

Pursuing a 'Perfect Knowledge'

By Ken Harvey, PhD



Life is a façade. It's a ghost of reality that all too often distracts us from what is real. Did you know that if the atoms that make up our reality were enlarged so we could see them with our naked eyes and the nucleus of one atom were the size of a baseball sitting in the middle of a football stadium, the atom's electrons would be flying around the city outside the stadium. Everything between the nucleus and the electrons would be empty, nothing, void.

Did you know that if all that space were squeezed out of all the atoms in the world so that the earth had the density of an atom's nucleus, that the earth would be smaller than an apple in size? Our greatest mountains would be the size of a grain of salt – a very heavy grain of salt.

Yet each atom is held precariously in a power balance, keeping the electrons from spinning out of the atomic configuration. Without this delicate balance, atoms would go radioactive and no life could exist on this planet.

What holds the world in this precarious balance? What keeps the atoms from collapsing and destroying life? Power, energy... And who controls that power that maintains this facade?

Right now you are probably sitting somewhere reading this book. You probably think that you are sitting very still, but you are not. You are sitting on a planet that is racing around the star we call the Sun at a speed of 71,000 miles (108,000 km) per hour. Our Solar System, meanwhile, is racing around the center of our Milky Way Galaxy at a speed of about 600,000 miles (900,000 km) per hour. And our galaxy, finally, is racing through the universe at a speed of nearly 1.5 million miles (2.2 million km) per hour. You are on the thrill ride of your life, and you weren't even aware of it.

I like to put my students through a little reality check. I challenge them to think about their happiest experience as a child – remember it in detail as if it were yesterday. Then I ask, "Were you there? Were you at that 'favorite experience'?" They look at me as if I'm crazy. Then I explain that each year, 98 percent of the atoms that make up a person's body are replaced by new atoms. So after 5 years it is unlikely that a single atom is the same. If you are remembering a special event 5-10 years ago, you are remembering an event that not a single atom of your body attended. In addition, it is interesting that despite this massive changeover, we remain with many disfigurements and chronic ailments we had a year or two or three ago with our old atoms. What tells our new atoms to realign like our old ones did?

Men and women – no matter how smart – who trust in their own knowledge and perceptions are fools, for their knowledge is miniscule compared to God's. If you could part the veil between this life and the next for just 10 minutes, you could learn more than by reading all the books ever written on religion, according to Joseph Smith. And who could dare challenge that?

Maybe we should try that to pierce that veil. Maybe we should consider how much time we spend maintaining this façade and how little time we spend trying to see beyond it into the eternities. To God, we must be like children in a sandbox, building our sandcastles. In our children's fantasy world, their creations are real, but we laugh at their make-believe, as God must ours.

But I don't think he laughs at our potential. Consider who we are – in reality – and the promises God has made to those who love him:

The Apostle John wrote: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:10-12).

John wrote elsewhere: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:1-3).

In his Book of Revelations, this same apostle recorded: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. ... And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. ... To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. ... He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." (Revelations 1:5-6; 2:26; 3:21; 21:7)

The Apostle Paul confirms this grand destiny for those who can overcome the facades, the foolishness, and the blindness of this world. Consider Romans 8:16-18: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together."

If these things are true, we must look at earth life from an eternal perspective. Our reality should only be that which will still be true and valid and of value a million years from now. Everything else is fake. The Lord will help us gain this new reality if we devote ourselves to him ... if we pursue him into the wilderness and to the top of our Mount Sinai.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. ... But the natural man receiveth not the things of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10,14).

As we ponder what our lives are all about -- who we are, where we are, and where we're going -- we should do so with a new perspective -- even the perspective of eternity. Stephen Covey shares a parable in his book, "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People." He tells of a crew building a road through the jungle. Day after day they work so hard. Certainly they could not be faulted for lack of effort, for they soak the jungle floor with their own sweat. But one day the crew chief climbs a tall tree and looks out over the jungle and shouts down in dismay, "Stop! Stop! We're going the wrong direction!" Workers down below, however, respond, "But we're making progress!" Many of us pour our hearts and souls into endeavors that are not getting us to where we really ought to be going. We're making "progress," but unless we get a higher perspective, we will be very disappointed when -- at the end of time -- we realize we failed to take into account those things that truly matter in eternity.

How are we using our time on earth? Do we sacrifice the things that matter most for the sake of those things that matter least? In other words, do the things of this earth take priority over those things that have eternal consequence?

In mental and emotional anguish, a farmer goes to his aging father. Bad weather and disease have destroyed the son's crops, and now he faces bankruptcy. The once proud man feels humiliated and angry as he sees the fruit of his years of labor in ruin. "Dad, my orchard's destroyed," he says. "Why would God let this happen to me?" I put his wise father's response into verse:

*God cares about problems; he cares about pain.
But he allows his children to make their own way.
When things go wrong, he could intervene.
But man, Sonny, is made to be free.*

*When the frost came late and killed the crops,
You said no God would allow your loss.
But while God loves apples, and cherries, too,
Mostly, Sonny, he cares about you.*

*God cares about drought; he cares about rain.
He cares about sorrow; he cares about pain.
God cares about earthquakes and your problems, too.
But mostly, Sonny, he cares about you.*

*No crops thrive where there's only sunshine.
There has to be snow and rain sometimes.
And while God cares how your crops grew,*

Mostly, Sonny, he cares about you.

*When you had the boom years, did you thank God?
You acted mighty proud around the in-laws.
When you had good years, did it make you strong?
No, Sonny, it was all going wrong.*

*You were running here and flying there.
No time for family or wife to spare.
So many tasks you said were past due,
No time for him who created you.*

*You cared about crops; you cared about self.
You cared about status; you cared about wealth.
But God's main crop isn't growing fruit.
Mostly, Sonny, he's trying to grow you.*

*God could give you fun; he could give you money.
He could make you happy all the time, Sonny.
But if God didn't give opposition, too,
Sonny, he wouldn't care about you.*

*Oaks don't grow strong in ideal conditions.
They need rain and snow ... and some opposition.
Men grow in opposition, too.
You see, Sonny ... God's still growin' you.*

While faced with all the plights of life, can we live in eternity? Time is insignificant when we realize that all the time in the world is but a drop in the infinite. And when time has run out, will we be judged based on what we have achieved in man's society? No. From his judgment seat overseeing the infinite, God will judge us for what we have become inside. What kind of character we have developed. Have we cultivated love of God, charity toward man, humility, peace, spiritual knowledge and wisdom, selflessness, purity of thought, consecration to God's will, and gratitude for our blessings?

What you do this day – will it matter 50 years from now? How about 5,000 years from now? Many things that absorb our time have no significance in even 5 days, much less in 5 million years.

May we not neglect our Mount Sinai, but climb our personal peak of inspiration in pursuit of heavenly light and perspective. May we look out over the eternities and recognize how short our vision has so often been. May our prayers then reflect eternity.

But does God hear our prayers?

How do we know God hears our prayers and will answer them? In a religion course I took at Brigham Young University, we had been studying Alma 32 of the Book of Mormon, about what it means to have a perfect testimony. We were taught that to have a perfect testimony of Jesus Christ means you have actually received what the Prophet Joseph called “the Second Comforter,” which is a face-to-face visit by Jesus Christ himself. Over the years I have continued to ponder the concept of having a “perfect knowledge.” Recently, I was reading Alma 32 again. Alma says it is possible to have a perfect knowledge about some pieces of the Gospel without having a perfect knowledge of all things (Alma 32:33-34). After comparing faith to a seed he wrote:

“And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good. And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because ye know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.”

However, Alma goes on to point out that in conducting this experiment of faith, one does not yet have a perfect knowledge of all things and must not lay aside his faith. As I pondered this, I realized that I have gained a perfect knowledge of at least one thing during my life -- that God answers our prayers. With that realization, I believe, comes a responsibility to bear witness of that knowledge. So, it is with that primary purpose that I write this testimony.

I believe I have a perfect knowledge that God answers prayers. I believe it is even more perfect than my knowledge that I exist – at least in the form that I perceive that I exist. I believe quite strongly that I do exist on this planet we call Earth, and that all of you exist here with me. It has passed through my mind the alternative, however, that this could instead be a dream – that I do exist, but this life isn't real, that there really is no one born into the terrible existence that some people have to endure in places such as parts of Africa where poverty, AIDS, starvation, and inter-tribal brutality is part of daily life. But even if life were just a dream, I would still have to presume that life in some sense is real and that my interaction with God within that dream is real. So it is in this sense that I can say that I know more perfectly that God answers prayers than that I know this life is real. For I know God is still communicating with me, whatever the nature of our “reality.”

I do not write about this perfect knowledge that you might think more highly of me than I deserve. In some ways this knowledge is to my condemnation. The more perfect our knowledge, as Alma says, the harsher our judgment when we go against that knowledge (Alma 32:19). And, despite my knowledge, I have been anything but a perfect person. Nor have I always done those things that I know bring me closer to God, even though I am certain that in so doing I would successfully commune more powerfully with my Heavenly Father. Nevertheless, please do not judge what I write based on my imperfections. My knowledge is my knowledge, and I could bear this witness under oath in a court of law.

In so saying, I also need to emphasize that I do NOT have a perfect knowledge of all things. I do not have a perfect knowledge that Joseph Smith was a prophet, but if he wasn't, I don't know why God would have answered my prayers the way he has at times. So I believe strongly that Joseph was a prophet, for I know God told me to join the church, and I know he has blessed me with answers to my prayers and gifts of the Spirit as I have shared my less-perfect testimony of the restored Gospel. So I have every reason to believe the Prophet Joseph restored the Church of Jesus Christ in its fullness, but it is not a perfect knowledge. I must still exercise my faith as I strive for a perfect knowledge of all things.

God answers the prayers of a child

The Scriptures are full of examples of people whose prayers were answered miraculously. But does God still hear our personal prayers? Does he listen and respond to us individually? Does he still perform miracles on our behalf? The Scriptures say God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Therefore, what he taught his followers in the Bible should be true today. Jesus taught (Matthew 7:7-8,11):

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. ... If ye ... being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

I testify that this Scripture is true – and not just for old people like me, but also for young children and teen-agers. To explain my testimony that God answers prayer, I must go back to my early childhood -- because I have no doubt that God answered the prayer of that child who knelt by his bed and gave his first unmemorized, personal and inspired prayer.

I believe I was 5 when I went to a father-and-son social with Dad at the Presbyterian-affiliated community church we attended in California. After we watched the movie, “A Man Called Peter,” about the great Presbyterian pastor and chaplain of the U.S. Congress, Peter Marshall, I went home, knelt down by my bed and said my first real, unmemorized prayer. My 5-year-old self promised God I would be a “missionary” for him, and throughout my youth I wondered why I said “missionary” instead of “minister” or “pastor,” since I really wanted to be like the Rev. Marshall. I felt God had guided my words, so that made me ponder all the more.

As soon as I could read the Bible, I began reading every day and praying for answers. In his youth Marshall felt he was saved from death by God. He – like me – was trying to figure out what his purpose was in life. It was during that time of prayer and pondering that he went out into the night to take a walk through the wilderness of his native Scotland. He was saved from walking over a cliff by a voice in the dark that called his name. It was then that he felt he was called to devote his life to the ministry. That movie helped me believe that God would answer prayers, and, as I already said, made me want to be a pastor – despite my prayerful promise to become a missionary.

