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Introduction

This series of *Read, Ponder, Pray* exercises are focused on the Atonement. In this series we examine the atonement under ten titles.

- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
- “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
- “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
- “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
- “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement”
- “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
- “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
- “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
- “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.”
- “Song of the Righteous: A Prayer unto me”



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo’s fresco, “Creation,” found above serves as metaphor for the means and ends of our scripture readings and ponder questions.

- ? How would you characterize God’s arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam’s arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam’s limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo’s fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture’s divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo’s fresco, represent all of us as we seek God’s enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God’s presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God’s help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following general questions to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site found on the site’s home page.

- ? What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- ? How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- ? What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- ? How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- ? Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- ? How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- ? How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- ? What does this reading discern or “read” about you?
- ? How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

fall: our need of atonement

Alma 34.⁸⁻⁹

⁸And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it. ⁹For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

Questionary

1. Consider the statement:

“There must be an atonement made, or else mankind perish.”

? How do you feel about this assertion?

Consider this statement:

“There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind perish.

? How is the second statement different than the first?

? Is the second statement more or less true than the first?

Now, consider a third statement.

“There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must perish.”

? How does it differ from the first two?

Now, consider Amulek’s statement as he wrote it.

“There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish.”

? How is Amulek’s statement different from the others?

? Would you agree that they all say essentially the same thing?

? Why, do you think, Amulek added the words “all,” “must,” “unavoidably,” when the principle might have been taught without them, as in our first statement above?

Amulek doesn’t say that without the atonement “mankind perish,” even though “Mankind” might sound to us like everyone. To say that “mankind perish” seems pretty universal. But, somehow, for Amulek, “mankind perish” wasn’t deemed strong enough for the profound truth that he wished to convey. So he wrote “*all* mankind perish.” Now, surely, we have arrived at the ultimate statement.

But, no, Amulek wasn’t satisfied yet. He felt stronger than this about the truth of mankind’s final state without Atonement. “All mankind *must* perish.” Here we have a double superlative. First, *everyone* perishes. Amulek leaves no one out. Second, they “*must*” perish. There is no other option. Again, sounds pretty absolute.

Yet, Amulek feels the need to up the ante one more time: “All mankind must *unavoidably* perish.” I would have thought that “*must*” implies “unavoidable.” But Amulek needs to be sure that we do not misunderstand our need.

? Why do you think Amulek was so intense in his language here?

? In your living, do you feel the same intensity concerning your personal need for the Savior and his Atonement?

- ? How do you feel about Amulek's assertion?
- ? Do you agree with him?
- ? Would no one truly be able to return to Heavenly Father without the Atonement? There have been some pretty impressive people who have come to earth. Is everyone truly "hardened," "fallen," and "lost" without the Savior and his Atonement?
- ? How do you feel, knowing that this is everyone's state and final destiny—however impressive they may be—without Atonement?

- ? Why do you think Amulek is so emphatic and intense in his language—He does not say "mankind perish;" not just ALL mankind perish," or even "ALL mankind MUST perish," but "ALL mankind MUST UNAVOIDABLY perish?
- ? What do you learn and feel about yourself from the intensity of Amulek's language?
- ? How strongly do you agree with Amulek, intellectually and emotionally?
- ? What impetus does today's reading provide for repentance?

2 Nephi 9:⁶⁻⁹

⁶For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. ⁷Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

⁸O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more. ⁹And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

Q^uestionary

1. This passage paints a grim reality of our eternal destiny without Christ and his Atonement. List the things we learn from this reading about our eternal destiny without Christ and his Atonement.
2. Consider the following realities of our eternal existence without atonement.

- We are “cut off from the presence of the Lord.”
- Upon dying, we would “rise no more.”
- “Our spirits must become subject to... the devil.”
- “Our spirits must have become like unto [the devil].”
- We would “become devils.”
- We would become “angels to a devil.”
- We would “remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself.”

- ? How do you feel about these assertions about our eternal state without Christ?
- ? Do you believe them?
- ? What do you sense when you imagine the existence described here?

3. Consider all the good people who have lived. Think of individuals such as Abraham (remember what is said of him—great and noble, etc.), Captain Moroni (remember what is said of him—if everyone was like him, the powers of hell would be shaken), Joseph Smith, or Russel M. Nelson. Consider all the good people who have known in your own life.

- ? How do you feel about Jacob’s suggestion that everyone, including such individuals as these, would end up “like unto the devil” without atonement?
- ? How is this possible?

4. Solomon Stoddard, a well-known and inspired Colonial era preacher, once taught,

“Men must be led into the Understanding of the badness of their Hearts and the strictness of the Law, before they will be convinced of the Preciousness of Christ” (In Seasons of Refreshing, Keith J. Hardman, p. 45).

Two centuries later, Ezra Taft Benson, taught, essentially, the same principle,

“Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ.

“No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effects upon all mankind” (A Witness and A Warning, p. 33).

? How do the realities of today's passage lead you to Christ and to rely on his Atonement?

2 Nephi 11.⁴⁻⁶

⁴Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

⁵And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

⁶And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. ⁷For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.

Questionary

1. In today's passage, Nephi mentions four things that delight him.
? What are those four things?
 2. Nephi delights
 - "In proving... the coming of Christ"
 - "In the covenants of the Lord"
 - "In [the Lord's] grace... justice... power... and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death"
 - "In proving... that save Christ should come all men must perish"
 - ? What, do you think, is it about these four things that cause Nephi to take such delight in them?
 - ? Do you share Nephi's feelings about these truths?
 3. When contemplating covenants, we most often focus on our role in a partnership with God. But here, notice the language. The focus seems to be exclusively on God. The Lord has made covenants "to our fathers," not "with our fathers." Here, it seems that we could replace the word covenant with "promise." Promises can be made without acceptance or compliance on the part of a second party. Not all of God's promises are conditioned on our acceptance or compliance. For example, God promised to send His son. Was that promise conditional? The effect of his coming may certainly be conditional, but the fact of his coming was not.

Nephi seems to delight, at least in part, in the simple fact that we have a God who makes and keeps promises independent of our response. Consider other promises—both conditional and unconditional—that God has made.

 - ? How do you feel about His being the kind of Being who makes and keeps promises?
 4. We might easily relate to Nephi's first three delights. They are positive and hopeful.
 - ? But how do you feel about Nephi's delight in proving that all men perish without the Savior?
 - ? Does it seem to be a tad on the negative side of things?
 - ? How might this truth, though potentially disconcerting, actually serve to draw us to the Savior?
 - ? Why is it so important that we understand and faithfully acknowledge this truth?
 - ? How do you acknowledge this truth?
 5. Nephi makes this startling declaration: "If there be no Christ there be no God."
 - ? We say it is startling... do you find this statement to be surprising?
 - ? How do you understand this assertion?
-
- ? It might seem a little odd to "delight" in proving that "all men must perish" if not for Christ. Why

is this such a delight?

- ? How does this truth that “all men must perish” without Christ impact and improve your daily life?
- ? Why would it be that if Christ did not exist, there would be no God?

Moroni 7.²⁰⁻²⁵

²⁰And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing? ²¹And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby ye may lay hold on every good thing.

²²For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. ²³And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come. ²⁴And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them.

²⁵Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing.

Q

uestionary

1. The phrase, “every good thing” is repeated several times in today’s reading.
 - In verse 19, Moroni exhorts us to “lay hold upon *every good thing*.”
 - In verse 20, Moroni asks “how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon *every good thing*?”
 - In verse 21, Moroni informs us that he is going to answer his own question about how we may lay hold of *every good thing*.
 - In verse 22, Moroni teaches that “in Christ there should come *every good thing*.”

? What does this phrase suggest to you?
? What does this repetition suggest about Moroni’s intent in chapter 7 as a whole?
2. In verse 24, Moroni says, “All things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could *no good thing* come unto them.”
 - ? How do you feel about Moroni’s assertion that without Christ “no good thing” could come to us?
 - ? Do you believe this?
 - ? Why, do you feel, could we obtain no good thing on our own and without Christ?
 - ? What does this tell you about “fallen” or “the natural man”?
3. In the remainder of the chapter, verses 27-48, Moroni lists a few of the good things that we can ask for and receive through Christ.
 - ? What are these “good things”?

Mosiah 16.³⁻⁷

³For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil. ⁴Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state. ⁵But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.

⁶And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption. ⁷And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

Questionary

1. Abinadi speaks of “that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall.”
 - ? What does it mean to “beguile”?
 - ? What was the nature of the serpent’s deception?
 - ? How does the fact that the couple was deceived or tricked according to the Book of Mormon relate to and square with our occasional modern assertions that Adam and Eve wisely chose to eat the fruit after careful and insightful thought?
2. Abinadi teaches some brutal truths about “all mankind.”
 - We are all “carnal, sensual, devilish”
 - “Knowing evil from good,” we all “subject” ourselves “to the devil”
 - “All mankind were lost”
 - ? How do you feel about Abinadi’s estimations of mankind?
 - ? Is any of this true of you? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What kind of behaviors and attitudes do you think could be thought of as “carnal, sensual and devilish”?
 - ? Are there any “carnal, sensual, and devilish” behaviors and attitudes in your own life?
3. Consider and ponder the consequences that, according to today’s reading, come into a “carnal, sensual, and devilish” individual’s life.
 - “The devil has power over them.”
 - They “remaineth in [their] fallen state
 - They are “an enemy to God”
 - “He is as though there was no redemption made”
 - ? To what degree are you free from all of this? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? To the degree that you are free from all of this, what role did Jesus play in your deliverance? What role did you play?

Mosiah 3.¹⁹

¹⁹For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

Q

1. In today's reading, Benjamin teaches that the "natural man" (man without Atonement), is "an enemy to God." The word "enemy" comes from the Latin word, '*inimicus*.' *Inimicus* is a compound word formed from the Latin word '*in*,' meaning "not," and '*amicus*,' meaning "friend. Enemy, then, literally means "not a friend." It does not have to imply very negative, passionate, and even violent feelings.
 - ? When you think of an enemy, what images, experiences, and feelings comes to your mind and heart?
 - ? What difference would it make in meaning if Benjamin had spoken of being an "enemy of God" rather than an "enemy to God"?
 - ? What would you think and how would you feel if we suggested that while we can think of and act toward God as an enemy, he can never think of us or act toward us as an enemy?
 - ? In what ways do we exhibit enmity toward God?
 - ? If you do not think of God as being directly against you, in what ways do you sometimes think of him as being less than "friendly" to you?
 - ? What would you think and how would you feel if we suggested that one of the ways we exhibit enmity toward God is by thinking of him as being capable of feeling enmity toward us?
 - ? How does the Savior's Atonement help us stop thinking of God as one who is "not our friend"?
2. Benjamin teaches that the only way to stop feeling enmity toward God—including falsely attributing to him feelings of enmity toward us—is to yield to the "enticings of the Holy Spirit."
 - ? How does the Holy Spirit do this?
3. Benjamin speaks of us becoming "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him."
 - ? Is this to be read as a "prerequisite" for "putting of the natural man" or something that those who have put off the natural man experience?
4. In today's reading, Benjamin provides a reason that we need the Savior's Atonement. The Savior's Atonement is a revelation concerning God's connectedness, attachment, unity with us. If properly understood it removes, among other things, all feelings of enmity we may feel toward God—an enmity that is often "reciprocal," based upon an erroneous sense that God feels enmity with us.
 - ? How does Jesus' Atonement remove all thoughts that God could possibly think of us with enmity?

Alma 22.¹³⁻¹⁴

And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name. And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.

Questionary

1. In looking at today's passage, the first thing we note is the similarity between Aaron's teaching here and Ammon's teachings found in Alma 18. Both begin with the existence of God (18.²⁴ and 22.⁷), and then move on to the creation (18.³⁶ and 22.¹⁰), the creation of man in God's image (18.³⁶ and 22.¹²), the fall (18.³⁶ and 22.¹³), and the redemption through Christ (18.³⁹ and 22.¹⁴).

The reader may want to turn to DC 20.¹⁷⁻²⁸, where we have a kind of "creedal statement" very similar to the teachings found in Alma 18 and 22.

- "There is a God in Heaven" (DC 20.¹⁷)
- "God, the framer of heaven and earth" (DC 20.¹⁷)
- "He created man... after his own image" (DC 20.¹⁸)
- "Man became sensual and devilish, and became fallen man" (DC 20.²⁰)
- "The Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son..." (20.²¹)

It is interesting to compare the "We know" statements of DC 20 with the document known as "The Apostles' Creed," one of the oldest Christian documents.

*"I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen."*

The two Nephite brothers, Ammon and Aaron, the 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Apostles' Creed all remind us of the most fundamental principles upon which our religion is based.

? Take some time to consider these fundamentals; how you feel about them, and how they impact your daily life.

2. Aaron taught that "since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins." This is yet another statement of why we need the Savior and his Atonement.

? What does it mean to "merit" something?

- ? Think about the relationship between “merit” and “demerit.” What is a “demerit”? Ponder these concepts and their relationship to the Atonement.

If we could not “merit” anything without the Atonement, it means that the opposite would hold. Without the Atonement we would only have “demerits.”

- ? What does this mean to you and how do you feel about it?
- ? Why could we, whatever our character might be, “not merit anything” without Christ and his atonement?

Read and consider these other Book of Mormon passages that speak of “merit” or “merits.”

2 Nephi 2.⁸

“There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits... of the Holy Messiah.”

2 Nephi 31.¹⁹

“After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path... ye have not come thus far save it were by... relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.”
(Note that word “wholly”)

Alma 24.¹⁰

“...that we might repent... he hath forgiven us... and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.”

Helaman 14.¹³

“Ye may have a remission of them [your sins] through his [Christ’s] merits.”

Moroni 6.⁴

“Relying alone upon the merits of Christ.”

- ? How do these passages and their statements concerning “merit” relate to and enhance your understanding of today’s reading?
- ? How do they add to your appreciation for the need of atonement and for the Savior?

In all of these passages in which “merit” is a part, there is a good deal of “absolutist” language. We are to rely “*wholly*,” and “*alone*” upon the merits of Christ. We cannot “merit *anything*” of ourselves.

- ? How do you feel about this absolutist language?
 - ? Have you and do you find it applicable in your own experiences?
3. Among the many doctrines that Aaron “expounded” was the “carnal state” in which all humankind lives.
- ? Avoiding any false notion that “carnality” has only to do with matters of sexuality, what does it mean to be carnal?

Romans 3.^{9-20, 23}

⁹... We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰as it is written,

“There is none righteous,
no, not one:

¹¹There is none that understandeth,
there is none that seeketh after God.

¹²They are all gone out of the way,
they are together become unprofitable;
there is none that doeth good,
no, not one.

¹³Their throat is an open sepulchre;
with their tongues they have used deceit;
the poison of asps is under their lips:

¹⁴Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

¹⁵their feet are swift to shed blood:

¹⁶destruction and misery are in their ways:

¹⁷And the way of peace have they not known:

¹⁸there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin....

²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Q

uestionary

1. In today's reading, Paul uses passages from the Hebrew Bible's Book of Psalms to describe the sinful and rebellious nature of humanity.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read Paul's unapologetic and uncompromising assertion that “There is none righteous, no, not one” as he evaluates mankind?
 - ? Do you agree or disagree with Paul's estimation of human character and inclinations?
 - ? What evidence do you use to agree or disagree?
 - ? To what examples and evidence would you offer in support of Paul's assertions that
 - There is none that understandeth
 - Their throat is an open sepulchre
 - Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness
 - Their feet are swift to shed blood
 - The way of peace have they not known
 - There is no fear of God before their eyes
 - ? Is there another Paul's statements that impresses itself upon you? If so, which one and why?
2. Consider King Benjamin's statement in which he states that even at our very best we are yet “unprofitable servants.”

“I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2.²¹).

 - ? How well does Paul's statement that “They are together become unprofitable” comport with that of King Benjamin?

- ? How does our reaction to the Book of Mormon making such assertions compare with our reactions to those such as that made by Paul? Why do you answer as you do?
- 3. Paul teaches that “all the world” is “guilty before God and that “by the deeds of the law,” or through obedience, “there is not flesh” that can be “justified” in the sight of God.
 - ? What does it mean to be justified?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings if you consider “justification” to mean being “right,” “acceptable,” “innocent” or “not guilty”?
 - ? Why is it impossible to observe the Law of Moses in such a way as to be thought right, acceptable, innocent, or not guilty in God’s eyes?
 - ? How is Paul’s statement about it being impossible to be justified through obedience to the Law of Moses, true of any and every law, including under any that we may currently be under?
 - ? How do the demands for obedience that law or commandments make end up putting an end to any self-righteousness we might possess and pronounce us “guilty” rather than “innocent” in the eyes of God?
 - ? How does the witness that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” influence your desires and efforts to come unto Christ and apply his atonement?
- 4. Paul says that “knowledge of sin” comes “by the law”?
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul’s assertion that we could not know or, indeed, commit sin if not for the law’s stipulations and demands?
- ? How does today’s reading apply and relate to the theme of “Fall: Our Need for Atonement”?

Moses 6. ⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹

⁴⁸“And he said unto them: ‘Because that Adam fell, we are; and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe. ⁴⁹Behold Satan hath come among the children of men, and tempteth them to worship him; and men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are shut out from the presence of God.

Questionary

1. It this passage, Enoch identifies several consequences that we all experience as a result of the fall.
 - ? What consequences do you find in the passage?
 - ? How do you feel when you read that “we are made partakers of misery and woe”? Do you agree?
 - ? What is Enoch talking about when he speaks of “misery and woe”?
 - ? How truly is this reflected in our own life? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read that we “have become carnal, sensual, and devilish” through the fall and Satan’s subsequent entrance into the life of mortal beings?
 - ? What does it mean to be “carnal”? “Sensual”? “Devilish”?
 - ? Is this fair assessment of humankind? Of you? Why do you answer as you do?

Ether 3.²

²O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

Questionary

Today's reading is a portion of a prayer that the brother of Jared offered as he sought assistance in preparation for his people's journey across the oceans in "barges" whose design God had revealed.

1. We have identified this passage as one that speaks to the fall and our need for atonement.
 - ? What do you find in this reading that justifies our inclusion of it in this topic of our atonement series?
2. The brother of Jared confesses that "we know... that we are unworthy before thee."
 - ? Why does he confess his and our unworthiness?
 - ? How do you feel about it?
 - ? Who else can you identify in scripture who makes the same confession?
 - ? Why is it so important for us to make such confession?
 - ? How is the prayerful confession of such unworthiness and our easy doing of evil an act of faith?
3. The brother of Jared goes on to confess that "because of the fall our natures have become evil continually."
 - ? How do you feel about this confession?
 - ? Do you agree with the brother of Jared's estimation of humans? Of you? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How does this compare/agree with the following statements found in the Lectures on Faith (Lecture 3)?

"But secondly: Unless he was merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, long suffering, and full of goodness, *such is the weakness of human nature, and so great the frailties and imperfections of men*, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist; for doubt would take the place of faith, and *those who know their weakness and liability to sin*, would be in constant doubt of salvation, if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that he is slow to anger, and long suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. An idea of these facts does away doubt, and makes faith exceedingly strong."

