

The Plan of Salvation

Lesson 19

Purpose: To understand the grand scope of the plan of salvation and to encourage them to live according to their knowledge of the plan.

1. The plan of salvation is "one of heaven's best gifts to mankind."

"Heavenly Fathers Plan of _____"

Complete the phrase. Think of as many answers from the scriptures as they can. Write their responses on the chalkboard. After a minute or two, share any of the following answers that they have not mentioned:

- Salvation (Alma 24:14; 42:5; Moses 6:62)
- Restoration (Alma 41:2)
- Happiness (Alma 42:8, 16)
- Mercy (Alma 42:15, 31)
- Redemption (Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25-33)

- What do these words teach about Heavenly Father's plan?
- The prophet Alma referred to Heavenly Father's plan as "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8). How can the plan of salvation bring us happiness?
- The Prophet Joseph Smith** taught, *"The great plan of salvation is a theme which ought to occupy our strict attention, and be regarded as one of heaven's best gifts to mankind"* (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 68). What can we do to give the plan of salvation "our strict attention"?

This lesson is an overview of the plan of salvation. It shows how the principles of the gospel relate to each other as part of one great plan.

2. Premortal life

The plan of salvation can be divided into three parts: premortal life, mortal life, and life after death.

Write Premortal Life on the chalkboard. One significant blessing of the Restoration is our increased knowledge of our premortal life. This knowledge helps us understand life's purpose and our part in God's plan of salvation. As we discuss the following questions, read the suggested scripture passages.

- We are sons and daughters of God, and we lived in a premortal existence as His spirit children (D&C 76:24; 93:29). How does the knowledge that you are a child of God influence you?
- Before the earth was created, Heavenly Father called a council in heaven and presented the plan of salvation to all His spirit children. What were some elements of the plan that Heavenly Father presented in the premortal world? (See 2 Nephi 2:24-26; Alma 34:8-9; Abraham 3:24-25. Answers could include the Atonement of Jesus Christ; the Creation of the earth; the Fall; time on earth during which we would receive a mortal body and be tested; and agency, or the power to choose good or evil.)
- How did Jehovah, the Firstborn of the Father, respond to the plan of salvation? (See Moses 4:2. To show how the Savior obeyed the Father's will, you may want to read D&C 19:16-19 and 76:40-42. Emphasize that the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes the plan of salvation possible. The Savior is the central figure in God's plan for our salvation.)
- Lucifer rebelled against the plan of salvation, seeking to destroy our agency and gain Heavenly Father's power (Moses 4:1, 3; D&C 29:36). He became Satan, and he and his followers were cast out of the Father's presence and denied mortality (D&C 29:36-38; 76:25-27; Moses 4:4; Abraham 3:26). Why is it important for us to know about the existence of Satan and his followers?
- How did we respond to the plan of salvation? (See Job 38:4-7. Explain that latter-day prophets have taught that verse 7 in this passage refers to the joy we all felt in our premortal existence when we accepted the plan of salvation.)

In the premortal world, Heavenly Father chose and foreordained noble spirits to carry forth His work on the earth (D&C 138:55-56; Abraham 3:22-23; see also Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 365).

- In what ways might our knowledge of premortal life influence our daily decisions? How can our knowledge of our premortal life help us when we face trials?

3. Mortal life

When we accepted Heavenly Father's plan in our premortal life, we kept our "first estate." Because of our faithfulness, we were given the opportunity to come to earth, which is our "second estate" (Abraham 3:26).

Write Mortal Life on the chalkboard. Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, we are in a fallen state in mortality (D&C 29:40). We are subject to physical death and also to spiritual death, or separation from the presence of God (D&C 29:41-42; Alma 42:9, 14; physical death and spiritual death will be discussed later in the lesson). From latter-day revelation we learn that the Fall is a necessary step in our eternal progress. Eve spoke of the blessings of the Fall: "Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (Moses 5:11).

Discuss the following questions, read the suggested scripture passages.

•What are some purposes of mortal life? (Write class members' responses on the chalkboard. Answers could include those listed below.)

a. To receive a physical body. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 181).

b. To prove our faithfulness through obedience to God's commandments (Abraham 3:25-26). This includes repenting of our sins and receiving the ordinances of salvation (Alma 12:24; D&C 29:42-43; Articles of Faith 1:3).

c. To live in families and to seal children to their parents through temple ordinances (Moses 2:28; D&C 93:40; 131:1-4; 138:48).

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles proclaimed that "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.... The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102).

•How does your understanding of the purposes of mortality make a difference in your life? How does your understanding of these purposes influence the decisions you make?

•As part of our mortal life, Satan is allowed to tempt us (D&C 29:39). Why? (See D&C 29:39; see also 2 Nephi 2:11-13.) Why is agency an important part of the plan of salvation? (See D&C 58:27-28; 101:78; 2 Nephi 2:25-27.)

4. Life after death

Our life does not end at physical death. Write Life after Death on the chalkboard. As class members discuss the following questions, have them read the suggested scripture passages.

•When we die, our spirits will enter the spirit world (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 309-10.) How will our works during mortality influence our life in the postmortal spirit world? (See Alma 34:34; 40:11-14.)

•People who do not receive the gospel on earth will have that opportunity in the spirit world (D&C 137:7-9; 138:30-34). What can we do to help them receive all the blessings of the plan of salvation? (See D&C 128:6-8, 15. Answers could include that we can do family history work and can perform priesthood ordinances for them in temples.)

•Remind class members that the Fall brought physical and spiritual death into the world. How will we be delivered from physical death? (See Alma 11:42; D&C 88:14-16; 93:33. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people will be resurrected, or "raised from this temporal death." Our spirits will reunite with our bodies, and we will be able to "receive a fulness of joy.") How can we be delivered from spiritual death? (See Alma 42:11-13, 15; Articles of Faith 1:3.)

After we are resurrected, we will return to the presence of God to be judged according to our works (Alma 11:43-45; D&C 76:111). We will inherit a place in the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, or the telestial kingdom based on the manner in which we have "received the testimony of Jesus" (D&C 76:51; see also verses 50, 79-82). The next lesson includes a discussion of these three kingdoms of glory.

•In what ways does the knowledge of life after death help us during mortality?

Conclusion: Read the following statement by **President Boyd K. Packer** of the Quorum of the Twelve:

"There are three parts to the plan. You are in the second or the middle part, the one in which you will be tested by temptation, by trials, perhaps by tragedy... .

"Remember this! The line 'And they all lived happily ever after' is never written into the second act [of a play]. That line belongs in the third act, when the mysteries are solved and everything is put right....