During subsequent years I had other special experiences. One day, for example, I felt very frustrated. While I prayed and read the Scriptures every day, it seemed like I never got any responses from God. It seemed my prayers were just bouncing off the ceiling, and so I had prayed “more earnestly” (Luke 22:44) to know if God was real and was hearing my prayers. Except for once when we took Randy Brown “snipe hunting,” I had never climbed the hill near our home at night. There were rattlesnakes there, and like most young kids, I was a little scared of the things that are unseen in the dark. Yet that night I was prompted to ask my younger brother Randy to join me in climbing the hill. As we reached the top, suddenly the whole sky lit up. I remember it was so bright that I could see more than a mile across the valley to the hill on the opposite horizon. I fell to my knees, remembering my morning prayer and thanking Heavenly Father for his answer. The next day the Tri-City Herald said it was a huge meteor shower. I don't doubt the science, but the timing, I believe, was not coincidental. What are the odds that it would happen exactly on the day of that prayer, on the one day of my life that I chose to climb the hill at night, and exactly as we approached the top? I am sure it was an answer to my prayer, but by itself there is certainly room for doubt.

When I was 17, I suddenly felt God was telling me that I was NOT supposed to be a pastor. I didn't hear a voice or see a vision, but the feeling was so strong and ran so contrary to my plans and personal desires that I had to find out if the feeling was true and why God would NOT want me to enter the ministry. I was willing to do whatever he wanted me to do, but I was confused. I had read the Bible, prayed, gone to many different churches and camps with the goal of becoming a pastor. I really wanted to be one, so I know my mind was not playing tricks on me. It wasn't like when people put themselves into an emotional frenzy and suddenly announce they have received an answer to their prayers. I was in no emotional frenzy, and the inspiration I was receiving was contrary to my own desires and plans. After my earlier experience on the hill, it had become a special place for me. So one Sunday morning I left a note for Mom and Dad that I was climbing the hill to talk to God instead of going to church. I spent all morning and early afternoon praying and pondering. Finally I felt prompted that as Gideon of the Old Testament, I was being allowed to ask for a sign – not as a basis for belief but as a clarification of what God wanted me to do.

In the case of Gideon, he was just a young man working on his family farm when he felt inspired to lead Israel to overthrow the bondage of the Midianites. As an Israeli army gathered to fight a much larger army of Midianites and Amalekites, it was hard for Gideon to grasp how an untrained soldier could be a successful general – or why the Israeli warriors would even follow him. So he asked God for

a sign. "If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand . . . I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand." In the morning, it was done as Gideon had asked. But to double-check, he asked God to do the opposite the next night. "Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew" (Judges 6:36-40), and thus it was.

So Gideon led the Israeli army against the Midianite forces, which numbered about 60,000. His army numbered 32,000. God told him that was too many; if they won, they would take all the credit. He ultimately sent home all but 300, and with those 300 soldiers and the power of God, Israel defeated the Midianites (Judges 7:1-25).

Jesus warned against those who seek signs as an excuse NOT to do God's will. But that was not Gideon's purpose, nor mine. So I asked for several very specific signs, one of which was that the others would occur without any effort on my part. Indeed, all of them did occur, and the most miraculous was the way God clearly made them happen. It wasn't anything I did.

One sign was that I would become state president of the Teenage Republicans in an overwhelming victory, and another was that I would receive a scholarship during that conference. I intended on running for the TAR position at the weeklong camp/conference, but even if I had put in all my effort, the likelihood of me winning was small. The previous year the large Seattle TAR club ran candidates against those of the large Spokane club. Both clubs were well organized with scores of students attending the conference, detailed campaign plans, well-prepared speeches, balloons, banners, signs, etc. But as I had requested in my prayer, God totally took it out of my hands by removing it from my mind during the entire weeklong conference. God made me forget I was even running until we were sitting in the culminating convention on the last full day of camp.

The previous year I had run for vice president, not because I expected to win but in order to share my ideas and feelings. Indeed, I had asked participants to vote for the other candidate but to just consider what I had to say. I lost the election by only 2 votes. Unknown to me, during that year the TAR president resigned and the vice president moved up to the top spot. When I arrived at the camp, the new president asked me to help rewrite the TAR constitution and prepare some resolutions for convention consideration. I was kept busy all week helping him, but nothing could have made me forget my goal to become president except God. During the state convention on that fifth day of conference, we had voted on the constitutional changes and the resolutions, and I was relieved to have all that over. Then they announced that it was time for nominations for state officers. Only in that instant did God allow me to remember my goal of running for president. I had not prepared a speech. I had no campaign organization. I had no signs, no banners, no balloons. I had not asked anyone to nominate me. So, I turned to the one student who went to conference with me from our little farming community of Connell and asked if she would nominate me. Valerie Dickman was so shy that she could hardly get those few words out. She definitely wasn't going to give a nominating speech. But after she nominated me, no one would run against me. It was elected unanimously. And immediately afterward they announced I had won a scholarship for which I had not applied. Despite my sometimes skeptical, over-analytical mind, I have no way to explain that sequence of events without testifying that God did answer my hillside prayer.

It was one year later when I realized only by that "still, small voice" within that my not becoming a pastor had something to do with what church I was to join. I had been searching for some time. I was then attending the Presbyterian Church with Dad and Mom; I was going to the United Protestant Church on Wednesdays with its youth leader, Ken Dorman; I was doing things with Baptist minister and renown entertainer Charles King; and I was occasionally attending other religious meetings, including a Pentecostal group in the nearby Tri-Cities. I was confused which way I should go, but the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not at all in consideration. I had grown up with a lot of prejudices against the LDS church. I used to argue with the Mormon kids on the bus to and from school. I had a good knowledge of the Bible and argued very effectively. I remember one day I argued

so persuasively that a young friend burst into tears. So, while my search for truth was sincere, in some areas I was blinded by bias.

Again one Sunday morning I left a note for Mom and Dad and climbed the hill to pray all morning and into the afternoon. Finally I felt a prompting that I would be led to the church I was to join in two weeks. With no thought of that earlier inspiration, two weeks later I invited myself to an LDS youth “missionary party.” I was not a party-goer, and I was not the type to invite myself to anything, let alone a Mormon missionary party. Nevertheless, I asked my debate partner (and future wife Gail Montierth) to take me, but she refused. “You will just start an argument,” she said. So I asked another student who had a crush on me. Linda Lemmon was delighted to be my date. After games and refreshments, the missionaries told the Joseph Smith story. I began arguing with them, as predicted, but afterwards they asked if I would be interested in taking the missionary lessons. I said yes just to have the opportunity to prove them wrong and to practice my debate skills. But as we met and as I attended church, I did feel the Holy Spirit and felt very much “at home” with the Latter-day Saints.

As I skeptically met with the young pair of Latter-day Saint missionaries, my prejudices slowly melted away. I could feel the Spirit as we discussed the Gospel, and I missed meeting with them when circumstances prevented it. One of the missionaries, Elder Thomas Kane, kept challenging me to put Joseph Smith to the test. “You have to find out whether he was a true prophet or a false prophet. And the best way to find out is to read what he wrote, pray to Heavenly Father and ask if what you read is inspired of God or of Satan.” His challenges haunted me. “You must know for yourself. If there are living prophets like Moses and Isaiah, and if there are living apostles like Peter, James and John, you need to know that. And that is exactly what the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers. If it is true,” he said, “it is worth absolutely everything. If it is false, then it is a terrible scam. And you have to know for yourself.”

But after a couple of months taking their lessons, the missionaries said they had nothing else to teach me unless I would prayerfully read the Book of Mormon. I was confused again. I enjoyed going to the LDS church, and I enjoyed meeting with the missionaries. But the missionaries were writing me off as insincere. That forced me to seriously and prayerfully begin reading the Book of Mormon to find out if, indeed, Joseph was a true prophet. I had read a lengthy “revelation” from the Pentecostal group and felt strongly that their prophecy was false (and later their prophecies, including the supposed second coming of Jesus Christ by the mid-1970s, did not come about), so now it was time to test Joseph through his writings. I knelt by my bed and prayed; then felt inspired to read the last book within the Book of Mormon – the Book of Moroni. I only got six chapters into that book when a powerful spiritual light hit me. I felt a literal burning in my bosom and what really did seem like a powerful light in my mind. It's hard to describe. And the spiritual prompting that came with the light was that a false prophet could not understand or write the inspired things I was reading. Since then I have compiled some Scriptures that I feel carry that same spiritual message for those who pray sincerely. I challenge people to read and pray about them because I believe they will get the same results I did. I suggest entire chapters so readers have the entire context. The Scriptures include:

2 Nephi 2

Moroni 1-7, 10

2 Nephi 9

2 Nephi 28

Mosiah 2-4

Alma 5

Alma 29

Alma 32, 34

Alma 41-42

3 Nephi 11

3 Nephi 27

Mormon 8-9

Joining the LDS church was very difficult for me. All my relatives and closest friends opposed the decision. The day of my baptism was the loneliest day of my life as Mom turned away from me in tears and Dad also choked with emotion as he asked if I was sure I was doing the right thing. About 100 people showed up for the baptism because many, like classmate Andy Biorn, did not believe I would do it since I had been so anti-Mormon. Biorn changed his life's direction and decided to go on a mission in part because of my baptism, and another friend who had attended the missionary party was baptized a couple of weeks after me.

Since joining the LDS church I have had many other prayers answered in powerful ways that are very, very difficult to explain away as coincidence, self-fulfilling prophecy or emotions. Following are a few to which I could testify in a court of law, and, if I could bring together my additional witnesses, I think I could convince a jury of Mormon-haters.

Miracles occur when we devote ourselves to God

Now I was in a position to fulfill my promise to God to become a missionary for him. The LDS Church has no professional pastors; but the church does have over 50,000 unpaid missionaries serving all around the world. I wasn't sure I could go on a mission because Dad was struggling financially with the farm, and just a couple years earlier he nearly had to sell the farm. He had to abandon any risky crops, such as sugar beets, in order to make sure he could keep up his payments. But Bishop Vernon Cook made me a promise that if I would go on a mission, God would bless my family financially. I had hardly entered the Missionary Training Center (MTC) before Dad's conservative crops suddenly started paying big dividends. Hay prices for perhaps the first time ever began to skyrocket, and the farm began to prosper.

When I arrived at the MTC, I wanted to have a perfect knowledge so I could be a strong missionary. I fasted four days, but received no angelic visitation, no great miracles. But when I actually arrived in the mission field and devoted myself to serving God and the good people of Guatemala and El Salvador, I experienced and witnessed many miracles, and my testimony grew rapidly. I have learned over the years that while God will provide us with an initial testimony based only on faith, most of the miracles we long to see come because we need them to serve others, not ourselves. They come as we serve in the name of the Lord. They are also more likely to come when the need is greater. For example, the gift of healing may come more often in a land where there is great poverty and poor medical care than in America where the need is not so great.

My most successful months statistically during my mission were my first four months in El Salvador, baptizing a total of nearly 50 people – 38 just during two months in Chalchuapa. But my most rewarding time spiritually was after I emailed the mission president as I approached my sixth month in Central America and offered to take his toughest assignments if he would make me a senior companion. He accepted my offer. Consequently, my last 15 months yielded relatively few baptisms but great spiritual experiences.