"Question 17: Is it not also necessary to have the idea that God is merciful, and gracious, long suffering and full of goodness?"

Because of *the weakness and imperfections of human nature, and the great frailties of man; for such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that he is liable to sin continually*, and if God were not long suffering, and full of compassion, gracious and merciful and of a forgiving disposition, man would be cut off from before him in consequence of which he would be in continual doubt and could not exercise faith: for where doubt is, there faith has no power, but by man's believing that God is full of compassion and forgiveness, long suffering and slow to anger, he can exercise faith in him and overcome doubt, so as to be exceedingly strong."

4. The brother of Jared follows his firm confession of unworthiness and inclination to sin with “nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee.”
 - ? How do you feel about this “nevertheless”?
 - ? How easy or difficult is it to “call upon” God for help when you are especially cognizant of our unworthiness and liability to sin? Why do you answer as you do?

5. Consider the following passage from Joseph Smith History (verses 28-29).

“I was *left to all kinds of temptations*; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I *frequently fell into many foolish errors*, and *displayed the weakness* of youth, and the *foibles of human nature*; which, I am sorry to say, *led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God*. In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But *I was guilty* of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., *not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God* as I had been. But this will not seem very strange to any one who recollects my youth, and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament.

In consequence of these things, *I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections*; when, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.”

- ? What was Joseph Smith praying to know on this 21st of September?
- ? How are the brother of Jared’s and Joseph Smith’s examples similar?
- ? How do you feel about Joseph’s confidence “in obtaining a divine manifestation” in a moment when he was feeling “guilty,” “offensive,” and “condemned” so intensely?
- ? How likely are you to feel and act similarly? Why do you answer as you do?

Psalm 143.¹⁻²

- ¹Hear my prayer, O LORD,
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness
answer me, and in thy righteousness.
²And enter not into judgment with thy servant:
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Questionary

Psalm 143 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. For both Jew and Christian, they have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God.

Today's is the first of five readings from Psalm 143. It also represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Our Need of Atonement." *

1. After pleading three times for God to hear his prayer, the Psalmist offers one plea and declares one very important truth—a truth related to the one plea. We will look first at the asserted truth:

“In thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

To be “justified” is to be thought of as “righteous.” It is to be “innocent,” “blameless,” or “free of guilt.” It is to be “right with God,” or to be “acceptable to God.”

- ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's contention?
- ? Why is his assertion accurate?
- ? Accepting his assertion and granting that it is an accurate description of your position, what do you do about it?
- ? How do you go about being and feeling “acceptable to God”?
- ? How do the following passages add light to the Psalmist's assertion?

“And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2.⁵).

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:²⁰⁻²⁶).

2. We now turn to the Psalmist's plea:

“Enter not into judgment with thy servant.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? How is it possible for God to “not enter into judgment” with someone? Isn't God a God of judgment? Isn't it necessary for him to “judge” us? What is the Psalmist after, if not the impossible?

Consider the following words, part of another prayer—this one offered by the prophet Zenos.

“And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.’

“And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: ‘Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son’” (Alma 33.¹¹⁻¹³).

- ? How does this prayer shed light on the Psalmist plea?
- ? Based on the insights you have gleaned from the Psalmist’s plea and assertion, along with the other passages reviewed above, can you, in good conscience and with a lively expectation of having your request granted, ask today that God “not enter into judgment with you”?
- ? If not, why not? What seems to you to be missing?
- ? If yes... what are you waiting for? For, as always, the “Day of Atonement” is upon us!

Alma 42.⁶⁻¹²—

⁶But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man. ⁷And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

⁸Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness. ⁹Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

¹⁰Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

¹¹And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. ¹²And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience...

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the twelfth and final reading in our series of atonement readings entitled, "Fall: Our Need of Atonement." As we close up this series of atonement readings with this 12th series, we note that nine of the twelve readings under this title have come from the Book of Mormon. This is not because the other standard works have nothing to say about the fall.

The Old Testament, for example, contains a treasure trove of truth about the fall and its impact on our daily lives, indeed, about the very nature of this world from the beginning. The Old Testament does this through the stories it tells rather than through theological statements. It also does it through the collected writings of the prophets with their criticisms of Israelite and Judean society. There are more stories and more prophetic criticisms about the nature of fallen man than can be counted. And they are powerful. These, however, are often long, and make for long and difficult readings. In addition, because they say nothing about "the fall," they are easily missed as statements of the fall and the nature of fallen man. So, as we have said there is much to learn about the fall from the Old Testament. If the reader wishes to see what it has to say about the fall, we suggest that they have a look at our "Just Scripture" series of readings. These really are about the fall, about fallen man, and about the nature of his/her life and the societies they create. With a picture being worth a thousand words, if one knows what they are looking at as they read the Old Testament, the stories contained in the oldest of scriptures are in many ways the most extraordinary witnesses of the fall and the nature of fallen man.

The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, has all these wonderful discourses in which inspired preachers and writers shared their theological thoughts on the fall and fallen man. They are simple and usually short. Sometimes even pithy. For this reason, we have largely limited our readings on the fall to the Book of Mormon. But, as we have said, we didn't want the reader to get the wrong idea and assume that when it comes to the fall and the nature of fallen man it says the most or it says it the best. It is simply the most assessable.

1. There is much to learn about the fall and the nature of fall people from this passage. Consider, for example the following words that describe the nature of fall man.

“Lost forever”

“Cut off”

“Spiritual death”

“Carnal, sensual, and devilish”

- ? What comes to mind when you read each of these phrases?

- ? Think, for example, of being “lost.” How does the child who is lost feel? How does the parent who has lost a child feel? What additional insights do you have from thinking on these questions?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read that mortal beings are “carnal, sensual, and devilish, *by nature*?”
 - ? To what evidence would you point for the Book of Mormon’s assertion that everyone is “devilish *by nature*”?
2. Here, humankind’s carnality, sensuality and devilishness is not blamed on others—Adam and Eve, in particular—but on individuals themselves: “Which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience.” Compare this with what we suggested in a previous reading was Paul’s statement of the fall.

“There is none righteous,
no, not one:
There is none that understandeth,
there is none that seeketh after God.
They are all gone out of the way,
they are together become unprofitable;
there is none that doeth good,
no, not one...

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3.^{10-12, 23}).3.

- ? How closely do Paul’s and Alma’s sentiments and conclusions match up when it comes to the nature of fallen man?
3. Alma says that fallen man become “subjects to follow after their own will.”
- ? How well, would you say, have humans done in being “subject” to “their own will”?
 - ? How have they used their will?
4. Alma calls this life a “probationary state.”
- ? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear or read the word “probation”?
 - ? You probably thought of someone who is on probation because of some misdeed or violation of the law. How is this form of probation appropriate to our mortal state?
 - ? You might have thought of someone who is inexperienced as something, say the demands of a new job, and so is given a short period of time to prove that they are up to the job. How is this form of probation appropriate to our mortal state?
 - ? Given Alma’s description of the nature of fallen man in this passage, which of the two do you think Alma had in mind?
5. Alma says of fallen man, “as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.”
- ? What do you think and feel when you think of being “miserable”?
 - ? What is the cause of misery in this instance?
 - ? If individuals are miserable being “cut off from the presence of the Lord,” how do you imagine God feels?
 - ? What are your thoughts about Gods who can suffer hurt and pain?
 - ? How does this impact your approach to a common LDS doctrine that has it that we can become Gods? Is maybe being a God not all that it is cracked up to be?
6. This reading concludes with Alma’s observation that “there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state...” Meaning, of course, that man had no means within him or herself to be reclaimed—while God did.
- ? How do you feel about such helplessness and the vanity of “self-reliance” in such a situation?
 - ? What does it cause you to feel about God and His Son... knowing that they have the means to save people who do not have the means within themselves?

? How does this statement relate to and amplify on the following passages, at which we have previously looked?

“And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them” (Moro. 7.²⁴).

“And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins...” (Al. 22.¹⁴).

? After examining all twelve readings under the heading “Fall: Our Need of Atonement,” what have you learned and felt, and what would you want another to know and feel about the fall?

g^race: the savior's generous and earnest invitation

3ⁿephi 11.¹²⁻¹⁷

¹²*When Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven. ¹³*The Lord spake unto them saying:

¹⁴“Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.”

¹⁵*The multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come. ¹⁶And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

¹⁷“Hosanna!

Blessed be the name of the Most High God!”

And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

Q^uestionary

1. Jesus extended this generous and earnest invitation to the Nephite multitudes: “Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet.”
 - ? In what manner might the same invitation be extended to you?
 - ? Has any such invitation been extended to you?
 2. We are told that the “multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth.”
 - ? What does it say about the character of Jesus and his interest in each individual that he took the time—with 2500 hundred people, this surely took many hours—to permit the multitude to handle him “one by one”?
 3. Today’s reading ends with these words and actions of the multitude, : ““Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.” Take a few minutes to close your eyes and imagine this scene.
 - ? What do you see in your mind?
 - ? What does it sound like?
 - ? What do you feel?
 - ? Have you felt a similar response to the Savior’s ministry to you?
- ? Close your eyes and imagine that you are on of the thousand plus individuals present when the Savior visited. Imagine that you are waiting your turn. What are you thinking and feeling as you wait?
 - ? Now, imagine it is your turn to touch Jesus. What do you think and feel?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate actually being able to bow down at Jesus’ feet?

3 Nephi 17.⁵⁻¹⁰

⁵*When Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them. ⁶And he said unto them:

“Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. ⁷Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. ⁸For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.”

⁹*When he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him. ¹⁰And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.

Q

uestionary

1. In this reading, we read that the multitude “did look steadfastly upon [Jesus] as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.”
 - ? How do you feel as you read of the multitudes attraction to Jesus?
 - ? What is it that attracts individuals to him so powerfully?
 - ? Have you felt that you were in his presence? How did you feel when in his presence?
 - ? Have you felt his attraction in your own life?
 - ? What do you feel when you read that the multitude bowed “down at [Jesus’] feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears”?
 - ? Can you relate to the multitude’s response to Jesus?

2. Have a look at the list of those to whom Jesus extends his invitation to come unto him to be comforted and healed.

The lame
The blind
The halt
The maimed
The leprous
The withered
The deaf
Those afflicted in any manner

Now look at the list of those who were comforted and healed

The sick
The afflicted
The lame
The blind
The dumb
Those afflicted in any manner

- ? What is the impact, emotional and otherwise, of these long lists of individual’s invited and ministered to?
- ? Do you have an “affliction” of any type—temporal, emotional, spiritual—concerning which

- you would have the Savior comfort and heal you?
- ? What is the impact of these long lists on your confidence in the Savior's generous, and sincere willingness to minister to you?

dc 6.³⁴⁻³⁷

³⁴Therefore, fear not, little flock;
do good; let earth and hell combine against you,
for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.

³⁵Behold, I do not condemn you;
go your ways and sin no more;
perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you. ³

⁶Look unto me in every thought;
doubt not, fear not.

³⁷Behold the wounds which pierced my side,
and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet;
be faithful, keep my commandments,
and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Questionary

1. Today's reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "The savior's generous and earnest invitation."
? What message or messages of invitation and comfort do you hear in today's reading?
2. The Savior speaks these comforting words: "Behold, I do not condemn you." Turn to D&C 23 and look for this same comforting statement. Look around in scripture for other passages that hint at the same promise. For example, read and consider John 3.¹⁶⁻¹⁸.
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned...
? How do you feel about this promise of the absence of "condemnation" in your life?
? Do you feel an absence of "condemnation" in your life? If not, why not? What do you need to think and do to realize this divine promise?
? In your mind, what is the key to feeling that we are not "under condemnation"?
? How likely are you to arrive at such feelings based solely on your "performance"?
3. The Savior's invitation to "behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet" might have been literal or figurative. The Savior may have been in view at the time of the statement, or it may be an invitation to keep him ever in mind.
? How can you read the invitation to "behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet" in such a way that it is extended to you personally?
? What can you do to accept the invitation?
? What can you do to extend the invitation to another to "behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet"?
? Take some time today or in the near future to close your eyes and "behold" the Savior's wounds. What do you see and feel as you do so?
4. Read John 5.¹¹⁻¹³ and John 10.²⁷⁻²⁹.
"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."
"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My

Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”

- ? How do these two passages relate to today's reading?
- ? How do they all fit together in your mind?
- ? Can you and do you hear in Jesus' promise “ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven,” words that you feel you can apply to yourself?

Alma 5.^{33-35, 38}

³³Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: “Repent, and I will receive you.” ³⁴Yea, he saith:

“Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life;
yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;
³⁵yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness,
and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire...”

³⁸Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ...

Q

uestionary

1. In the course of our atonement readings we have heard Jesus extend many hopeful invitations. We will also encounter many examples of repentance. We sometimes weigh the principle of repentance down with so many lists that the idea of repenting becomes overwhelming and discouraging. It can even be thought of negatively.

At its very core, the idea of repentance is really quite simple, hopeful, and even, ultimately joyful. Note, for example, that, here, it is an “invitation” to repent. Think about invitations. Have you gotten an “invitation” lately to attend some event or other? Chances are, the invitation was given by someone who thought the invitation would please and gladden you. Most likely the invitation was for some happy event.

- ? What does this suggest to you when you consider the Savior’s invitation to repent?
- ? What do you think of when you think of “invitations”?
- ? The Savior “invites” repentance, he does not “challenge” or “warn.” How would the Savior’s “invitation” be different if it was a warning or challenge?
- ? What is the significance of this observation that the Savior extends an invitation to repent rather than a challenge or warning?

2. Consider, next, the simplicity of repentance. Very few passages get to the heart of repentance better than Alma 34.¹⁷.

“Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, *that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you.*”

- ? How does this passage shape your understanding of what it means to repent?
- ? How often do you find yourself calling upon God for mercy?

Repentance, then, at its most basic, is the act of calling upon God, acknowledging our present need, pleading for His merciful forgiveness for past and present sins, seeking His merciful acceptance, asking for His merciful help in the future to resist and overcome sin, and expressing a desire to follow His counsel so as to show appreciation for His merciful forgiveness, acceptance, and help.

While the *desire to obey* is part of the repentance process and is prerequisite to our being forgiven, the actual *carrying out of our desire* is not. The carrying out of our desire to obey is something we work on and develop one step at a time over our life time. Until we are perfected, we must continually repent; that is, we must constantly cry out to God for mercy, help, and the revelation of His acceptance.

- ? If you close your eyes and imagine the Savior’s “arms of mercy extended towards you,” what do you see? How do you feel?
- ? The Savior’s “invitation” takes the form of “Repent, and I will receive you.” What form would a

“command” to repent take?

- ? What is the difference between “invitation” and “command”?
- ? How do you experience the Savior? Does he tend more toward one of the other in your life—“invitation” or “commandment”?

Ether 12.³²⁻³⁴ & 41

³²And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared. ³³And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. ³⁴And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father.

⁴¹And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen.

Questionary

1. We most often think of charity in terms of thoughts, feelings, and actions that exists between individual mortals. But today's reading provides a different perspective on charity.

- ? Who offers charity in today's reading?
- ? Who is encouraged to accept the offered charity in today's reading?
- ? Of what does the offered charity consist?
- ? Do you possess charity in the sense that you have accepted Jesus' offered charity as expressed in his suffering and death for you?

2. Consider the attributes of charity as found in 1 Corinthians 13.⁴⁻⁸ (also Moroni 7.⁴⁷):

“Charity suffereth long,
and is kind;
charity envieth not;
charity vaunteth not itself,
is not puffed up,
Doth not behave itself unseemly,
seeketh not her own,
is not easily provoked,
thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity,
but rejoiceth in the truth;
Beareth all things,
believeth all things,
hopeth all things,
endureth all things.
Charity never faileth...

- ? How do these charitable attributes relate to Christ and how he, then, treats and responds to you, whether in strength or in weakness?
3. After describing the charity that Jesus possesses for and toward us, Ether “commend” that we “seek this Jesus.” He does so hoping that “the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost... may be and abide in [us] forever.”
 - ? How, do you think, does “charity” relate to “grace”?
 - ? If we understand charity, as Moroni does in today's reading, to be the “love which [Christ has] for the children of men” what does it mean for an individual to “have charity”?
 - ? What does it mean that we “cannot inherit that place which [Christ has] prepared for us” without possessing the “love which [he has] for [us]”?

? What can you do to more fully follow Moroni's "commendation" that you "seek this Jesus"?

Helaman 3.²⁷⁻³⁰

²⁷Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.

²⁸Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

²⁹Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—³⁰And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.

Questionary

1. In our atonement reading, entitled “Why We Need Atonement” based on Mosiah 3.¹⁹, we established some of the human weaknesses that necessitated the Savior to “at-one.” In spite of such troubling human weaknesses, the Savior extends generous and earnest invitations. Today’s reading contains a few of such invitations.
? What invitations do you hear being extended to you in today’s reading?
2. In editing his history, Mormon pauses to remind us of a few of his objectives in writing. He does this through “thus we see” statements. First, the blessings:
 - “the Lord is merciful...”
 - “the gate of heaven is open...”
 - “Land their souls...at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven...”

On Mormon’s ancient title page, he wrote his purposes in editing the Book of Mormon.

“Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations...”

- ? How do Mormon’s stated objectives as found on the title page relate to his “thus we see” statements here in Helaman 3?
3. The blessings that Mormon mentions in Helaman come as a result of
 - Calling “upon his holy name”
 - Believing “on the name of Jesus Christ”
 - Laying “hold upon the word of God”

? How do these actions relate to statements made on Mormon’s title page?
4. Consider the following questions:
 - ? Do you regularly feel the Lord’s mercy in your life?
 - ? If you were to die today, do you feel that the “gate of heaven” would be open to you?
 - ? Can you see yourself “landing” at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven?

Matthew 11.²⁸⁻³⁰

²⁸Come unto me,
all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you,
and learn of me;
for I am meek and lowly in heart:
and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy,
and my burden is light.

Questionary

In addition to being a reading on atonement, today's reading is also the 6th in a series of Advent readings.

It also represents our last of seven readings from Matthew 11. In this chapter, Jesus is engaged in an extraordinary amount of self-revelation. In our first reading (11.¹), we saw Jesus "teaching and preaching." In the second (11.²⁻⁶), Jesus presented evidence of his Messiahship by ministering to the vulnerable. In the third reading (11.⁷⁻¹⁵), Jesus revealed the unassuming character of Messiah by pointing out the selection of the humble John, the Baptist, as emissary and for-runner. In the fourth reading (11.¹⁶⁻¹⁹), Jesus accused Jewish society of being hardened to the message of repentance, no matter how it was presented to them—threateningly or hopefully. In the fifth reading (20-24), Jesus unfavorably compares Judah to the gentile nations of Tyre and Sidon, and to the archetypical wicked nation: Sodom. In the sixth reading (25-27), Jesus prays to his father, affirming his humble nature by the humble status of those who come to know and trust him.

1. Jesus invites those who "labour and are heavy laden" to yoke themselves to him.
 - ? Why? What advantage does he suggest they will have by doing so?

