

# Choosing Christ's Light Burden

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Forty-seven years ago, my grandfather spoke at a BYU devotional; twenty-two years ago, my father spoke at a BYU devotional. Today it appears to be my turn. You can imagine how nervous this makes my kids! I was trying to find a scripture that might explain this pattern, and the only thing I could come up with was something about God cursing families to the third and fourth generations.<sup>1</sup> Let's hope, despite the possibility of a family curse, that the message I share can be a blessing to some.

## Our Burdens

I have had the opportunity to teach many classes at BYU, but the Eternal Family course is one of my favorites. In it I have come to a greater and greater appreciation of the blessings of the restored gospel. It is a very personal class, and I have come to know some of the burdens that students bear, particularly as they strive to live a religious life that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ. We have all felt the burdens of discipleship—learning how to forgive as the Savior would, struggling to maintain good

religious habits that can get lost so quickly, and feeling like you are not measuring up in keeping the commandments and wondering if you ever will. Today I would like to talk about bearing religious burdens. In many ways I think this talk is for a younger version of myself—one who is newly experiencing some of these burdens, seeing others struggle, and wondering whether bearing the burdens of living a religious life is really worth it.

Some see religious burdens as harmful. There are books entitled *The God Delusion*<sup>2</sup> and *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.<sup>3</sup> Many have argued that religion is long past its usefulness—if it ever was useful—and encourage us to abandon its burdens for a better, freer, more advanced life.<sup>4</sup> These voices seem to be getting louder, and we see some people following them away from religion.

Yet Jesus taught that *His* yoke is easy and *His* burden is light.<sup>5</sup> But clearly the Savior experienced many difficulties. There must have been something about His burden that led Him to choose to hold to it, even when He was tempted with all the

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riches and kingdoms of the world. What is it that makes bearing Christ’s burden worth everything?

### Every Choice Is Imbued with Burden

First, we should understand that *everyone must* carry a burden of one form or another. *Every* choice is imbued with burden. And *we* decide what is worth carrying. You have chosen to carry the burden of attending college, but there would be a different burden to carry if you had chosen not to attend. Studying for an exam is a burden, but we all know that binge-watching a show rather than studying brings its own burden. Each choice we make is accompanied by burden.

Jesus asked the rich man to put down his burden of riches and take up His—Christ’s—burden. Jesus said, “Sell whatsoever thou hast . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”<sup>6</sup>

Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard noted, “One bears a yoke of iron, another a yoke of wood, a third a golden yoke, a fourth the heavy yoke, but only the Christian bears—the yoke that is good!”<sup>7</sup> Kierkegaard’s idea that the Christian’s yoke, or Christ’s yoke, is “good” or “light” seems to mean more than it simply weighing less than burdens of iron or wood or gold. Christ’s burden is not simply “less bad” than other burdens. In my experience, His burden is light because when we take it up, we bear it *with* Christ, and then His grace, His enabling power, comes to us. We must have faith in the Savior to see this. Kierkegaard said: “Have faith that the yoke is good for thee. This good yoke is Christ’s yoke.”<sup>8</sup>

President Russell M. Nelson has said:

*Making and keeping covenants actually makes life easier! Each person who makes covenants in baptismal fonts and in temples—and keeps them—has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ.*<sup>9</sup>

The choices we make are our burdens, and through faith in Christ, we can choose the light ones.

### Religion and Research

But some experiences we have seem to suggest that religious burdens are, at times, crushing rather than enabling. Probably all of us know

some people who assume that the burden of a religious life is, on the whole, harmful. When I first started teaching the Eternal Family course, I was often asked how Latter-day Saints’ mental health compared to the mental health of those of other faith traditions or those of no faith.

So for the past seven years I have turned my research to studying this. Some research had already been done, but there was still a lot we didn’t know. My colleagues and I have crunched data on hundreds of thousands of people, including Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints, religious and non-religious people, those living in Utah and those living around the United States, and people across sexual orientations and gender identities. With our work and the work of others, an important picture has begun to emerge.