For me the greatest need and opportunity for miracles came during the two months I served as missionary and branch president in Antigua, Guatemala. Antigua is the center of Catholicism in Central America. It has many different Catholic schools, universities, monasteries and nunneries. The missionaries had been run out of town 10 years earlier, but I volunteered to open it up again. Sometimes when we were tracting door to door, nuns would follow us to convince people they should not let us come back. Overall, we confronted a lot of prejudice and suspicion among the people. And the 30 members of the small branch also had challenges I needed to address as branch president.

My first companion there was a “greenie” who had recently arrived from America. Over the past year we have made contact again over Facebook, and he has shared some of his journal entries and some additional emailed insights on what we experienced there. So as I describe the miracles of Antigua, I will call Elder Eric Monson to the witness stand, so to speak, to share his perspective. First,

I'll let Elder Monson set the stage about our work in Antigua:

From his journal, June 5, 1970:

"My new comp is Elder Kenny Harvey. He's a terrific elder: a hard worker, in tune with the Spirit, has good Spanish, and highly intelligent. He's helping to rid me of some of the wrong attitudes and ideas I had. ... We're racking up a lot of hours, and we're feeling the help of the Holy Ghost...."

From his journal, June 8-15, 1970:

"Things are toughening. We seem to be losing investigators, and step-by-step I fear we're heading for a blind alley. We've been doing some tracting, and have gotten past lots of doors. The problem we're having, though, is that seemingly good families are falling away one by one. Either one member of the family will be strongly Catholic, or there will be a Catholic grandmother who hates us, or people will be afraid of the truth. ... Something keeps happening.

"This is a city of fear, I think. People are seemingly afraid to listen to us – especially people over 45-50 years old. We've had one incident in which a mother said the husband wasn't home. A little boy, almost 3 years old, then came to the door and said he was. The mother clamped her hand over the youngster's mouth and again said [her husband] wasn't home. Then from inside I heard what sounded like a little boy crying; I'm virtually certain the mother had spanked her child for telling the truth.

"This whole town reminds me of the passage in which the Apostle Paul prophesied about people having 'itching ears.' It's hard to find very many here who are honest in heart. People don't care or can't understand the importance of our message, or will actively try not to hear our message.

"I'm not discouraged, however. I've told the Lord to do as He sees fit with me. He has promised me blessings which I know I'll receive if I stay worthy. If He wants me to have to wait or to endure tests and trials first, that's fine. For our part, we'll keep working...."

From his journal, June 23-25, 1970:

"We're starting to turn the corner, I think. We have really been praying hard for the Lord's help, and we just finished a fast. We have several very good investigators, of whom I think at least some will be baptized.

"We're really working hard. We worked 10½ hours yesterday (Monday [Prep Day]) and continue to push hard. So hard, in fact, that I'm too tired to write any more!"

From his journal, June 26, 1970:

"We're finishing up what has been kind of a mediocre week. Ironically, we have more hours this week than any other week this month (we should get about 85). Some of the investigators which we already have are coming along fine, but we've found no new ones....

"More and more people are starting to hate us now. It seems that more people whisper, 'Ellos son Mormones. [They are Mormons.]' when we walk by. This is quite a town!! I like it here, though. There are some good people, and this is a very beautiful town. The greenery is very lush, the mountains are pretty, and it's all very picturesque."

From his journal, June 28, 1970:

"This started out as quite a discouraging weekend. We worked 14 hours yesterday and seemingly accomplished nothing. We had a film at the chapel – basketball and conference talks. We had publicly advertised the basketball film, but hardly anybody came.

"This morning seemed quite bad, too. I guess I'm just not used to services with so few people. However, tonight we had a visit that made it all worthwhile. Hermano Mendez and I

visited a great kid – right there with the answers. He believes all we say. I was walking on air after that one!

“My testimony is a great deal stronger than it's ever been. I'm feeling close to the Lord, humble, and joyous in His service. Today I gave a talk in Sacrament Meeting, and in it I bore my testimony. I said this was the first time my testimony had been tested and that my experience here had strengthened my testimony considerably.”

From his journal, June 29, 1970:

“I want to write a few thoughts concerning my comp, Elder Harvey, and my mission up to now. I've really enjoyed my month with Elder Harvey, even though we've had no baptisms. We've worked very hard, but we've had our fun, too. We laugh a lot together. He has an exceptionally strong testimony, and has had to go through a lot to be a member of the Church. It's been very good for me starting here in Antigua. The hard times we've had have both toughened me and have made me a great deal more humble. I now see that I'm nothing without the Lord's help. I've been very close to the Lord these past few days, and I'm continuing to get closer....”

From his journal, July 2, 1970:

“Some more random entries about Antigua.... First, about this coming weekend: we're going to baptize five people! We're going to baptize a profesora and her three kids. She's really going to be a great member. She's been reading, studying, and has a great understanding of the Gospel. She also has a good testimony. We're also going to baptize her 3 fine children. Our other baptism will be a man named Eduardo Mesaya. He has two brothers who are members, and who are really great. Eduardo's wife and mother-in-law hate us, but he has a strong testimony, and he, too, should be a good member.”

From his journal, July 5, 1970:

“I learned yesterday that I'm being moved to Jocotales in Guatemala City. Antigua was a fine place to start my mission. My faith had never been tested so much as it's been tested here, and I've never needed the Lord's help as much as I've needed it here....”

“We didn't baptize anyone today, by the way. Mesaya didn't show up, and the profesora still has to get her husband's approval of such things as tithing before she can be baptized. That means no baptisms for the entire month, even with an average of 81 hours [of work] per week. I think it's been very good for me, though. If nothing else, I have an idea how I'll react when confronted with tough assignments – keep going and try harder. And it's been a real pleasure working with Elder Harvey. He has a great desire to work, strong testimony, an unbreakable will, but a good sense of humor. A great guy, and he's a great missionary.

“There is one investigator I have to write about. His name is Victor Antonio, and he's a great person. If he would just get down on his knees! He's a very intelligent kid – a medical student with fine understanding, and, as he says, a good intellectual testimony. Yesterday I think we gave him the greatest spiritual challenge he will ever receive. We visited with him, and my comp and I had what amounted to a testimony meeting. We both have very strong testimonies, and we know we were teaching by the Spirit – it was there. I just pray that he'll get on his knees and ask the Lord. Like he says, all he lacks is a spiritual testimony....”

“We had a rather tragic occurrence this morning. We've been teaching an investigator named Lorenzo Lopez, a teacher. We thought we had him coming along. (We were the first people who'd ever gotten him to stop drinking.) And we came very close to baptizing him. About 10 days ago, however, a relative of his died and he promptly went on a drunk – BOY did he go on a drunk!! He's still on it. Today was the first time since then that we'd been able to find him

home. His breath smelled of cheap wine, and his speech was garbled....”

Elder Monson introduced some of our Antigua investigators. After we regained contact with one another this year (nearly 40 years since I finished my mission), we exchanged additional memories, and I was able to update him on what happened after he was transferred to Guatemala City.

LORENZO LOPEZ: On the day when we finally met with Lorenzo after he returned from his drunken stupor, we were about to leave when he called out to me and said, "Elder Kenny, don't you have the priesthood of God? I know I can be healed." And after he essentially called us to repentance, we went back and gave him a priesthood blessing to overcome his alcoholism, which I believe worked. By the end of the next month the alcoholic teacher had read every church book available in Spanish, and he had repented of his sins. He was baptized and began teaching many of the church classes because he already knew more than most of the other members.

MEDICAL STUDENT [Elder Monson refers to “Victor Antonio,” a medical student investigating the church, but I believe that was the name he gave us when he was still afraid of what associating with us might do to his career. I believe his real name was Elmer Marcelo Nunez, the name he used later in correspondence with me.]: I, too, have very vivid memories of our meetings with the medical student, because I, too, felt the Spirit very strongly as we taught. He was very intellectual. I remember, since I had just completed my second year as a church member, that he was asking questions for which I had no answers -- but the Spirit did. I would feel led by the Spirit to explain certain things and then have to go back to the apartment and ask Elder Monson questions and study to verify that everything I was prompted to say was in accordance with the teachings of the church. Several years later he was then a medical intern and I owned the Franklin County Graphic when there was a major earthquake in Guatemala. Somehow he got a hold of me and asked for another copy of the Book of Mormon. That was 6 years after our meetings with him, but he was impressed to go to some considerable effort to contact me. So, I would say he felt the Spirit, too. In a recent email Elder Monson added:

“Victor Antonio is one of the investigators I remember most. After we presented one of the discussions (I think #2, re the Book of Mormon), I remember us walking home or to our next appointment and me saying, 'That's what it's like to teach with the Spirit, isn't it?!' It was an amazing experience, and it taught me what we were striving for in our teaching.”

EDUARDO MESAYA: I was able to baptize Eduardo after Elder Monson left, and Eduardo became a very strong member. But the biggest shock came a couple of months later when the elders who replaced us told me his wife, who had hated us so much, had then joined the church. Eduardo was able to baptize her because her heart had been softened by his good example and the powerful changes she saw in his life. That was a major miracle!

PROFESORA [ALICE RAMIREZ?]: I don't remember her name for sure, but I found some correspondence from an Alice Ramirez, whom I think may have been the “profesora” we were teaching. She was finally baptized after I left Antigua. Her husband at first would not allow it but later agreed. I don't remember if Elder Monson was there when we taught her the Word of Wisdom. That was a major breakthrough. She had a longtime habit of drinking milk with coffee mixed into it for breakfast. The week after we taught the Word of Wisdom she told us that she ate some toast and eggs for breakfast and then drank her milk with coffee. Suddenly her stomach started churning and she had to run to the bathroom to regurgitate. But she didn't throw up the eggs nor the bread nor even the milk - only the coffee. Immediately after that, she became our most faithful unbaptized member. She started paying a full tithing, attending all the meetings, and, of course, keeping the Word of Wisdom. It was

only a month or so after my departure that her husband saw that the church was a good thing and let her join.

HEALING: There were some other spiritual experiences I recall. One, I think, was soon after I arrived in Antigua. A man and woman stopped us right in the middle of the street and asked us to pray for their sick child who had a very high fever. I remember feeling the Spirit very strongly and that the fever broke immediately. We ran into the father again later, and he thanked us for healing their son.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES?: We were teaching a good Lutheran man about the restored Gospel. Nice guy but it seemed to me that he was never going to join the church. So as Elder Monson finished the discussion, I determined that we would say good-bye but not set another appointment. We had better things to do with our time. I was definitely not in any frenzied or emotional state. I had no strong attachment to this person, and I felt it was time to move on. But as my companion concluded his part of the lesson, I believe an unseen angel or the Holy Spirit started talking to this man through me. I remember it was perfect Spanish – far better than mine has ever been. It was not my voice. They were not my words. I knew I had the right and power to interrupt, but I chose not to. My mind was free to think about other things. I noted out of the side of my vision that Elder Monson was aware that something was happening. He looked scared at first, then apparently felt the Spirit and calmed down. Whoever spoke to that man through me bore witness of Joseph being a prophet and the Gospel being restored. Strangely, my companion and I never really spoke about it. On the way home he said something like, "I never experienced anything like that." And all I said was, "Me neither." We spoke so little of it, I was not sure he fully understood what occurred, so recently I asked Elder Monson about it. This was his emailed response:

"I do remember the Lutheran man. As I recall, it was quite late at night, and we weren't getting anywhere. I do remember your voice and countenance changing, and sitting there in amazement as I watched the Spirit come over you. As I said in my earlier email, that was an amazing month, especially for a greenie!"

