

# *“A Wonderful Flood of Light”*

DANIEL K JUDD

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, this is truly a wonderful experience to join with you in this devotional assembly. I compliment each one of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend. In addition to the remarkable students, faculty, and staff of Brigham Young University, I would like to acknowledge the presence of my family, our friends, and those of you who are listening or watching this devotional from afar.

The topic I have chosen to address today is what latter-day apostles and prophets have described as “a wonderful flood of light,”<sup>1</sup> an apt description of what we have come to know as the restored gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would like to begin by sharing with you a story of a woman living on the seacoast of Ireland at the turn of the last century. This woman was quite wealthy but also very frugal. Her neighbors were surprised when she was among the first in her area to have electricity installed in her home. Several weeks after having the power installed, a man from the electric company visited her to see how things were working. She assured him that everything was working well.

“I’m wondering if you can explain something to me,” he said. “Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?”

“Certainly,” she answered. “Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off.”<sup>2</sup>

Not only did reading this story bring a smile to my face, but, as a good story often does, it also helped me to articulate and ponder the following question: “To what degree am I being true to the abundance of light and knowledge made available to me through the gospel of Jesus Christ?” Specifically I ask myself, “Am I continually walking by the ‘flood of light’ made available through the restoration of the gospel by the Prophet Joseph Smith, or is the path on which I am walking lighted in ‘some other way’” (D&C 50:19)?

The prophet Mormon taught us that the light of Christ “is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16). For those who are faithful to this lesser light, a greater light is then made available through the ministry of the Holy Ghost. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read that “a man may receive

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the Holy Ghost, and it may descend upon him and not tarry with him” (D&C 130:23). After baptism and during confirmation, we are then entitled to receive “the gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 33:15; Acts 2:38) as our “constant companion” (D&C 121:46). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that we increase in knowledge “in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven.”<sup>3</sup>

If you’re like me, there are times you feel that your life is on track and you are being true to the light God has given you, but at other times you may feel as if you are, as described in the Doctrine and Covenants, “walking in darkness at noon-day” (D&C 95:6). For me, the difference between the times of light, the periods of darkness, and those cloudy days when I am somewhere in between is the degree to which I am open to and act upon the influence of the Holy Ghost. President Brigham Young once taught:

*There is no doubt, if a person lives according to the revelations given to God’s people, he may have the Spirit of the Lord to signify to him His will, and to guide and to direct him in the discharge of his duties, in his temporal as well as his spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect, we live far beneath our privileges.*<sup>4</sup>

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once shared a story from his personal experience that illustrates President Young’s observation. Several years after Elder Ballard had returned from serving as a mission president, one of his former missionaries came to see him in his office at Church headquarters.

“President,” this missionary said, “I think I’m losing my testimony.”

Elder Ballard was surprised because this missionary had been one of his most faithful elders.

The young man continued, “For the first time, I have read some anti-Mormon literature

[and] I have some questions, and nobody will answer them for me.”

Though the questions were what Elder Ballard described as “the standard anti-Church issues,” he explained to the young man that he would like some time to collect the appropriate materials to ensure that he could provide some meaningful answers. The elder agreed, and they set an appointment to meet again in 10 days.

As the former missionary left the office, Elder Ballard stopped him and said, “Elder, you’ve asked me several questions here today. . . . Now I have one for you.”

Elder Ballard then asked, “How long has it been since you read from the Book of Mormon?”

The missionary admitted that it had been a long time.

“All right,” Elder Ballard responded. “You have given me my assignment. It’s only fair that I give you yours. I want you to promise me that you will read in the Book of Mormon for at least one hour every day between now and our next appointment.”