Now, it is important to know that general trends found in research should not be used to dismiss anyone’s personal experience: we should recognize and empathize with whatever experience a person has. However, recognizing these general trends has helped me understand my own experiences of living my religion and has provided me with a few insights into what choosing Christ’s light burden means.

Research on religion and mental health goes back 120 years.<sup>10</sup> We have been looking at this for a long time. And the evidence amassed since then is rather clear: attending religious services and engaging in other religious and spiritual practices are, on average, related to better mental health.<sup>11</sup> They are related to more volunteering in the community<sup>12</sup> and, in general, better physical health.<sup>13</sup> They are also related to greater family happiness, better parenting, and lower likelihood of divorce, particularly when family relationships are seen as divine and connected to God.<sup>14</sup> A global study also found, to the surprise of the researchers, that men who are more religious do more housework<sup>15</sup>—something not bad to consider when choosing a spouse. The reality is that research on the whole shows that religious people are better off across nearly every conceivable domain.<sup>16</sup>

And this seems to be more than just correlation: Berkeley researchers have concluded that the accumulated evidence makes a compelling case

for a *causal* link between religious and spiritual practices and good mental health.<sup>17</sup>

What about LGBT individuals—who may be of particular concern, given the higher rates of mental health difficulties in this population? (I am using LGBT to mean all sexual and gender minority experiences.) How might religion be related to their mental health? Although the research is somewhat more nuanced, taken as a whole, studies suggest that just as in the general population, LGBT individuals who have greater connections to religion or spirituality have, on average, fewer mental health difficulties.<sup>18</sup>

You are probably aware that mental health problems have soared in the last few years while religious and spiritual practices have plummeted. The obvious question researchers have begun asking is whether these trends are connected. Harvard professor Tyler J. VanderWeele and his colleagues estimated “that nearly 40% of the increase in the suicide rate could be attributed to the decline in religious service attendance.”<sup>19</sup> This is a very important and telling research finding. At the same time—and perhaps this is particularly felt by those of us whose lives have been touched by the suicide of a loved one—we do not want this to be oversimplified. There are so many aspects of suicide to consider. If anyone is struggling, please reach out and let others help lighten your burdens.

What about research specifically on Latter-day Saints? My colleagues and I recently conducted a review of every study on Latter-day Saint mental health published in the last twenty years.<sup>20</sup> It probably won’t surprise you that Latter-day Saints tend to be a highly religious group, engaging more in their religion than almost any other group.<sup>21</sup> And that seems to translate into good things. Although this research area is still new and much more work needs to be done, studies generally find that Latter-day Saints’ mental health is just as good as and often better than the mental health of those of other religions or of no religion.<sup>22</sup> And let me also mention that research suggests Latter-day Saints are the most honest on surveys compared to others.<sup>23</sup>

And what about LGBT Latter-day Saints? Large-scale, representative studies have found

that Latter-day Saint LGBT individuals have, on average, just as good and almost always better mental health compared to LGBT individuals of other religions or of no religion.<sup>24</sup>

In talking about all this research, let me make just two notes. First, there are instances when religion may not be related to better mental health. I will talk more about that later, and in the notes of this talk I provide helpful sources. Second, when we are looking at this research, it is important to know we are not proving whether the gospel is true. That comes from a witness of the Holy Spirit. The truthfulness of the gospel is not at stake in this research. What is at stake is a better understanding of what is helpful to people and how we can best serve them. And so it is important to recognize the overall trend that religious people, including Latter-day Saints, have something that is related to better mental health.

Yet it can be difficult to reconcile these big-picture findings when we know that so many Latter-day Saints struggle with their mental health. It is clear that we still have a lot of work to do.

### How Religion Bears Us Up

To understand why religion is generally related to better mental health, we must recognize that *all* people experience trials. Again, we all carry burdens of one form or another. Paul said, “There hath *no* temptation taken you but such as is *common* to man.”<sup>25</sup> Our trials are trials shared with the whole human race, whether religious or not. “But,” Paul added, “God is faithful . . . [and will] make a way to escape, that ye may be able to *bear* it.”<sup>26</sup> When we are connected to God, He provides a way to bear the burden. Amidst all the burdens we can choose, when we have faith to choose the Savior’s light burden, God bears us up.