"Until you have a broad perspective of the eternal nature of [the plan], you won't make much sense out of the inequities in life. Some are born with so little and others with so much. Some are born in poverty, with handicaps, with pain, with suffering. Some experience premature death, even innocent children. There are the brutal, unforgiving forces of nature and the brutality of man to man. We have seen a lot of that recently.

"Do not suppose that God willfully causes that which, for His own purposes, he permits. When you know the plan and the purpose of it all, even these things will manifest a loving Father in Heaven" (The Play and the Plan [satellite broadcast, 7 May 1995], 1-2).

A knowledge of the plan of salvation can help us make righteous decisions, find joy in mortality, and prepare for eternal life. Express your feelings about the role of Jesus Christ in the plan of salvation. As prompted by the Spirit, testify of the truths discussed during the lesson.

Additional Teaching Ideas:

1. "The Plan of Salvation" video presentation

If the videocassette Teachings from the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History (53933) is available, consider showing "The Plan of Salvation," a four-minute segment. Consider using some or all of the following questions after the presentation:

- How is our mortal life like the experience of the young man who found himself on stage in the second act?
- How does the revealed knowledge of the first act (premortal life) help us in the second act (mortality)? How does knowledge of the third act (life after death) help us in the second act?
- When the young man found himself on stage, he did not know who the villain was or who the hero was. What problems can arise if we do not know who the villains and heroes are in our lives?

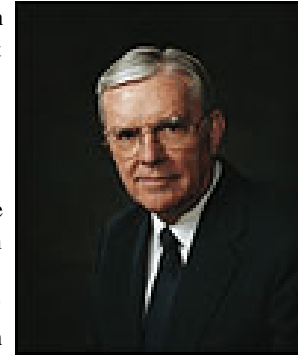
- What did the young man do to gain knowledge about the play? What serves as the "script" in our lives?

2. Counsel for parents

Read Alma 12:32. Before this verse refers to Adam

Adam and Eve already had a knowledge of the plan of redemption when they received commandments. Then ask

- Why is it helpful to have a knowledge of the plan of redemption when we receive commandments? How can parents follow this teaching pattern with their children?



do to gain knowledge serves as the "script" in reading, the word *them* in and Eve. had a knowledge of the `t h e y r e c e i v e d` the following questions:

Answers to Life's Questions

M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

"Answers to Life's Questions," Ensign, May 1995, 22

Life's most challenging questions seem to be those that begin with the word *why*. "Why is life so hard?" "Why is there so much sorrow, hate, and unhappiness in the world?" "Why does death take the young?" And "why must the innocent suffer?" We all have wrestled with such questions from time to time as we struggle with the

vicissitudes of mortality. I particularly want to talk to the younger members of God's family about why I believe the only satisfying answers to such questions come from the comforting perspective of faith in our Heavenly Father and his eternal plan for our happiness.

The prophet Alma called the plan "the great plan of happiness" ([Alma 42:8](#)). It is known more commonly as the plan of salvation. It is beautiful in its simplicity to all who seek prayerfully to know and understand the true meaning and purpose of life.

Through prophets past and present, God has revealed the doctrines of his "great plan of happiness." It consists of infinite, eternal, absolute, unchanging principles. From Alma we learn that "God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known ... the plan of redemption" ([Alma 12:32](#); emphasis added). The plan teaches that all who have or will live on earth are the spirit children of heavenly parents. We lived with them before coming to this earth to receive our bodies of flesh and bone.

"If Adam [and Eve] had not transgressed [they] would not have fallen, but [they] would have remained in the garden of Eden. ...

"And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy. ...

"Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" ([2 Ne. 2:22–23, 25](#)).

After the Fall, God instructed Adam to cleave unto his wife, Eve (see [Moses 3:24; D&C 42:22](#)). "God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" ([Gen. 1:28](#)), a commandment that has never been rescinded.

Our Father's plan provides for redemption from the Fall through the atonement of Jesus Christ. As the Only Begotten Son of God and the only sinless person to live on this earth, he made a perfect atonement for all mankind. It applies to everyone unconditionally as it pertains to the resurrection from temporal, or physical, death, for all shall rise from the dead with immortal bodies as a result of the Atonement. However, the Atonement is conditional as it pertains to each person's individual sins. It touches everyone to the degree that he or she has faith in Jesus Christ, repents, and obeys the gospel. Exaltation and eternal life with God are reserved for those who keep the commandments.

Mortality, then, is the time to test our ability to understand our Heavenly Father's plan and, of course, our willingness to be obedient. Obedience is essential to obtain exaltation and eternal life. King Benjamin explained that "the Lord God

hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe [in] Christ, ... the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy" ([Mosiah 3:13](#)).

He also taught his people: "Consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness" ([Mosiah 2:41](#)).

What a wonderful, warm, and reassuring thing it is to know that the primary objective of the very God of heaven is "the immortality and eternal life of man" ([Moses 1:39](#)), or, in other words, our eternal happiness and joy. Sometimes I wonder if we really appreciate what that means and how it should affect our lives. We must give adequate attention to the doctrines of happiness—real happiness, infinite and eternal. They should be the objective of everything we teach in the Church and of everything we do.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "We cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 256).

We must understand the basic doctrines and receive the saving ordinances that are essential for our eternal exaltation and happiness. Our present mortal state places a veil of forgetfulness over our minds, allowing us to prove ourselves able to "do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command" ([Abr. 3:25](#)). But even though our present long-range view of eternity is limited, the Lord has not left us without direction. He has provided scriptures and Apostles and prophets through whom he has revealed his plan for our exaltation and eternal life. And we have the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to guide us.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "in obedience there is joy and peace unspotted, unalloyed; and as God has designed our happiness ... he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 256–57).

Critical to our knowledge of the plan of happiness is an understanding of the great governing principle of agency. A person does not have to spend much time in the

schoolroom of mortality to realize that Heavenly Father's plan does not provide for blissful happiness at every step along our mortal journey. Life is filled with harsh realities that tug at the heart and tear away at the soul.

One cannot look at suffering, regardless of its causes or origins, without feeling pain and compassion. I can understand why someone who lacks an eternal perspective might see the horrifying news footage of starving children and man's inhumanity to man and shake a fist at the heavens and cry, "If there is a God, how could he allow such things to happen?"

The answer is not easy, but it isn't that complicated, either. God has put his plan in motion. It proceeds through natural laws that are, in fact, God's laws. Since they are his, he is bound by them, as are we. I recognize for purposes we mortals may not understand, the Lord can control the elements. For the most part, however, he does not cause but he allows nature to run its course. In this imperfect world, bad things sometimes happen. The earth's rocky underpinnings occasionally shift and move, resulting in earthquakes. Certain weather patterns cause hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and drought.