Consider the imagery of two cattle yoked together, walking side by side, closely watching one another. Now, consider yourself joined to Christ, walking beside him, watching him closely. Jesus suggests that in doing so, we will "learn of him."
 - ? What might we learn?
 - ? What does Jesus say in this passage that we will learn about him and his character?
2. Jesus says that in being joined to him, we will learn that he is "meek and lowly in heart."
 - ? What does it mean to you that Jesus is "meek and lowly in heart"?
 - ? Think of someone whom you think of as "meek and lowly." What traits do they possess?
 - ? How do they view and treat others?
 - ? Since Jesus is like his father, our Heavenly Father is also "meek and lowly in heart." Have you thought of him in this way?
 - ? Would your daily approaching of God in prayer change if you approached him with this image of him in mind? If so, how?
 - ? How are Father and Son, then, being "meek and lowly in heart," likely to view and treat you?
3. Chapter 11 began with Jesus offering John's disciples evidence concerning his Messianic character.

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

 - ? How does Jesus' invitation to those who "labour and are heavy laden" relate to this passage and Jesus' character?

4. If we join ourselves to Jesus, we learn from and of him. We learn that he is “meek and lowly in heart.” Having learned this of him, we seek to imitate him and become, ourselves “meek and lowly in heart.”
 - ? How does learning that Jesus is “meek and lowly in heart,” and becoming so ourselves, bring us “rest”?
 - ? How does this lighten our burdens?
5. We suggested that in reading Matthew 11, we would find it extraordinarily revelatory in regard to the character of Jesus. We also suggested that it would be subversive.
 - ? In the final analysis, what stands out most to you in regard to Jesus’ character as revealed in the chapter?
 - ? What ideas, cultural prejudices, principles, doctrines does Jesus subvert?

Luke 4.¹⁴⁻²²

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. ¹⁷And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;
he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
to preach deliverance to the captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty them that are bruised,
¹⁹To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

²⁰And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹And he began to say unto them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

²²And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

Questionary

1. We are utilizing today’s passage under the title of “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.”
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his grace?
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his generosity?
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his earnestness?
2. Jesus makes promises to the “poor,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “blind,” and “bruised.”
 - ? What do these groups have in common?
3. Jesus promises to “preach the gospel” or to “bring good news” to the poor.
 - ? What kind of news would be good news to the poor?
4. Jesus promises to “heal the brokenhearted.” We often hear in scripture of those who have a “broken heart and contrite spirit” (See, for example, Ps. 34.¹⁸; Ps. 51.¹⁷; 2 Ne. 2.⁷; 3 Ne. 9.²⁰; DC 20.³⁷).
 - ? What is the relationship between the “brokenhearted” spoken of by Isaiah and those who have a “broken heart” in other scriptures?
5. By utilizing Isaiah, Jesus promises “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”
 - ? What do you understand the nature of this promise to be?
 - ? How does it impact your understanding of this promise if we read, “proclaim the time of Yahweh’s acceptance”?
 - ? What would it mean to each of these groups—the “poor,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “blind,” and “bruised” to find acceptance to God?
 - ? How do the promises that Jesus makes to each group serve as invitation for them to come unto him and trust him?

Psalm 51.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

¹⁶For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
thou delightest not in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.

Questionary

We have shared this before, I have found from past experience that it does not hurt to provide the reminder often. Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins in relation to the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^e-david* (of David) may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained. It was utilized by many who came to the Jewish temple seeking forgiveness of sins.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
 - ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
 - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
 - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, and that it is this that we must bring and present to God?
 - ? How difficult is it to present a wounded heart to God as opposed to a heart that is well (humility)?
2. This reading is placed under the heading of our Atonement reading, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.”
 - ? How appropriate, do you feel, is this passage under this heading?
 - ? Why is the Savior’s willing acceptance of our broken (unwell) heart such an act of grace?
 - ? What do you think when you consider that although traditionally God required a sacrifice be “without blemish” this passage contends that God is happy with and accepts the “blemished” sacrifice of our broken, wounded heart?
- ? We usually domesticate the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” into some desirable “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that one seeks to avoid?
- ? How do you feel about the promise to the humiliated that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?

- ? How will today's reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

John 14.¹⁻³

¹Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Questionary

1. Jesus' invitation here is "Let not your heart be troubled." This is partly in response to the troubled hearts of the disciples at the moment.
 - ? As you look at the previous chapter, what is troubling the disciples?
 - ? What comfort does Jesus offer his disciples in today's reading?
 - ? What comfort do you find in today's reading?
2. Jesus promises that "in my Father's house are many mansions."
 - ? What do you hear in this by way of comfort?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that rather than considering the doctrine of "degrees of glory," you might want to consider that Jesus' promise is "there is lots and lots of room for you in my Father's mansion?"
 - ? Which is most meaningful in your daily life?
3. Jesus promises that he is leaving "to prepare a place" for his disciples.
 - ? What does Jesus do to "prepare a place" for his disciples?
 - ? What is Jesus currently doing to "prepare a place" for you?
4. Jesus promises his disciples that he "will come again, and receive you unto myself."
 - ? How, do you think, did the disciples feel when they heard this promise?
 - ? How applicable to you is this promise?
 - ? What do you imagine in your mind when you envision Jesus coming to "receive you unto" himself?
 - ? What would it mean to you to be "where [he is]"?

Romans 5.⁶⁻¹¹

⁶For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. ⁸But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ¹⁰For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. ¹¹And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Questionary

Paul can be difficult to understand. Other translations can often be helpful. Here is the NIV translation.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

1. We have placed this reading in our atonement reading entitled, "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation." * In Paul's thought, Jesus personally suffered and revealed his and his Father's love and attachment to us long before we could respond to it, long before he could know how we would respond to it, and while we were still unrepentance sinners or "ungodly."
 - ? How does his atonement, revealed long before we even knew of it or went looking for it in mortality, serve as an "invitation" and act to draw us to him?
 - ? How do you feel about being labeled "ungodly" before such time as you learned of and came to Christ?
2. The KJV speaks of the time when we are "without strength." The NIV speaks of a time when we are "powerless."
 - ? When is this time of powerlessness?
 - ? What would our eternal state be without Jesus and his atonement?
3. Paul speaks of the rarity of someone suffering and even dying to benefit even the best of people.
 - ? How common, then, is it for someone to suffer and even die for the benefit of someone deemed bad, especially when the results of such suffering and death are unknown and when the suffering and death are unlikely to produce any good or positive results?

Paul reminds us that Jesus did that most rare thing of all: he suffered and died for "the ungodly," and "enemies" who "were yet sinners."

 - ? How does this speak not only to the idea of Jesus' "invitation," but to the "generosity and earnestness" of that invitation?
 - ? What do you feel when you hear yourself described as "ungodly" and as an "enemy"?
4. We are accustomed to thinking and speaking of being "saved." In doing so, we usually think of the future benefits, especially the potential for eternal life with God. But, Paul speaks of being "saved *from* wrath" reminding us that to be "saved" is to be "rescued" from something, some present danger.
 - ? What do you think of when you think of being "saved from *wrath*"?

5. Paul asks us to consider, “if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, [how] much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved.”
 - ? What does this suggest for those who have chosen to have faith in and follow Christ?
6. Paul teaches that “we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read this?
 - ? How does Jesus’ atonement teach us to rejoice in God rather than fear and avoid him?

Psalm 27.^{4, 7-8, 13-14}

⁴One thing have I desired of the LORD,
that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to enquire in his temple.

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice:
have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

⁸When thou saidst, "Seek ye my face;"
my heart said unto thee, "Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

¹³I had fainted,
unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait on the LORD:
be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart:
wait, I say, on the LORD.

Questionary

This reading is the 4th in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings. It also represents the 12th and final instalment in our atonement series of readings entitled, "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation."

? What invitation do you find in this reading?

? How do you apply the invitation found here with the Savior's invitation to come unto him?

1. It is appropriate, of course, to go to the temple to "work." There is important work to be done there. We can and should also go to the temple with the intent to "worship." Psalm 27 mentions several blessings that come to us as we go to the "house of the LORD" to find and worship God, Himself.

? What are those blessings?

2. While the Psalmist certainly has the physical structural temple in mind, Paul reminds us the we, each of us, are "temples of God."

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"
(1 Cor. 3.¹⁶).

? In light of this, how would you apply this reading from Psalm 27 to your daily life?

? What sort of temple are you? How intimate and revelatory is your inquiry after God?

? What can you do to become a temple of greater intimacy with and revelation from God?

3. Think about each of these blessing and how they might be realized in your life.

We can "Behold the beauty of the LORD."

We can "enquire."

We can "hide... in his pavilion."

We can "offer... sacrifices of joy."

We can "sing praises unto the LORD."

"We can "seek the face of the LORD."

? What, do you think, would one "behold" if they were to behold "the beauty of the Lord"?

? What privilege/s, do you think, is the Lord holding out when he extends the invitation: "seek ye my face"?

- ? What have you done to make “seeking the face of God” a priority in your life?
- ? What distractions might you need to remove from your life to accept and act upon the Lord’s invitation?
- ? What would cause the Lord to “hide his face”?
- ? How do the following passages apply to the invitation found in this reading?

“And again, verily I say unto you that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual” (DC 67.¹⁰).

“And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God...” (DC 84.¹⁹⁻²³).

“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. Remember the great and last promise which I have made unto you...” (DC 88.⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹).

4. The Psalmist confesses, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD.”
 - ? What, do you think, does the Psalmist mean by “fainting”?
 - ? To what degree—large or small—do your feelings correspond to those of the Psalmist? Why do you answer as you do?
5. The Psalmist admonishes us to “wait on the LORD.”
 - ? What does he mean by “wait”?
 - ? What would you think and feel if we suggested that the Hebrew word translated as “wait,” has the nuance of “expectation”—“Wait expectantly on/for the LORD”?
 - ? How “expectant” are you that when you “seek the face of the LORD” and seek to “behold the beauty of the LORD” God will respond happily and meaningfully? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What could you do to increase your sense of “expectation” or “anticipation”?

atonement: the savior's unity and connectedness with us

hebrews 2.⁹⁻¹⁸

⁹But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. ¹⁰For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."

¹³And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me."

¹⁴Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

¹⁷Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Questionary

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

With this in mind, today's passage contains one of the best descriptions of Jesus' atonement anywhere in scripture, even though the word, atonement, does not appear.

- ? The writer of Hebrews lists several ways in which Jesus demonstrates his unity or oneness with human kind. What are these ways?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus, God, choose to unite himself with humankind so far as to experience the challenges and suffering that accompany mortality and to die, or "taste death" as every man dies?
- ? What does one mean to communicate when they call another "brother" or "sister"?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus, God Himself, the greatest of all, when you contemplate his willingness to enter into such intimate relations with you?
- ? How has Jesus demonstrated his feelings of unity, connection, and attachment with you?

Luke 5.¹²⁻¹⁶

¹²*When he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

¹³And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, "I will: be thou clean."

And immediately the leprosy departed from him. ¹⁴And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

¹⁵But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. ¹⁶And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

Questionary

Narratives recording Jesus' healing of the leper can also be found in Mark 1.⁴⁰⁻⁴⁵ and Matthew 8.¹⁻⁴.

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- ? As you consider the following questions remember to consider how Jesus become one, connected, attached, and unified himself to and with the leper.
- ? What do you know about the social and religious status of a leper in Israel? Consider the following scriptures as you consider this question.

Leviticus 13.²⁻³

Leviticus 13.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶

Numbers 5.²⁻³

- ? How, do you think, did the leper feel about him or herself? What did they think God felt toward them?
1. Luke describes the leper as "a man full of a leprosy" or "covered with leprosy."
 - ? What do you envision when you consider the man's extreme case of leprosy?
 - ? What does it suggest the powers that Jesus possesses?
 - ? Given that leprosy is associated with sin, what does this suggest about Jesus' capacity to deal with even the worst of sin?
 2. The leper says, "If you want to, you can cleanse me."
 - ? Do you hear in these words a statement or question?
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of the leper's uncertainty: Jesus willingness or Jesus' capacity?
 - ? Can you relate to the leper's uncertainty about Jesus' willingness to act in an imperfect, unclean life?
 - ? Why would he NOT be willing to respond to a heart-felt request?
 - ? How do you feel when you hear Jesus' respond to the leper's uncertainty with "I do want to"?
 - ? How can the leper's experience help you the next time you question Jesus' willingness to act in your messy life?
 3. Luke records that Jesus "put forth his hand, and touched" the leper.
 - ? What kind of "touch" do you envision?

The Greek word that Luke uses for "touch" is used of the kind of "touching" that wrestlers do in an arena or that lovers use in intimacy. It might better be translated, "grasp" or "embrace."

- ? Does this change the way you envision Jesus' touch? How?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus using such an intense "touch" with an unclean leper?

4. Luke records that “immediately the leprosy departed.”

? What is the significance of this “immediately”?

? How does the following passage relate?

“Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34.³¹).

? Take a few minutes to reflect on today’s reading and reconsider how it is a reflection of “atonement” or the Savior’s happy and willing attachment to us?

Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁷

¹³And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. ¹⁴And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, "Follow me."

And he arose and followed him. ^{15*}As Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. ¹⁶And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, "How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?"

¹⁷When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Questionary

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

1. Mark informs us that "many" publicans and sinners followed Jesus and sat down with him to share table fellowship.
 - ? How do you feel when you read of "sinners" and that many of them were interest in and highly attracted to Jesus?
 - ? How does this reading reflect "atonement," or, Jesus' connectedness with Levi, publicans, and sinners?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus' feelings of connectedness with "sinners" and other individuals deemed undesirable by their society?
 - ? How do you suppose Levi and the hated publicans and sinners felt when they sensed Jesus' willingness to conduct table fellowship with them and thus demonstrate his feelings of attachment to them?
 - ? To what types of sinners and "undesirables" might Jesus feel connected in today's society?
 - ? How might today's society, especially that portion called "Christian," respond to Jesus' willingness to assist and find connection with them?
2. Jesus speaks of "they that are whole" and "have no need of the physician."
 - ? Do such individuals exist?
 - ? Do "the righteous" really have no need to repent?
 - ? What then, is Jesus saying?
 - ? How would you respond if we understood Jesus saying that those who "imagine" that they are whole and are in need of no repentance have no need of him?
 - ? What sorts of people imagine such a lie and thus feel no need to turn to Jesus?

Mark 4.³⁶⁻⁴¹

³⁵And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, “Let us pass over unto the other side.”³⁶And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. ³⁷And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. ³⁸And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

³⁹And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, “Peace, be still.” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

⁴⁰And he said unto them, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”

⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Questionary

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- ? How does Jesus’ calming of the storm show his sense of connectedness to his disciples?
 - ? How does Jesus’ calming of the storm demonstrate his connectedness to and at-one-ment with nature—the cosmos?
1. Faced with the terrifying storm, the disciples exclaimed, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”
 - ? How do you feel about their fear?
 - ? How do you resist giving in to such doubt in the midst of trials?
 2. Mark records that “the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you see a ship “full” of water?
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you imagine the tempest?
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you see the “great calm”?
 - ? What types of storms have and do come into your life?
 - ? How strong or weak is your faith that Jesus can calm those storms?

Luke 2.¹⁻⁷

¹In those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ²(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Q

uestionary

In addition to being a reading in our atonement series, today's reading is one of our Advent readings. It also represents the tenth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction.

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expatiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

1. Today, we use the passage as a demonstration and evidence of the Savior's unity and connectedness with us.
 - ? What have you learned and felt in the past as you have personally read this passage or heard it recited in various settings?
 - ? What light does it shed on Jesus' at-one-ment and his willingness to participate in our individual lives and the kind of lives we all live?
2. Luke reports that Mary "wrapped [Jesus] in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."
 - ? What are swaddling clothes? What, exactly, is a "manger"?
 - ? In addition to any "historical" reportage that this notice may involve, what greater significance might it hold concerning the character of Jesus and his relationship with the world?
 - ? What message might it possess in relation to Jesus' "atonement," or his "unity/connectedness to others, including you?"

Deuteronomy 6.⁴⁻⁹

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: ⁵and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Questionary

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1. Today's reading is the great Jewish Shema! (Hear!), perhaps one of the most influential pieces of literature in human history. It is often found at the entrance to a Jewish home, serving as a simple reminder of the central place God is to occupy in the believer's life.
 - ? What evidences would others find in your life that God and the things of God are central to your life?
 - ? How does the way you spend your time, emotional energy, or material resources demonstrate your priority to serving and worshiping him?
2. The first line is perhaps most commonly understood to assert that Yahweh is the sole God—in its minimalistic reading, Israel's only God (henotheism), and in its maximalist reading, the only God of all humanity (monotheism). But both readings, it seems to me is too narrow. Thus, I translate the passage as follows:

"Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one."

- ? In addition to possibly meaning there is no God but Yahweh, what might it mean to say that Yahweh is "one"?
- ? How else might we speak of the "oneness" of God?
- ? How might this be related to the idea of "Atonement," or "at-one-ment"?
- ? How would you feel and what would you learn about God, if we read the great Shema as a witness of God's unity or connectedness with, or attachment to all creation, particularly to humanity?

"Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is a connected Being."

- ? How did Jesus express his sense of connectedness with humanity during his earthly ministry?
- ? How has he demonstrated his sense of and commitment to oneness, unity, and connectedness with you?

Psalm 40.¹⁻⁵

- ¹I waited patiently for the LORD;
and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
- ²He brought me up also out of an horrible pit,
out of the miry clay,
and set my feet upon a rock,
and established my goings.
- ³And he hath put a new song in my mouth,
even praise unto our God:
many shall see it, and fear,
and shall trust in the LORD.
- ⁴Blessed is that man
that maketh the LORD his trust,
and respecteth not the proud,
nor such as turn aside to lies.
- ⁵Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works
which thou hast done,
and thy thoughts which are to us-ward:
they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee:
if I would declare and speak of them,
they are more than can be numbered.

Questionary

1. One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.
? How does today's reading speak to the Lord's feelings of connected, attachment, and unity with us?
2. The Psalmist says that he "waited patiently" upon the Lord.
? What does it mean to "wait"? To wait "patiently"?
? How would the meaning and feeling of the verse change for you if we read that the Psalmist "waited expectantly" on or simply "fully expected" the Lord?
? What is the emotional/psychological difference between simply waiting for someone and expecting someone?
"Waiting" might stress the passing of time and may or may not be accompanied by confidence concerning arrival. But "expecting" suggests confidence concerning arrival in which the passing of time is nearly lost. "Expecting" is not a matter of "wondering if" but of "wondering when."
? When you have been in need of the Lord's help, was your attitude more one of "waiting" or "expecting"?
? How does the knowledge that we can anticipate the Lord's response to our needs serve as evidence of his feelings of connectedness, attachment, or unity with us?
3. The Psalmist speaks of "a new song" placed in his mouth.
? What, do you think, is the content of that song?
Consider Alma 5.²⁶.

“And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?”