There are many ways in which religion can help bear us up. Three that I want to emphasize are (1) a community of covenant caring, (2) an eternal perspective, and (3) divine patterns of living.

### A Community of Covenant Caring

Religion provides not just community but a community of *covenant caring*. When his people wanted to come into the fold of God, Alma the Elder said

they must be “willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort”<sup>27</sup> and “bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light.”<sup>28</sup> To a large extent, God’s fold—His Church—is *about* taking on the burden of making our brothers’ and sisters’ burdens light.

President Nelson has said:

*Everyone has pain somewhere, and our challenge is to find out where the pain is. Usually it’s not physical pain but comes in the stress of living. . . . This is what we try to teach the missionaries. When you meet someone, find out how we can help them. The Church literally has the capacity to help people no matter what their problem is. The gospel exists to help people.*<sup>29</sup>

The Church’s *General Handbook* outlines many aspects of our covenant-caring responsibility, including this responsibility: “The Church encourages families and members to reach out with sensitivity, love, and respect to persons who are attracted to others of the same sex.”<sup>30</sup>

Are there Church members who treat others poorly? Tragically there are. But true religion calls us to lighten burdens. As President Nelson said in our last general conference, “Charity propels us ‘to bear one another’s burdens’ rather than heap burdens upon each other.”<sup>31</sup> We must choose the light burden of lightening others’ burdens and at the same time allow others to lighten our burdens.

### *An Eternal Perspective*

Along with a community of covenant caring, the eternal perspective that religion provides can lighten burdens.

When Joseph Smith, in his own suffering, pled for himself and for the suffering Saints, God comforted him with an eternal perspective, saying “that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good”<sup>32</sup> and “if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high.”<sup>33</sup> The Lord helped Joseph see past the immediate suffering to a glorious future.

Suffering is a burden, but when we can’t see past the immediate suffering, it is doubly heavy. Kierkegaard gave an analogy of a rich man driving a lavish carriage at night with lamps all around. He could see what was right in front of

him, but his lights blinded him to the stars. Yet a poor peasant with no lights had a splendid view of the heavens. And so Kierkegaard concluded that those who are like the rich man

*would do away with this notion of eternity and eternal blessedness altogether, and . . . would teach men to surround themselves with the greatest brightness possible in things temporal, till it become impossible to see eternity at all.*<sup>34</sup>

My friends, you have the blessing of learning the best knowledge this world can offer, but never let it blind you to the light of heaven. We may feel claustrophobic relying on our own limited light—seeing only the heavy burden right in front of us. Choosing an eternal perspective helps lift our burdens.

### *Divine Patterns of Living*

Along with a community of covenant caring and an eternal perspective, religion offers divine patterns of living: commandments and covenants. These divine patterns enable us and keep us from the heavy burdens the natural man would have us carry. You won’t be surprised to learn that religious people, particularly Latter-day Saints, are less likely to drink, smoke, use drugs, and have unhealthy sexual behaviors.<sup>35</sup>

The patterns of the Church Educational System Honor Code are a burden to many. My wife—and this is true—signs me up for Church media casting, hoping I will get a part as some kind of Welsh pioneer extra so I can grow my beard. On a more consequential note, aspects of the law of chastity embedded in the Honor Code are a light burden, especially when we realize that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that one in five Americans has a sexually transmitted infection.<sup>36</sup> And, young adults, it is your age group that bears the brunt of this crushing burden. This is to say nothing of other difficulties that come from noncommitted sexual relationships. Research finds that the more sexual partners one has, the greater the risk of developing mental difficulties and engaging in substance abuse.<sup>37</sup>

And regarding the Word of Wisdom embedded in the Honor Code, a report from last year found

that *more than half* of all “people involved in serious or fatal road accidents tested positive for drugs or alcohol.”<sup>38</sup> A few years ago, Columbia University produced a report entitled *Wasting the Best and the Brightest*<sup>39</sup>—a grim pun on the alcohol tragedy at universities in the United States.

*Choosing* the light burden of the Honor Code puts you in one of the safest places physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Of course BYU students who follow the Honor Code still struggle with their own trials. But there is a profound blessing that comes from attending a university that unabashedly chooses the light burden of religion.