Much adversity is man-made. Men's hearts turn cold, and the spirit of Satan controls their actions. In foreseeing the day of suffering in our time, the Savior said, "The love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound" [D&C 45:27](#)). Violence, immorality, and other evils run rampant on the earth. Much adversity has its origin in the principle of agency.

We tend to think of agency as a personal matter. If we ask someone to define "moral agency," the answer will probably be something like this: "Moral agency means I am free to make choices for myself." Often overlooked is the fact that choices have consequences; we forget also that agency offers the same privilege of choice to others. At times we will be affected adversely by the way other people choose to exercise their agency. Our Heavenly Father feels so strongly about protecting our agency that he allows his children to exercise it, either for good or for evil.

The plan of happiness is available to all of his children. If the world would embrace and live it, peace, joy, and plenty would abound on the earth. Much of the suffering we know today would be eliminated if people throughout the world would understand and live the gospel.

We mortals have a limited view of life from the eternal perspective. But if we know and understand Heavenly Father's plan, we realize that dealing with adversity is one of the chief ways we are tested. Our faith in our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is the source of inner strength. Through faith we can

find peace, comfort, and the courage to endure. As we trust in God and his plan for our happiness with all our hearts and lean not unto our own understanding (see [Prov. 3:5](#)), hope is born. Hope grows out of faith and gives meaning and purpose to all we do. It can give us comfort in the face of adversity, strength in times of trial, and peace when we have reason for doubt or anguish.

By focusing on and living the principles of Heavenly Father's plan for our eternal happiness, we can separate ourselves from the wickedness of the world. If we are anchored to the correct understanding of who we are, why we are here on this earth, and where we can go after this mortal life, Satan cannot threaten our happiness through any form of temptation. If we are determined to live by Heavenly Father's plan, we will use our God-given moral agency to make decisions based on revealed truth, not on the opinions of others or on the current thinking of the world.

For example, we are moving into an era when the Information Superhighway will have the capacity to cut a wide path right into our homes. With fiber-optic computer technology, it can link homes to an incredible assortment of messages and influences. This highway will be the conduit of information that will have the power to change our culture and, thus, our very lives. As we consider the importance of nourishing our intellects with the promising potential of Superhighway resources, we must be ever cautious about the choices of programs and the impact of media in our lives. Those who understand our Heavenly Father's eternal plan for the joy and happiness of his children will be better prepared to make good choices as the Information Superhighway rolls across the world. The computer, television, satellite, microchip, and even the telephone, all can bless and enhance our lives—or can make them miserable.

This is why making life's decisions based on our Heavenly Father's plan is so important. If we truly believe that we are his children and are here on earth to learn to live, by faith, the teachings and the commandments of God and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, we will make the choices that will qualify us to one day return to live in their presence.

Understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ and following him as our Savior and our Redeemer will influence every aspect of our lives, including all of our individual choices. Those who live according to Heavenly Father's eternal plan will not want to absorb any information that is illicit or untoward, nor will they destroy their spiritual sensitivity through immoral acts or the consumption of any harmful substances. Neither will they search for doctrinal loopholes to find reasons to challenge the ordained leadership of the Church nor tamper with the simple truths of the gospel. They will not attempt to justify any lifestyle that is contrary to the plan of happiness. If they do any of these things, they will never find the inner

peace and joy that living the gospel brings. All of our Father's children can seek prayerfully to know who they are and can find real happiness if they obey God's commandments and endure to the end. President Howard W. Hunter said:

"There is nothing sad or gloomy about a person who accepts the truths of the gospel and incorporates these principles in his daily living. God wants all of his children to be joyous and glad, and we can have this blessing if we are willing to keep his commandments and live by his word in all that we do" (in Conference Report, Sept./Oct. 1961, p. 108).

When the plan of our Heavenly Father is understood, the answers to life's questions are found in the gospel of Christ. May we learn to accept with faith the doctrines and teachings of the gospel and accept the plan of salvation with believing hearts and minds. Always know, brothers and sisters, that the leaders of the Church understand and accept the gospel plan and will defend it at all times and in all places.

My testimony of the "If ye know these ye do them" ([John](#) for the doctrines and great plan of we learn them, may we willingly. By doing so joy, happiness, and "Peace I leave with unto you: not as the unto you. Let not your neither let it be afraid" ([John 14:27](#)).



coincides with the beloved Apostle John: things, happy are ye if [13:17](#)). May we search commandments of the happiness; and when embrace them we will find lasting peace. Jesus said, you, my peace I give world giveth, give I heart be troubled,

I leave you my testimony that the Lord's promise of peace comes from knowing and living the principles of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. May his peace and joy be with all of us I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book

Neal A. Maxwell, 252-255.

Plan of Salvation

How can we truly understand who we are unless we know who we were and what we have the power to become? How can there be real identity without real history? How can one understand his tiny, individual plot without knowing, even a little, about Father's grand, galactic plans? (*Ensign*, May 1986, p. 35.)

Without an understanding of the plan of salvation, including our premortal existence and the judgment and the resurrection, trying to make sense of this life by itself would be like seeing only the second act of a three-act play, while wondering—does it make any sense; who is the director; what is the purpose of it all? We cannot fully understand this act without the others, and particularly the trials and suffering in this second act. Failure, therefore, to understand God's plan of salvation can needlessly diminish faith in Him and in His purposes. (Talk given January 8, 1996.)

The very word *plan* confirms God's paternal purpose, a realization so desperately needed by the confused and despairing on the world's stage. (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 21.)

Con conversationally, we reference God's great design almost too casually at times; we even sketch its rude outlines on chalkboards and paper as if it were the floor plan for an addition to one's house. However, when we really take time to ponder the Plan, it is breathtaking and overpowering! Indeed, I, for one, cannot decide which creates in me the most awe—its very vastness or its intricate, individualized detail. ("Thanks Be to God.")

The Lord's plan of salvation is not a set of floor plans for a new house that we as clients can modify or reject. The Architect is not our employee, but our Host, even the Lord of Hosts; He is not only our Landlord, He is also our Lord! (*Even As I Am*, p. 9.)

This plan constitutes the mother lode of meaning and can cradle us, conceptually, amid any concern. Its truths and perspectives permit us to distinguish between a great book and mere want ads, between vengeance and justice, rage and righteous indignation, and pleasure and happiness. (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 22.)

Even with all of its interior consistency... the plan cannot bring true happiness to anyone whose life is grossly inconsistent with its standards. It cannot fully enfold him who is too worried about being taken in. It has no place of honor for one too concerned with losing his place in the secular synagogue. (See John 12:42-43.) (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 22.)

