord's hands. During the past eight years, one of my assignments in the Twelve Apostles was to review and read all the remarkable Joseph Smith papers and documents and the research that led to the publication of the *Saints* volumes.⁵ My testimony and admiration of the Prophet Joseph Smith have been greatly strengthened and enhanced after reading the inspiring details of his life and foreordained prophetic ministry.

Joseph's translation of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God was foundational to the Restoration.⁶ The Book of Mormon is internally consistent, beautifully written, and contains the answers to life's great questions. It is another testament of Jesus Christ. I testify that Joseph Smith was righteous, full of faith, and an instrument in the Lord's hands in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

The revelations and events recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants provide the keys, ordinances, and covenants necessary for salvation and exaltation. They not only set forth the essentials required to establish the Church but also provide profound doctrine that allows us to understand the purpose of life and gives us an eternal perspective.

One of the numerous examples of Joseph Smith's prophetic role is found in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is an explicit record of the vision of heaven, including kingdoms of glory, which the Prophet Joseph and Sidney Rigdon were blessed to receive on February 16, 1832. At that time, the vast majority of churches were teaching that the Savior's Atonement would not provide salvation for most people. It was believed that a few would be saved and the vast majority would be doomed to hell and damnation, including endless tortures "of the most awful and unspeakable intensity."⁷

The revelation contained in the 76th section provides a glorious vision of the degrees of glory where the vast majority of Heavenly Father's children who were valiant in their premortal estate are profoundly blessed following the ultimate judgment.⁸ The vision of the three degrees of glory, the lowest of which "surpasses all understanding,"⁹ is a direct refutation of the then strong but erroneous doctrine that the majority would be doomed to hell and damnation.

When you realize Joseph Smith was only 26 years old, had a limited education, and had little or no exposure to the classical languages from which the Bible was translated, he was truly an instrument in the Lord's hands. In the 17th verse of

section 76, he was inspired to use the word *unjust* instead of *damnation* that was used in the Gospel of John.¹⁰

It is interesting that 45 years later an Anglican church leader and academically credentialed classical scholar,¹¹ Frederic W. Farrar, who wrote *The Life of Christ*,¹² asserted that the definition of *damnation* in the King James Version of the Bible was the result of translation errors from Hebrew and Greek to English.¹³

In our day, many have adopted the concept that there should be no consequence for sin. They support the unconditional condoning of sin without repentance. Our revealed doctrine not only refutes the idea that most people would be eternally condemned to hell and damnation but also establishes that personal repentance is a commanded prerequisite to partake of the Savior's Atonement and inherit the celestial kingdom.¹⁴ I testify that Joseph Smith was truly an instrument in the Lord's hands in bringing forth the Restoration of His gospel!

Because of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we understand the importance of both repentance and the "works of righteousness."¹⁵ We understand the overwhelming significance of the Savior's Atonement and of His saving ordinances and covenants, including those performed in the temple.

The "works of righteousness" emanate from and are the fruits of conversion. True conversion is brought about by the conscious acceptance and commitment to follow the will of God.¹⁶ The banquet of consequences and blessings that flow from conversion is true and permanent peace and the personal assurance of ultimate happiness¹⁷—despite the storms of this life.

Conversion to the Savior changes a natural man into a sanctified, born again, purified person—a new creature in Christ Jesus.¹⁸

Many Are Kept from the Truth Because They Know Not Where to Find It

What are the obligations that flow from conversion? In Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph noted that many "are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it."¹⁹

In the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, a big-picture declaration of the Lord's purpose for us was set forth. He declared, "Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments." He further instructs, "That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world."²⁰ That includes full-time missionaries. That includes each of us. This should be a laser-like focus to everyone who has been blessed with a conversion to the will of God. The Savior graciously invites us to be His voice and His hands.²¹ The love of the Savior will be our guiding light. The Savior taught His disciples, "Go ye therefore, and

teach all nations.”²² And to Joseph Smith, He declared, “Preach my gospel unto every creature who has not received it.”²³

One week after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836, which was Easter Sunday and also Passover, the Lord appeared in a magnificent vision to Joseph and Oliver Cowdery. The Lord accepted the temple and declared, “This is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people.”²⁴

After this vision closed, Moses appeared “and committed ... the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.”²⁵

President Russell M. Nelson, our beloved prophet today who holds these same keys, taught this morning: “You young men have been reserved for this time when the promised gathering of Israel is taking place. As you serve missions, you play a pivotal role in this unprecedented event!”²⁶