Choosing to live divine patterns does bring a burden of accountability to those patterns. At BYU we can always discuss how we manage that accountability. But there must be accountability, or there is no commitment. And without commitment, the Honor Code is of no benefit. I am grateful for accountability to my religion—and to BYU—because it reinforces what I most desire. The burdens, freely chosen, are light because they help me become who I truly want to be and who the Lord would have me be.

### **Carrying the Light Burden Heavily**

At this point let me mention some instances when religion may feel heavy—when sometimes we may carry this light burden heavily.

The first is when we are religious simply to avoid something bad, we don’t want to disappoint someone, or we want to avoid criticism and shame. When we are religious simply to avoid something bad, we live our whole lives like terrified Bilbo Baggins when he anxiously snuck into the mountain trying not to wake the dragon.<sup>40</sup> But when we are religious because it is important to us, because it is part of our identity, because we value it, and because we love the Lord and the opportunities religion gives us to lift others, then the burden is light.

Religion may also feel heavy when we think of it as being transactional rather than transformational. When it is transactional, we see ourselves putting our religious acts into a spiritual vending machine and expecting the instant, proper payout. And we get angry and start kicking at the machine when it seems the owed spiritual

blessings have gotten stuck and don’t appear. The burden is light when we see religion as transformational, thinking of our religious acts as helping us little by little, line by line, to become more like the Savior.<sup>41</sup>

Religion may also seem heavy when we feel it is wrong to experience doubts. Doubts will come to many of us at one point or another, and when we see them as opportunities for growth, the burden is light.

Religion can also feel heavy when we see God as cruel rather than compassionate, impersonal rather than personal, or apathetic rather than sympathetic—when we feel He is out of reach rather than near at hand. These feelings may arise from our experiences. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “A young person’s developing concept of God centers on characteristics observed in that child’s earthly parents.”<sup>42</sup>

A few years ago a woman in my ward shared the following in sacrament meeting, and I share it with her permission. She said:

*One of the most pervasive things I remember from living with my father is his sternness and his temper. I never felt completely safe with him. I loved my dad and I knew he loved me, yet I experienced fear when he was around. For many years I saw Heavenly Father the same way I saw my own father—as someone who, for the most part, kept his distance and was easily disappointed and frustrated at my weakness.*

This sister then described what she did to help make this heavy burden light:

*I have asked God many times to show me who He really is and to help me shed all my misconceptions and false beliefs so I can experience the real Him. He has responded with patience and love beyond my expectations. He has taken me by the hand, and I am slowly learning to trust that He is not distant but right here next to me. He is slowly walking me out of fearing Him and into the saving power of His love.*

Our experiences may influence how we see God and religion. But when we come to know and experience God’s true, infinitely loving nature, our burdens become light.

Religion may also feel heavy when we believe we must live it perfectly rather than patiently.<sup>43</sup> President Nelson said:

*Be patient with yourself. Perfection comes not in this life but in the next life. Don't demand things that are unreasonable but demand of yourself improvement. As you let the Lord help you through that, He will make the difference.*<sup>44</sup>

To be impatient with ourselves is to bear the light burden heavily. When we choose to be patient with ourselves and others, the burden is light.

While it is unhealthy to place perfectionist demands on ourselves, we must recognize that the light burden of religion stretches us in healthy ways. We will feel the strain on occasion, and that's good—we are growing. Don't run away from it. But we need wisdom and the Spirit to know where to place our efforts. Remember King Benjamin, who said, “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength.”<sup>45</sup>

### **The Pilgrim's Progress**

There will come times when we are not sure just how to carry the burden of religion lightly rather than heavily. There is a story that was written about 350 years ago entitled *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is an extended allegory in which a man named Christian has a great burden on his back, and, try as he might, he cannot shed it. Then a man named Evangelist tells Christian he must get on the path to the Celestial City. As Christian enters the path, he sees the Cross and his heavy burden falls off. He takes up the burden of the path and has many adventures on his way to the Celestial City.<sup>46</sup>

At one point Christian comes to a fork in the path. Both ways look just the same. He sits confused, not knowing which is the way to the Celestial City. Then a person in bright, shining clothes greets him and tells him he knows the way, and Christian follows. All of sudden this person captures Christian in a net and leaves him for dead. But someone from the Celestial City happens upon Christian and frees him.