FASTING TO SAVE THE BRANCH: There were two families that made up the bulk of the branch, and those two families began feuding. The mother in one of the families was Relief Society president, and the mother in the other family was Primary president. They began criticizing one another, and I feared the feud would lead to the closure of the branch. I fasted and prayed for about 3 days with no answer. But then as church began on Sunday, during the opening prayer suddenly I began feeling "spiritual light" and receiving a stream of ideas, which I felt certain was a revelation from God. I started writing down ideas like taking dictation. Subsequently, I did and said what God told me, and we brought harmony back to the branch. Part of what I felt inspired to do was to switch the callings of the two women so the one who was Relief Society president became the Primary president, and the other sister became the Relief Society president. They were to walk in each other's shoes, so to speak. But what was more interesting to me is that I did not tell anyone that I had received a revelation and certainly not when I receive it. Nevertheless, the teenage daughter of one of the families later told us that on that particular Sunday she was struggling with some doubts implanted in her head by an atheist friend who had visited their home the night before. She prayed all night for relief from the doubts, but as the Sunday meeting began, exactly when I was receiving my revelation, she felt prompted to open her eyes during that opening prayer, looked up and saw a beam of light coming through the ceiling onto me. She took it as a sign, but I feel strongly that she was privileged to see a revelation.

From his first vision the Prophet Joseph described: "...I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me." Later, in describing his angelic visitation from Moroni, Joseph wrote: "While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at

noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.” And about Moroni's departure Joseph added: “After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person... until the room was again left dark, except just around him; when, instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared.” Joseph later taught in D&C 88:11-13 that God communicates and even controls the universe through the power of light:

“And the light which shineth ... is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space. The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.”

If I were in court, I would certainly want to call Elder Monson, the parents of the sick child, the healed alcoholic, the “profesora,” and the young lady who saw my revelation all to the witness stand.

I have experienced other miracles both before and after Antigua, but the degree to which we felt the Spirit and enjoyed the gifts of the Spirit in Antigua was something special. I think it could be attributed to our total dedication to the work during that time, as well as the great need we had for those spiritual gifts to do our work successfully. It was also possibly influenced by the fact that we enjoyed the mantle of our missionary callings but I was also branch president, so I needed more help from the Spirit -- especially since I was so new to the church.

I appreciate Elder Monson putting up with me. I guess I nearly worked him to death, but I think we shared a sense of urgency and devotion that drove us to commit our whole souls to the work. I was so inexperienced in the church, I'm sure I did some pretty stupid things -- or at least unorthodox things. But I greatly appreciate the great attitude reflected in his journal. In a recent email he added:

“What a great month! ... What I most remember is us working our tails off, taking occasional breaks for frijole sandwiches and 7-Up floats, and loving every minute of it. ,, Even though we didn't have any baptisms, I'll never forget how hard we worked and prayed, and what great spiritual experiences we had.”

Other mission miracles

I had some great spiritual experiences during the other 22 months of my mission, too. I would like to share a few.

GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT: In the poor area of Guatemala City called La Florida, we were tracting one day when we stopped to talk to a seamstress working by the open window of her home. She said she did not need to talk to us because she was already “saved,” but that we should come back and talk to her Catholic husband. We came back and began presenting our first discussion about the need for modern-day prophets when I was suddenly inspired to change directions and teach him about eternal marriage.

Senor Pineda became very excited and asked that we come back and teach him and his wife together. When we returned, he had already given the entire prior discussion to his wife. She knew and understood the concepts we had taught her husband better than most of our investigators ever did before baptism. The conflict that was apparent when we first talked to the wife was gone, and they were so excited to find out how they could be married forever.

They attended church my last week in La Florida and heard my farewell address. They came up almost in tears that I would be leaving them until I assured them that another missionary would take my place to teach them the rest of the restored Gospel. While I did not have a chance to baptize them, it was another evidence of how the Holy Ghost could guide our teaching – inspiring me to teach a man in obvious conflict with his wife about the concept of eternal marriage, something we would normally not

teach until near the end of our series of discussions.

LET GO AND LET GOD: After Antigua I was sent to Retalhuleu, Guatemala, in the lowlands near the Pacific coast. It was hot and humid, and there had been no baptisms for months. The other three missionaries were unmotivated, but my companion responded well to my enthusiasm, and we started working very hard. After a couple of months I bet the other two missionaries that they could not put in more work hours than we would. So, all four of us turned it up a notch and started working about 80 hours a week. We had essentially no investigators, so we tracted nearly every day. But that wasn't working, either. Then in my fifth month there, I hurt my foot so badly that I had to be in bed for two weeks and then either in bed or on crutches for another month. Our bedroom had a window out into the street, which we would open in the daytime. About all I could do at first was just pray and study. But then something very strange began to happen. Suddenly after five months of hard work with no baptisms and few lessons, people started coming to our window and asking if we could teach them the Gospel. During the time I was in bed, we had six baptisms! I don't ever remember even hearing of investigators coming to missionaries' apartment and asking to be taught. It hard certainly never happened to me before. But to get six baptisms that way was miraculous.

LOOKING FOR LEADERS: My final mission transfer was back to El Salvador to the same zone where we had experienced so much success the previous year. The same month my companion and I were baptizing 25 people in Chalchuapa, another pair of missionaries baptized 31 in Santa Ana, and another pair in that same city baptized 30. As I recall, our zone had over 250 baptisms that one month in 1970. But with that kind of growth, many new branches were created without strong leadership. The full programming of the church could not be developed and maintained, and consequently many new members fell away, many branches were recombined, and few new members were being baptized. The mission president sent a number of strong missionaries into that area to seek out strong leaders to bring into the church and to strengthen the branches.

I arrived during Christmas week of 1970, and as I prayed one morning I felt inspired to send a Christmas card to the mayor and to suggest that we meet to see how we missionaries could be of service to the city. To my surprise, within two days his secretary called to set up an appointment. As we were sitting in the mayor's waiting room, I realized that I had no idea what I was going to say that did not sound pretty stupid. I could already feel my face turning red in embarrassment, and I had not even met the mayor yet. Sitting there awaiting that opportunity, I prayed fervently for inspiration. What should I tell the mayor? In what way could I suggest that we could be of service to the city?

Suddenly, moments before our names were called, I began receiving a flow of inspiration. As in Antigua, it was like taking dictation. And, as inspired, I then proposed to the mayor that he allow us to use the public schools in the evenings to start a community school program. The missionaries would teach free English classes, and we would recruit other community leaders from the service clubs, like Rotary, and from among local educators, etc., to teach other subjects. The Green Cross (their version of the Red Cross) could teach first aid and hygiene, others could teach culture, communications, geography, etc.

This would be of great service to the humble, poorly educated people of the city, and it would bring us missionaries into contact with community leaders, as well as with the more common people. The mayor was very excited about the idea. Over the subsequent weeks, we made plans with one of his assistants while we also met with the Green Cross, the service clubs, etc. On the week we were to begin, the mayor sent jeeps around the city with loudspeakers announcing the free classes. Within a couple of weeks, we had over 700 students attending our classes, and we had many community leaders helping with the instruction.

Frankly, I think the zone leader became a little jealous over the attention I was getting and shut down the community school program after a short period of time. I believe it was a very bad decision

and that I should have made my case to the mission president, but I didn't. Nonetheless, we were able to maintain good relations with many community leaders. One took Mom, Dad and me to a restaurant in the crater of a volcano later when they came to pick me up at the end of the mission. And one of my best baptisms of my entire mission was Osmin Santos, who was secretary of the national teacher's union and a brilliant educator. He, like the Antigua educator mentioned previously, quickly read every church book translated into Spanish at that time and immediately after baptism started teaching many of our classes because, while he was the newest member, he already knew more than anyone else in the branch.

God continues to answer prayers

I did not stop praying for God's divine assistance at the end of my mission. One general authority called the mission our church's young people are called on to serve "the University of the Melchizedek Priesthood." And that, I believe, is a very appropriate way to think of it. It is the beginning of one's adult life of service in the church, not the end of it. And a mission should certainly prepare young men and the young women who choose to serve for many future callings, as well. While Antigua was specifically the highlight of my life in the sense of receiving spiritual gifts from God, I thank God that he has continued to answer my prayers since then. I think it is to my condemnation that I fail to live, fast and pray in such a way that my life after my mission has not included many more such events as I experienced in Antigua. But answers to my prayers post-mission should certainly be added to my testimony if I were to stand before a judge and jury on God's behalf.

HEALING OF AN ULCER: About 12 years after returning from my mission I was a counselor in the Bishopric in Buffalo. A young lady there came to us for a blessing. She worked full-time as a stewardess but was also trying to care for her aging and ailing parents. With all this stress she had developed a bleeding ulcer. The doctors had scoped it out and decided it could not be treated chemically. They had to do surgery. This further stressed her out because she felt like she didn't have time to be sick.

Under these circumstances, she came and asked us to give her a blessing. The Spirit was very present as I called down the powers of heaven to heal her. She then entered the hospital on Monday to be prepped for surgery Tuesday morning. However, when the doctors saw that there was no blood in her stool, they decided to send the scope down again to see if maybe they could treat the ulcer chemically. They were very confused when they did this, however, because they told her afterwards that the ulcer had not just stopped bleeding, it had disappeared. There was no sign that she had ever had an ulcer. I'll call her and her doctors to the witness stand, too.

DISCOURAGED YOUNG LADY: Also while I was in the Buffalo bishopric a young lady told me she wished she were dead. She had a good job but very few friends. No close male friends. She seemed sad all the time. She was perhaps below average in appearance, but her attitude was probably the main thing that repelled people who otherwise might have enjoyed a relationship with her. When she told me she wished she were dead, I felt inspired to tell her essentially: "Good because the Lord said that he who would save his life will lose it, and he that will lose his life for God's sake will find it. So, die. Die as to all your self-centered concerns and complaints. I challenge you to quit your job, go on a full-time mission and totally devote yourself to the Lord. If you will do that, it will change your life. Remember that the Lord also said that he who would be first of all must be last of all and servant of all. Go dedicated yourself to serving others." She accepted my challenge. Some time later I was in the chapel preparing for the start of sacrament meeting when I noticed a crowd of people around a beautiful young lady in the back of the room. I had been in the ward over three years and was puzzled about who this person was. I had to ask someone. I was startled to learn that it was that sad, unpopular

young lady returning for a successful mission. Without changing physically, her whole countenance had changed to such a degree that she had become beautiful and was attracting people like moths to a light. I don't think I've witnessed a greater miracle than what occurred in her life. And I feel strongly that it was the Holy Spirit guiding me in making that challenge.