The plan always points the way, but does not always smooth the way, since individual development requires an "opposition in all things." (2 Ne. 2:11.) (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 22.)

Truly, of all the errors mortals could make, God's plan of salvation is the wrong thing to be wrong about! No error could be more enormous or more everlasting in its consequences! (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 22.)

God's plan... is not something to be deduced by logic alone, nor is human experience deep enough or long enough to inform us adequately. It requires revelation from God. (*Ensign*, November 1986, p. 53.)

It does no violence even to our frail human logic to observe that there cannot be a grand plan of salvation for all mankind, unless there is also a plan for each individual. The salvational sum will reflect all its parts. ("Meeting the Challenges of Today," p. 153.)

If we criticize God or are unduly miffed over sufferings and tribulation, we are really criticizing the Planner for implementing the very plan we once approved, premortally (see Job 38:4, 7). Granted, we don't now remember the actual approval. But not remembering is actually part of the plan! (*That Ye May Believe*, p. 10.)

Knowledge of certain *future* things could affect the way in which we use our agency *now*. Thus, the future would overhang and impose itself unduly upon the present. This would be counterproductive so far as the developmental purposes of the plan of salvation are concerned. (*We Talk of Christ, We Rejoice in Christ*, p. 127.)

Having so very long ago set in motion His plan of salvation, God will not revise the structure or the schedule of this second estate just because you and I have a bad day. (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, p. 11.)

Having faith in the Father's macro plan of salvation includes making allowance for His micro plans as well. (*Lord, Increase Our Faith*, p. 38.)

Where would we be if, instead of focusing on bringing "to pass the immortality and eternal life of man," God were distracted by self-centeredness? In fact, God has described what His work is, and does nothing save it be for the benefit of man (see Moses 1:39; 2 1 Ne. 26:24). Where would we be, too, if our Father in Heaven experienced people fatigue and we were merely His annoying posterity who kept Him from doing what He really wanted to do? (*Lord, Increase Our Faith*, pp. 38-39.)

Upon arriving at the foreseen geographical destination, President Brigham Young confirmed, "This is the place!" Of God's plan of salvation with its developmental destination, it can be confirmed, "This is the process!" (*If Thou Endure It Well*, p. 126.)

We can and will be tried tactically, but this can occur without our calling into question the whole strategy of God's plan of salvation. (*If Thou Endure It Well*, p. 127.)

Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord, Increase Our Faith*, 33-54.

Faith in the Father's Plan of Salvation

If we know of Him and about His character, including the very approach He uses in His plan of happiness, suggests clearly to us that our Heavenly Father is in it for the long haul, for all the right reasons, and with all the right motivations. He is also in it with the right methodology: love unfeigned, long-suffering, and by showing us the way. It is contrary to God's character to dictate to us. Hence some will be lost because of their misuse of moral agency and their lack of faith. Were it otherwise, genuine happiness and growth could not occur. Scientist Alan Hayward wrote of an illustrative experience.

Suppose for a moment that God made His presence felt all the time—that every action of ours, good or bad, brought an immediate response from Him in the form of reward or punishment. What sort of a world would this be then?

It would resemble, on a grander scale, the dining room of a hotel... where I once stayed for a few days. The European owner evidently did not trust his... waiters. He would sit on a raised platform at one end of the room, constantly watching every movement. Goods that might possibly be pilfered, such as tea bags, sugar knobs and even pats of butter or margarine, were doled out by him in quantities just sufficient for the needs of the moment. He would scrutinise every bill like Sherlock Holmes looking for signs of foul play.

The results of all this supervision were painfully obvious. I have stayed in many hotels around the world... but never have I met such an unpleasant bunch of waiters as in that hotel. Their master's total lack of trust in them had warped their personalities. As long as he was watching they acted discreetly, but the moment they thought his guard was down they would seize the opportunity to misbehave.

In much the same way, it would ruin our own characters if God's presence were as obvious as that of the [hotel owner]. This would then be a world without trust, without faith, without unselfishness, without love--a world where everybody obeyed God because it paid them to do so. Horrors!

But how sustained is our faith in the Father's plan of salvation when we experience personal or family adversity? Or when we see wrenching, widespread human suffering? Especially if either of these continues unrelieved?

Modern communication ensures that we will receive poignant and regular doses of graphic, global suffering. Our scale of such awareness is something earlier generations never knew. Granted, we still see only a very small fraction of all that God sees, but the tiny fraction is part of the needless suffering He witnesses. Could we bear seeing any more anyway? Increased awareness already overloads our limited bearing capacity, causing some to "tune out" and inducing still others to doubt God's purposes and capacity.

When trials of faith are no longer something we see happening to others but instead involve "me," it is more difficult! When a different configuration of challenges presents itself, for instance, even past experiences may not sustain us fully. Memory can surely help by keeping us meek and trusting in the face of what is new. The sobering indication "All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7) tells us that while we are doctrinally rich, we are usually experience poor. God's plan is designed to correct the latter deficiency; one's soul shivers, however, as one contemplates the implications.

If we do not understand God's plan of salvation sufficiently, we will run the risk of misreading life's trials, whether these come to us or to our loved ones. Amid stress, if we do not understand the character of God and Jesus adequately—including their perfect love and omniscience—we may either doubt their love or question their tutoring wisdom.

Applying faith to daily life, therefore, amid the overall plan is not merely mental gymnastics involving abstract theology. Instead, faith becomes genuinely operative in our daily lives as we really begin to "liken" the doctrines "unto [our]selves" (1 Nephi 19:23). This effort to "liken" is part of being "anxiously engaged" in a risk-filled adventure.

If in God's plan of salvation there were not moral agency, risk, and uncertainty, resulting in the trying of our faith and patience, there would be no real growth or real happiness. Even God cannot try our patience without our having the relevant, clinical experiences in which impatience can so easily carry the day. How can we learn to "be of good cheer" without passing through situations of insecurity or anxiety?

Furthermore, in the isometrics of individual development God may try us where we are the weakest (see Ether 12:27). One understandably may wince while exploring the implications of that hard teaching!

Faith in the plan of salvation with its developmental dimensions makes allowance for the fact that so many undesirable things occur "in process of time." Exercising one's faith "in process of time" involves, as noted, the steady isometrics of pitting the old self against the new self. No wonder patience is also required in this, the most grinding and exhausting form of calisthenics.