- ? How does this song relate to the Psalmist’s song?
 - ? Do you have your own “new song” of “redeeming love”? Take a few minutes to right down some of the words it might include.
4. The Psalmist says that the Lord’s thoughts of us or his plans for us are vast and beyond description.
- ? How often does God think of you? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What does God have planned for you?
 - ? Why are you such a focus of His attention?
 - ? How do you feel, knowing that you are always in His thoughts and that He is ever planning for you with purpose?
 - ? How does the Psalmist’s witness concerning the Lord’s constant and continual mindfulness of you and your needs relate to at-one-ment, or God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, and unity with you?

5. Here are three poetic lines.

“Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust,
And [but] respecteth not the proud,
nor such as turn aside to lies.

- ? What is the relationship between the first and the second line?
- ? What does one do to show “respect” toward the proud?
- ? How would you feel about the contention that “respect” and “trust” are pointing to the same idea: who do you look to for help?
- ? What is the relationship between the second line and the third?
- ? How and why do “the proud” rely on “lies”?

The “proud,” are not to be thought of as simply hyper self-confident. They are not simply boastful or arrogant. In the context of this Psalm, it is clear that the lies that are told are in relation to claims that are made about themselves. They stand in competition with God. They claim to be as trustworthy, reliable, dependable, and capable as God, or nearly so. Their empty boasts are lies that seduce the unwary. Such individuals and institutions become, essentially, idols, who, like Satan, attempt to take God’s place in the hearts and minds of believers.

The Psalmist reminds us that we are happiest and most secure when we rely upon the Lord rather than others, however boastful and sure they may be of their abilities. Consider the following passages:

2 Nephi 4. ³⁴	Alma 26. ¹²
Moroni 6. ⁴	Psalm 62. ⁵⁻⁹
Psalm 147. ¹⁰⁻¹¹	Psalm 148. ¹³

- ? How do these passages relate to the Psalmist’s assertions found in these three lines?
6. The Psalmist reports that he was rescued from a “pit” and the “miry clay,” “quicksand,” if you will.
- ? What do you see in your mind when you consider this imagery?
 - ? What sorts of trials and temptations might be likened to a pit with “quicksand” that threatens to draw us under?
 - ? Have there been, or are there now, trials in your life for which this imagery is appropriate?
 - ? How do you feel about the Lord’s response when the Psalmist was threatened by pit and quicksand?

“[he] set my feet upon a rock [firm ground],
and established my goings.

- ? How is the Lord’s quick and dependable response to the Psalmist’s danger indicative of atonement, or connectedness, attachment, linkage, and unity with us?

Luke 7.³⁶⁻⁵⁰

³⁶And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. ³⁷And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, ³⁸And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

³⁹Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner."

⁴⁰And Jesus answering said unto him, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

And he saith, "Master, say on."

⁴¹"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. ⁴²And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

⁴³Simon answered and said, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most."

And he said unto him, "Thou hast rightly judged."

⁴⁴And he turned to the woman, and said unto "Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. ⁴⁵Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

⁴⁸And he said unto her, "Thy sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?"

⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Questionary

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- ? How does Jesus demonstrate and form his attachment to, his connectedness to, his willing participation with the woman, who was guilty of *many* sins, according to Jesus' discernment?
- 1. The narrator identifies the woman as a "sinner." Then, within the narrative, Simon identifies her as a "sinner." Jesus confirms her status as a "sinner" in saying that her sins "are many."
 - ? Using your imagination, what kind of woman do you imagine her to be?
 - ? Knowing that she is a "sinner," how would you feel if she engaged in the kind of intimate physical touch with you that she did with Jesus?
- 2. Jesus says of the woman, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."
 - ? Was the woman forgiven because she loved much or did she love much because she was forgiven?
 - ? How does the parable of verses 41-42 help?

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

3. Even though Jesus had announced to Simon and all who were present that the woman's sins were forgiven, he nevertheless turned and addressed the woman herself directly: "Thy sins are forgiven."
 - ? Why, do you think, did Jesus go to this "trouble" of repetition?
 - ? What does it suggest about Jesus' interest in the individual?
 - ? How does this demonstrate Jesus' atonement, or his interest in forming personal connections with individuals?

4. Finally, Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."
 - ? What, do you think, does Jesus mean by "saved"?
 - ? What is the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and being "saved"?

Mark 5.²⁵⁻³⁴

²⁴And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. ²⁵And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, ²⁶And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, ²⁷When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. ²⁸For she said, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." ²⁹And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

³⁰And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹And his disciples said unto him, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?"

³²And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. ³³But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

³⁴And he said unto her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us." *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

- ? In light of this, how does Jesus exhibit his "connectedness" with the woman with an issue of blood?
- ? How do they literally become "connected"?
- ? How does the literal physical contact between Jesus and the woman—she "touched his garment"—signify Jesus' emotional and spiritual "connectedness" with the woman and the impact that his "connectedness" had on her?

1. Mark relates the encounter between Jesus and "a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years."

- ? What is meant by "an issue of blood"?
- ? What would have been the physical impact on the woman of the ailment lasting "twelve years"?
- ? After reading the following Old Testament passage, consider the question: What would have been the spiritual impact on the woman of the ailment lasting "twelve years"?

"And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean. Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation...."

Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them. This is the law of him that hath an issue..." (Lev. 15.^{25-26, 31-32}).

- ? How, do you imagine, did this woman feel about herself after being unworthy to enter either synagogue or temple for over a decade?

2. Mark tells us that the woman had “suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.”
 - ? What does this tell you about Jesus’ power?
 - ? What is the symbolic significance of this notice?

3. Jesus seems to have gone out of his way to call attention to the woman’s healing through physical contact.
 - ? Why, do you think, was it important to Jesus that the woman’s boldness in touching him and her healing be made public?
 - ? What might the consequences been to him of the woman’s touch?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that although Jesus was made unclean by the woman’s touch and thus excluded for a time from the synagogue and temple he nevertheless made public her touch and his consequential uncleanness?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus experiences a kind of “uncleanness” through his association with us?
 - ? Even though we might think that the woman (and we) are not really spiritually unclean, yet, it was a deeply held belief in Jesus’ day. What does it say about Jesus that he so easily and willingly defied so many religious conventions of his day?
 - ? Does he, and if so, how, defy cultural and religious conventions today?

John 15.¹⁻⁸

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ²Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

³Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴Abide 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. ⁵I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

Questionary

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

? In light of this, how does this reading reflect Jesus’ connectedness to us?

1. Jesus says that his Father is his “husbandman.”

? What does Jesus mean by this?

? What does this acknowledgement say about Jesus’ feelings for his Father?

2. Jesus teaches that “as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” Leaving the metaphor behind, Jesus warns that “without me ye can do nothing.”

? How is our reliance upon Jesus related to Jesus’ acknowledged reliance upon his Father?

? How do you feel about such dependence upon Jesus?

? Do you acknowledge your dependence upon Jesus as willingly as Jesus acknowledges his dependence upon his Father?

? How do you feel about being able to do “*nothing*” without Jesus?

? How does the following quote from Lorenzo Snow relate to today’s passage?

“The character of the religion that we have espoused demands a certain course of conduct that no other religion that we know of requires of its adherents; and the nature of those demands upon us are such that no person can comply with them unless by assistance from the Almighty... the sacrifices that are required of us are of that nature that no man nor woman could make them, unless aided by a supernatural power; and the Lord, in proposing these conditions, never intended that his people should ever be required to comply with them unless by supernatural aid... He has promised this aid.”¹

? What do you think and feel when you consider that you have a religion that is impossible to comply with without “supernatural aid”?

? What is the real point of such a religion?

? What does it seek to teach us about ourselves and our relationship with the world and the cosmos around us?

3. Jesus speaks of “bearing fruit” and “bringing forth much fruit.”

? What does it mean to “bear” or “bring forth” fruit?

? What fruit is Jesus after?

¹ *JD*. Vol. 20, p. 362

- ? What is the difference between working in the garden, orchard, vineyard, etc. and actually producing a good crop or harvest?
 - ? Can one “work” without actually producing a harvest? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What fruit have you and are you producing?
4. Jesus warns that “every branch in me that beareth not fruit” is “taken away,” “cast forth,” and “cast into the fire,” and “burned.”
- ? How do you feel about this warning, the high expectations for fruit, and dramatic and negative consequences of not bearing fruit?

1 John 1:1-5

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ²(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) ³that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

⁴And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. ⁵This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Questionary

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

- ? How does today's reading contribute to your understanding and appreciation for the Savior, his feelings of connectedness to you, and the witness it is to the Father's feelings of attachment to you?
- 1. John testifies that he and his fellow disciples had "heard," "seen," "looked upon," and "handled" Jesus. This among other things was indicative of their "fellowship" with Jesus. After sharing this testimony, John then expresses his wish that his readers share in the disciple's fellowship with the Father and Son.
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of our "fellowship" with Father and Son?
 - ? What role, if any, would "hearing," "seeing," "looking upon," and "handling" play in our fellowship with Jesus?
- 2. John assumes that the news of fellowship with Father and Son would bring about a fullness of joy.
 - ? How does this news of fellowship with Father and Son effect you?
- 3. John seeks to summarize the gospel message that he had heard from Jesus: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the importance of the truth that there "is no darkness" in God?
 - ? How would you feel and what would you think if we understood John to mean that those who are "in God" do not experience "darkness" in their lives?
 - ? What would be the nature of a "darkness" that is kept from one's life in God—it certainly is not disappointment, failure, etc.?
 - ? What would it mean to have the light of God in one's life?

John 10. ^{1-5, 11-15, 27-30}

¹Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ²But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. ⁴And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. ⁵And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

¹¹I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ¹²But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. ¹³The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ¹⁵As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and my Father are a one.

Questionary

Today's reading represents a reading from our atonement series entitled, "Atonement: the Savior's Unity and Connectedness with us." It also represents one in our series of Advent readings.

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

2. How does this reading witness Jesus', and thus his Father's feelings of attachment and connectedness to humankind in general and of those who rely on and trust in him.
1. Jesus speaks of himself as "the good shepherd."
 - ? When you think of Jesus as "the good shepherd" what comes to your mind? What images come to your mind?

A shepherd can simply be a herded of sheep. But in the parable, Jesus is more than a "shepherd" or herder. He is the owner.

 - ? What difference does this make?
 - ? Who is going to feel a greater sense of care for the sheep, a heired sheep herder, however conscientious, or the owner?
 2. In his parable of the shepherd and his sheep, Jesus says that the shepherd "calleth his own sheep by name" and that he "knows his sheep."
 - ? What does this signify to you?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate Jesus' "knowing" you well and intimately?
 - ? Given your daily life and conduct, do you find this comforting or intimidating? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What, do you imagine, are his thoughts when he considers you?
 3. In the parable, Jesus says that the shepherd "goeth before" the sheep.
 - ? What does this signify to you?

- ? How significant are the accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry and the example he set during it in shaping how you think, feel, and act, especially as you relate to those with whom you come in contact either casually or intimately?
- 4. In the parable, the sheep not only "know" the shepherd's voice but "know not the voice of strangers" and so "fleeth" them.
 - ? To what examples would you point of "strangers" whose voice is not to be heeded and whose sincere interest in you (and others) is not to be trusted?
- 5. Jesus says that "as the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father." Then in the same sentence—thus signifying a relatedness— he says "and I lay down my life for the sheep."
 - ? What is the relationship between these two halves of the sentence?
 - ? What do the two halves of the sentence suggest about what the Father, Himself, is willing to do in order to serve and save His children?
- 6. Jesus testifies that "no man is able to pluck" his sheep either "out of my hand" or "out of my Father's hand."
 - ? Do you believe this in general and especially in relation to yourself?
 - ? What thoughts do you have when you consider that you cannot be "plucked" from Jesus' or Father's hand?
 - ? How does this impact the way you live your daily life?
 - ? What does it mean to be in their hands?

Sacrifice: what jesus suffered for us

Matthew 27.³³⁻⁵⁰

³³And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, ³⁴they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. ³⁵And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots. ³⁶And sitting down they watched him there; ³⁷And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

³⁹And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, ⁴⁰and saying, "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."

⁴¹Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴²"He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. ⁴³He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." ⁴⁴The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,

"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

⁴⁷Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, "This man calleth for Elias." ⁴⁸And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him."

⁵⁰Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

Questionary

1. We have mentioned before and will likely mention in future readings, Jacob's hope and admonition that "all men would believe in Christ, *and view his death*" (Jacob 1.⁸). As you have done before, close your eyes and imagine. Imagine now that you are standing at the foot the cross. Look at the Savior hanging on the cross.
 - ? What do you see?
 - ? How do you feel about what you see?
 - ? Who and what do you see around you?
 - ? What are their moods and attitudes?
 - ? What role have you played in what is happening to him?
 - ? Look into the eyes of Jesus and let him look into your. What do you see in the way he looks at you?
 - ? What do you want to say to him?
2. Today's reading is dominated by the thrice repeated challenge that Jesus, if he is who he says he is, deliver himself from the suffering of the cross.
 - ? What is the significance of this challenge being repeated three times?
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus' refusal to his life, his ministry, and the meaning of his atonement?

Luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁴

³⁹And [Jesus] came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ⁴⁰And when he was at the place, he said unto them, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²Saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

⁴³And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Questionary

1. Luke says that Jesus, “being in an agony... prayed more earnestly.”
? What comes to your mind when you think of “agony”?
2. Luke does not say that Jesus is “in agony,” but “in an agony.”
? Is there a difference, and if so, what is the difference?
3. The word agony comes from the Greek word *agonia*. It means ‘a contest,’ ‘a battle,’ ‘a conflict.’
? Why do you think Luke chose this word?
? In what type of “battle” or “conflict” was Jesus engaged?
? With whom was he “battling”?
4. In seeking relief from his terrible ordeal, Jesus asked, “remove this cup from me.”
? Have you ever wondered why, in this terrible moment, Jesus resorted to a metaphor—the metaphor of a cup—rather than just saying outright what he meant, “stop the pain”?
? Why, do you think, did he resort to this particular imagery of a cup?
? What is the significance of the “cup”?

Consider the following passages.

Mosiah 3.²⁵⁻²⁷

Isaiah 51.^{17& 22}

Ezekiel 23.³²⁻³⁴

Revelation 17.⁴⁻⁶

DC 43.²⁶

Psalms 11.⁶

Jeremiah 25.^{15-17, 27}

Revelation 14.¹⁰⁻¹¹

Alma 40.²⁶;

DC 101.¹¹

Psalms 75.⁸

Jeremiah 51.⁷⁻⁹

Revelation 16.¹⁹

D&C 29.¹⁷

- ? After reading these passages, what do you think was “in” Jesus’ cup?

The following words and phrases are associated with this cup:

“Torment... as a lake of fire and brimstone”

“Be moved and mad”

“Awful view of... guilt and abominations”

“Be drunken, and spue, and fall”

“Shrink from the presence of the Lord”

“Astonishment and desolation

“State of misery and endless torment”

“Wrath of God”

“Snares, fire and brimstone”

“Indignation”

“Horrible tempest”

“Fierceness of his wrath”

“Dregs”

“Cast out”

“Fury”

“Unclean”

“Cup of trembling”

- ? What does all of this language suggest to you about the nature of Jesus’ suffering?
5. As you have done previously, close your eyes and imagine that you are present in the garden of Gethsemane and witness Jesus’ “agony.”
- ? What does Jesus look like?
 - ? What does the garden feel like?
 - ? What do you think you would want to say to him if you had been there?

Mosiah 3.⁵⁻⁹

⁵For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. ⁶And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. ⁷And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. ⁸And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. ⁹And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

Questionary

1. King Benjamin says that Jesus shall “come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read this?
 - ? How is this an aspect of Jesus’ “sacrifice”?
 - ? How is this an aspect of Jesus’ “at-one-ment” or connectedness, unity with us?
 - ? What, do you think, might it feel like for God, the Son, to leave an eternal glory and live on a fallen planet with imperfect beings who live contrary to his nature?
 - ? What other “sacrifices” does King Benjamin mention Jesus suffering for us?
2. King Benjamin teaches that Jesus suffered “more than man can suffer, except it be unto death.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus suffered, endured, and survived an ordeal that would have killed any other of Heavenly Father’s children, even the very greatest of them?
3. King Benjamin teaches that Jesus worked “mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear.” He also cured “all manner of diseases.... And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.”
 - ? Do you think that such work “cost” Jesus anything; represented a sacrifice of any type?
 - ? In what way, other than the exorcism of alien life-forms, can we understand Jesus’ casing out “evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men”?
 - ? In what way do we all have “evil spirits” which we are unable to abandon without Jesus’ powerful intervention?
- ? How thoughts and feelings do you have when you contemplate that no one could have physically or spiritually survived the sufferings through which Jesus passed as he revealed the Atonement—God’s commitment to remaining connected to his children?
 - ? What can you do to grow in your appreciation of Jesus, and to help others grow in their appreciation of him?

2 Nephi 9.¹⁹⁻²¹

¹⁹O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!
For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil,
and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone,
which is endless torment.

²⁰O how great the holiness of our God!
For he knoweth all things,
and there is not anything save he knows it.

²¹ And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice;
for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men,
yea, the pains of every living creature,
both men, women, and children,
who belong to the family of Adam.

Questionary

1. In a previous Read, Ponder, Pray, we pointed out the numerous exclamation points found in 2 Nephi 9.¹⁰⁻²⁴—in today’s reading there are two of them. Have another look at verses 10-24, identify the exclamation points, and ponder the significance and focus of each of them.
2. Jacob testifies that Jesus “delivereth his saints from that *awful monster*.”
 - ? Why do you think and how do you feel when you consider Jacob’s resort to the intense imagery of “monsters”?
 - ? What do you learn from today’s reading concerning the nature of this “monster”?
3. Jacob contends that Jesus “suffereth the pains of all men, yea the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.”
 - ? In his efforts to be one with us and save us, how was Jesus subjected to “the awful monster”?
 - ? How did he suffer at the hands of the “devil”?
 - ? How did he suffer in “death”?
 - ? How did he suffer “hell”?
 - ? How did he suffer “fire and brimstone”?
 - ? How did he suffer an “endless torment”?

? How do you feel about his subjecting himself to the “awful monster”?
3. We sometimes uncharitably poke fun at other Christians for their use of the imagery, a “lake of fire and brimstone.” Yet here it is in the Book of Mormon.
 - ? What does this imagery suggest to you?
 - ? How is it appropriate as an analogy for spiritual torment?

? From what “torments” and “pains” would you have the Savior deliver you?

Mark 14.³²⁻⁴¹

³²And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, “Sit ye here, while I shall pray.”

³³And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; ³⁴and saith unto them, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.”

³⁵And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶And he said,

“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

³⁷And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, “Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour? ³⁸Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. ⁴⁰And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. ⁴¹And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, “Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

Q

uestionary

1. In Jacob 1.⁸, Jacob admonishes us to do several things. One of them is to “view his death,” meaning the Savior’s death. We have and will yet review many passages, such as today’s, that reveal what the Savior suffered for us. Through these, we will seek to “view his death.” After reading today’s reading a couple of times, consider how you can follow Jacob’s admonition to “view his death.” Find a quiet moment to close your eyes and imagine being in the garden with the Savior. Picture him kneeling, praying, pleading. While doing so, consider the following questions.
 - ? What does Jesus look like?
 - ? What does the garden look and feel like?
 - ? What do you think you would want to say to him if you had been there?
2. Mark reports that when Jesus entered the garden he “began to be sore amazed,” and indicated to those around him that he was “sorrowful unto death.”
 - ? What do you think it means that Jesus was “amazed”?
 - ? What is it, do you think, Jesus felt, thought, and experienced that caused him to be “amazed”?
 - ? What do you think when you think of Jesus being so sorrowful that he felt death looming?