SCOUTMASTER CALLING: Around 1989 or 1990 I was called to be a scoutmaster in the Kennewick 10th Ward. Since I had little experience as a Scout or as a Scout leader, I was scared about the prospects of taking over a troop that had only achieved about a dozen merit badges and advancements the entire previous year. These were strong-willed young athletes who had become accustomed to spending their Wednesday nights playing basketball. My prospects for success were dim. After several months of small successes, the bishop asked me to speak about the scouting program in sacrament meeting. Perhaps it was that opportunity that really drove me to my knees to ask God what he wanted me to say. In the process, he rolled out an entire plan for me. The talk served as a fairly effective raw-raw motivational speech, but at the end I asked parents and Scouts to join me in the high council room to discuss how our young men could all become Eagle Scouts. The Lord had inspired me as to how we could make that happen. I had analyzed all the rank requirements and correlated them with some of the related merit badges, such as first aid, orienteering, emergency preparedness, etc., and the Lord helped me come up with a plan by which the Scouts could dedicate themselves to a weeklong "Eagle Scout Boot Camp" and come out having passed off all the rank requirements through First Class, plus about 10 merit badges. The plan required many adult volunteers to specialize in one subject apiece and for older Scouts to help with basic skills since I personally was pretty bad at all Scout skills. Following the weeklong early morning to late night boot camp, we would take one day off and then go on our weeklong regular Scout camp run by professionals. I told the Scouts and their parents that if everyone would work really hard during the boot camp and at the regular Scout camp, it would be easy to finish off all the ranks plus 15 merit badges that summer and then easily finish the Eagle requirements over the next couple of years. I remember one of the rowdiest of the boys, Alan Bostock, shouting, "Yeh, let's do it. Then we can just screw around after that." While that was not exactly the attitude I was hoping for, it was close enough. The plan went so well that we replicated went on to set up similar mini-boot camps for the younger Scouts and eventually used the same plan at the stake level. And we also kept the boys interested in Scouts long-term, typically working on one merit badge per month. During those two weeks of intensive effort, the boys had finished or nearly finished most of their required merit badges. So after that we could often choose badges the boys would enjoy, such as motorboating. I was only Scoutmaster for a little over a year, after which one of the most experienced Scout leaders, John Dockum, took over. At a party Dockums threw for me upon my release, he told the gathering that we had essentially gone from worst to first in the Scout district. That year, if I remember correctly, our troop had achieved a record 260 merit badges and rank advancements.

A STEP OF FAITH: In 1992 after six years of trying to leave my job as a copy editor/wire editor for the Tri-City Herald and five years of futilely trying to build the CBC journalism instructor job into a full-time, permanent position, a member of the stake high council came to our home and asked me to accept a calling in the stake Young Men's presidency. I told him that I was working until after midnight five nights a week, including most weekends, and hardly ever saw my family. I asked if he was sure the calling came from the Lord because it didn't make sense to me to spend additional time away from the family. He assured me that it was an inspired calling, so I said OK. But the next morning I went into my office at CBC and prayed as hard as I've ever prayed. I told the Lord that I would do whatever he asked but the situation didn't seem fair to my family. I begged him to help me find another job that would be more compatible. That afternoon I went to my job at the Herald and I received a call from a former student of mine, who told me about a great job she had with an engineering firm. She thanked me for teaching her the skills she needed for that job. I congratulated her and then said jokingly that I

wished I could find a job like that. She responded, “Good. I have to move out of town, and I would like you to take my job.” So, in less than one day the Lord accomplished what I not been able to accomplish in six years – find a job that was more family-friendly. That's when I went to work for J-U-B Engineers.

FIXING MY FINANCIAL PROBLEMS: After working at J-U-B for about a year, I asked my boss if I could run for City Council. He agreed that it would be OK. But after I was elected, the real estate manager for the Kennewick Irrigation District became upset with the way I was voting and otherwise opposing the city's purchase of the Tri-Cities Coliseum. The KID was a major client for J-U-B, and it owned a lot of property surrounding the coliseum which would benefit from the city purchasing the coliseum and would suffer if the coliseum were shut down, as the owner was threatening to do. So, KID began pressuring my boss at J-U-B so much that my he finally gave me an ultimatum that I either quit City Council or quit my job. When I refused to do either one, I was fired. Over the next month I went into debt about \$10,000 trying to start a magazine. Gail was very upset; indeed, that was the beginning of the end for us. She became very hostile after I defied her in starting the magazine. It was four years before we divorced, but the process really began in the fall of 1994. The magazine was not doing well, and the stress in our home made it much worse. So I began praying for God to help me find a job and also pay off my debt. One Thursday morning during prayer, I felt prompted that I would have a solution by the next Tuesday. The prompting was strong enough that I wrote this prophecy in my journal. (I may be a little off on the details. I put that journal in the shed and don't have easy access right now. But the essence of this experience is accurate.) Anyway, a company called after that prayer, and its president met with me on Saturday or Sunday. I told them I would join their company only if they bought out my magazine for \$10,000. They called back on Monday and gave me the check when I signed papers and started work on Tuesday. While the financial problem was at least temporarily solved, my relationship with Gail was never fully repaired. I am going to skip that episode of my life, although there were answered prayers during that period of time, too.

NOT FIXING MY FINANCIAL PROBLEMS: As part of the divorce settlement with Gail, I gave all the equity in the house, my pension fund, etc., and agreed to pay about triple what her attorney originally requested. That was fine until I remarried. For a variety of reasons, including alimony, Delma and I began going into debt. Efforts to balance our budget failed, so I turned to trying instead to increase our income through a variety of business ventures based on desperation rather than inspiration. In 2007 I had my contract with the state to produce the bilingual Migrant Education News and had launched the Tri-City Citizen newspaper. The Citizen was not doing well, and Delma and I were still going into debt.

I decided to fast and to go to the temple to pray in the Celestial Room as long as it took to get an answer. I wanted God to “bail me out” of my financial problems as he had in the past. After a couple of hours in the temple, pondering and praying to make contact with Diety and to find out from the Source what I was missing, I finally “got it.” What I received was the sweetest reprimand I had ever received. At the same time that I was feeling overwhelmed by God’s spirit and a sense of love and piece, I was being “scolded” for having my priorities mixed up.

I was told by that still, small voice that I had been confusing the ENDS and the MEANS of life. I had been treating God as if he were the means to my glory, to my achieving great goals on his behalf. What a fool I had been. I was told that oneness and communion with God is NOT a means to an end – it IS the end goal. It is the ultimate goal of life. Nothing else matters without that. God may endow me with great inspiration, and I may achieve great things on his behalf – or I may not. But whether I do or don't, those other “great” goals should not be confused with the ultimate goal that is right there, that requires not great effort, no long hours of drudgery. Nothing else during the day should take priority over this one goal – to achieve oneness with our Father. To talk with him, commune with him, partake

of his spirit, bask in his light, walk in his love, and dwell in his peace. That was what I was enjoying in the temple, and it was difficult to pull myself away. I realized that if my business went bankrupt, if I never have another leadership position, if I never achieved my Ph.D, if I died a pauper, if I fell short of ALL my temporal goals – including all the best-intentioned things I was driven to accomplish for God, none of it mattered as long as I was – and remained -- one with God. Of course, “by their fruit ye shall know them,” and I expected God would open the way before me to be of service, as long as I kept the real END in mind. Even prayer and temple attendance cannot be seen as my goals. Praying and fasting for 40 days is nothing unless one achieves the kind of communion I enjoyed that morning. Praying 5 minutes or 5 hours is not the goal. Truly, I think I finally realized from the inside out that “whatever it takes” does not refer to winning God’s favor for something, it’s what is required to achieve the most meaningful of all goals – oneness with God.

In his last sermon to his disciples while in mortality, Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me” (John 15:4). Then Jesus and the 12 walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Messiah took upon himself our sins, but he first stopped to pray, “I come to thee, Holy Father, ... that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17).

That was Jesus’ prime directive, the BIG ONE, the ultimate goal of our existence. To be one with God. To be connected to the Source of spiritual power, peace, light and joy. The Lord told the Prophet Joseph: “I leave these sayings with you to ponder them in your hearts, with this commandment which I give unto you, that ye call upon me while I am near. Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. ... And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (D&C 88:62-68).

I thought, as I sat in the temple, how my Gospel studies, my intellectual comprehensions, etc., have been like pieces to a puzzle. I could see all the pieces but had never put them together until that one Aha! experience in the temple. Later I went to a store and bought a beautiful 1,000-piece puzzle of a mountain peak to remind me. I wrote this message on the back: “Get the whole picture. Don’t confuse the ENDS with the MEANS. Oneness with God is NOT the means to other goals. That IS the ultimate goal!”

We need to go to the “mountain of the Lord” as often as possible, and in between we need to walk and talk with God each morning before we begin our hectic schedules. We need to slow down in try to continue to feel God’s loving Spirit and to walk in his light throughout the day. When we pay a full 10% tithing – we typically do it first, and then somehow we don’t miss the money. God fulfills his promise in Malachi to bless us more than we have sacrificed. Similarly, if we commune with God at the start of each day, I’m convinced the rest of our day will be more effective, more fruitful. But that doesn’t matter – in comparison. The communion is the most important part of the day anyway.

I have consistently been confusing the ENDS and the MEANS of life. I have been treating God as if he were the means to my glory, to my achieving great goals on his behalf. What a fool I have been. Oneness and communion with God is the ultimate goal. Nothing else matters without that. He may endow me with great inspiration, and I may achieve great things on his behalf – or I may not. But whether I do or don’t, those other “great” goals should not be confused with the ultimate goal that is right there, that requires not great effort, no long hours of drudgery. Nothing else during the day should take priority over this one goal – to achieve oneness with our Father. To talk with him, commune with him, partake of his spirit, bask in his light, walk in his love, and dwell in his peace.

OPENING THE RIGHT DOORS & CLOSING OTHERS: Some time after my temple

experience I decided to fire myself at the Citizen to save employees' jobs and determined to get my Ph.D and pursue a lifestyle more compatible with what God intended for me. I had been working on my Ph.D for about 10 years, off and on, and figured it would take at least another year of hard work to complete it, but with the Lord's assistance it was completed in just a couple of months.

While continuing my contract with the state and looking for a full-time job in academia, I asked the Lord for an experience similar to my mission as a young man. I wanted what He told me in the temple. I wanted to commune with him more closely and regularly. As I had learned during my mission to Central America, God's inspiration and miracles come more regularly when we are requesting them for others than when we seek them for ourselves. Without me discussing that prayer with anyone, the bishop was inspired to call me as a ward missionary, and I had the wonderful opportunity to help bring a former pastor and his family into the church. Altogether, 10 members of the Ray Brown family joined the church. I felt a lot of inspiration and joy throughout that experience.

One thing I felt inspired in sharing with Ray was a "20 Signs of Christ's True Church" flier I had developed, expanded from a lecture by the late Floyd Weston. Ray reviewed all the scriptures carefully and prayerfully, gaining a testimony of the restored gospel. I include my "20 Signs" flier below:

Jesus established a church (Eph. 4:11-14) and desired there be "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). Today there are over 1,000 different "Christian" churches claiming to represent the Gospel the way Jesus would if He were here. Yet, which is right? Does it matter? The Scriptures say God is "the same yesterday and today and forever." So, how can we identify Christ's true church if it exists on the Earth?