Our youth are sometimes buffeted daily in Babylon beyond what we who are older know. They need at least a rudimentary understanding of the plan of salvation, especially in their tender times of growing up. For them, in a moment of needed response, the smile of one friend is like a standing ovation. A compliment can part the curtain on their unappreciated possibilities. Unfortunately, however, our youth can almost be terrorized by the disapproval of their peers. It is as if their group's "thumbs down" were the equivalent of a Roman emperor dispatching with finality gladiators in the Colosseum. Youth can be so easily devastated by cutting remarks, as if such slights represented the irreversible verdict of the universe as to their worth. When so discouraged, the "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy can end up being alluring, especially if they do not understand God's plan, His love of them, and what Jesus' atonement did for them, personally. The less they feel of ultimate belonging, the more counterfeit forms of belonging will appeal. Of course, ultimate belonging is not just for teenagers. Lacking an understanding of

the plan of salvation, one may feel like a permanent resident in an airport transit lounge with its busy, ever-changing, lonely crowd.

For all of us, much has been helpfully revealed about the role of suffering and the purposes of individual chastisement during this mortal proving (see Abraham 3:25; Mosiah 3:19; 23:21). These true doctrines can inform us and brace us. Ignorance of them, however, can squeeze out the hope that is sorely needed to company with faith and charity.

The perception of one of Morris L. West's characters as to the "tragedy of the human condition" is that man is "conceived without consent" and "wrenched whimpering into an alien universe." Absent an understanding of God's plan of salvation (which knowledge comes to mankind solely by revelation, not by induction, deduction, or observation), such poignant feelings of lamentation may be expected. When there is an accompanying sense of helplessness or a willingness to surrender to the temptations of the flesh, it should not surprise us.

President Young reassured us as follows: "When you understand the Gospel plan, you will comprehend that it is the most reasonable way of dealing with the human family." Yet "the most reasonable way" causes you and me to tremble when our trials seem unreasonable and unexpected.

One of faith's most trying experiences occurs when, after having given our loving help, we watch with feelings of helplessness the struggles of those we love. If their circumstance or suffering goes unrelieved, did we quit importuning the Lord too soon? If we had importuned a little longer, would things be different? How do we balance sincere importuning with submissively accepting what God has allotted to us? Only the Holy Ghost can give us such discernment and assurance. What a splendid gift is thus given to us!

In these tender and perplexing situations, each case is different. We sometimes genuinely don't know what to pray for "as we ought" (Romans 8:26). But the Spirit can tell us when our importuning has been sufficient and when it is time to accept what is allotted.

As to the simplicity and relevancy of the gospel, President Brigham Young observed:

If you could see things as they are, you would know that the whole plan of salvation, and all the revelations ever given to man on the earth are as plain as would be the remarks of an Elder, were he to stand here and talk about our every day business... You may now be inclined to say, "O, this is too simple and child-like, we wish to hear the mysteries of the

kingdoms of the Gods who have existed from eternity, and of all the kingdoms in which they will dwell; we desire to have these things portrayed to our understandings." Allow me to inform you that you are in the midst of it all now.

Having faith in the plan of salvation makes all the difference in how we see our personal situation amid what others call the human predicament. The Apostle Paul understood the plan, and his faith was such "that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). Nephi, though momentarily perplexed, similarly observed: "I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17).

We know, for example, that some either enter into this life with, or subsequently acquire, significant and disabling limitations to their capacity to function fully. The meaning of such situations is not quickly apparent in all such instances. Nevertheless, even with their severe limitations some of these individuals are so valiant. They do so much with so little! One senses, at times, that they press almost eagerly against those limitations, as if they were trying to "get out."

One day, when we have a fulness of facts, we will see yet another application of the parable of the talents as pertains to these individuals who do so much with so little. Surely in God's perfect love and mercy, those who have been thus valiant will hear their own deserved version of, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." If, further, it also turns out that there was a premortal agreement by them to accept their limitations, so much more reason to rejoice and to admire them. Meanwhile, their response to their limitations should concern us less than how we respond to these special individuals.

Having faith in the Father's macro plan of salvation includes making allowance for His micro plans as well, just as having faith in His character encourages us to become more like Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. Emulation becomes the highest form of adoration.

However, what if God had His ego only mostly under control? Or where would we be if, instead of focusing on bringing "to pass the immortality and eternal life of man," God were distracted by self-centeredness? In fact, God has described what His work is, and does nothing save it be for the benefit of man (see Moses 1:39; 2 Nephi 26:24). Where would we be, too, if our Father in Heaven experienced people fatigue and we were merely His annoying posterity who kept Him from doing what He really wanted to do? Or where would we be if God became bored with the whole process?

As life presses upon us with both goodness and relentlessness, we must pace ourselves and recognize the limitations that go with our "strength and means" (D&C 10:4). Yes, we should do things in "wisdom and order" (Mosiah 4:27). Granted, there are times when we need respite and renewal, our equivalent of going to "a desert place... privately" (Mark 6:32). But though we can acknowledge this, why wouldn't a loving Father, full of joy, want all His children to have all that He has and therefore provide the growth conditions that could make this possible? How would we feel, later on, if we learned that He had not so striven in behalf of His children, earnestly wanting His children to receive "all that [He] hath"? (See D&C 84:38.) No wonder His efforts in our behalf are so unceasing.

God's comprehensive plan of salvation is the means by which He achieves all of His purposes.

Is it any wonder, then, if, in His plan, our "faith and patience" are regularly tried? (See Mosiah 23:21.) Paul confirms that those who "inherit the promises" are those who have triumphed "through faith and patience" (Hebrews 6:12). Abraham "obtained the promise," but only "after he had patiently endured" (Hebrews 6:15). Long- suffering, endurance, and patience are designed to be constant companions, as are faith, hope, and charity.

While a person is thinking his way through his particular hesitations or reservations about faith, he might ask, "Does God really know what I am passing through?" The answer is "Yes!" He knows! He also knew—through His foreknowledge. We worship an omniscient Father—a stunning characteristic of God which we forget at the peril of our perspective. Hence understanding the implications of key doctrines is part of further developing one's faith.

One may ask, With all else God has to do, does He really care about me or mine? Yes! He is a perfect Father, with attributes of perfect love and mercy. He is not only fully aware, but He cares. He knows, too, how good and conscientious parents can sometimes "take" more themselves than they can watch their children "take." But since He would not take away the cup from His Only Begotten and "Beloved Son" in Gethsemane and Calvary, He will not always intervene for us, either, as we might sincerely desire in the life crises of our children.

Does God already know the outcome of that through which I am passing? Yes! And He has taken that outcome, foreknown to Him, into account along with all other outcomes. In the Prophet Joseph Smith's words, God "has made ample provision," so that the purposes in His plan of salvation will be achieved—including our part within that plan, if we are faithful.

The inability to believe in the foreknowledge of the Father and Jesus and in their perfect love perhaps accounts for many failures of faith. As some encounter life's proving purposes, resentment of the challenges may cause a misunderstanding of God's plan. To those of little faith, His nonintervention is mistakenly taken to mean God either isn't there or doesn't care.