Consider Mosiah 3.⁷.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”

- ? How does this passage amplify and enhance your appreciation of Jesus’ confession?
3. Mark reports Jesus saying to his disciples, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”
 - ? We can legitimately read this as good general advice, but is there some reason that this counsel is particularly needed on that night in that place?

1 Nephi 19.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem. ⁹And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught;

wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it;
and they smite him, and he suffereth it.
Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it,

because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.

¹⁰And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men,

to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock,
and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum,
and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos.

Questionary

1. In today's reading, Nephi describes some of the things that Christ "yielded" to and "suffereth."
 - ? With all the power he possessed, how easy or hard was it for the Savior to "yield" to the humiliation and pain of being "scourged," "smitten," and "spit upon"?
 - ? How badly might he have wanted to respond in a way that would show his persecutors that he was more powerful than they?
 - ? What made him endure all this pain, and resist the temptation to let those who opposed him feel the full measure of his power?
 - ? On the other hand, how is it that in enduring the pain and resisting the temptation to resist and lash out, he was, in fact, showing them and future generations the full measure of his power?
 - ? What would be the implications in our lives and our relationships if his power is best seen in his "yielding" and "suffering"?
 - ? What does it mean that he was "set at naught"?
2. Nephi says that he endured all of this "because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men."
 - ? Take a moment to think about what it means to be "long-suffering." How is this attribute exhibited toward us?
3. Nephi says that "the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught." He also says that Jesus "yieldeth himself... into the hands of wicked men."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you note that Nephi puts Jesus' suffering and death squarely on the shoulders of the world and its wicked?
 - ? How does this relate to the notion that Jesus was a sacrifice that the Father made, or was the victim of "justice" or the Father's need to "satisfy justice" and thus be "appeased"?

Psalm 22.¹⁻¹⁸

- ¹My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why art thou so far from helping me,
and from the words of my roaring?
- ²O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not;
and in the night season, and am not silent.
- ³But thou art holy,
O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.
- ⁴Our fathers trusted in thee:
they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.
- ⁵They cried unto thee, and were delivered:
they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.
- ⁶But I am a worm, and no man;
a reproach of men, and despised of the people.
- ⁷All they that see me laugh me to scorn:
they shoot out the lip,
they shake the head, saying,
- ⁸“He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him:
let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”
- ⁹But thou art he that took me out of the womb:
thou didst make me hope
when I was upon my mother’s breasts.
- ¹⁰I was cast upon thee from the womb:
thou art my God from my mother’s belly.
- ¹¹Be not far from me;
for trouble is near;
for there is none to help.
- ¹²Many bulls have compassed me:
strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.
- ¹³They gaped upon me with their mouths,
as a ravener and a roaring lion.
- ¹⁴I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint:
my heart is like wax;
it is melted in the midst of my bowels.
- ¹⁵My strength is dried up like a potsherd;
and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;
and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
- ¹⁶For dogs have compassed me:
the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:
they pierced my hands and my feet.
- ¹⁷I may tell all my bones:
they look and stare upon me.
- ¹⁸They part my garments among them,
and cast lots upon my vesture.

Questionary

Psalm 22 is often referred to as a “Messianic Psalm.” Some see its use by Jesus himself (he utters the words found in Psalm 22.¹ while suffering on the cross), and by the Gospel writers (Matthew quotes Psalm 22.¹⁸) as evidence of prophecy; evidence that Jesus’ “passion” was seen in vision many years before the actual event. Others see such use and quotation as indicating that the

feelings and experiences of the ancient Psalter/s were similar to those of Jesus. Whichever tact one takes, it seems that a number of Psalms can inform our reading of the “passion narrative.”

In speaking of a “passion narrative,” we make reference to Acts 1.³. There, in referring particularly to Jesus’ final days, including his suffering experiences in Gethsemane and Calvary, the writer speaks of Jesus’ “passion.”

Psalm 22 speaks of “passions,” or feelings associated with suffering. They can profitably be likened to those experienced by the Savior.

1. In reading Psalm 22, the reader may want to re-read one of the Gospel accounts of the Savior’s crucifixion.
 - ? What parallels do you find between this psalm and the passion narratives found in the Gospels?
 - ? What new insights might Psalm 22 provide into the Savior’s “passion.”
2. Think about the imagery behind the following descriptive phrases—remember, this is poetry.
 - ? For example, when the speaker says “I am a worm,” what do you think he is feeling?
 - ? When the speaker complains that his “bones are out of joint,” what is he experiencing and feeling?
 - ? How would this apply to the Savior’s experience of crucifixion?
 - ? What do the following descriptive phrases suggest to you about the Savior’s experiences and feelings?

“Trouble is near.”

“There is none to help.”

“Many bulls have compassed me.”

“I am poured out like water.”

“My heart is like wax... melted in the midst of my bowls.”

“My strength is dried up like a postsherd.”

“My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.”

“Dogs have compassed me.”

“The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me.”

“They pierced my hands and my feet.”

“I may tell [count] all my bones.”

- ? How do these images alter and enhance your understanding of what the Savior went through in order to save us?
3. Jesus found the Psalmist’s complaint—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”—appropriate to his feelings and experiences at Calvary.
 - ? What does this suggest to you about Jesus’ attention to and appreciation of the Psalmist?
 - ? What attention do you give to the Psalmist and how appreciative of him are you?

There are many Psalms that point our minds to the Savior and his “passion.” Today, or over the next days, read around in the Psalms and see if you can identify others that testify of Christ and his Atoning “passion.”

Alma 34.¹⁰⁻¹²

¹⁰For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. ¹¹Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay. ¹²But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.

Questionary

In today's reading, the fourth of 12 taken from Alma 34 as well as an atonement reading, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. In today's reading, Amulek speaks of a sacrifice that is "infinite and eternal." We might think of this in temporal terms, indicative of its length and scope. Certainly Jesus' sacrifice is infinite and eternal in its duration and scope. But Amulek seems to have something else in mind.

? What, do you think, is this something else?

Amulek contrasts an "infinite and eternal sacrifice" with "a sacrifice of man."

? What does this suggest to you?

Amulek teaches that an "Infinite and eternal" sacrifice is indicative of a sacrifice that is the sacrifice of a God. Sacrifices made by men and/or of men cannot save. It must be a sacrifice of a God. Amulek returns to these two words—infinite and eternal—in verse 14.

"And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

? Do you think that these two adjectives, "infinite and eternal," modify "sacrifice," "the Son of God," or both?

2. In speaking of the Savior, we often, and appropriately, think of him as "the Son of God." But the Book of Mormon, and specifically Amulek here, thinks of him simply as "God" Himself, infinite and eternal (See, for example, Mosiah 13.³⁴).

? Does it shape or alter in any way your understanding and appreciation of the Atonement to know that it came through a sacrifice of a God?

? What do you think when you contemplate the death of God, Himself?

Alma 7.⁹⁻¹³

⁹But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. ¹⁰And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God. ¹¹And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. ¹²And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. ¹³Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

Q

uestionary

1. In today's reading, we read repeatedly that Jesus "will take upon him..."
? What does this language of "taking upon himself" suggest to your mind?

Consider the things that Jesus "takes upon him:"

- "The pains and sicknesses of his people"
- "Death"
- Our "infirmities"
- "The sins of his people"

- ? What impact has Jesus' having "taken upon him" all these things had on you personally?
- ? How is the troubling reality that we are beset and yield to sin "easily" affected by knowing that Jesus "takes upon him" all of these things?
- ? How has Jesus "taken upon him" these things in your behalf?

2. We learn from today's reading that

- Jesus looses "the bands of death which bind"
- Jesus' "bowels" are "filled with mercy"
- Jesus knows "how to succor his people according to their infirmities"
- Jesus "blots out their transgressions."

Being released from those things that Jesus "takes upon him" and experiencing the truths of those things listed just above is part of the experience that the scriptures call "being born again." Being born again is the outcome of repentance.

- ? Have you repented? Have you, then, been born again?

3. In inviting us to come unto Christ and repent, Alma encourages us to "come and fear not."

- ? What is the nature of the fear from which Alma encourages us to free ourselves?
- ? What role does Jesus play in eliminating such fear?

4. Alma teaches that Jesus will "take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy."

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? What comes to your mind when you read of the "bowels" being filled with mercy?
- ? How does Jesus' experience of the same trials that we encounter increase the extent of his already huge amount of mercy and give him the knowledge "how to succor his people"?

- ? Have you had the experience of growing in mercy towards others by finding yourselves in their shoes?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus' willingness to suffer as others suffer?

3 Nephi 11.⁹⁻¹¹

⁹*He stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

¹⁰“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. ¹¹And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.”

Questionary

1. Jesus said that in doing what he had done he had “suffered the will of the Father.”
 - ? Why, do you think, Jesus speaks of “suffering” the will of the Father?
 - ? What does it say about the character of Father that Jesus did precisely as the Father willed
2. In seeking relief from his terrible ordeal, Jesus asked, “remove this cup from me.” We have seen and examined this imagery before, but it is worth repeating.
 - ? Have you ever wondered why, in this terrible moment, Jesus resorted to a metaphor—the metaphor of a cup—rather than just saying outright what he meant, “stop the pain”?
 - ? Why, do you think, did he resort to this this particular imagery of a cup?
 - ? What is the significance of the “cup”?

Consider the following passages.

Mosiah 3.²⁵⁻²⁷

Psalm 11.⁶

Psalm 75.⁸

Isaiah 51.^{17& 22}

Jeremiah 25.^{15-17, 27}

Jeremiah 51.⁷⁻⁹

Ezekiel 23.³²⁻³⁴

Revelation 14.¹⁰⁻¹¹

Revelation 16.¹⁹

Revelation 17.⁴⁻⁶

Alma 40.²⁶;

D&C 29.¹⁷

DC 43.²⁶

DC 101.¹¹

- ? After reading these passages, what do you think was “in” Jesus’ cup?

The following words are associated with this cup:

“Torment... as a lake of fire and brimstone”

“Be moved and mad”

“Awful view of... guilt and abominations”

“Be drunken, and spue, and fall”

“Shrink from the presence of the Lord”

“Astonishment and desolation

“State of misery and endless torment”

“Wrath of God”

“Snares, fire and brimstone”

“Indignation”

“Horrible tempest”

“Fierceness of his wrath”

“Dregs”

“Cast out”

“Fury”

“Unclean”

“Cup of trembling”

- ? What does all of this language suggest to you about the nature of Jesus’ suffering?

dc 19.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

¹⁸Which 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—¹⁹nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

Q

uestionary

1. We have many accounts and summaries of Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane and at Calvary. Some come from eyewitnesses, such as those found in John and Matthew. Some, such as Luke's and Mark's seem to come from investigation of sources near to the events in time and space. Others come from vision, such as Enoch's, or Nephi's, or King Benjamin's, or perhaps, Isaiah's. But today's witness concerning Jesus' suffering is unique. It is intimate and personal and private. It comes from Jesus' own mouth.
 - ? What do you learn and feel from Jesus' witness concerning his own suffering that you might not learn or feel from secondhand accounts?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Jesus' lives eternally with the remembrance of the event in ways that no one else can?
2. Jesus openly admits that he wanted to "shrink" from drinking the "bitter cup."
 - ? How do you feel about this candid admission?
 - ? What does it tell you about the nature of the "bitter cup"?

We have explored the imagery of a "bitter cup" and what it tells us about Jesus ordeal elsewhere (See Luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁴ and 3 Nephi 11.⁹⁻¹¹).

3. Jesus refers to himself as "God, the greatest of all."
 - ? How do you feel about his calling himself "God" without any caveats?
 - ? Is he "God" to you? If so, why? If not, why not?

John 19.^{16-18, 23-37}

¹⁶Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.

¹⁷And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: ¹⁸Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst...

²³Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

²⁴They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be:" that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, "They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots." These things therefore the soldiers did.

²⁵Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" ²⁷Then saith he to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

²⁸After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, "I thirst."

²⁹Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished:" and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

³¹The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ³²Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: ³⁴But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

³⁵And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. ³⁶For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, "A bone of him shall not be broken." ³⁷And again another scripture saith, "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

Questionary

1. Like the three synoptic Gospel writers, John reports Jesus' crucifixion. Take a few minutes to compare John's account with those of the other Gospels.
 - ? What similarities do you find?
 - ? What differences do you find?
2. From the beginning of his Book, John has spoken of Jesus as "the Lamb of God," signifying the Passover Lamb. There are several elements to John's reporting of Jesus' crucifixion that point the mind to Passover and the Passover lamb.
 - ? What elements do you find in Jesus' crucifixion that point toward Jesus being the Passover lamb.
 - ? How does the presence of "hyssop," only mentioned in John, point to the Passover?
 - ? How does the fact that Jesus' legs were not broken—it was common for victims of crucifixion to have their legs broke so that they would die faster—point to Jesus as the Passover lamb?
3. John speaks of Jesus' spirit going out of him. Then, unique among the Gospel writers, John reports that Jesus was pierced in the side (piercing the heart) and that "blood and water" came out.
 - ? What does the presence of "blood and water" in Jesus' wound tell you about the nature and cause of death?

- ? What is the symbolic meaning of John’s having “spirit,” “blood,” and “water” present at Jesus’ death?
- ? How are the elements of “spirit,” “blood,” and “water” related to an actual birth?
- ? How are the elements of “spirit,” “blood,” and “water” related to our spiritual rebirth?
- ? How do the following passage relate to and amplify your answer to the previous two questions?

“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (1 Jn. 5.⁸).

“That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; for by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified...” (Moses 6.⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰).

- ? What do you think when you consider that John is really signifying that our spiritual birth came at the time of or through Jesus’ crucifixion?
 - ? How would you feel about the suggestion that John’s emphasis of Jesus’ crucifixion being the cause of our spiritual birth really makes an appeal to a feminine element—Jesus being more of a mother given birth than of a father siring a child?
4. Each of the Gospel writers record different statements that Jesus made from the cross—totally, between them, seven.
- ? What words does John report?
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus’ words to and about his mother?
 - ? How do you feel about and what do you learn from Jesus showing concern for his mother during his moment of greatest pain and suffering?

Glorification: resurrection, ascension, and enthronement

Ephesians 1.¹⁵⁻²³

¹⁵Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, ¹⁶cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ²²and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Questionary

Today's reading of nine verses is one long sentence. The single sentence represents Paul's hopes for the saints at Ephesus as expressed to God in prayer. We have included the entire sentence in today's reading for the sake of context, but we will only explore verses 19-21.

1. Paul teaches that God, the Father "raised [Jesus] from the dead."
 - ? Is this consistent with your understanding of Jesus' resurrection and the power by which it was achieved?
 - ? What do you envision in your mind when you imagine God acting as agent of Jesus' resurrection?
 2. Paul teaches that God, the Father, exercises the same "mighty power" in our lives to achieve the ends of our salvation as he exercised in raising Jesus.
 - ? What do you think about when you consider the power that is necessary to raise the dead?
 - ? What things require greater power than raising the dead, do you think?
 - ? How do you feel knowing that you have access to the sort of strength that can raise the dead?
 - ? When have you experienced such power in your life?
 3. God also exerted his power to "set [Jesus] at his own right hand in the heavenly places."
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus being at the "right hand" of God?
 - ? What does Jesus do from his privileged and intimate place at God's right hand?
 4. Sitting at God's right hand, Jesus is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."
 - ? What is the significance of this in your daily life?
 - ? What kinds of "powers" and "dominating influences" are in your life against which you protected and over which you hope to see victory?
- ? How does today's reading help you understand and appreciate the fact that Jesus' resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and his enthronement at the right hand of God are as essential a part of his atonement as his suffering in Gethsemane or at Golgotha?
 - ? How does Jesus continue to reveal is at-one-ment, or his connectedness to you from his place at the right hand of God?
 - ? What is the significance of his advocacy for you at the right hand of God?
 - ? When have you sensed his advocacy in your behalf? How did it make you feel?

3 Nephi 17.¹¹⁻¹⁸

¹¹And *he commanded that their little children should be brought. ¹²So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him. ¹³*When they had all been brought, and Jesus stood in the midst, he commanded the multitude that they should kneel down upon the ground. ¹⁴And *when they had knelt upon the ground, Jesus groaned within himself, and said: “Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel.”

¹⁵And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him. ¹⁶And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; ¹⁷and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.

¹⁸*When Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome.

Q

uestionary

In addition to being the 29th in a series of Advent readings (this one “post-Advent”) that will continue throughout the month of December, this reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement”

1. Jesus’ resurrection is important in relation to our faith in the reality of our resurrection and in our very ability to be resurrected.
 - ? But, without Jesus’ ascension and enthronement, where would we be without his advocacy and his ability to exercise power in our lives today, while we continue in mortality?
 - ? How does today’s reading relate to the theme of Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and enthronement?
 - ? How does it relate to Jesus’ advocacy for each of us?
 - ? How do you feel as you hear the multitudes joy and wonder at hearing Jesus pray for them?
 - ? How would you feel to hear your name escape Jesus’ lips as he prays for you?
 - ? Have you experienced or sensed in any way Jesus advocating for you at any time?
 - ? If you have felt Jesus advocating personally for you, how has it impacted your life?

Mark 16.¹⁻⁶

¹And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. ²And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. ³And they said among themselves, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?”

⁴And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. ⁵And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. ⁶And he saith unto them, “Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him....”

Q

uestionary

1. As the women approached Jesus’ tomb, they asked, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” Then, immediately, the text informs us, “And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.”
 - ? Consider the larger symbolic meaning of this narrative. How would this apply to you, your life today, the impossible challenges of life, and the prospects of your own resurrection?
 - ? Have you had experiences in your life when you, wondering how you would accomplish something difficult, found that God had already prepared the way for you to accomplish that very thing?
2. Take a moment to read and compare the other three accounts of Jesus’ resurrection (Matthew 28.¹⁻⁶; Luke 24.¹⁻¹²; and John 20.¹⁻¹⁸)
 - ? What unique items and principles do you learn from each account?

dc 45.³⁻⁵

³Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father,
who is pleading your cause before him—

⁴Saying: “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;

⁵Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name,
that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.

Q

uestionary

In our first reading from DC 45 (verses 1-2), we heard the Lord’s thrice repeated invitation to members of the church that they “hearken” to him “lest death shall overtake you.”

1. If we were to consider things outside the context of section 45, we could identify any number of things to which we should hearken. However, if we restrict our considerations only to the context of section 45, today’s reading contains one specific thing to which the church is to hearken in order to avoid “death.”

? What is said in today’s reading that is to be hearkened to, and will rescue the hearer from death?

? Why is it so important that we “hearken” to the Lord’s advocacy for us?

? How does hearing his advocacy for us deliver us from “death”?

2. In our previous reading on “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement” (3 Nephi 17.¹⁶⁻¹⁸), we considered an instance when individuals heard Jesus praying for them, and how they felt and what they said about it.