1. *The true church should have the same organization as Christ's early church, including Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Corinthians 12:14-18, 27-31; Eph. 2:19-20; Mark 3:13-15).*
2. *The true church must claim divine authority (Hebrews 5:4-10; Mark 3:13-15; John 15:16; Acts 19:1-16).*
3. *The true church should have no paid ministry (Isaiah 45:13; 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:33-35; Acts 8:18-21; Matt. 10:9-11; Matt. 19:16-26).*
4. *The true church should baptize by immersion (Matt. 3:13-16; Romans 6:3-5).*
5. *The true church must bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17; Acts 19:5-6; Hebrews 5:13-14, 6:1-2).*
6. *The true church must practice divine healing (Mark 3:14-15; James 5:14-15).*
7. *The true church should teach that God and Jesus Christ are separate and distinct beings (John 17:11; John 20:17; Acts 7:55-56; Rev. 1:10-18).*
8. *The true church should teach that God and Jesus Christ have physical bodies (Luke 24:36-39; Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelations 1:10-18).*
9. *The true church must teach a literal resurrection of mankind, as well (1 Cor. 15:20-26, 29-30, 35, 38, 40-43, 48-49, 51-55; 1 John 3:1-2).*
10. *The true church should understand Paradise and the three degrees of resurrected glory (1 Cor. 15 [all]; 2 Cor. 12:1-5; Psalms 82:6; John 10:34-36; 1 John 3:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-3; Matt. 25:21; Rev. 2:26-28; Rev. 3:21; Rev. 21:6-8; Romans 8:16-18).*
11. *The true church should teach that our faith is demonstrated by and that we shall be rewarded according to our faithfulness (Matt. chpts. 5-7 [all]; Matt. 25:14-46; Romans 8:16-18; James 2:14-20; Rev. 3:15-22; 20:12-13).*
12. *The officers must be called by God, not man (Heb. 5:4; Exodus 28:1, 40:13-16; Acts 13:1-3).*
13. *The church must receive ongoing revelation from God (Amos 3:7; 1 Cor. 14:1-3; Eph. 4:11-14).*
14. *The true church must be a missionary church (Matt. 28:19-20; James 5:19-20).*
15. *The true church should be a restored church, with the understanding that there was a general apostasy from the original Church of Jesus Christ after the apostles were killed (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3; Acts 20:29-30; Rev. 13:7, 14:6; Acts 3:19-20; James 5:7).*
16. *The true church must understand and teach all the "first principles and ordinances of the true gospel" (Hebrews 5:13-14, 6:1-2).*
17. *The true church should teach there is a way for the dead to receive the gospel and ordinances after this life (1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6; 1 Cor. 15:29).*
18. *The members of the church should stand out from the general population in many good and obvious ways. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20).*

19. *But it should not be surprising if, as the early Christian Church, “everywhere it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22-23), and leaders of the dominant churches may be its main detractors.*
20. *The true church must teach that God will answer our individual prayers and reveal his will to us personally by the Holy Spirit (James 1:5; 1 Cor. 2 [all]; Luke 11:5-13).*

About that same time I was also made an offer by KIMEP to teach in Kazakhstan. In my soul I felt I was supposed to do it, but it didn't make sense, considering the church's teachings that no success in life compensates for failure in the home. I continued to pray and to receive subtle promptings to proceed in that direction, but I also continued to ask the Lord to make it very clear – to open the right doors and close the others. By June one of the Citizen creditors decided to sue me personally for over \$100,000, and the state let me know that the Migrant Education News might be eliminated from its budget. I had no other job prospects. All other doors were closing, and the one I felt I was supposed to enter was opening.

I have uttered a similar prayer many other times in my life and have felt the Lord has consistently responded to that prayer. When I felt it was time to leave Tampa, Florida, I felt inspired to ask Dad to talk to the owners of the Franklin County Graphic to see if they might be interested in selling the newspaper. The publisher, Dave Adams, told Dad, “That’s strange, I just put it up for sale today.” That turned out to be a very important part of our lives, and the profits I made from selling the Graphic two years later paid for my master’s degree.

When I felt it was time to leave Buffalo, I asked the Lord that if it was his will that we move to Arkansas that he help us sell our house by the following weekend. That was done, and we were able to move to Arkansas as a family and buy our home out in the woods.

I have already discussed my transition from the Herald to J-U-B and then from J-U-B past the failed magazine to another job that paid off my previous debts. I would say I’ve seen the hand of the Lord in every move or change of job that I’ve experienced in my life. And, as I already described, never more so than my move to Kazakhstan.

MY ‘MISSION’ TO KAZAKHSTAN: I have had many spiritual experiences in Kazakhstan over the past three and half years, and I know that's where I was supposed to be. Whether it is time to come home to the U.S. now I’m not sure. I am calling on the Lord daily now to clarify that. I’m calling on him again to open the right door and close others. Even as I write this in early December 2011, I can see that this could go either way. A couple of universities have suddenly expressed an interest in me, despite my age and other drawbacks. But KIMEP has also talked about promoting me. In the past the Lord’s hand has seemed very evident in keeping me here. After my first semester, for example, Ball State University was interested in hiring me but somehow got ahold of my KIMEP email address, even though all my correspondence provided my Hotmail address. That was when Delma was being checked for possible thyroid cancer, so I stayed in the U.S. an extra week and wasn’t having my KIMEP email forwarded. When I returned to KIMEP, Ball State had emailed me the previous day saying since I had not responded to their several emails, they had to presume I was no longer interested in their job. So, they had given it to someone else. Other jobs that seemed likely have similarly disappeared, and overall it seemed that few universities were interested in a 60-year-old man just relaunching his academic career.

While here in Kazakhstan, as I said, I have felt the Lord’s promptings on many occasions. I am currently both the branch mission leader and the first counselor in the Elders Quorum presidency (although I am a high priest), even though my church records are still in Kennewick. Almaty’s branch is the most isolated branch in the world and is located in a country dominated by the Muslim Church and to a lesser degree the Russian Orthodox Church. But even before I received any calling, I decided to use this opportunity to help the missionaries. Every week I cook dinner for 20-30 people – the missionaries and guests – and I share my insights and testimony. Since my arrival, the number of

church members has nearly doubled, but the ones who are still active nearly all have one thing in common – they came to my home many times for dinner, Gospel discussion and fellowship. There are certainly exceptions both directions. Some who came to my home are not active; and a few who did not come still are. But the correlation between coming to my home and maintaining activity is very high. The missionaries and the mission president over these few years have all said that my dinners have been very important in making our branch one of the most successful in missionary work in all Eurasia. And I have felt the Lord’s inspiration every week as I have taught and testified. It has been very rewarding to watch the progress of people like Nikolay Gussev, who pronounced in my home during his first visit that he was an atheist. He turned out to be a very bad atheist. He has since served two short-term missions and will soon be leaving on a full mission. Another new member who has attended many of my dinners is Kristina Mustkemova. She is now so totally immersed in church service that it is just a delight to watch her growth.

I have also felt inspired frequently as I have worked at KIMEP. I cannot talk about my own religion at KIMEP, but I do talk about Stephen Covey’s “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” values, service, individual potential, eternal priorities, and finding our place in the grand scheme of the universe. I let my students know that I love them, and they frequently come to me for help and advice. I have no doubt that I will maintain a relationship with many of my students for the rest of my life – or until the Internet collapses, whichever comes first.

‘Whatever it takes’ to commune with God

With all of us, there are big prayers and little prayers; prayers of desperation and prayers of inspiration. According to Luke’s description of Christ in Gethsemane, there were times when even Jesus “prayed more earnestly” (from Chapter 22):

39 ¶*And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.*

40 *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

41 *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,*

42 *Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

43 *And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

44 *And being in an agony he **prayed more earnestly**: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

So there are times when even the Son of God prayed more desperately and more earnestly for God’s help. Sometimes those moments lead to our most powerful prayers; but sometimes – as in the Garden of Gethsemane – we don’t get the results we want.

Like everyone, I suppose, there are times when I get discouraged, when difficulties make me want to give up. Sometimes I question my “mission” in life and whether I am just a fool to sacrifice so much. Then I think back on all these experiences I have had, of which I believe I could give convincing testimony before a judge and jury. But, more importantly, I realize that I will need to testify before the Great Judge some day. And his question won’t be whether I have a knowledge of the truth but what I have done with the light I have been given. That is the trial I hope not to fail.

Scientists have been able to show in repeated experimental studies that people’s perception of reality – even what they see, hear and recall – is warped by their experience, beliefs and expectations.

I did a national study while working on my master’s degree, relating to the concept of “dogmatism.” I found the current test for dogmatism seriously flawed and pretty much predetermined anyone assessed as “dogmatic” had to be on one political or religious extreme or the other.

I questioned the assessment test because I know a lot of people who are considered on the political or religious extreme, and they are still very open to new information and ideas. And I know people in the middle of the road who are very closed to new ideas and use “security in numbers” as their

rationale that they must be right, since most people agree with them.

I noted the “middle of the road” is always changing. What is now considered extreme used to be middle of the road, and vice versa.

As part of that research I presented participants with several scenarios relating to world affairs, economics, etc., and asked respondents to predict the future, based on their beliefs and understandings. Each scenario had three possible outcomes, but the typical respondent -- regardless of which outcome he chose -- said his own prediction had a 75-80 percent chance of being accurate.

Of course, in each scenario, some of the respondents eventually turned out to be somewhat accurate in their prediction, but, again, their degree of certainty did not depend on which prediction they selected. And I say “somewhat accurate” because one of the questions was about the future relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The minority who at that time projected that the U.S.-USSR relationship would improve were somewhat right, but in another sense they were wrong, too, because the USSR very surprisingly ceased to exist.

But my point is that this research made me question whether anyone is capable of being open-minded and whether we are ALL essentially "dogmatic." We all have our own conceptual framework that helps the world make sense to us. Anything that fails to fit into our framework is "nonsense." And that's a problem in our sincere search for truth.

To me, the only option in trying to escape our conceptual prison is clear, unfantasized revelation from God. That's why several of my personal "revelations" are so important to me. They included elements that could not be fantasized or manipulated by self-deception. My prayers asking God to verify the still, small voice telling me that I was not supposed to become a professional pastor first of all went contrary to my personal desires. So there was nothing in my mind prompting me to fantasize the answer I received. And then when I asked for specific signs, one was that the others occur without me in any way making them occur. The way I became state TAR president was bizarre, and I can never doubt that God made it happen since he caused me to totally forget about running for the office during the entire week's activities until they called for nominations. And I never applied for the scholarship that I won.

My “speaking in tongues” experience in Antigua I also know was not fantasized. While I liked our Lutheran investigator, I had no emotional attachment to him. It was my decision to end the discussion and not set a new appointment, even though he would have gladly done so. In fact, in spite of the experience, I never went back. And while the Holy Spirit or angel or whoever was testifying to him, I was totally thinking about what was going on, listening to the words, but not at all involved in deciding what to say or how to say it. They weren't my words, it wasn't my voice nor my Spanish – I was just a spectator, so to speak.

Also, as president of the Antigua branch when I was praying to know how to stop the backbiting that I feared could destroy the branch, the revelation I received could have been a mental/emotional experience. But that doesn't answer how my revelation was “seen” by a member of the congregation as a light coming through the ceiling. I suppose she could have fantasized that. But the two experiences by two separate people occurred at exactly the same time without either of us knowing what the other was experiencing. That's beyond coincidence and beyond emotionalism.

Many of the other experiences I have described could be considered possible coincidences, emotionalism or self-fulfilling prophecy when considered individually. And as a trained social scientist and journalist, I am by nature and by training a skeptic. I question everything. But when I consider my interactions with God in their totality, I cannot come up with another explanation than that they are real. My spiritual self knows they are real, and my skeptical, intellectual self cannot come up with a viable alternative.