Mormon assured us, however, that Christ "advocateth the cause of the children of men" (Moroni 7:28). Other "good causes" pale by comparison. Angels help to "call men unto repentance... by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts..." ; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men." (Moroni 7:31-32.) Therefore, those who discount angels and angelically delivered truths underestimate God's capacity to achieve His purposes for man "in [his] own way" (D&C 104:16).

The "most believing," however, are truly "alive in Christ," though in a dying world. These few have "hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of His resurrection." They "have faith in Christ because of [their] meekness." (Moroni 7:39, 41.) Just as important, they are filled with charity and "faith unfeigned" (see 2 Corinthians 6:6). Even for high-achieving individuals, however, personal development occurs "in process of time."

This whole, glorious dispensation of the fulness of times began with the simple act of faith by a very young man who had read a verse about faith written centuries before by faithful James. Young Joseph had a genuine desire to know which Church to join. He "gave place" (see Alma 32:28) in his schedule and his life and found a place to pray vocally, thereby exercising his faith. Then the mighty restoration began, with its precious revelations; and none was more needed than those about the plan of salvation.

No sooner do we begin to display a little faith, however, than that faith is tried--just as happened in the Sacred Grove.

Yet without the trials which come even to early faith, greater things cannot subsequently be revealed to us. Only after our faith is tried can we receive the witness which is subsequently needed to sustain us (see Ether 12:6).

Even so, amid life's tests we may still sometimes wonder, if only inwardly, "Why me? Why this? Why now?" The remedy, Brigham Young indicated, is for "the Spirit of revelation [to] be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God." There can

be no such personal revelation, however, without our first developing personal faith in God's patterns of divine disclosure.

Let it be said, however, that not only does God have a plan but so also does the adversary. President Young assured us that "the Lord Jesus Christ works upon a plan of eternal increase, of wisdom, intelligence, honor, excellence, power, glory, might, and dominion, and the attributes that fill eternity. What principle does the devil work upon? It is to destroy, dissolve, decompose, and tear in pieces." This destruction includes marriages, friendships, faith, self-esteem, and purposeful living in all its dimensions.

Why is it so hard, then, especially if we know and understand these things? One major reason is the impact of the flesh. We also live in the dimension of time which, by its very nature, creates vexing suspense for us. Life is so designed that we use our moral agency by choosing for ourselves daily. This steady stream of our responses forms a cumulative record out of which we will later be judged. This same plan, a framework for life, ensures that we are to overcome by faith, not by perfect knowledge.

One of the purposes of the Father's plan of salvation is that "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). This means that we are proffered the necessary experience in enduring, choosing, and learning from various outcomes. In this way we get to know ourselves, our strengths and our weaknesses. If meek, we get experience in developing empathy, not only for those close to us but for others as well who are struggling to make it through this second estate successfully.

Since the natural man is too attached to his possessions anyway, the plan requires that we must have experience in giving possessions away—in sharing and even losing them—in order to give us experience with the principle of sacrifice without worrying about getting credit or receiving recognition as we worship Him who made the "great and last sacrifice" (Alma 34:10).

Since the natural man is also too selfish and too caught up with himself, there must be experiences which are empathy enhancing.

Since the natural man is likewise too impatient, there must be experiences to teach patience.

Since the natural man is inclined to hold back his talents, his time, or his possessions, there will also be enhancing experiences to teach us, if we will, the need to let our wills be swallowed up in the will of the Father.

Since the natural man is too proud, there will be meekness-enhancing experiences.

Despite our need for these experiences, we mortals are free to choose for ourselves whether to use for our good the experiences through which we pass. In his plan, God "permits" many things of which He clearly does not approve. Brigham Young taught: "The inquiry may rise, 'Does the Lord reign upon the earth?' We could answer, 'Yes; for it is his earth, and he controlleth according to his pleasure, and it will yet be devoted to those who serve him. But, in consequence of the agency that is given to the intelligent children of our Father and God, it is contrary to his laws, government, and character for him to dictate us in our actions any further than we prefer.'"

President Joseph F. Smith said: "Many things occur in the world in which it seems very difficult for most of us to find a solid reason for the acknowledgment of the hand of the Lord. I have come to the belief that the only reason I have been able to discover by which we should acknowledge the hand of God in some occurrences is the fact that the thing which has occurred has been permitted of the Lord."

Faithful and tried John Taylor candidly said we need to have faith in the plan, even when we do not have all the explanatory divine data: "I do not know why Jesus should leave his Father's throne and be offered up a sacrifice for the sin of the world, and why mankind have to be put through such an ordeal as they have to pass through on this earth; we reason upon this, and the Scriptures say that it is because man cannot be made perfect only through suffering. We might ask why could not mankind be saved in another way? why could not salvation be wrought out without suffering? I receive it in my faith that this is the only way, and I rejoice that we have a Savior who had the goodness to come forth and redeem us."

Real storm fronts do pass turbulently through our lives, but they do not last forever. We can learn the important difference between passing, local cloud cover, and general darkness. We can "hold out," if we but hold on by maintaining our perspective. But while we are in the midst of "all these things," the very experiences which can be for our long-term good, the anguish is real. We may feel, for instance, that some trials are simply more than we can bear. Yet, if we have faith in God's character as an all-knowing and all-loving Father, we understand that in His plan He will not give us more than we can bear. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13; D&C 50:40.)

The role of moral agency in God's plan of salvation is crucial. Since things have a way of going awry whenever we mortals misuse our agency, there is great need for us to develop our own capacity to extend long-suffering and mercy towards

others, even when their mistakes adversely affect us. The injunction of forgiving "seventy times seven" not only instructs us but also implies much about the frequency of mortal errors, thus reinforcing the counsel for us to be long-suffering.

Just as God provided in His plan a Savior for mankind, He has not left mankind alone in other ways. From time to time in human history He has given Apostles and prophets for the "edifying" of the Church and to bless all who would pay heed to them (see Ephesians 4:11-14). Edifying means "building up," with all that implies. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seeks to promote the edifying numerical and spiritual growth of its membership. No wonder the Joseph Smith Translation of the familiar Matthew 6:33 stresses that we are to seek first to "build up" the kingdom of God and to "establish" His righteousness. Then "all these things shall be added unto you." (JST, Matthew 6:38.) The building up of individuals by helping them to establish righteousness in their lives is at the core of Heavenly Father's purposes in restoring His Church.