The missionary reluctantly agreed. Elder Ballard’s own words describe what happened next:

*Ten days later he returned to my office, and I was ready. I pulled out my papers to start answering his questions. But he stopped me.*

*“President,” he said, “that isn’t going to be necessary.” Then he explained: “I know that the Book of Mormon is true. I know Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.”*

*“Well, that’s great,” I said, “but you’re going to get answers to your questions anyway. I worked a long time on this, so you just sit there and listen.”*

*I answered all of those questions and then asked, “Elder, what have you learned from this?”*

*And he said, “Give the Lord equal time.”*<sup>5</sup>

Not only does this story serve as an important reminder to give the Lord “equal

time,” it also illustrates the importance of *consistency* in being “nourished by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4), especially the doctrines of the Restoration. Brother Robert J. Matthews, former dean of Religious Education at BYU and more recently the president of the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple, once stated:

*President Heber C. Kimball said that we cannot survive on “borrowed light” [Orson F. Whitney, Life of Heber C. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 450]. That is, we cannot borrow testimony from someone else. It also means that we cannot continually borrow, even from ourselves from an earlier time. . . . If we drift we may not realize that faith was becoming thin within us, and perhaps we have only the memory of a testimony and not a live, current, dynamic testimony.*<sup>6</sup>

Elder Ballard’s experience also illustrates the Lord’s warning in the Doctrine and Covenants:

*And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—*

*Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. . . .*

*And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written. [D&C 84:54–55, 57; emphasis added]*

The good news is that much of the darkness that clouds our minds and troubles our lives may be removed by taking seriously rather than “treat[ing] lightly” (D&C 84:54) the doctrines of the Restoration.

During these next few minutes I will present three doctrinal teachings that are unique to Latter-day Saint theology and practice. As I discuss these doctrines, please write down any impressions you have about how you might more effectively live by the increased light

made available through these teachings. The first doctrine I wish to address is the doctrine of the eternal family.

### **The Doctrine of the Eternal Family**

Not long after we were sustained as members of the Sunday School general presidency this past April conference, President Roger Merrill and I were privileged to meet with a senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve regarding our new responsibilities. The third member of the new presidency, Brother William Oswald, was unable to join with us because he was still serving as president of the Russia Vladivostok Mission. Soon after we entered the office of this beloved apostle, he invited me to tell him about myself. Feeling overwhelmed but also sensing his kindness and support, I shared a 30-second “abridged version” of my life story. He urged me to tell him more, which I did.

After sharing more of my story and discussing various aspects of what I had said, this member of the Twelve looked me directly in the eye and said, “Brother Judd, thank you for sharing your story, but you have missed something.”

I responded by saying, “I’m sorry. Please help me understand what I have missed.”

He simply said, “You tell me.”

I soon realized that although I had mentioned my family, they hadn’t been the focus of what I had shared. He then asked me to tell him more about my family, including my ancestors, and afterward he provided counsel to Brother Merrill and myself that in all we did in our new callings and in our personal lives, we should always keep our families and the families of the Church a top priority. That is a lesson I will never forget.

Most of us know and understand the uniquely Latter-day Saint doctrine that “family relationships [may] be perpetuated beyond the grave”<sup>7</sup>, but do our lives truly reflect our belief in this divine doctrine? Although we must

give serious attention to the Savior’s caution that “he that loveth father or mother . . . son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37; see also JST, Luke 14:26) and also understand that placing family before God can be a form of idolatry, we must also realize that family relationships are more than just a means to an end. They are an end in themselves—a celestial end with an eternal destiny.

Are we so busy pursuing career interests, church responsibilities, and personal recreation that we are neglecting our families? If we are to take the doctrine of eternal families seriously, each of us must continually ask ourselves if we are giving our family members “equal time.” Let the names and faces of your family pass through your mind: Are there those among them who need more of you? Mother, father, husband or wife, son, daughter, brother, or sister? If you are a young person of marriageable age and maturity, are you doing your part to find your eternal companion, or are you just “hanging out” on a personal plateau, giving your best efforts to school and to work? No matter who we are or what our particular circumstances might be, the following counsel from Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve is a good reminder of the importance of putting first things first:

*Are there so many fascinating, exciting things to do or so many challenges pressing down upon you that it is hard to keep focused on that which is essential? When things of the world crowd in, all too often the wrong things take highest priority. Then it is easy to forget the fundamental purpose of life. Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction. He would have good people fill life with “good things” so there is no room for the essential ones. Have you unconsciously been caught in that trap?*<sup>8</sup>

Several years ago, while doing research and writing an article about the relationship of religious affiliation and mental health, I observed

an interesting dynamic. Among the many individuals and families I interviewed, including Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and members of the Bahia and Hari Krishna faiths, I was pleased to note that many of the Latter-day Saints I interviewed and tested were among those with the most favorable scores. Sadly, however, other LDS members were among those who had the poorest showing.<sup>9</sup> The scores from the LDS sample appeared to be more polarized than the test results from the members of the other faiths. Although we know that rain falls “on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45) and serious problems come to faithful individuals and families as well as the less faithful, my observations and the data I collected confirmed the Lord’s statement in the Doctrine and Covenants: “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3; see verses 1–10).

The good news is that the opposite is also true. The scriptures clearly teach that when individuals and families are true to the greater light—especially when life is hard—increased blessings eventually follow. The Lord stated in the Doctrine and Covenants: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24).

### **The Doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement**

Although time doesn’t permit a detailed discussion, I would like to briefly discuss the Latter-day Saint doctrines of the Fall of Adam and Eve and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. These two doctrines along with the doctrine of the Creation constitute what Elder Russell M. Nelson described as the “three preeminent pillars of God’s plan.”<sup>10</sup> Not only do we as Latter-day Saints accept the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement of Christ as literal, historical events,

we also believe they have great doctrinal significance and personal relevance.

During my tenure as a bishop and stake president, I regularly met with individuals and couples for whom these doctrines of the Creation, Fall, and Atonement were more than theological principles. They were actually accurate descriptions of the various stages of their lives and relationships.

Most of the engaged couples with whom I met were in the “Creation” stage of their relationships, for in a metaphorical sense, most were living a Garden of Eden–like existence. For them the grass was perpetually green, the water was constantly clear, and the sky was always blue. For the most part, these couples were only partially aware of the challenges that lay ahead.

Other individuals and families with whom I met were experiencing the “Fall,” for they had left the Garden of Eden long ago and were struggling in the “dark and dreary waste” (1 Nephi 8:7) of conflict, disappointment, and despair.

The desire of my heart as their priesthood leader was to help them feel the love of their Heavenly Father, invite them to establish the Savior as the foundation of their lives, and assist them in identifying and being true to the teachings of our prophets and the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Over the years I have come to deeply appreciate the following counsel of President Howard W. Hunter:

*Please remember this one thing. If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.<sup>11</sup>*

Every individual and family—faithful to the gospel or not—experiences challenges and trials of many kinds. Many people naïvely believe, however, that if they are living as they

should, they will never face any serious problems. Consider the scriptural account of the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi and his wife Sariah. Did this righteous couple ever face any serious problems? As a couple, did Lehi and Sariah ever have any differences of opinion? If you’re not sure, read chapter 5 of 1 Nephi. Did the prophet Lehi ever murmur because of his afflictions? Consider 1 Nephi 16. Did Lehi and Sariah ever have any problems with their children? Grandchildren? Please read the Book of Mormon. My dear friends, it is not a coincidence that this wonderful book of scripture, the Book of Mormon, begins with the story of a family dealing with the consequences of the Fall and the other challenges of life. Their story is our story.

No other religion of which I am aware teaches that the Fall of Adam and Eve and the opposition that made the Fall possible were essential parts of God’s plan for the salvation of His children. The prophet Lehi taught that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in *all* things” (2 Nephi 2:11; emphasis added), which includes every aspect of our lives: family, church, mission, romance, school, and so forth. Lehi continued, “And to bring about his [God’s] eternal purposes in the end of man . . . , it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter” (2 Nephi 2:15).

This very day many of us are learning that it is the stress of final exams (or giving a devotional talk) that gives a certain sweetness to the promise of the holiday that follows.