Truth must come from God -- not from emotionalism, tradition, prejudice or even intellect – because we cannot trust our perceptions and preferences. God has to be the source of truth, and only through clear personal inspiration can we be sure what his will is for us. There is NOTHING more

important each day than to pursue God's inspiration. And, ultimately, whatever God tells us to do is what we need to do. To us, that has to be "our truth," no matter what he tells anyone else. However, it is not always easy to "hear" God's still small voice. So, it is reassuring to have some kind of clear confirmation from time to time.

Nevertheless, have you ever felt your prayers have not made it past your ceiling, much less to heaven? You may think receiving answers was easy for Jesus. But read your New Testament closely and you will see that before essentially every important event in his life, Jesus didn't just give a 2- to 3-minute prayer like many of us would. Rather, he prayed all night – or longer.

Before he started his 3-year ministry, he went into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days (Luke 4:1-2,13-15). Before he chose and ordained his 12 apostles, he was on a mountain praying all night (Luke 6:12-13). Before he walked on water, Jesus was up all night praying again on a mountain (Matt. 14:23-25). And Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to a mountain, where he was transfigured before them. He met with Moses and Elias, and the apostles heard the voice of the Father (Matt. 17:1-9).

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus again took Peter, James and John with him into the Garden of Gethsemane – a place the Scriptures say he frequented. There he prayed in great agony as he took upon himself our sins (Luke 22:39-44) and he prayed "more earnestly."

Jesus once taught a parable about a widow who had to beg a judge many days for relief before it was granted, and Jesus said prayer is sometimes like that (Luke 18:1-8). Similarly, his disciples asked why they could not cast out an evil spirit as Jesus did. He responded: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind [of evil spirit] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:19-21).

God doesn't always answer our prayers as quickly as we want, nor the way we want. But if we pray with the kind of commitment Jesus displayed, I know God will answer our prayers. The message I received from God in the temple was that I needed to do "whatever it takes" to commune with Heavenly Father. There is no option – not even for the Son of God.

The object of prayer

Prayer is pointless if the object of our prayer is incorrect. For that reason, there is no story more important to mankind than that of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah of mankind, the Savior of souls, the Lamb of God, the Redeemer of the unworthy. But never has it come under stronger attack than in our day, as those who truly believe in his divine mission dwindle in number.

There are hundreds of millions who call themselves Christians, including many who are terrorizing Northern Ireland and Eastern Europe. Those who truly understand Jesus' mission and have become his disciples in word and deed are probably numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

As evidence from the Dead Sea scrolls reveals a "Christian" community in the Israeli desert before Christ's birth, more supposed scholars join the ranks of skeptics who question Jesus' divinity. Never mind that the pre-Christ Christians themselves -- like John the Baptist -- still expected the Messiah to come. Their prophet received "Christian" teachings by revelation. Did not Jesus receive his from the same source?

True religion from the days of Adam and Jacob and Moses, through the time of Jesus Christ, and still today, must come from God. Either God reveals himself and the truths by which he governs the universe, or he remains forever hidden.

Many times we jump to conclusions because we think we understand something we really do not understand at all. Such was the case with

Nathanael when Phillip told him he had found the Messiah--Jesus of Nazareth. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" asked Nathanael. He expected the Messiah to come from Bethlehem and did

not understand Jesus' history. But within minutes he was convinced of Jesus' destiny. Phillip answered Nathanael simply and appropriately: "Come and see."

That is the same invitation we must give skeptics and half-believers. If they will "come and see" and seek understanding through study and prayer, and if they will apply the teachings and become worthy of the promptings of the Holy Spirit--that same Spirit that inspired Jesus, John the Baptist, the pre-Christians, and those who have followed Jesus since his death--then they will come to the same conclusion as Nathanael ultimately did.

As Nathanael approached Jesus with Phillip, Jesus cried out, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" How did Jesus know him, Nathanael asked. Jesus said he had seen him in vision under a fig tree just before Philip found him -- just before Nathanael had blurted out his skepticism. "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel," responded Nathanael. Jesus smiled knowingly. "Thou shalt see greater things than these," he said.

Before long, as Nathanael himself was sent out to share the Gospel, he was probably confronted with that same question he had asked: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" As he watched his Master at work, he could have compiled a list of witnesses, as did the Gospel writers, to help answer that question.

He could have asked the beggars along the road, like the lonely cripple, deformed and hardly capable of bodily movement. For 38 years he laid along the roadways begging for pennies to keep from starving to death. Most people would try to keep their distance, try not even to notice that dirty, starving beggar. They'd rather not have to think about him.

The deformed beggar apparently had been abandoned even by friends and relatives, for each year he would tediously drag himself to the side of the pool of water called Bethesda. According to tradition, an angel descended yearly to stir the water. The first person to enter the water after the angel came would be healed. It was here that the poor beggar was waiting when Jesus walked by.

"Would you be made whole," Jesus asked. "Sir," responded the beggar humbly. "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

That pitiful man did not presume to ask Jesus to wait and help him. He had no idea how long it would be before the angel came. But as the beggar contemplated his plight, he heard the authoritative command of the Messiah: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk" (John 5:8). Imagine the beggar's tearful joy at suddenly having a whole and strong body after having groveled in the dust for 38 long years.

Similarly, Nathanael could ask the blind beggar. From birth he never knew the light of day. Never knew the beauty of the sunrise, nor the richness of the blue summer skies. All he knew was the daily struggle for survival. Being pushed out of people's way and derided. I can hear the busy merchants and town leaders shouting at him. "Get out of the way, you bum. You're in our way. Go beg someplace else!"

Suddenly, through the Lord's healing power, the whole world opened up unto him. The people who lived in the neighborhood where the blind man customarily begged could not believe what had happened. "Is this not the blind man that has sat along the road and begged all these years?" asked some. Others answered: "It cannot be. He just looks like him."

But the beggar shouted with joy, "It is I! I can now see! It was Jesus that healed me!"

Before the end of the Lord's ministry on earth, there were thousands who could answer that question: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

There was the nobleman who personally went searching in the wilderness to have Jesus just say the word to have his son healed far off in Capernaum. There were the lepers Jesus healed, and the thousands whose hunger he satisfied with just a few fishes and loaves of bread.

There was the father who pleaded with Jesus after the disciples failed in casting out an evil spirit. The man pleaded for the Lord's mercy and compassion. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," Jesus responded. And the father cried in tears: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine

unbelief.” And Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy and never return (Mark 9:14-30).

And, of course, there was Lazarus. John writes directly that Jesus dearly loved Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. But when the sisters sent word into the wilderness for Jesus to come and heal their brother from a deadly disease, Jesus did not come. For several days he tarried in the wilderness, teaching the people and avoiding the church leaders who were now plotting his death.

Finally he told his disciples: “It is time to go. Lazarus is sleeping, and I must awaken him.”

Jesus’ disciples tried to dissuade him because of their fear of the Jewish leaders. “If Lazarus is sleeping,” they said, “he is fine.”

So Jesus spoke more clearly: “Lazarus is dead.”

With that, Jesus headed for Bethany, accompanied by his disciples, who vowed to die at his side. Before Jesus arrived, Martha came running out to him. “If only you had been here, Lazarus would not have died.” Mary also came out, crying great tears of sorrow. “If only you had been here, Lord.”

John writes that Jesus wept also. Such was his compassion for these dear friends. But when they had walked to the tomb and Jesus had ordered that it be opened, even the two sisters tried to stop him, saying: “Lazarus has been dead now four days. His body stinketh.”

But then that same voice the disciples had heard turn water to wine, the same voice that stilled the tempests, the same voice that had cast out devils and commanded bodies to be healed of every kind of disease, that same voice then commanded what no man thought was possible. Jesus commanded that after four days of death Lazarus return to life. “Lazarus, come forth!”

No one spoke as every eye focused with fear and joy and anticipation on the mouth of the tomb. And he that was dead made his way out, bound head to foot like a mummy in gravesclothes.

Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? We should ask those who have been healed and transformed, literally brought back to life spiritually. The hard-working fishermen like Peter, struggling at the only trade they knew until this humble but kingly man from Nazareth called out from the seashore: “Come, and I will make you fishers of men.”

In similar manner, the despised tax collector for the Romans was called to be a disciple. Matthew was hated by all ... until Jesus came by. And there were others, mostly of humble backgrounds, but a few noblemen, as well, who gave up everything to answer the call to discipleship.

Their lives were transformed as the disciples walked with Jesus during his three-year mission. But still they were weak. All fled and hid or cowardly denied the Christ when he was arrested. But after his death, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with new commitment and conviction to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. They became great leaders and missionaries, converting many thousands to the church. And nearly all the apostles and many other disciples died courageously as martyrs, unwilling to ever again deny what they knew to be true.

They sealed their testimonies with their own blood. Peter was crucified in Rome, head downward. James, son of Zebedee, was beheaded. John was banished to the Isle of Patmos. Bartholomew was beaten, crucified, then beheaded. James, son of Alphaeus, was stoned and beaten to death. Matthew was slain with a halberd, the spear-like weapon tipped with a combination pike and battle axe. Andrew, Simon Zelotes, Thaddeus and Phillip were all crucified. Thomas was thrust through with a spear. Matthias was stoned, then beheaded. Paul, after many sufferings for the Gospel, was beheaded in Rome by Nero. Stephen was stoned to death. Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria and then burned. Luke was hanged. (Book of Martyrs by John Fox, Book I, pp. 27-32.)

Concerning transformed lives, our best witnesses should be you and me. Living disciples. But, as one church leader queried: “Have you spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?”

I think we can add some questions to these: Have we changed our lives as a result of our inner changes? Do we love the Lord enough to keep his commandments. His last sermon in the upper room contained this simple charge: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:14). And in the same sermon, a few moments later, he urged: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his

life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:13,14).

Jesus was the epitome of what he asked his disciples to be. Unlike the hypocritical Jewish leaders, Jesus never asked of others what he did not expect of himself. On the other hand, he expected of his disciples ultimately everything he expected of himself. He knew they wouldn't do everything perfectly the first time, but he gave them the long-term goal in the Sermon on the Mount: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Of his disciples, including a rich young man who turned down a call to discipleship, Jesus asked everything: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor and thou shalt have

treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” The rich young ruler went away sorrowful, unable to make that total consecration (Matt. 19: 16-22).

But, again, in his last sermon in the upper room, Jesus told those disciples willing to make that sacrifice of the power they would have in accomplishing his will. Referring to all of his miracles, he told his disciples: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. ... At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you that I will pray unto the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me” (John 14:12; 16:26,27).

Besides the inner commitment, the change of heart, and besides the willingness to do God's will and receive of his power, do we receive the peace and joy that Jesus felt under even the most adverse circumstances?

To us at times Jesus seems full of contradictions. He said our burdens could be lightened, that our sorrow would be turned to joy, that he had come to give us life in full abundance. But almost in the same breath he then said we should be prepared to be rejected by our families, hated by many, and even slain by some who would think they were serving God in so doing. How do we make sense of all this?

The very night before his prophesied death, Jesus sat calmly around the table with his apostles and told them, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

But then he warned that his apostles would be “scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32). And he warned that many would be killed by their enemies. Just before walking out into the night toward Gethsemane, Jesus again assured his disciples, however, “These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!”