Lest we be too intimidated about the plan of salvation's eventual emphasis on our becoming perfect, as the Father and Jesus are, it is well to keep in mind that the word perfect emphasizes that one can become "finished" and "fully developed" (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48; 27:27; Ephesians 4:13). It thus emphasizes the "completeness" and wholeness essential to full happiness, including, of course, the glorious resurrection and joyous exaltation. However, instead of resulting in a democratic sameness among all resurrected people in each and every respect, God's plan clearly accepts that there will be variations of attainment. These will reflect how well we lived in mortality and to what extent we developed our individual possibilities.

Enduring affliction is certainly part of enduring to the end, but the word enduring also means to last, to continue, and to remain (see 2 Nephi 33:9). This emphasis on staying the course appears at so many points in the scriptures (for examples, see D&C 20:29; 2 Nephi 9:24). We could scarcely become "finished" or "completed" if we did not finish and complete all of life's assigned course!

Since the plan of salvation is aimed at our individual spiritual development, it is well for us to take account of life's high-risk situations. One tremendous risk is possessing power, though this is a circumstance for which many crave (see D&C 121:34-46). There is currently much fascination with empowerment but very little interest in the everlasting significance of the attribute of meekness, which was so perfectly embodied in the character of Jesus, our great Exemplar.

President Abraham Lincoln, a student of human nature, knew firsthand of the interplay of political power and purpose. He wrote eloquently of the persistent human strivings for power and for glory, especially among the talented:

This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and they, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us.... Towering genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees no distinction in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It denies that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen.

Another high risk while we pass through the second estate of the plan of salvation is the human tendency to assume one has intellectual self-sufficiency and can disregard divine revelation. Skepticism abounds about the very process of revelation. Ironically, it is by revelation that we know anything at all about the plan of salvation! One could stare at the stars a long time, even appreciatively and with the radio telescope, without ever discovering God's purposes for the universe.

The denial of revelation has been and is expressed variously:

And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that... no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come (Jacob 7:7).

Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ. (Alma 30:13, 15.)

Some, though sincere, nevertheless discount revelation, simply because they cannot really accept that God exists, as Joseph Smith taught, in "an eternal now" with the past, the present, and the future before him. But having faith in the Father's plan of salvation is tied to having faith in this vital dimension of His character and capacity.

God's plan of salvation features His invitation, "Come home!" Our Father's invitation was thus accompanied by the restoration of all the implementing priesthood keys, authority, ordinances, and doctrines. It truly was a "marvelous work and a wonder"—wording denoting something "extraordinary"—but it is also clearly something "hard to understand" (see Isaiah 29:14).

With the Restoration came a clear understanding of our true identity and a sense of everlasting community. We know who we really are and where our "home" really is. Hence life, when properly lived, is really a journey "back home." In this narrow sense we are like the prodigal son. As we come to ourselves, we too will say with determination, "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18).

The Prophet Joseph Smith learned so much about the overall plan of happiness throughout the extended process of the Lord's restoring of the holy apostleship, the holy priesthood, the holy endowment, the holy sealing power, and so forth. Yet young Joseph, whose impact would become global, merely went into the Sacred Grove to find out which local church he should join. How generous God is!

The Father's plan, then, was set up to bring us all the way "home." Upon entering the third estate, however, we will never know the welcoming embrace of the celestial gate's keeper if in this second estate we embrace the things of the world (see 2 Nephi 9:41; Mormon 5:11; 6:17).

Of course, some can be content with being numbered among the "honorable" terrestrials (D&C 76:75). Yet each of us has been invited to become "the man [or woman] of Christ" (see Hebrews 12:9; Helaman 3:29; 3 Nephi 27:27; D&C 76:24).

Hence no temporary designation and no other way of being known here on earth should take precedence. Having faith in the plan of salvation includes steadfastly refusing to be diverted from our true identities and responsibilities. In the brief season of our existence on earth we may serve as plumber, professor, farmer, physician, mechanic, bookkeeper, or teacher. These are useful activities and honorable designations; but a temporary vocation is not reflective of our true identities. Matthew was a tax collector, Luke a physician, and Peter a fisherman. In a salvational sense, "So what!"

Magnifying our callings signifies our willingness to be further tutored and trained—all in order to become the "man [or woman] of Christ." The more we become like Jesus, the more useful we are to Him and the more prepared to live with Him.

Even the various offices and Church callings we hold should not be seen as limitations but as intrinsic invitations to facilitate our going home, having been "added upon" (see Abraham 3:26).

To magnify one's calling means seeing "with the eye of faith" the enlarged and detailed possibilities of service to one's family, flock, friends, and others. After all,

the same power of God that brought into existence "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33) can surely watch over our little universes of individual experience!

Of the great invitation we have received to "come home," the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, "If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses." King Benjamin was specific in saying that if one wishes to become a saint, he must become "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

The more one sees of life, the more one understands why there is such a scriptural stress on submissiveness and meekness. The dangers flowing from an excess of ego are real and constant. Would that we first placed an ego-filtering screen over all our thoughts, words, and actions before they hurt others or embarrassed us. If we are steadily becoming more and more the man or woman of Christ, the filtering mesh in that ego screen will become finer; fewer things will slip through to harm.

Some questions may help us to "audit" how much operative faith we have in the Father's plan of salvation.

How perceptibly are we developing the Christlike qualities enumerated by King Benjamin?

What will our sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters learn from us about gospel doctrines? Or will we depend entirely upon Church classrooms to teach our children?

Does our understanding of the plan of salvation help us to handle disappointments in life? Can we partake of our tiny, bitter cups without becoming bitter?

How often do we render quiet, Christian service? A lack of sufficient love for others constitutes a major failure for which no other successes can ever fully compensate.

How consistently do we show love and respect for our family members? for women? There is no real manhood without real respect for womanhood. No man can be exalted who demeans women. Surely no man who is brutal, harsh, or disrespectful to a wife or mother or children or to any woman is worthy of his priesthood! Since our sons and grandsons will treat women much as we men now do, what generational proclivities are we building?

Likewise, our daughters and granddaughters will regard men much as their mothers do.

One seldom-mentioned reason for keeping the commandments is that we then become genuinely happier with ourselves. Otherwise, if unhappy with ourselves, the grim tendency is to pass our misery on, or at least to allow it to cloud and even diminish the lives of others who must put up with us. Our happiness is the intent of God's plan of happiness.

The more we come to understand the plan of happiness, the more we come to understand how incomplete and unfinished we were in our first estate and how much we needed this difficult mortal experience. We finally realize that there is no other way. Remembering this reality helps, especially when the only way is so difficult and discouraging at times and when we experience sadness as participants in the great plan of happiness.