“And behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him. And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17.¹⁶⁻¹⁷).

? Have you heard/sensed Jesus praying for you?

? If so, how did it make you feel? If not, why not? What might you do to hear him?

3. We are admonished to “praying in the name of Jesus Christ.” This is much more than instruction concerning the “formula of prayer.”

? What does praying in his name mean to you?

When we invoke his name in prayer, we are actually inviting him to join in our prayer as a partner.

? Have you experienced prayer in which you felt Jesus participating with you in the prayer?

Romans 6.³⁻¹¹

³Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

⁶knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. ⁷For he that is dead is freed from sin.

⁸Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: ⁹knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. ¹⁰For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

¹¹Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questionary

1. Jesus' resurrection, of course, makes it possible for us to live in happiness eternally. However, his resurrection also impacts the quality of life we can live while still mortal.
? According to today's reading, what are the implications of Jesus' resurrection for our life here on earth?
2. Paul says that "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."
? What does it mean to you that Jesus "was raised up from the dead *by the glory of the Father*"?
? What role did the "glory of the Father" play in Jesus' resurrection?
? We are to "walk in newness of life" in the same manner that Jesus was resurrected. In what manner was he resurrected?
? What do you think and feel when you read Paul's admonition as follows: "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life *by the glory of the Father*"?
? What role does the "glory of the Father" play in our walking "in newness of life"?
? How does one invite and then experiences the Father's participation in our desire and attempts to "walk in newness of life"?
? What is likely to happen if we do not have his participation?
? What could you do to invite "the glory of the Father" into your life so that you can "walk in newness of life"?
3. Paul says that when we "walk in newness of life" we should no longer "serve sin."
? What does it mean to "*serve sin*"?
? Is one failing to walk "in newness of life" if sin and weakness continues to be found in their lives?
4. Paul speaks of being "freed from sin" and being "dead... unto sin." He also speaks of "the body of sin" being "destroyed" through Christ.
? What does all this mean to you?
? How would you know if you are either "serving sin" or "freed" from/"dead unto" sin"?
? What does all this mean in relation to the individual—every individual—who still struggles with weakness and yields to temptations more than they would like?

Luke 24.¹⁻¹²

¹Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. ³And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴*As they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: ⁵and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁷saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

⁸And they remembered his words, ⁹and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. ¹¹And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

¹²Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Questionary

In addition to being a reading in our atonement series, today’s reading was also the 45th reading for Lent/Easter 2021.

1. As the women went to the tomb with materials necessary to cleaning Jesus’ body, they were met with a series of surprises. They

“found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre”
“found not the body of the Lord Jesus”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon seeing the stone rolled away and the sepulchre standing wide open?
- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt had you entered the tomb in which you knew full well Jesus had been buried only to find that his body was not there?

2. The women had another surprise in order as an angel informed them,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁸saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon hearing this news?

3. We know what Jesus’ resurrection means for us and the possibilities it holds out to us for a glorious future. But, consider the following passage.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6.⁴⁻¹¹).

- ? What do you learn about the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for our daily life in the here

and now?

- ? What does Jesus' resurrection from death signify about the renewal of our spiritual lives today?
- ? As we have so often done, we will ask again that you close your eyes, imagine the tomb, imagine entering the tomb, and imagine hearing the angelic message of Jesus' resurrection.

dc 20.²¹⁻²⁴

²¹Wherefore, the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son, as it is written in those scriptures which have been given of him.

²²He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them.

²³He was crucified, died, and rose again the third day;

²⁴And ascended into heaven, to sit down on the right hand of the Father,
To reign with almighty power according to the will of the Father;

Questionary

1. The first half of DC 20 is divided into five parts by a repeated, “Amen” (1-4; 5-12; 13-16; 17-28; 29-36).¹ Today’s reading is a portion of the fourth part. This fourth part of Section 20 takes a “creedal” form, its content not unlike that found in one of Christianity’s earliest documents, “The Apostles’ Creed.”

“I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.”

- ? What elements of “atonement” do you find in today’s four verses and in the Apostles’ Creed?
2. In thinking about and speaking of Jesus’ atonement, we are quite accustomed to considering Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. But today’s text does not end there. It includes his ascension into heaven and his enthronement at the right hand of God.
 - ? What is the significance of these two additional elements?
 - ? How do these two additional elements to Jesus’ atonement impact your daily life? (You might want to review our previous readings under this topic)
 - ? What does Jesus do from his throne at God’s right hand?
3. From God’s right hand, Jesus “reign[s] with almighty power according to the will of the Father.” We can think of this from a cosmic “administrative” perspective.
 - ? But how does his “reign with almighty power” impact you personally in your daily life?
 - ? As you consider this question, consider the following passage. How does it amplify your appreciation of Jesus enthronement at the right hand of God?

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at

¹ The latter half of the section is divided by three headings (verse 37, 38, 68)

his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1.¹⁸⁻²³).

- ? What hostile “principalities,” “powers,” “might,” “dominions,” and “names” do you need help putting under your feet, or subduing?
- ? How does Jesus’ enthronement and his power over all these things impact your ability to subdue and conquer all hostile influences in your life—whether internal or external?
- ? How might the knowledge of Jesus’ enthronement at the right hand of God impact the way you pray when you seek divine assistance?

John 20.¹⁹⁻³¹

¹⁹Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, "Peace be unto you."

²⁰And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. ²¹Then said Jesus to them again, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: ²³whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples therefore said unto him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said unto them, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you."

²⁷Then saith he to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

²⁸And Thomas answered and said unto him, "My Lord and my God."

²⁹Jesus saith unto him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

³⁰And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: ³¹But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Questionary

1. Upon visiting his disciples after his resurrection, Jesus said, "Peace be unto you."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read this greeting?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read this greeting in light of the fact that the disciples had shut themselves up inside a house "for fear of the Jews"?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read his second greeting, "Peace be unto you," in light of his following, "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."
2. In being informed of Jesus' resurrection, the absent Thomas responded, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."
 - ? Do you relate to Thomas' feelings? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. Jesus invited to Thomas to "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side..."
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you try to picture this scene?
 - ? How common an invitation, do you think, is this?
 - ? What other individuals or groups have received a similar invitation?
 - ? Does Jesus' "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," mean that others are less likely to receive a similar invitation?
 - ? In what way might this invitation be extended to you?
- ? Take some time to close your eyes, imagine the Savior standing before you and inviting you to touch him as Thomas and others have been invited to do. What do you see? What do you feel?

Psalm 110.^{1, 4-6}

¹The LORD says to my lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

⁴The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:

“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶He will judge the nations,
heaping up the dead
and crushing the rulers of the whole earth (NIV).

Questionary

For those who wish, here is the KJV.

¹The LORD said unto my Lord,
“Sit thou at my right hand,
until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

⁴The LORD hath sworn,
and will not repent,
“Thou art a priest for ever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord at thy right hand
shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.

⁶He shall judge among the heathen,
he shall fill the places with the dead bodies;
he shall wound the heads over many countries.

1. In addition to Jesus’ suffering and death, his atonement also includes his resurrection, his ascension, and his enthronement in heaven.
 - ? What do you learn about his enthronement and the impact his enthronement has in the real world?
 - ? How do you feel about real-politic impact of Jesus’ enthronement?
 - ? Is the defeat and the end of the kingdoms of this world something that seems desirable to you?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do? What is attractive about the kingdoms of this world that it doesn’t seem desirable, or what is unattractive about the kingdoms of this world that it does seem desirable?
2. Verse 1 speaks of making Messiah’s enemies his “footstool.”
 - ? What does this imagery conjure up in your mind?
3. In addition to the real-politic effects of Jesus’ enthronement, the writer of Hebrews lists several others in chapters 7-10. For example, in chapter 7, we read the following.

“(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, ‘The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:’) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth

to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7.²¹⁻²⁷).

- ? What additional effects and benefits do you identify in this Hebrews passage?
- ? What attributes does Jesus have as a high priest that earthly high priests do not possess?
- ? What do you think and feel when you are reminded that due to personal flaws, religious leaders lack the effectiveness that their followers need, whereas Jesus, because of his lack of flaws, can devote himself full time and without diversion to the needs of his people?

dc 38.¹⁻⁴

¹Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made; ²the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes; ³I am the same which spake, and the world was made, and all things came by me. ⁴I am the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom; and verily, I say, even as many as have believed in my name, for I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them.

Questionary

1. In introducing himself as the source of the revelation found in this 38th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, Jesus adds a number of titles and descriptors of his own Being.
 - ? What titles and descriptors do you identify?
 - ? What do each of the following titles and descriptors teach you about Jesus?
 - “The Lord your God”
 - “The Great I Am”
 - “Alpha and Omega”
 - “Beginning and End”
 - The One “which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven”
 - The One “which knoweth all things”
 - The One before whom “all things are present”
 - The Creator
 - The One “which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom”
2. This same magnificent Being, “spilt” his blood.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the “contradiction”—in the sense that “Jesus suffered greater contradiction than any other man,” Joseph Smith—between who Jesus was and is in eternity and what he experienced in mortality?
3. Jesus says that he has “pleaded before the Father” for all of us “by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt.”
 - ? How and why does Jesus’ experience of spilling his blood allow him to “plead” for us?
 - ? What does this tell you about the Father’s feelings toward Jesus?
 - ? Have you sensed Jesus pleading for you? What were the circumstances? How did it make you feel?

dc 49.⁵⁻⁷

⁵Thus saith the Lord; for I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world for the redemption of the world, and have decreed that he that receiveth him shall be saved, and he that receiveth him not shall be damned—⁶and they have done unto the Son of Man even as they listed; and he has taken his power on the right hand of his glory, and now reigneth in the heavens, and will reign till he descends on the earth to put all enemies under his feet, which time is nigh at hand—⁷I, the Lord God, have spoken it; but the hour and the day no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor shall they know until he comes.

Questionary

1. Those who “receiveth” Jesus “shall be saved.” Those who “receiveth him not shall be damned.”
 - ? What does it mean and what is entailed in receiving Jesus?
 - ? What scriptures would you use to justify your answer?
 - ? “Saved” and “damned” seem to be opposite conditions. What does it mean to be “saved” and “damned”?
 - ? What scriptures would you reference to justify your answer?
2. The Father says that “they have done unto the Son of Man even as they listed (wanted, were inclined).
 - ? Who is the “they”?
 - ? How accurate is it to lay the responsibility of Jesus’ death only upon Romans and Jews who actively participated in Jesus’ death?
 - ? How would you feel about the suggestion that while those who were present during Jesus’ life were the only ones who *could* kill Jesus, they are not the only ones who *would* kill Jesus if they could?
 - ? What responsibility do peoples all over the earth and during all periods of earth history have for Jesus’ death if they would kill him if they could?
3. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and was enthroned on the right hand of God and now “reigneth in the heavens.”
 - ? How does his reign in heaven impact you personally? Daily?
 - ? How does it impact the inhabitants of the planet?
4. Jesus “will reign,” we are informed, “till he descends on the earth to put all enemies under his feet.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What do you think, feel, imagine, when you contemplate “enemies” being “put under his feet”?
 - ? Is this a happy thought or a disturbing one? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Do passages such as the following relate to this putting of enemies under his feet? If so, how?

“And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages, reproving the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble” (84.¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁸).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face. Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord” (112.²³⁻²⁴).

Mosiah 15.⁸⁻⁹

⁸And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—⁹having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

Questionary

1. We have encouraged the creation of “scripture lists” before. These two verses contain quite the list of things Jesus does for humankind as the result of his ascension into heaven where he sits on the right hand of God.
 - ? Make a list of those things on a separate sheet of paper or place numbers—①,②,③, etc.—directly in your scripture text before each benefit?
2. Abinadi says that Jesus possesses “bowels of mercy.”
 - ? What do you think of when you read of “the bowels of mercy”?
 - ? One of the definitions of “bowels” is “the deepest inner parts or areas of something.” Is this how you thought of it? How does it shape your understanding of the phrase?
3. Abinadi says that Jesus stands “betwixt them and justice.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? We often think of “justice” as a good thing, almost synonymous with “fairness” and “equity.” Clearly that meaning of justice is not appropriate here. So, what does “justice” mean in this context? With what words would you replace it?
 - ? It seems that it is a feature of the Book of Mormon that it always thinks of “justice” in negative terms, as if it were synonymous with “punishment” or “negative consequences” and rarely in positive terms. How do you feel about this observation and this feature of Book of Mormon vocabulary?
4. Abinadi says that Jesus “satisfied the demands of justice.”
 - ? What is it that “justice” demands?
 - ? How does Jesus “satisfy” these “demands”?
 - ? What did that “satisfaction” mean for him?
 - ? “Justice” in the negative sense is here almost presented as some sort of cosmic force or entity. How would you feel about viewing it as something entirely human, a psychological response to disappointment and failure? About seeing this manner of speech as rhetorical rather than literal?
 - ? If we take it in that sense, how does Jesus satisfy our inner need for punishment to accompany failure?

Justification: how we repent and change

Enos 1.²⁻⁹

²And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins. ³Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart. ⁴And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens. ⁵And there came a voice unto me, saying:

“Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.”

⁶And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away. ⁷And I said: “Lord, how is it done?” ⁸And he said unto me:

“Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.”

⁹Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.

Questionary

1. This is the first of several stories we will ponder in which individuals or groups repent and come to know and experience God’s forgiveness and acceptance such that they become changed and new people. In each of these stories we will see the same basic pattern.
 - First, there is an individual and spiritual *crisis*. This crisis usually involves the acknowledgement or confession of personal sin, with its attendant pain and insecurity.
 - Second, there is a *confession* and a pleading *prayer* offered on the part of the person or persons in crisis for relief from the crisis
 - Third, there is a *response* from the Lord to the prayer offered in crisis.
 - Fourth, there is a statement of the *reason* that the Lord responded as he did to the individual’s prayer in crisis.

Identify the elements of this pattern as found in Enos’ story.

- ? What is the crisis?
 - ? What is the nature of the prayer?
 - ? What is the nature of the Lord’s response?
 - ? What is the basis for Enos’ healing?
2. While our experiences may not be exactly like that of Enos, each of us can feel peace about past errors and know that God is pleased with us and our imperfect efforts.
 - ? Have you gone through a similar process and experienced God’s forgiveness?
 - ? If not, why not?
 - ? What did Enos have or do that you have not or cannot?

Alma 36.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

¹⁴Yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. ¹⁵Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

¹⁶And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

^{17*}As I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one of two readings examining Alma's experience of repentance and rebirth.

1. In this reading, Alma has, essentially, the same experience as Enos. In examining Enos' repentance, leading to change and rebirth (Enos 1.²⁻⁹), we identified the following pattern or "morphology of rebirth."
 - Individual and spiritual crisis.
 - Confessing of sin and prayer for relief from the crisis
 - A response on the part the Lord to the prayer offered in crisis.
 - A statement of the reason for the Lord's response to the individual's prayer in crisis

? Identify these elements of the pattern in today's reading—some may appear in part 2 (verses 18-23).
2. Alma uses very intense language in describing the crisis stage of his rebirth (verses 14-17).
 - ? What language stands out to you?
 - ? What images and circumstances come to your mind as you consider the following words that Alma uses to describe his crisis?
 - Horror
 - Damned
 - Racked
 - Tormented
 - Harrowed
3. Alma tells us that "the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror."
 - ? How, do you suppose, does God feel about being the cause or object of "horror" in any human being?
 - ? If your sins have ever caused you to feel a similar "horror," how did you overcome such feelings?

Alma 36.¹⁸⁻²³

¹⁸Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart:

“O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me,
who am in the gall of bitterness,
and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.”

¹⁹And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. ²⁰And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! ²¹Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. ²²Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there. ²³But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Questionary

This reading is the second of two that examine Alma’s experience of repentance and rebirth.

1. Alma has, essentially, the same experience as Enos. In examining Enos’ repentance, leading to change and rebirth (Enos 1.²⁻⁹), we identified the following pattern or “morphology of rebirth.”

- Individual and spiritual crisis.
- Confessing of sin and prayer for relief from the crisis
- A response on the part the Lord to the prayer offered in crisis.
- A statement of the reason for the Lord’s response to the individual’s prayer in crisis

? Identify these elements of the pattern in today’s reading. Some will be found in part 1 (vs. 14-17).

2. Many have pointed out that Alma 36 is, in its entirety a chiasm. Without going into detail on the nature of chiasm, we will only say that often a chiasm is used to focus the reader’s attention on the center element. In Alma 36, the following is the center of the chiasm.

“O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me.”

Before this prayer, Alma’s experience is all “crisis.” After this prayer, it was all redemption.

? What is it about this prayer that was so effective in obtaining a positive and redemptive response from God?

? Have you offered such a prayer? How did God respond?

? If you yet need to offer such a sincere prayer, what is stopping you?

4. In verses 19-23, Alma describes the feelings and experiences that came into his life due to God’s response to his prayer of crisis.

? What language does Alma use to express his feelings and experiences of redemption?

? What does the following language bring to your mind?

Joy
Marvelous
Light
Exquisite
Sweet

5. Take a moment to compare and contrast the list words from part 1, words that described Alma’s crisis, and the list of words from today’s reading—words that describe his experience of being

redeemed.

Horror	Joy
Damned	Marvelous
Racked	Light
Tormented	Exquisite
Harrowed	Sweet

- ? What comes to mind when you compare and contrast this two lists?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that it was Alma's prayer that created such a drastic change?
- ? Do you need a change such as this in your life?
- ? If so, what is keeping you from experiencing such a change?

- ? What, if any, application does today's passage have in your life?
- ? How "lively" are the "memories of your own sins"?
- ? What could you do to duplicate Alma's experiences of "deadening" the memories of your sins?

helaman 5. ⁴⁰⁻⁴⁷

^{40*}The Lamanites said unto [Aminadab]: “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?”

⁴¹And Aminadab said unto them: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.”

^{42*}They all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed. ^{43*}When they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from over-shadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire. ⁴⁴And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. ⁴⁵And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words. ^{46*}There came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying:

^{47*}“Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.”

Q

uestionary

1. In a previous readings focused on “How we repent and change,” we identified four elements of forgiveness, conversion, or spiritual rebirth that are found in the account. As a reminder, they are:
 - An individual and spiritual *crisis*.
 - Confessing of sin and a pleading *prayer* offered on the part of the person or persons in crisis for relief from the crisis.
 - A *response* from the Lord to the prayer offered in crisis.
 - A statement of the reason that the Lord responded as he did to the individual’s prayer in crisis.

? While the story found in today’s reading tells a real-life story about how Nephi and Lehi were delivered from a physical prison, it also tells the story of a group of people who were delivered from a spiritual bondage, and were spiritually reborn. Look for the four elements above of spiritual rebirth.
2. The multitude was encouraged to pray “even until ye shall have faith in Christ.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What would it look like to pray until one has faith in Christ?
3. The “cloud of darkness” here is literal. However, it also plays a symbolic role.
 - ? What is its symbolism?
4. We read that the multitude heard “a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying: ‘Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.’”
 - ? What do you see and hear when you imagine this experience in your mind?
 - ? What does it mean to you that Jesus “was from the foundation of the world”?
 - ? Have you heard God speak peace to you and been “filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory”?