For the Savior’s mandate to share the gospel to become part of who we are, we need to become **converted** to the will of God; we need to **love** our neighbors, **share** the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, and **invite** all to come and see. As members of the Church, we cherish the Prophet Joseph’s reply to John Wentworth, the editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, in 1842. He was requesting information about the Church. Joseph concluded his response by using the “Standard of Truth” as a preface to the thirteen Articles of Faith. The standard conveys, in a concise way, what must be accomplished:

“No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”²⁷

This has been the clarion call for generations of Latter-day Saints, especially missionaries. In the spirit of the “Standard of Truth,” we are grateful that in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, faithful missionaries have shared the gospel. Missionaries, we love you! The Lord asks each one of us to share His gospel in word and deed. Our personal conversion includes the responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world.

The blessings of sharing the gospel include increasing our conversion to the will of God and letting God prevail in our lives.²⁸ We bless others to experience a “mighty change” of heart.²⁹ There is truly eternal joy in helping to bring souls unto Christ.³⁰ Laboring for the conversion of oneself and others is *the noble task*.³¹ I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. I served in the British Mission from September 1, 1960, to September 1, 1969

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2. The other young men had to be available for the military draft.
3. After Joe's return from his mission, he did graduate from medical school and serve as a successful doctor. His mission also prepared him to be a bishop, stake president, regional representative, and mission president.
4. See Moroni 10:4. I had already read the Book of Mormon. With the seriousness of this issue in our family, I was praying with real intent.
5. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (2018), and vol. 2, *No Unhallowed Hand, 1846–1893* (2020).
6. The translation commenced on April 7, 1829, and was completed around the first of July 1829. It has been remarkable to study the facts surrounding the translation. I particularly appreciated reading the printer's manuscript and the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon published as volumes 3 and 5 in the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. They are both landmark volumes.
7. Frederic W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope: Five Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey, November and December, 1877* (1892), xxii.
8. The vision includes those who do not learn of Christ in this life, children who die before the age of accountability, and those who have no understanding.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 76:89.
10. See John 5:29.
11. Farrar was educated at King's College, London, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a Church of England (Anglican) cleric, archdeacon of Westminster Abbey, dean of Canterbury Cathedral, and chaplain to the Royal Household.
12. See Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (1874).
13. See Farrar, *Eternal Hope*, xxxvi–xxxvii. Frederic Farrar felt compelled to correct teachings about damnation and hell. He strongly proclaimed what he termed "simple, undeniable, and indisputable facts. ... The verb 'to damn' and its cognates does not once occur in the Old Testament. No word conveying any such meaning occurs in the Greek of the New Testament." He goes on to explain that the word *damnation* is a "grievous mistranslation ... [and] perverts and obscures the real meaning of our Lord's utterances" (*Eternal Hope*, xxxvii). Farrar also pointed out the overwhelming demonstration of a loving Father in Heaven throughout the Bible as additional evidence that the definitions of *hell* and *damnation* used in the English translation were incorrect (see

- Eternal Hope*, xiv–xv, xxxiv, 93; see also Quentin L. Cook, “Our Father’s Plan—Big Enough for All His Children,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 36).
14. The relationship between repentance and the Atonement is set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 19:15–18, 20. In addition, endless punishment is clarified in Doctrine and Covenants 19:10–12.
 15. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.
 16. See Mosiah 27:25; Doctrine and Covenants 112:13; see also Dale E. Miller, “Bringing Peace and Healing to Your Soul,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 12–14.
 17. See Mosiah 2:41.
 18. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 33; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 41; see also 2 Corinthians 5:17; Bible Dictionary, “Conversion.”
 19. Doctrine and Covenants 123:12.
 20. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 23.
 21. If that is our desire, we are “called to the work” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:3; see also Thomas S. Monson, “Called to the Work,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, June 2017, 4–5).
 22. Matthew 28:19.
 23. Doctrine and Covenants 112:28.
 24. Doctrine and Covenants 110:10.
 25. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
 26. See Russell M. Nelson, “Preaching the Gospel of Peace,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 6–7; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), [HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.hopeofisrael.churchofjesuschrist.org).
 27. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 444.
 28. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 92–95.
 29. Alma 5:14.
 30. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:15; see also James 5:19–20.
 31. See Alma 26:22; Doctrine and Covenants 18:13–16; see also Bible Dictionary, “Conversion.”