We can take heart and rejoice when we see the divine virtues well developed in our fellow servants. It gives the rest of us hope and encouragement. "You can do it!" is best received from someone who has done it. We understand, therefore, that sometimes the less heralded but highly developed individuals are "no less serviceable" (Alma 48:19) in the cause of God than those who may be much more in the spotlight.

The best thing we can do is to be in the serious process of becoming the men and women of Christ. If we are moving in the direction of becoming more loving, meek, humble, patient, long-suffering, kind, and gentle, then all those we lead will be safe with us; we will lead our flocks as Christ leads the Church (see Ephesians 5:23).

The cardinal virtues are always the ones most needed for living in close, mortal quarters, anyway. It is in close quarters that we experience and endure each other's imperfections. This is one reason why patience and forgiveness are such cardinal virtues, especially in families.

With regard to our small world of families and flocks, how wonderful it would be if it could be correctly said of each of us what is correctly said of our Father: that He "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world"! (2 Nephi 26:24.) Would that we'd not do "anything save it be for the benefit" of our family, friends, and flocks.

As we move along the pathway on the journey back home, it is only fair to acknowledge that, even with all its resultant blessings, faithfulness will bring some added challenges. It seems God is always stretching most those who meekly serve Him. At times His best pupils experience the most rigorous and continuous courses. Eventually, each who proves to be a man or woman of Christ will thereby become a distinguished alumnus of life's school of affliction, graduating with

honors. This is a wintry doctrine, but a true one. And complying with each wintry doctrine brings its own summer-like set of rewards.

Knowing of God's plan, we should beware of any group that requires us to alienate ourselves from God in order to belong. We should be careful, too, of any rites of social passage if these are the very passages that lead down to the gulf of misery and woe (see Helaman 3:29; 5:12).

Finally, consider how long ago some were actually called: "And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works" (Alma 13:3, italics added).

Foreordinations for men and foredesignations for women happened a long, long time ago. Let us be true to those anticipations by striving to journey "home" complete with our families. Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. Meanwhile, however, there may be some dark days immediately ahead, but with brighter days eventually ahead.

In 480 b.c. a small Greek force under the Spartan king Leonidas courageously held a mountain pass for three days at a place called Thermopylae against overwhelming numbers of the enemy. When someone commented that the Persian army was so huge that their arrows blocked out the sun, one of the defenders replied: "So much the better. We shall fight in the shade!"

In the life of each of us there is intermittent shade brought by passing cloud cover. It takes operative faith in the Father's plan to survive, whether in the shade or under the scorching, secular sun. Both discouraging shade and the heat of the sun bring out our weaknesses. By relying on faith, we repent and improve in honest recognition of those inadequacies. Otherwise—without faith—why bother to change?

In this life, clearly we "walk by faith" rather than by perfect knowledge (2 Corinthians 5:7). The plan ensures that our perspective is intentionally limited. Elder Charles W. Penrose perceptively instructed:

The knowledge of our former state has fled from us... and the veil is drawn between us and our former habitation. This is for our trial. If we could see the things of eternity, and comprehend ourselves as we are; if we could penetrate the mists and clouds that shut out eternal realities from our gaze, the fleeting things of time would be no trial to us, and one of the great objects of our earthly probation or testing would be lost. But the past has gone from our memory, the future is shut out from our vision

and we are living here in time, to learn little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept. Here in the darkness, in the sorrow, in the trial, in the pain, in the adversity, we have to learn what is right and distinguish it from what is wrong, and lay hold of right and truth and learn to live it... If we have any evil propensities... we have to grapple with them and overcome them. Each individual must find out his own nature, and what there is in it that is wrong, and bring it into subjection to the will and righteousness of God.

In the rigorous second estate, the inherent journey of selfdiscovery is best made. Wilford Woodruff confirmed: "There is a veil between man and eternal things; if that veil was taken away and we were able to see eternal things as they are before the Lord, no man would be tried with regard to gold, silver or this world's goods... and this [veil is there] for a wise and proper purpose in the Lord our God, to prove whether the children of men will abide in his law or not in the situation in which they are placed here."

One day, however, full perspective will be ours, as President Brigham Young declared:

We talk about our trials and troubles here in this life: but suppose that you could see yourselves thousands and millions of years after you have proved faithful to your religion during the few short years in this time, and have obtained eternal salvation and a crown of glory in the presence of God; then look back upon your lives here, and see the losses, crosses, and disappointments, the sorrows... you would be constrained to exclaim, "But what of all that? Those things were but for a moment, and we are now here."

Even though we are presently shorn of perspective, if we have faith we can face the darkness and life's fiery trials. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three valiant young men, knew that God could easily rescue them from the fiery furnace if He so chose. "But if not" they said, they would believe in and trust Him anyway! (See Daniel 3:18.) Since death comes to all of us, the tersely expressed faith of two Book of Mormon prophets too is worthy of emulation. So far as the specific timing of their own deaths was concerned, they said, if they could but do their duty, "it matters not." (See Mosiah 13:9; Ether 15:34.)

It should be the same with us. Blessings are given to some who are sick and they are healed, some quickly and some slowly. But some are not healed. Moreover, some wrenching conditions provide sharp, persistent thorns in the flesh which are to be endured, not removed (see 2 Corinthians 12:7).

President Lorenzo Snow, speaking of the universal plan of salvation with its personal trials, once quoted some sobering and confirming lines of poetry:

All who journey soon or late, Must come within the garden gate, And kneel alone in darkness there, And battle hard, yet not despair.

Successfully meeting our trials, therefore, shows we have faith in the Father's plan of salvation. Besides, being too comfortable here would only produce a later discomfort, for, as President Woodruff counseled, "if we had no trials we should hardly feel at home in the other world in the company of the Prophets and Apostles who were sawn asunder, crucified, etc., for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ."

Having faith in the Father's plan of salvation includes allowing for that suffering, including the vexations growing out of some interpersonal relationships. Of these vexations, John Taylor observed: "Many of us are tried and tempted, and we get harsh and hard feelings against one another. And it reminds me of your teams when going down hill with a heavy load. When the load begins to crowd on to the horses, you will frequently see one snap at his mate, and the other will prick up his ears and snap back again. And why? A little while before, perhaps, and they were playing with each other. Because the load crowds on them. Well, when the load begins to crowd, do not snap at your brethren, but let them feel that you are their friends, and pull together."

If we now have full faith in the Father's plan of salvation, one day we will look back with fulness of fact and acknowledge God's perfect justice and mercy (see Mosiah 27:31; Alma 12:15).

Mercifully, the Restoration scriptures came to inspire, inform, and bolster us. God knew we urgently needed these added, precious pages of holy writ with their "convincing" content. We could not do His work in this last and full dispensation without them.