Alma 22.¹⁵⁻¹⁸

¹⁵* After Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: “What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold,” said he, “I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.”

¹⁶But Aaron said unto him: “If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.”

¹⁷When Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

¹⁸“O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day.”

And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

Questionary

1. Today’s reading is another in our series of atonement readings relating to *How we Repent and Change*.
 - ? What realizations brought the king to his desire to repent and experience the love of God in his life?
 - ? What was the king willing to give up that he might know the joy of feeling God’s love and forgiveness?
 - ? What have you given up or what are you willing to give up in order to experience the reality of God’s love and forgiveness?
2. The king speaks of “having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast.” Think about this idea of “rooting out.”
 - ? What do you picture in your mind when you contemplate “rooting out”?
If wickedness has taken “root,” it is deep and tenacious.
 - ? Is there a sin or weakness in your life that is more than superficial, that has a bit of a root?
Getting rid of such things can be difficult and painful. “Rooting out” a weed tends to tear the soil a bit.
 - ? Are you willing to experience this type of temporary pain in order to bring about a greater and longer-term benefit?

Mosiah 4.¹⁻³

¹*When king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. ²And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying:

“O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.”

³And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

Questionary

1. Remember the pattern of rebirth that we have seen in the other readings under the title “How we Repent and Change”:

- Personal Crisis
- Personal Prayer
- The Lord’s Response
- Reason for the Response

? Can you identify these elements in today’s reading?

? How did it contribute to King Benjamin’s experience of being born again?

? What were the key things that the people of King Benjamin did in order to be born again—that is, to be “filled with joy,” to receive a “remission of their sins,” and to have “peace of conscience.”

? How do you feel about our identification of being “filled with joy,” receiving a “remission of sins,” and having “peace of conscience with being “born again”?”

2. The text records that the people of King Benjamin “viewed themselves in their own carnal state.”

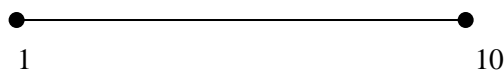
? What does this mean to you?

? Is this a “viewing” or “revelation” with which you can relate?

? Have you experienced a crisis similar to what King Benjamin’s people had when “they... viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth”?

? If so, what did you do about it? How did you resolve it?

? On a scale of 1 to 10—‘10’ being: “I have experienced, and feel today the kind of ‘joy,’ ‘remission of sins,’ and ‘peace of conscience’ that is spoken of in today’s reading;” and ‘1’ being: “I have not experienced the kind of ‘joy,’ ‘remission of sins,’ and ‘peace of conscience’ that is spoken of in today’s reading, and am not sure that I can”—where are you in following the example of King Benjamin’s people?



? If you are not today where you would like to be, what could you do to imitate King Benjamin’s people and move toward it?

Mosiah 27.²³⁻²⁹

²³*After they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

²⁴“For,” said he, “I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. ²⁵And the Lord said unto me:

‘Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; ²⁶and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.’

²⁷“I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off. ²⁸Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. ²⁹My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.”

Q

uestionary

In a previous atonement reading (Alma 36.¹⁴⁻²³), we reviewed Alma the Younger’s reflections with his son, Helaman, concerning his conversion; i.e., how he repented and began to change. In today’s reading, we look at Alma the Younger’s thoughts and feels in the immediate aftermath of his conversion.

1. In reviewing Alma the Younger’s later reflections on his conversion experience, we looked at words and phrases Alma used to describe his experience.
 - ? What words and phrases does Alma use in today’s reading to describe that from which God delivered him?
 - ? What images and feelings do these words and phrases bring to you heart and mind?
 - Everlasting burning
 - Bands of Iniquity
 - Eternal Torment
 - Gall of bitterness
 - Darkest Abyss
 - ? How do each of these represent a portion of what we would unavoidably experience without the Savior and his Atonement?
 - ? Have you to any degree felt the reality of such things in your life?
2. In speaking of his conversion, or his deliverance from the above realities, Alma uses another set of words and phrases.
 - ? What words or phrases does Alma use to describe his conversion?
 - ? Think about each of these words or phrases. Ponder their real-life meanings as well as their spiritual meanings?
 - Redeemed (bought back)
 - Born again
 - Changed
 - Snatched
 - ? In what settings, for example, would the word ‘snatched’ be used?
 - ? What does the word, “snatched” imply?
 - ? Consider the imagery of physical birth as a metaphor for spiritual change and conversion.

- What do you see in a real live birth that can be likened to spiritual rebirth?
- ? Is the child a fully formed and mature adult at birth?
 - ? Does its immaturity, its “imperfections” and “weaknesses” diminish or cancel in any way the reality of its having been born?
 - ? How does this apply to our own spiritual rebirth and life-time development?
 - ? What do you feel when you consider that one can be born again without being “fully developed spiritually”?
 - ? What do you feel when you consider that just as a child’s without flaws—not being able to walk, for example—does not negate its birth and being, so ones spiritual flaws, sometimes serious, does not negate one’s spiritual rebirth?
3. Alma teaches that “all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again... and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.”
- ? How do you feel about the requirement that one be born again to enter the kingdom of God?

Consider the Doctrine and Covenants’ description of those who enter Celestial glory.

“They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—that by keeping the commandments [the commands to receive and believe in Jesus and be baptized] they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true” (DC 76.⁵¹⁻⁵³).

- ? How is Alma’s teaching concerning the necessity of being born again corroborated by the Doctrine and Covenants’ description of those who enter Celestial glory?
- ? Have you been born again and thus made worthy to enter the kingdom of God or Celestial glory?
- ? If not, why not?

Alma 5.⁷⁻¹⁴

⁷Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

⁸And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not. ⁹And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

¹⁰And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell? ¹¹Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them? ¹²And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true. ¹³And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

¹⁴And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Questionary

1. Alma uses several phrases to describe the spiritual state of his “fathers” before their spiritual rebirth.
 - ? What phrases do you identify as descriptive of these un-regenerated individuals?
2. Alma speaks of his “fathers” as being “in a deep sleep,” “in the midst of darkness,” encircled about by the bands of death,” and “encircled about by the chains of hell.” Finally he teaches that an “everlasting destruction did await them.”
 - ? How do you feel about Alma’s description of the human spiritual state before spiritual rebirth?
 - ? How broadly true is this of each individual?
3. Alma teaches that his “fathers” escaped all of this by being born again. Again, he uses several phrases to describe their regenerated state.
 - ? What phrases does he use?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the following phrases and the contrast that they represent with the life that existed before?
 - “He changed their hearts”
 - “He awakened them”
 - “Their souls were illuminated”
 - “Their souls did expand”
 - “They did sing redeeming love”
 - “They are saved”
 - “They were faithful until the end”
 - They “received his image in [their] countenance”
4. After describing the spiritual state of his “fathers” both before and after spiritual rebirth, Alma asks his audience to consider several questions concerning their own spiritual state.
 - ? What questions does he ask?
 - ? Ask and answer each of the following questions for yourself.

- Have I spiritually been born of God?
 - Have I received his image in my countenance?
 - Have I experienced this mighty change in my heart?
 - Have I experienced an illumination or expansion of my soul?
5. Alma speaks of his “fathers” as “singing redeeming love” after their spiritual rebirth.
 - ? What does that look like?
 - ? What does it feel like?
 - ? Do you find yourself doing so regularly?
 - ? What are the words to your own song of redeeming love?
 6. Verse 11 provides a key to having one’s heart changed, or being born of God. As you consider the “how is it done?” question, cross reference the following passages: 2 Ne. 26.⁸; Jac. 6.⁸; Mos. 15.¹¹; D.C. 20.²⁶.
 - ? Is the emphasis on believing the prophets one of general belief in prophets, or a more focused belief in a specific message that dominates their call?
 - ? How do those who minister to you testify of Christ and his regenerating power?
 7. Consider rereading Alma 36, Mosiah 4, and/or Enos 1 where other’s experience of being born of God is recorded.
 - ? Do you find the same feelings and experiences there that Alma describes in today’s passage?

Alma 7.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

¹⁴Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. ¹⁵Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

Questionary

1. Alma teaches that we must “be born again” or we “cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “be born again”?
 - ? Have you been born again? How would you know?

In association with being “born again,” Alma mentions baptism, repentance, and faith. These three represent three of the four “First Four Principles of the Gospel.

? How do the first four principles relate to being “born again”?

2. Alma admonishes us to “lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you.” Compare this with Nephi’s confession found in 2 Nephi 4.¹⁸.

“I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.”

- ? How do you feel about this idea that temptation and sin “easily besets” us?
- ? Is this consistent with your own experience?

Moses 6.⁵⁹⁻⁶²

⁵⁹That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; ⁶⁰for by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified; ⁶¹therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven; the Comforter; the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment. ⁶²And now, behold, I say unto you: This is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten, who shall come in the meridian of time.

Questionary

1. We have often spoken of the frequent need for a crisis before we truly seek to be born again/justified/be forgiven/receive a remission of sins.
 - ? What language in today's language is likely to create a spiritual crisis in one's life if the language is taken seriously and personally?
2. As we have seen in previous readings, the spiritual rebirth is patterned after the physical birth with water, blood, and spirit being present in both
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when you contemplate that just as your immortal spirit must enter the physical body to bring and sustain temporal life, so must the Holy Spirit of God enter into your life to bring and sustain spiritual life in this world and the world to come?
 - ? How does the Holy Spirit act to sustain spiritual life?
3. Enoch speaks of "enjoy[ing] the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come."
 - ? What does it mean to "enjoy the words of eternal life in this world?"
 - ? How is your enjoyment of "the words of eternal life" manifest in your daily life?
4. Enoch teaches that
 - "by the water ye keep the commandment..."
 - "by the Spirit ye are justified..."
 - "and by the blood ye are sanctified."
 - ? What do each of these mean to you?
 - ? How does Enoch's "by the water ye keep the commandment," clarify the following statement concerning "keeping the commandments" and the "commandments" that are to be kept in order to "be washed and cleansed from all... sins" (be born again) and so receive a celestial glory?
 - "They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true" (DC 76.⁵¹⁻⁵³).
 - ? How do you feel about the contention that the commandments that must be kept to be forgiven are faith and baptism?

- ? How about the contention that keeping all and every commandment is not a prerequisite for forgiveness/being born again/entering the celestial glory?
- 5. Enoch describes the Holy Spirit, principle agent in our justification/being born again/forgiveness, with the following words and phrases.
 - “The record of heaven”
 - “The Comforter”
 - “The peaceable things of immortal glory”
 - “The truth of all things”
 - “That which quickeneth all things”
 - “That which maketh alive all things”
 - “That which knoweth all things”
 - “That which hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment”
- ? What do each of these attributes of the Holy Spirit mean to you?
- ? To what degree have you and do you experience these spiritual manifestations in your life?

Psalm 51.¹⁻⁶

- ¹Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy lovingkindness:
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies
blot out my transgressions.
- ²Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³For I acknowledge my transgressions:
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done this evil in thy sight:
that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,
and be clear when thou judgest.
- ⁵Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- ⁶Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Questionary

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's reading is the first of three from Psalm 51 and is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "How We Repent and Change." *

Because this psalm's superscription connects it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation l^e-david may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. In the Book of Mosiah, King Benjamin comments, "ye have been calling on his [God's] name, and begging for a remission of your sins' (Mosiah 4.²⁰). He also asks "Are we not all beggars?" (vs. 19)
? How does the Psalmist reflect this same truth that we are beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness? Consider particularly verse 1
2. We will read the Psalmist's "according to thy lovingkindness" as "because of thy lovingkindness (or fidelity)." We will read his "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies," "in keeping with the multitude of thy tender mercies."

- ? Do such readings change the way you understand the Psalmist's request for "lovingkindness" and "mercy"?
- ? Do they shed light on the reality of our being beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness?
- 3. Unlike Psalm 38, where the Psalmist utilized several intense metaphors to describe the depth of his sin and the remorse that he felt for them, the Psalmist does not use intense imagery in this Psalm. But his language does reflect a similar intensity.
 - ? How does the Psalmist get across the intensity he feels about his sins in today's reading?
 - ? What is the impact of the Psalmist's use of so many words associated with error: "transgressions" (twice), "iniquity," "sin, sinned" (three times), and "evil"?
 - ? How does this reflect his intensity of feelings?
 - ? What other language reflects the Psalmist's strong feelings?
 - ? What does the Psalmist ask God to do with his sins?
 - ? When you think of "blotting out" and "washing thoroughly," what images come to your mind?
 - ? How are they appropriate images in reflecting what we hope God will do with our sins?
- ? How will today's reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

1 John 1.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Questionary

1. According to John, those who refuse to acknowledge sin reveal several things concerning their perspectives about themselves and God.
 - ? What are those things revealed?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a form of self-deception?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a rejection of truth and the word of God?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a rejection of God's faithfulness, or commitment to us?

2. Immediately after warning about the evils of refusing to acknowledge our sins and sinfulness, John reminds us that God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins."
 - ? What is the significance of this follow up to the warning about refusing to acknowledge sin and sinfulness?
 - ? God has unambiguously taught that "all have sinned" and that He, Himself, can be counted on to be on our side, as well as being compassionate and friendly to those who trust Him. How does a refusal to acknowledge sin make a liar of God on both counts?
 - ? Why can it be so difficult to acknowledge, both to ourselves and to God, our sins?
 - ? What sins and weaknesses are in your life that you have been reluctant to acknowledge?

Psalm 51.⁷⁻¹²

- ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness;
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- ⁹Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹Cast me not away from thy presence;
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;
and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Questionary

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance.

Today's reading, the second of three from Psalm 51. It also represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Justification: How We Repent and Change." *

Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

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For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 6 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In today's passage, the Psalmist makes several requests.
 - ? What are those requests?
 - ? What comes to your mind when you consider the following requests that the Psalmist makes of God?
 - Purge me with hyssop
 - Hide thy face from my sins
 - Create in me a clean heart
 - Renew a right spirit within me
 - Cast me not away from thy presence
 - ? How does actually "*create* a clean heart" where it does not exist?

- ? How does he “renew a right spirit”?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What role do you play in this divine “creative” and “renewing” work?
 - ? How does this “creative” and “renewing” go beyond the request for mere “cleansing”?
2. In verse 9, the Psalmist makes use of two very different metaphor’s for forgiveness. In the first God covers his eyes so that he does not even see the sin. In the second, God seems almost to attack and annihilate sin.
- ? What do you think when you contemplate these two different ways of viewing forgiveness?
 - ? Why, do you think, does the Psalmist resort to so many different metaphors for forgiveness—sometimes presenting metaphors that seem to contradict each other (for how could God attack something that he refuses to see)?
- ? How will today’s reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create, renew, and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

Renewal: hope, joy, peace, and power of atonement

Psalm 130.¹⁻⁸

¹Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice:
let thine ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications.

³If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

⁵I wait for the LORD,
my soul doth wait,
and in his word do I hope.

⁶My soul waiteth for the Lord
more than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

⁷Let Israel hope in the LORD:
for with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.

⁸And he shall redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Questionary

Psalm 130 is one of the “Psalms of Ascent.” It is also the sixth of seven Penitential Psalms.

1. Psalm 130 might be thought of as a prayer offered in association with a “sin offering.”
 - ? How does this possibility impact how you understand the psalm and the feeling that you get from it?
2. The Psalmist begins his prayer by informing God that his prayer is coming “out of the depths.”
 - ? What do you see when you imagine “depths”?
 - We avoid deep places. Such places are dark and cold. Deep places intimidate us. If we are talking about watery depths, then deep places suffocate and kill.
 - ? As you consider this psalm, what are the “depths” that threaten the Psalmist?
 - ? The depths are a metaphor for the Psalmist’s iniquities— abundant enough to bury, and threaten to snuff out his life. Have you felt your sins to be threatening?
 - ? How were they threatening and what did you do about it?
3. Consider the question posed by the Psalmist: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”
 - ? What do you think about this question?
 - ? What is the answer to the Psalmist’s question?
 - ? What does it mean to “mark” sin?
 - ? Does anyone live without iniquities?
 - ? If we accept the implied answer that no one lives without sin and that no one can stand before God if he marks their sins, who will be able to stand before the Lord?
 - ? What is it that gives anyone the ability to stand before the Lord?

4. The Psalmist's question suggests that the Lord does not "mark" our sins? To "mark" means to "call to mind," "acknowledge," "pay attention."
 - ? What do you think about the suggestion that the Lord does not "take note" of all our iniquities?
 - ? What makes it possible for him to "overlook" our iniquities?
 - ? What does this suggest about the character of God?
 - ? How does God's feelings of at-one-ment—connectedness, attachment, unity—with us influence this willingness to overlook the sin we inevitably commit?

5. In verse 6 the Psalmist says that he "waiteth for the Lord."
 - ? What do you think the Psalmist is waiting for?

Consider the possibility that the Psalmist is waiting to hear the voice of the Lord come into his mind, as Enos did, that his sins are forgiven, or, in other words, that the Lord refuses to "mark" his "iniquities."
 - ? Have you sensed this willingness on the part of God to not "mark your iniquities"?
 - ? What does it mean to "wait"? What kind of a wait is it? Is it an anxious, uncertain wait? Or is it a hopeful, expectant wait?

The Hebrew word suggests the latter.

6. Think about the Psalmist's confession that he waits on the Lord "more than they that watch for the morning."
 - ? How confident and expectant are you that the morning will arrive?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy about the Lord's willingness to forgive you?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy that the Lord does and will forgive you?
 - ? What is the basis for the Psalmist's confidence? How does verse 7 answer this question?

Psalm 32.¹⁻⁵

¹Blessed is he

whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no guile [guilt].

³When I kept silence,
my bones waxed old
through my roaring all the day long.

⁴For day and night
thy hand was heavy upon me:
my moisture is turned
into the drought of summer.

⁵I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
and mine iniquity have I not hid.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD;"
And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Q

uestionary

1. There are any number of English words that can be used for human weakness.
 - ? How many and which ones does the Psalmist use in today's reading?
 - ? What does it suggest to you about the Psalmist's feelings, that he utilizes so many such words in a passage as short as today's reading ("transgression," "sin," "iniquity," and "guilt.")?
 - ? Are you ever overcome and "obsessed" by feelings of guilt over your sins?
2. The Psalmist speaks of a time when he suffered because he "kept silence."
 - ? What did the Psalmist keep silent about?
3. After some stubbornness (see verse 3), the Psalmist finally confessed, or acknowledged his sin. Verse 5 of today's reading describes one thing that we must do in order to be forgiven. We must "confess," or "acknowledge" our sins. This applies to both specific sins and our general sinfulness. We must acknowledge specific sins and ask for help to overcome them. We must also acknowledge the truth that no matter how hard we try, we frequently come short of our expectations.
 - ? Why is it so important to God that we acknowledge our sin?
 - ? Why is it sometimes so difficult to acknowledge our sin?
 - ? How do you feel about the Lord's quick response to the Psalmist's delayed confession?
 - ? Do you believe the Lord will respond as quickly and faithfully to your confession of sinfulness?
4. Consider the Brother of Jared's frank confession:

"... Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that *we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually*; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires" (Ether 3.²).