Christian wonders what he did wrong. He had followed someone who seemed to know the way. The person from the Celestial City says that Christian had followed the Flatterer and reminds Christian that he had been given a note that would have directed him at the fork in the road. Christian was given everything he needed, but he had forgotten.<sup>47</sup>

Like Christian, most, if not all, of us will come to a fork in the path—a choice—in how we live our religion. Either path will lead to a burden. The question is, which one leads to the light burden, to Christ's burden?

May I suggest three notes to guide us to the Celestial City: they are the documents “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,”<sup>48</sup> the bicentennial proclamation “The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,”<sup>49</sup> and “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”<sup>50</sup> These three one-page documents are the united voice of Christ's apostles: the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. “The Living Christ” teaches us who Jesus is and of His infinite gift to us all. The Restoration proclamation teaches us of the Savior's restored Church and of His preparations for His Second Coming. And the family proclamation provides His teachings to guide us in our family life choices—some of the most important choices we will ever make. These three documents are sure anchors for our choices as we live a religious life. When we are unsure of which way to go, we can take these documents out. These documents will lead us to choose the light burden.

President Nelson said, “This path is rigorous and at times will feel like a steep climb.”<sup>51</sup> But he reminded us of the

*blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven.*<sup>52</sup>

Again, the difficulties we face are common to mankind. Many of the mental difficulties we experience come through no fault of our own but simply because we live in a fallen world and our bodies are subject to physical and mental sickness.

If we experience such difficulties, we should be careful not to label ourselves as worthless or less than or just somehow weak.

Please don't hear me saying that if you were only more religious you wouldn't have mental health challenges. But do hear me saying that we must recognize the wonderful blessings within religion, even with all the imperfections of the people in it. Do hear me saying that we should rejoice, for Christ's Church has come, and we should not let our hearts be troubled or be afraid.<sup>53</sup> *Christ is faithful* and has blessed us with a church designed to help us bear our burdens. The Church is a manifestation of "the love Jesus offers [us]" and "the grace that so fully He proffers [us]."<sup>54</sup> Knowing of His infinite love can persuade us to move forward with infinite hope. As Kierkegaard said, "In the thought that God is love is held the whole blessed persuasiveness of the eternal."<sup>55</sup>

All choices bring burdens. Aligning our choices with Christ—with His Church and His apostles—is the light burden. If I were to talk to my younger self who was newly trying to sort this all out, I would say to hold on to religion's light burden with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. Taking on Christ's burden *is* worth more than all the riches and kingdoms of the world.

To bear the name of Christ is a choice to have faith in Him and to yoke ourselves with Him who bears *our* burdens, *our* sins, *our* sorrows, and *our* griefs. It is a choice to allow Him to do for us what He offered to ancient Israel: to bear us "on eagles' wings" and bring us home.<sup>56</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. See Exodus 34:7; Doctrine and Covenants 124:50.

2. See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

3. See Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2009).

4. For an example, see Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1928).

5. See Matthew 11:30.

6. Mark 10:21.

7. Søren Kierkegaard, *Gospel of Sufferings*, trans. A. S. Aldworth and W. S. Ferrie (Cambridge: James Clarke and Company, 1955), 37.

8. Kierkegaard, *Gospel of Sufferings*, 34.

9. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, November 2022.

10. See Émile Durkheim, *Le Suicide: Étude de Sociologie* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie, 1897); first published in English as *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1951).

11. See Harold G. Koenig, *Religion and Mental Health: Research and Clinical Applications* (London: Academic Press, 2018); see also David H. Rosmarin and Harold G. Koenig, eds., *Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health*, 2nd ed. (London: Academic Press, 2020).

12. See Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

13. See Lynda H. Powell, Leila Shahabi, and Carl E. Thoresen, "Religion and Spirituality: Linkages to Physical Health," *American Psychologist* 58, no. 1 (January 2003): 36–52.