Many people believe that if Adam and Eve had not partaken of the forbidden fruit, their posterity, including you and me, would be living in the Garden of Eden happily ever after. The Book of Mormon clearly teaches otherwise. From 2 Nephi we read:

*If Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. . . .*

*And [Adam and Eve] would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. [2 Nephi 2:22–23]*

Lehi further revealed that “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). As Latter-day Saints we accept the doctrine of what has come to be known in theological circles as “the fortunate fall” (*felix culpa*). Although many theologians and philosophers struggle to answer why God allows evil and adversity to exist, the doctrine of the Fall as revealed in the scriptures of the Restoration and in the teachings of latter-day prophets offers profound insights concerning this difficult subject. Elder Orson F. Whitney once stated:

*No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven.<sup>12</sup>*

In addition to gaining insight as to why God allows us to experience the troubles and trials we do, the doctrines of the Restoration also help us more clearly understand the need we have for a Savior.

Several years ago Elder Bruce C. Hafen, formerly of BYU and now a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, drew my attention

to an article discussing the similarities and differences between Latter-day Saints and other Christians with respect to their beliefs in Christ. See if you agree with the following assessment of Latter-day Saint belief written by the religion editor of *Newsweek* magazine:

*According to Mormon tradition, not only did Adam’s fall make procreation possible, it also established the conditions for human freedom and moral choice. Unlike orthodox Christians, Mormons believe that men are born free of sin and earn their way to godhood by the proper exercise of free will, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus’ suffering and death in the Mormon view were brotherly acts of compassion, but they do not atone for the sins of others. For this reason, Mormons do not include the cross in their iconography nor do they place much emphasis on Easter.<sup>13</sup>*

When challenged by Latter-day Saint readers that he had misrepresented the doctrine of the Church, the *Newsweek* writer defended his article by explaining that he had carefully studied the official teachings of the Church, but what he had written was intended to represent the beliefs of the typical Latter-day Saint and not necessarily the official doctrine of the Church. In other words, he was saying that the general Church membership did not believe in the *necessity* of Christ’s grace but in the *sufficiency* of their own good works.

We don’t know how the *Newsweek* editor selected his sample of Latter-day Saints to interview, but we do know that their apparent answers to the editor’s questions were not accurate reflections of the core doctrine of the Restoration. The prophet Lehi taught: “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is *no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah*” (2 Nephi 2:8; emphasis added).

I regret that as a full-time missionary I allowed my dislike for what some have defined as “cheap grace”<sup>14</sup> to influence me to overemphasize the importance of good works. I permitted those who insisted that one could be forgiven without repentance and that making and keeping covenants wasn’t important to cloud my understanding of what the prophet Alma described as the “one thing which is of more importance than they all” (Alma 7:7): the saving and enabling power made possible through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps one of the reasons some have distorted the doctrine of grace and others have misunderstood the importance of good works is found in the following statement from C. S. Lewis:

*He [the devil] always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one.*<sup>15</sup>

In a well-known verse the prophet Nephi stated: “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added). Although many have attempted to define what Nephi meant by his phrase “all we can do,” Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the Book of Mormon king, answered the question well:

*And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins . . . and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain. [Alma 24:11; emphasis added]*

Repentance is the key that fully invokes the enabling power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Having faith in Christ, repenting of

our sins, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and faithfully enduring to the end establishes the foundation upon which additional covenants and ordinances may be revealed and received. The prophet Nephi taught, “If ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with an illustration that I hope will summarize what I have attempted to share with you today. It was 17 years ago this month that I graduated from Brigham Young University with a doctorate in counseling psychology. I value the many things I learned in my philosophical and clinical training, and I’m grateful for the experiences I had with fellow students, faculty, staff, and others, but the one academic experience I treasure the most occurred during the very last hour of my graduate school experience.