Many nominal Christians are willing and anxious to obtain the joy and peace and the “life abundant” Jesus promised, but they shy away from the struggle and the trials that were also part of the promise. Christianity for these is only a placebo, an emotional sugar pill.

On the other hand, some "Christians" take upon themselves the yoke of Christ, but they carry it as a heavy burden, a necessary obligation. They feel no joy, and their hearts are devoid of peace. In trying to avoid an eternal hell, they have engulfed themselves in an earthly hell. They do not understand that it is impossible to go through an eternity of work they do not enjoy. To become like Heavenly Father and to enjoy living with him and working with him, we must not only do what he does, we must learn to love what he loves, enjoy what he enjoys, value what he values. As Paul wrote to the Hebrews, we must have the commandments of God written in our hearts and in our minds.

We must not be fooled by a false euphoria that all is well if we are not helping to build the Kingdom of God, doing the work Jesus did when he was on Earth, taking up our cross, as he instructed. However, if we are burdened down with the Lord's labor and feel no joy and no peace, something is wrong. We're hiding some sin; we're working only half-heartedly, wishing we could be doing something else; or we've forgotten the Lord's sacrifice.

Perhaps we simply haven't learned to really love our neighbors and our enemies -- all our spiritual brothers and sisters, however spiritually immature they may be. We haven't learned to love the sick, the poor and the blind, speaking both spiritually and physically. We don't really love the Lord.

If we loved like Jesus loved, we would have to love our spiritual work here on Earth --and peace and joy would fill our souls. Perhaps we just need to see beyond the human frailties and facades and to see the limitless potential in others and within ourselves, potential that can be released by "The Touch of the Master's Hand."

'Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who will start bidding for me?
"A dollar, a dollar"--then "Two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars once; three dollars twice;
Going for three--"But no,
From the room, far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As sweet as a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bidden for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand once; three thousand twice;
And going and gone!" says he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand
What changed its worth?"
Swift came the reply:
"The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scattered with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine;
A game--and he travels on.
He's "going" once, and "going" twice;
He's "going" and "almost gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

By Myra Brooks Welch

May we let the Lord touch our lives and heal our wounds. May we put strife and envy and hate out of our hearts. May we truly love one another. May we be excited about the Lord's work. May we follow the path set by the Savior and be truly his disciples in heart and deed. May the Lord's peace fill our minds and our souls. May his joy bubble forth as an unquenchable spring of refreshment no matter what painful trials may confront us. May we add our witness to that of the thousands and perhaps millions who can truly testify of the power and grace of Jesus Christ. Again, I put my testimony into verse:

Anything good out of Nazareth?
This question we together answer--
The lowly beggar blind from birth;
Deplored by all, the tax collector;
Raised from the grave, dead Lazarus;
The invalid of 38 long years;
The sick and crippled raised from the dust;
And, now healed, the 10 lepers;
The nobleman's son from Capernaum;
And across the years, beyond the sea,
The transformed lives of the fishermen;
And here and now, the spiritual blind--you and me.
Any man good out of Nazareth?
This was not man that healed our hurts.
So, to this question we do witness
He is our God who came to Earth!

Comprehending Christ's sacrifice

Jesus spent his last few hours of freedom with his disciples in the upper room of a home and then in the darkness of the garden called Gethsemane.

As he taught his disciples that one last time during mortality, he prayed with them, sang with them, washed his disciples' feet and instituted the first sacrament of bread and wine. He combined all the power of a master teacher to reinforce in them the most important concepts of his earthly mission.

However, what Jesus was about to do, starting yet that evening, was more important than the concepts he taught. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," Jesus taught (John 15:13). But then he actually went out and did it!

As they completed their last supper together, Jesus took his disciples out into the night, across the brook Cedron to a garden where he frequently sought his Father in prayer. Leaving the other disciples at the edge of the garden, he proceeded with Peter, James and John.

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," he told them (Matthew 26:38). Jesus then "fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass from him. ... 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt'" (Mark 14:35-36).

This is where his sacrificial ordeal began. In response to his prayer, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him," but that did not stop the great spiritual pain Jesus was suffering.

I don't believe the agony we see at this time was caused by fear of dying. Jesus was prepared for that. Indeed, he had practically forced the hand of the Jewish leaders with his speech earlier that week declaring that they were hypocrites and comparing them to whited sepulchres – beautiful on the outside but inside filled with corruption and dead men's bones.

The pain Jesus felt was a spiritual death that came upon him as he accepted the guilt of all mankind. The pain was unfathomable, as God withdrew his presence completely from his only begotten Son. Jesus had to suffer much more than just physical death in order to appease the demands of justice to pay for our sins.

Despite the presence of the angel, the Scriptures say: "Being in agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:43-44).

Bruce R. McConkie describes the scene: "In this garden called Gethsemane outside Jerusalem's wall, the greatest member of Adam's race, the one whose every thought and word were perfect, pled with his Father to come off triumphant in the most torturous ordeal ever imposed on man or God. There, amid the olive trees – in the spirit of pure worship and perfect prayer – Mary's son struggled under the most crushing burden ever borne by mortal man. ... Upon his suffering servant, the great Elohim (the Father), there and then, placed on him the weight of all the sins of all men of all ages who believe in Christ and seek his face. ... This was the hour when all eternity hung in the balance. So great was the sin-created agony laid on him who knew no sin that he sweat great drops of blood from every pore, and 'would,' within himself, that he 'might not drink the bitter cup.' ... From creation's dawn to this supreme hour, and from this atoning night through all the endless ages of eternity, there neither had been or would be again such a struggle as this."

And this was just the beginning of Jesus' suffering.

Christ was then betrayed by a friend, arrested as a common criminal, put through a rigged trial, spit upon, slapped, mocked, tempted to call down the angels of heaven, crowned with a ring of sharp thorns pressed into his skull, "scourged" with a multi-lashed whip with pieces of bone attached to the ends, digging into his back, and then forced to carry his heavy cross to the site of execution.

Satan knew that this was the most important event in all human history. If he could stop Jesus from fulfilling his mission, he could win the eternal struggle between good and evil. God's plan of salvation would be destroyed. God's children could not return to his presence because there would be no perfect sacrifice to suffer vicariously for their sins.

The Roman executioners inflicted the greatest pain they knew to inflict. They drove nails through Jesus' hands and feet, crushing nerves and tendons. To keep the flesh from ripping away, they drove additional spikes through his wrists, where some of the most sensitive nerves reside. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, naked and humiliated. His weight tore the spikes further through his flesh.

With just a few more hours to stop God's plan, Satan's servants passed by wagging their heads and taunting Jesus: "Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). Jesus could have called down legends of angels and saved himself, but he did not – for our sake.

Although Jesus may have seen his entire mission in vision beforehand, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland suggests that the experience of spiritual death which Jesus began in Gethsemane and finished on Golgotha may have been beyond what even he could comprehend. Elder Holland described it in his Sunday morning conference talk in April 2009:

Now I speak very carefully, even reverently, of what may have been the most difficult moment in all of this solitary journey to Atonement. I speak of those final moments for which Jesus must have been prepared intellectually and physically but which he may not have fully anticipated emotionally and spiritually—that concluding descent into the paralyzing despair of divine withdrawal when he cries in ultimate loneliness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The loss of mortal support he had anticipated, but apparently he had not comprehended this. Had he not said to his disciples, "Behold, the hour ... is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" and "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"?

With all the conviction of my soul I testify that he did please his Father perfectly and that a

perfect Father did not forsake his Son in that hour. Indeed, it is my personal belief that in all of Christ's mortal ministry the Father may never have been closer to his Son than in these agonizing final moments of suffering. Nevertheless, that the supreme sacrifice of his Son might be as complete as it was voluntary and solitary, the Father briefly withdrew from Jesus the comfort of his Spirit, the support of his personal presence. It was required, indeed it was central to the significance of the Atonement, that this perfect Son who had never spoken ill nor done wrong nor touched an unclean thing had to know how the rest of humankind — us, all of us — would feel when we did commit such sins. For his Atonement to be infinite and eternal, he had to feel what it was like to die not only physically but spiritually, to sense what it was like to have the divine Spirit withdraw, leaving one feeling totally, abjectly, hopelessly alone.

But Jesus held on. He pressed on. The goodness in him allowed faith to triumph even in a state of complete anguish. The trust he lived by told him in spite of his feelings that divine compassion is never absent, that God is always faithful, that he never flees nor fails us. When the uttermost farthing had then been paid, when Christ's determination to be faithful was as obvious as it was utterly invincible, finally and mercifully, it was "finished." Against all odds and with none to help or uphold him, Jesus of Nazareth, the living Son of the living God, restored physical life where death had held sway and brought joyful, spiritual redemption out of sin, hellish darkness, and despair. With faith in the God he knew was there, he could say in triumph, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

When Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" some people see this as a moment of doubt and weakness, but I believe with Elder Holland that it was in this moment the Father again withdrew his presence so completely that we cannot comprehend the spiritual pain that was combined with the physical torture. Christ had to make that last and great sacrifice alone. In latter-day Scripture (D&C 19) Jesus tries to describe this experience in his own words:

15 Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest ... your sufferings be sore — how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

16 For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

17 But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

18 Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit — and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

19 Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

20 Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest ... you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.

As I was praying and meditating about these things one morning, it was as if I was transported spiritually to Golgotha. During his life, Jesus frequently challenged his disciples to take up their cross and to follow him — an indication that, indeed, he knew how he was to die. But I felt as I prayed that in seeing a vision of his death, Jesus would naturally have focused on the most visual aspects — of the nails being driven through his hands, his wrists and his feet, and then being lifted up on the cross. As Elder Holland suggested, in focusing on the visible physical torture, he might not have fully comprehend the agony of spiritual death. He could not without experiencing it. It struck me with great force that in latter-day Scriptures, the resurrected Christ has still occasionally challenged us to take up our cross but more frequently commands us to offer up a sacrifice of "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (D&C 97:8; 59:8; 2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20; Mormon 2:14; Moroni 6:2).

Doctors have testified that the watery substance that poured out when the soldiers speared Jesus in the side is evidence that he died NOT directly from the wounds and torture but literally of a broken heart and a spirit weighed down by our sins. After all the pain the Jews and the Romans could inflict upon him, our sins provided the final impetus to death. The soldiers did not kill Jesus. You and I did!

We can understand such things intellectually and even spiritually without reaching full comprehension. As Christ's sacrifice opened to me that morning in prayer, it went beyond intellectual or spiritual. It was real; it was experiential. As I realized more fully than ever before what was happening on Golgotha, it hit me so forcefully that I gasped, "Oh my God." I started to reprimand myself for a phrase commonly taking God's name in vain, but then I realized it was all too appropriate at that moment and continued in tears: "Oh, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

We cannot truly love Jesus with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our soul and with all of our strength unless we can somehow comprehend the magnitude of his love for us. And we cannot comprehend his love without comprehending his sacrifice.

And, if possible, may we ultimately gain that "perfect knowledge" that these things are true. May we meditate concerning these things, praying for a full comprehension and confirmation of Christ's sacrifice, and may we then truly come unto Jesus, offering our own heart broken and our own spirit contrite, prepared to take upon ourselves his mission and become one with him. This I pray in his most sacred name, Amen.