14. See Annette Mahoney, Daniel D. Flint, and James S. McGraw, "Spirituality, Religion, and Marital/Family Issues," in Rosmarin and Koenig, *Handbook of Spirituality*, 159–78; see also Edna Brown, Terri L. Orbuch, and Jose A. Bauermeister, "Religiosity and Marital Stability Among Black American and White American Couples," *Family Relations* 57, no. 2 (April 2008): 186–97.

15. See Bethany Gull and Claudia Geist, "Godly Husbands and Housework: A Global Examination of the Association Between Religion and Men's Housework Participation," *Social Compass* 67, no. 3 (September 2020): 389–409.

16. For more information specifically on Utah and mental health, as well as LGBT mental health, see W. Justin Dyer and Michael A. Goodman, "Sexuality, Religion, and Mental Health," Brigham Young University presentation, March 2022, [foundations.byu.edu/00000183-e77a-d2ff-a7b3-ffff7e0b0001/religion-sexual-orientation-and-mental-health-byu-presentation](https://foundations.byu.edu/00000183-e77a-d2ff-a7b3-ffff7e0b0001/religion-sexual-orientation-and-mental-health-byu-presentation).

17. See Doug Oman and S. Leonard Syme, “Weighing the Evidence: What Is Revealed by 100+ Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews of Religion/Spirituality and Health?” in Doug Oman, ed., *Why Religion and Spirituality Matter for Public Health: Evidence, Implications, and Resources* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 261–82.

18. See G. Tyler Lefevor, Edward B. Davis, Jaqueline Y. Paiz, and Abigail C. P. Smack, “The Relationship Between Religiousness and Health Among Sexual Minorities: A Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 147, no. 7 (July 2021): 647–66.

19. Tyler J. VanderWeele, Shanshan Li, and Ichiro Kawachi, “Religious Service Attendance and Suicide Rates—Reply,” *Letters: Comment and Response, JAMA Psychiatry* 74, no. 2 (February 2017): 198.

20. See William Justin Dyer, Daniel K. Judd, Megan Gale, and Hunter Gibson Finlinson, “Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints: A Review of Literature 2005–2022,” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (June 2023): article 701.

21. See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

22. See Dyer, Judd, Gale, and Finlinson, “Religion”; see also Daniel K. Judd, “Religiosity, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints: A Preliminary Review of Literature (1923–95),” in James T. Duke, ed., *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 473–97.

23. See Mark D. Regnerus and Jeremy E. Uecker, “Religious Influences on Sensitive Self-Reported Behaviors: The Product of Social Desirability, Deceit, or Embarrassment?” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 145–63.

24. See W. Justin Dyer and Michael A. Goodman, “Religious Affiliation’s Association with Suicidality Across Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities,” *Religions* 13, no. 10 (October 2022): article 932; W. Justin Dyer, Michael A. Goodman, and David S. Wood, “Religion and Sexual Orientation as Predictors of Utah Youth Suicidality,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2022): 51–103; James S. McGraw, Meagan Docherty,

Jay R. Chinn, and Annette Mahoney, “Family, Faith, and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors (STBs) Among LGBTQ Youth in Utah,” *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 10, no. 2 (June 2023): 257–68; and Jared S. Klundt, David M. Erekson, Austin M. Lynn, and Hannah E. Brown, “Sexual Minorities, Mental Health, and Religiosity at a Religiously Conservative University,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 171 (March 2021): article 110475.

25. 1 Corinthians 10:13; emphasis added.

26. 1 Corinthians 10:13; emphasis added.

27. Mosiah 18:9.

28. Mosiah 18:8; emphasis added.

29. Russell M. Nelson; quoted in Sheri L. Dew, *Insights from a Prophet’s Life: Russell M. Nelson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 189.

30. “Same-Sex Attraction and Same-Sex Behavior,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, July 2021 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2021), 38.6.15 (p. 409); see also “Transgender Individuals,” *General Handbook*, 38.6.23 (p. 413).

31. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023; quoting Mosiah 18:8.

32. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.