In my particular discipline we were required to conduct original research in an area of our choice, formally write up the study in a doctoral dissertation, and then defend our work before an examination committee. The results of this exam determined whether we would pass or fail. I looked forward to defending my dissertation. I had worked hard and had been greatly blessed by studying my particular topic. I had also received tremendous help from the professors on my committee and felt confident that I could adequately defend my work.

The first 15 minutes of the examination went quite smoothly. The questions were straightforward, and I felt I answered them well. I began to feel the excitement of having achieved a goal I had been working toward for several years. The next set of questions were more difficult, as we began to discuss some of the debatable parts of my work. I still felt fairly confident in my answers. Even though I realized that I would probably need to make some revisions, I felt I would pass. I wasn’t prepared for what happened next. One of the professors

on the examination committee voiced his feelings that he wasn't happy with the overall scope of my study. He didn't know if he could give me a passing vote. After several more attempts to defend my work, I realized that this professor would not be convinced—and what he was saying appeared to be influencing the others. I began to lose hope.

At that critical moment, another member of my committee, Professor Richard N. Williams, asked the examination committee if he could make a few comments. For the next several minutes Professor Williams defended my work and he defended me. The spirit in the room changed dramatically. Differences were reconciled, a vote was taken, and I passed the examination and graduated—fulfilling the dream of a lifetime.

I hope each of you at some time in your life can have someone stand up for you, plead your cause, and rescue you as Professor Williams did. This experience helped me understand in a very meaningful way what is meant in scripture when the Savior is referred to as our “advocate with the Father” (D&C 110:4; JST, 1 John 2:1). There is, however, a major difference in the means by which the Savior is our Advocate and what Professor Williams did to assist me. Please look for this vital difference as I read from section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

*Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—  
Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;*

*Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. [D&C 45:3–5]*

Professor Williams defended me based on the integrity of my work and his belief in me;

the Savior's advocacy is based on the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice and our willingness to believe in Him. This is what the prophet Lehi was teaching his son Jacob when he said, “I know that thou art redeemed, because of *the righteousness of thy Redeemer*” (2 Nephi 2:3; emphasis added). The scriptures plainly teach that salvation is much more about the Savior than it is about us. I testify, in the words of King Benjamin, that there is “no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord” (Mosiah 3:17).

What a blessing it is to be living in a day when we are privileged to have such “a wonderful flood of light” by which we may live. I testify to you of the truthfulness of the restored gospel and that we are led by a living prophet of God—President Gordon B. Hinckley. I testify to you that Jesus Christ is our Advocate, He “is the light and the life of the world; . . . a light that is endless, that can never be darkened” (Mosiah 16:9). I pray that each of us, especially during the Christmas season, will reflect upon how we can be true to the wondrous Light we have been blessed to receive. I leave you my testimony and my love in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Statement of the First Presidency, “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, November 1909, 80; also in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 4:205. See also Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990).

2. From David Jeremiah audiotape, *The God of the Impossible*, TPR02; cited in Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus*, rev. ed. (Dallas, Texas: W Publishing Group, 2003), 7–8.

3. *Teachings*, 51.

4. *JD* 12:104; emphasis added.

5. M. Russell Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted: Continuing Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 51–52.
6. Robert J. Matthews, “Doctrinal Aspects of Church Discipline,” Utah South Regional Conference, Priesthood Meeting, January 1999, 5, unpublished manuscript in possession of the author; emphasis added.
7. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102; see also D&C 131:1–3.
8. Richard G. Scott, “First Things First,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 7.
9. See Daniel K Judd, “Religious Affiliation and Mental Health,” in *Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints*, Daniel K Judd, ed. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1999), 245–79.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Constancy Amid Change,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 33.
11. Howard W. Hunter, “Fear Not, Little Flock,” *Brigham Young University 1988–89 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1989), 112.
12. Orson F. Whitney, quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 98.
13. Kenneth L. Woodward, “What Mormons Believe,” *Newsweek*, 1 September 1980, 68; quoted in Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 2.
14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 44–47.
15. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1960; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1984), 160.