33. Doctrine and Covenants 121:8.

34. Kierkegaard, *Gospel of Sufferings*, 116.

35. See Hilary S. Connery and Jeff Devido, “Spirituality/Religion and Substance Use Disorders,” in Rosmarin and Koenig, *Handbook of Spirituality*, 119–38; see also Steven E. Barkan, “Religiosity and Premarital Sex in Adulthood,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 3 (September 2006): 407–17.

36. See “CDC Estimates 1 in 5 People in the U.S. Have a Sexually Transmitted Infection,” Newsroom, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 25 January 2021, [cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0125-sexually-transmitted-infection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0125-sexually-transmitted-infection.html); see also “U.S. STI Epidemic Showed No Signs of Slowing in 2021—Cases Continued to Escalate,” Newsroom, CDC, 11 April 2023, [cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/s0411-sti.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/s0411-sti.html).

37. See Wyndol Furman and Charlene Collibee, “Sexual Activity with Romantic and Nonromantic Partners and Psychosocial Adjustment in Young Adults,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43,

no. 7 (October 2014): 1327–41; see also Sandhya Ramrakha, Charlotte Paul, Melanie L. Bell, Nigel Dickson, Terrie E. Moffitt, and Avshalom Caspi, “The Relationship Between Multiple Sex Partners and Anxiety, Depression, and Substance Dependence Disorders: A Cohort Study,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 42, no. 5 (July 2013): 863–72.

38. Jen Christensen, “More Than Half of People Involved in Road Accidents Had Drugs or Alcohol in Their System, Study Says,” CNN Health, 14 December 2022, [cnn.com/2022/12/14/health/drug-alcohol-driving/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/14/health/drug-alcohol-driving/index.html); citing *Alcohol and Drug Prevalence Among Seriously or Fatally Injured Road Users*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, December 2022, report no. DOT HS 813 399.

39. See *Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America’s Colleges and Universities*, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, March 2007, [drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal/Wasting-the-best-and-the-brightest-substance-abuse-at-americas-colleges-and-universities\\_0.pdf](https://www.drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal/Wasting-the-best-and-the-brightest-substance-abuse-at-americas-colleges-and-universities_0.pdf).

40. See chapter 12, “Inside Information,” in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937).

41. See Isaiah 28:10, 13; 2 Nephi 28:30; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12; see also Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.

42. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Hands of the Fathers,” *Ensign*, May 1999; citing Jane R. Dickie, Amy K. Eshleman, Dawn M. Merasco, Amy Shepard, Michael Vander Wilt, and Melissa Johnson, “Parent-Child Relationships and Children’s Images of God,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (March 1997): 25–43.

43. It is important to acknowledge a condition known as scrupulosity, which is a type of obsessive-compulsive anxiety disorder surrounding religion.

Those with scrupulosity suffer from crippling bouts of anxiety over religious or moral issues to the point that they have constant spiritual anxiety. Their anxiety is so strong that it leads to maladaptive behaviors. This type of mental health disorder can truly be heavy, but it can be alleviated by meeting with a qualified professional. See Debra Theobald McClendon, “Understanding Scrupulosity (Religious OCD),” Digital Only: Young Adults, *Ensign*, September 2019, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/ensign/2019/09/young-adults/understanding-scrupulosity-religious-ocd](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/ensign/2019/09/young-adults/understanding-scrupulosity-religious-ocd).

44. Russell M. Nelson, excerpt from *Men’s Hearts Shall Fail Them*, Church of Jesus Christ, 18 November 2011, YouTube video, 2:22–49, [youtube.com/watch?v=EMwKxmTLAcs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMwKxmTLAcs).

45. Mosiah 4:27.

46. See John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), part 1.

47. See Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, part 1, 178–81.

48. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles” (1 January 2000).

49. See “The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation to the World,” 5 April 2020; introduced in Russell M. Nelson, “Hear Him,” *Ensign*, May 2020.

50. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (23 September 1995).

51. Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022; see 2 Nephi 31:18–20.

52. Mosiah 2:41; quoted in Nelson, “Spiritual Momentum.”

53. See John 14:27.

54. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 193.

55. Kierkegaard, *Gospel of Sufferings*, 86.

56. Exodus 19:4.