Consider, too, the confession of the writer of the Lectures on Faith:

"...such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that he is *liable to sin continually*" (Lecture 3:20, questions and answers)

- ? How can we make such faithful confession without feeling demeaned, or engaging in ungodly and unfaithful self-hate?

? Why is it so important to do this?

5. A “blessed” person is one who has been forgiven or whose sins are not “imputed” to them.

? What does “impute” mean?

? Why does the Psalmist not say that the blessed person is one who does not sin?

6. In Romans 4.⁶⁻⁸, the apostle Paul quotes verses 1-2 to explain what he means when he speaks of “justification.” When Paul speaks of a man or woman being justified, he is talking about their being forgiven for the sins that they inevitably commit. Paul’s “justification” or “forgiveness of sins” is discussed in the Book of Mormon under the rubric of being “Born of God.” So...

“Justification,” “forgiveness,” and being “born of God” are different ways of speaking of the same spiritual experience.

? Have you experienced justification, forgiveness, or the new birth?

? If not, why do you think you have not felt this powerful encouragement?

? Which is most likely? 1) You haven’t experienced it because of your own distrust of God, or
2) You have not experienced it because God has not found you to have done what is necessary?

Alma 26.¹⁷⁻²¹

¹⁷Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

¹⁸Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

¹⁹Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction?

Yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

²⁰Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

²¹And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things?

I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

Q

uestionary

1. I have reformatted today's reading in order to call attention to the series of six questions that Ammon asks.
 - ? Take a few moments to answer each of these questions and to consider why you answer as you do?
 - ? On what are your answers based?
 - ? Are they based on "doctrinal" or "theological" understanding, your own personal experience, or both?
2. The first two questions seem rhetorical, anticipating an obvious answer of "No one." The third question, "Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?" also seems rhetorical—again, "No one." But it also contains an implied assertion. It seems to assert that God's mercy goes beyond that which the human mind and heart anticipates or would predict.
 - ? What do you think and feel about the implied assertion?
 - ? Again, do you think and feel as you do because of a "doctrinal" or "theological" understanding, or because of your own experience with God?
 - ? Has he been merciful toward you in ways that seem beyond a reasonable expectation?
 - ? What other scriptures come to mind that suggest that God is extravagant in his mercy?
3. Ammon's fourth and fifth question seem to go beyond rhetorical. In fact, they almost seem beyond human capacity to answer. These two questions are:
 - Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction?
 - Yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?
 - ? As you continue to contemplate the generosity of God, do you answer the same as before? Has your answer expanded? If so, how?
 - ? How does an apparently correct response, "because he is merciful," still leave one feeling confused, feeling as though one was witnessing something beyond one's ability to "suppose"?
4. Ammon's final question, "And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things?" seems almost rhetorical as well, with an anticipated answer "None." At the same time, it invites the reader to introspection.
 - ? Do I know these things? Do I know that God's mercy goes beyond all human expectation or supposition? Do I know and understand that in my limited human comprehension God cannot be manipulated or predicted?
 - ? Or am I a "natural man" who remains ignorant of God's boundless mercy because of my lack

of experience with him?

5. In addition to the six questions, there are six statements or exclamations.
 - ? As you examine these, do you find yourself in agreement with Ammon, both intellectually and emotionally?

Enos 1.²⁷

²⁷And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me:

“Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father.”

Amen.

Questionary

1. In today's reading, we have opportunity to compare our own feelings, testimony, and assurance with those of a “holy man.”
 - ? Do you share Enos' feelings of assurance?
 - ? Do you now feel that you are at “rest” in and with your Redeemer? Do you have a witness that you will “rest” in and with your Redeemer in eternity?
 - ? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Enos rejoices that in death, he would “see [God's] face with pleasure.”
 - ? Close your eyes and view yourself standing before God. Can you see yourself standing before God and seeing “his face with pleasure”?
3. Enos believes and, indeed, senses that a “mansion” is being prepared for him. Read Jesus' comforting announcement found in John 14.¹⁻³.

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

 - ? How does this passage relate to Enos' confident assurance?
 - ? Imagine the Savior “preparing a mansion” for you. What is the nature of his efforts?
 - ? How does the Savior's preparations for you in eternity affect the way you feel and act today?

Romans 8.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. ¹⁵For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry,

“Abba, Father.”

¹⁶The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ¹⁷And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Questionary

1. As Jesus did during his earthly ministry, Paul refers to Heavenly Father as “Abba.”
 - ? If you need to, look this word up. What does this word mean?
 - ? What do Jesus and Paul want to suggest and have you understand by referring to and calling upon Heavenly Father as “Papa,” or “Daddy”?
 - ? Are you comfortable addressing Heavenly Father in such intimate terms?
 - ? What does your answer to the previous question suggest about your relationship with Heavenly Father?
 - ? How does the Savior’s atonement reveal the truth of Heavenly Father’s feelings of intimacy with us?
2. Paul suggests here, as he does elsewhere (see, for example, Ephesians 1.5), that we are “adopted” children of God.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about being an “adopted” child, rather than a “natural born” child?
 - ? What do you suppose Paul is teaching through this choice of language?
3. Paul suggests here that we are “children,” “heirs of God,” and “joint-heirs with Christ” *“if so be that we suffer with him.”*
 - ? What, do you think, does it mean to “suffer with him”?
 - ? How do you feel about the necessity of “suffering with him” in order to possess the promised blessings?
 - ? What role does the Spirit play in our understanding God’s feelings of intimacy with us, in our feeling intimacy with him, and in our understanding of our worth?

2corinthians 5.¹⁷⁻²¹

¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. ¹⁸And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. ²¹For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Qquestionary

1. Paul speaks of God “not imputing their trespasses unto them.”
 - ? What does it mean to “impute”?
 - Read Psalm 130.³⁻⁴ and Romans 4.⁶⁻⁸ found below.

“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee...”

“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying,
‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’”
 - ? How do these two passages relate and enhance Paul’s statement in today’s reading?
2. Paul says “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”
 - ? How is this different than if Paul had said “that God was in Christ, reconciling himself unto the world”?
 - ? What does it say about Heavenly Father’s character that he does not need to reconcile himself unto us?
 - ? What does it suggest about Heavenly Father’s feelings toward us that he had no need to be reconciled to us?
3. Paul says that those who are “in Christ,” are “new creatures;” that “old things are passed away;” and that “all things are become new.”
 - ? How have these truths been reflected in your life?
 - ? What “old things” have passed from your life because of Christ?
 - ? What new things have entered your life because of Christ?
4. We speak often of Jesus having “taken upon himself our sins.”
 - ? What imagery comes to mind when you consider this language?
 - Paul uses different language here. He says that God “made him [Christ] to be sin for us.”
 - ? How do you feel about this language?
 - ? How does it alter how you think of Jesus and the impact of his atonement upon himself?
 - In saying that Jesus “took upon himself our sins,” it can almost seem as if “sin” remains “external” to him, as if he bore a weight on his back.” Paul’s language that Jesus was “made sin” seems to reflect the fact that “sin” became, somehow “internal” to him.
 - ? How do you feel about “sin” being, somehow, an “internal” rather than merely an “external” phenomenon in Jesus’ Being?

2 Nephi 2.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸Wherefore, 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, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. ⁹Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved. ¹⁰And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him.

Questionary

1. Lehi teaches 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.”
 - ? What is a “merit”?
 - ? What is a “demerit”? How does contemplating “demerits” help you understand and appreciate “merits”?
 - ? How do you feel about the necessity of relying upon Jesus’ “merits” rather than your own?
 - ? How do Jesus’ merits become applied to you
2. Lehi speaks of Jesus making “intercession.”
 - ? What does this mean, in general?
 - ? What does it mean in the context of today’s reading?
 - ? One who “intercedes is often called an “advocate.” How does Jesus’ intercession as our advocate relate to his “answering the ends of the law”?
 - ? What might an advocate feel, say, and do in behalf of a broken individual?
 - ? Have you felt the need for an advocate?
 - ? Have you felt the Savior advocating for you?
 - ? Have you experienced his advocacy?

If so, take a moment to write the experiences down. If not, take a moment to write what you might not have considered or what you might have done to deny yourself this privilege.

2 Nephi 2:4-7—

⁴And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free. ⁵And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever. ⁶Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. ⁷Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

Questionary

1. Lehi teaches his son that “salvation is free.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?

We speak of “free markets.” This does not mean that everything in the market is without cost, but that everything in the market is open to all for purchase.
 - ? How does this relate to Lehi’s “free” salvation?
2. Lehi teaches that “by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off.” We might be tempted to read this in light of the apostle Paul’s doctrine of justification through faith without works. However, Paul’s thought was formed in the context of the debate swirling in the early Christian church concerning the law of Moses and his relationship with one’s right standing with God. Lehi’s teaching concerning justified must be placed in a different context.
 - ? In Lehi’s discussion, what “law” “cuts off” men?
 - ? How would you feel about thinking of the “law” as Lehi talks of it as something other than the Law of Moses?
 - ? What does he mean by a “temporal” law and a “spiritual” law?
 - ? How does the “law,” or the commandments as we presently have and live them serve to “cut us off” from God?
 - ? What is the remedy to this “cutting off?”
3. Lehi says that Jesus “answers the ends of the law.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What does “the law” say that Jesus “responds to”? (Hint: the answer is found in verses 4-5)
 - ? If the law claims that you are “unjustified,” “guilty,” “cut off” from God, and incapable of achieving anything “good,” what is Jesus’ response?
4. Lehi promises that the Savior offers himself for “all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” We sometimes read this as if it were a “command:” “If you want me to respond to the law’s verdict of “guilty,” and make you “not-guilty,” you had better have a broken heart and a contrite heart. Otherwise...
 - ? Is this how you read it? How do you feel about this reading?
 - ? What if we read it, not as a demand, but as an “invitation:” “If those of you who are broken, wounded, sick, or in other way not whole come to me, I will respond to the law’s charge that you are guilty by defending you as “not-guilty”?”
 - ? How do you feel about this reading?

I suggest that the latter reading is always how passages that speak of the broken hearted and contrite in spirit are to be read. It is welcoming invitation not strict demand.
 - ? Those who are spiritually broken, or wounded, are sometimes reluctant to approach their God. They think to wait until they are “better,” “healed,” or have “put themselves back together.” What would this passage say to such individuals?

Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹⁴

- ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
⁹He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³Like as a father pitieth his children,
so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.
¹⁴For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust.

Questionary

1. In verses 8-10, the Psalmist makes several straightforward theological assertions concerning God's character. Then, in verses 11-12, the Psalmist abandons straightforward theological statements for powerful imagery to portray the character of God. Finally, verses 13-14 describe how the divine character directly impacts us.
 - ? What assertions does the Psalmist make about God's character?
 - ? How do these divine attributes impact human beings? You, in your day-to-day life?
 - ? Is there one attribute of God that the Psalmist mentions with which you have had little experience?
 - ? What could you do to discover and appreciate this heretofore un-experienced divine attribute?
2. The Psalmist testifies that God is not one who is constantly "chiding."
 - ? What does it mean to "chide."
 - ? How do the following definitions of the Hebrew word used here, *rib*, alter or amplify your understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the divine character?
 - "accuse"
 - "upbraid"
 - "prosecute"
 - "feel adversity with"
 - "feel quarrelsome toward"

Consider this very well-known passage—one that might be thought of as foundational to the LDS Church.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1.⁵).

- ? How does this passage relate to today's reading?

Our normal reading of James, focuses on his testimony that God answers sincere prayers. This strikes me as a fairly ho-hum observation, and one that largely misses James' point. What kind of God would he be if he *did not* answer sincere prayers of the faithful? Not one that would interest me.

- ? But, what about the prayer of one who might be open to an "upbraiding"? Will he answer them?
- ? What role, do you think, did James' testimony that God "upbraideth not" those who come to him with a need play in Joseph's determination to pray, as opposed to the simple observation

that God answers prayers? (There is strong evidence that Joseph Smith painfully felt unworthy and sinful at the time of his “First Vision.”)

- ? How do you feel and how does it impact your own prayer life to understand the focus of James’ testimony to be that God “upbraideth not” those who pray to him in need rather than the mere fact of God’s answering a prayer of need?
 - ? What does it mean to you to know that the Lord is not inclined to “chide,” or “upbraid,” over sin?
 - ? Is this consistent with your feelings about and experiences with God? If not, what do you need to know, do, feel, and experience to experience God as the Psalmist did?
3. Consider this part of the Psalmist’s testimony concerning God’s character as it relates directly to us.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

- ? How do you feel about God dealing and rewarding us in ways that do not exactly match or reflect our actions?
 - ? How does God do this and remain just?
 - ? Is this consistent with your conception of and experience with him?
 - ? How has he demonstrated to you that at given moments and after certain erroneous actions he was not dealing with you as your actions might have “deserved”?
4. One of the great things about poetic imagery is that it allows us to form pictures in our heads.
- ? What pictures come into your mind when you consider the following two images.

“For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”

And

“As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Take a few minutes to consider the size and scope of the universe. Feel free to do a quick Google search of “the universe” and look at some of the images.

- ? Just how big is the universe?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the Psalmist’s testimony that God’s mercy is as expansive as the universe is large?
- ? How closely does this match your experience with God?
- ? Have you experienced this extreme, even extravagant generosity?
- ? What does your answer to the previous question suggest about your relationship with God?
- ? What do we call the furthest extent of our sight on earth?
- ? How well do you make out objects at the far horizon of your view?
- ? If God symbolically removes your sins as far as your eastern horizon is from your western horizon, what is their impact going to be on you? How well can you “see” them?

The imagery of moving our sins as far away from us as our eastern horizon is from our western horizon is a way of saying that God removes our sins further from us than can be measured, reducing their impact upon us to near nothingness.

- ? How does this square with your experiences with God, his willingness to forgive, and the extent of his forgiveness?
5. Verse 8 reminded us that God’s generosity is due to the divine character of God. He is a merciful and gracious Being. Verses 13-14 give us another reason that He is so generous with us.
- ? What is that reason?

God is an amazing Father. That is true. But there is another reason given here. God is not only generous with us because of His character and His divine parentage, but because of who and what we are as well. We “are dust.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? How do you feel being thought of as somewhat vulnerable, in need of help, protection, and “pity.” (The Hebrew verb translated as “pity” here comes from the noun for “womb,” and seems to reflect the tender and protective feelings a mother has for her infant.)
- ? Again, what does it suggest about God and his relationship with us that he is “protective” of us, especially in regard to our sins?

Alma 33.¹²⁻¹⁶

¹²And now Alma said unto them: “Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? ¹³Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said:

‘Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.’

¹⁴Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God? ¹⁵For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—¹⁶For behold, he said:

‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.’

Q

uestionary

- ? As you consider today’s reading, of what specific hope, joy, peace, and power are you invited to partake of?
2. Alma specifically highlights two quotations: one from Zenos and one from Zenock.
 - ? What are you invited to understand and respond to in these two quotations?
3. Reconsider the quotation from Zenock, which begins with “For behold, he said: ‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because...’” Stop there. We might finish the sentence with any number of things that the Lord might be saddened to find in our lives.
 - ? Take a few minutes to make a list of a few of those things.
 - ? If you had not read the rest of the verse already, would you have thought to include, “because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son”?
 - ? Would you have thought of this as one of the things that saddens God?
 - ? Why do you think this is true? Why is Heavenly Father saddened when we do not understand his mercy?
 - ? What negative consequences can this lack of understanding bring into our lives?
 - ? What is your own understanding concerning the mercy God bestow upon you because of his Son?
 - ? Are there times and ways when you are guilty of misunderstanding” God’s mercy? When? Why?
4. Zenock speaks of “understanding” the mercies that Father has bestowed upon us because of his Son.
 - ? What do you think is meant by “understand”?
 - ? Is understanding about more than mental and intellectual comprehension? Could we read “understand” as “experience”?
 - ? What does it mean to “experience” Father’s mercies which he has bestowed upon us because of thy Son.’
 - ? Have you done so?
5. Alma highlights Zenos’ testimony that Father “hast turned away [His] judgments because of [His] Son.
 - ? What does the “turning away of judgments” mean to you?
 - ? Is it significant that it is “judgments,” plural, rather than “judgment,” singular?
 - ? Is this something that you can experience in the here and now?
 - ? Have you felt this “turning away of judgments” in your life?
 - ? How does the following passage relate to God’s “turning away His judgments”?

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹²).

- ? How do you feel about God “not rewarding us according to our iniquities”?
- ? Have you experienced this divine bestowal of mercy?
- ? What feelings does such a bestowal of mercy produce in you?

Luke 8.²⁶⁻³⁹

²⁶And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. ²⁷And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not." ²⁹(For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

³⁰And Jesus asked him, saying, "What is thy name?"

And he said, "Legion:" because many devils were entered into him.

³¹And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. ³²And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. ³³Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

³⁴When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. ³⁶They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

³⁷Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. ³⁸Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹"Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee."

And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

Questionary

1. Luke describes "a certain man" that met Jesus when he "arrived at the country of the Gadarenes."

? How does Luke characterize him?

? What do Matthew and Mark add to the description?

"And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way" (Matthew 8:²⁸).

"Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: ⁴ Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. ⁵ And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones" (Mark 5:³⁻⁵).

? What do the following descriptions of the man suggest about his psychological state?

- He "ware no clothes."
- He "neither abode in any house, but in the tombs."
- He "was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands."
- He "was driven of the devil into the wilderness."
- He was "exceeding fierce."
- "Neither could any man tame him."
- He "cut himself with stones."

? How does the man feel about himself?

- ? How does he feel about others?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when we suggest that in his living in the tombs and cutting himself with stones, the man evidences a desire to be dead and attempted suicide?
2. The man's initial response to Jesus' presence was, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this feeling of unworthiness was not only possessed by "the legions of devils" but also by the man himself?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the man himself thought of Jesus as a "tormentor"?
 - ? How do we often possess the same feelings of unworthiness and distrust of Jesus' love and commitment to us that this man felt?
 3. We have examined the character and manner of life of the man with a legion of devils and how he felt about himself before his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? Now, make a list of how the man is described after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? How, do you think, does the man now think of himself? Why do you answer as you do?

After his encounter with Jesus, the man...

is found "sitting at the feet of Jesus."

is found "clothed."

is found to be "in his right mind."

- ? What do you think and feel as you contemplate the transformation between what the man was before and after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? What might Luke want you to learn from this dramatic difference from "before" and "after"?
4. Compare the man's feelings about being in the presence of Jesus before (vs. 28) and after (vs. 38) his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? How do you feel about this change?
 - ? What other scriptural accounts come to mind as you consider the man's changed attitude about God and God's acceptance of him?
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when you compare the man's changed attitude about being in Jesus' presence with Alma the younger's changed attitude?

Alma, before his prayer for mercy:

"... the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds" (Alma 36.¹⁴⁻¹⁵).

Alma, after his prayer for mercy:

"Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there" (Alma 36.²²).

- ? What might this change of feelings about being in the presence of God and in the presence of the Savior teach you about your own ability to have the Savior's presence in your life?
5. We have not mentioned or asked any questions about swine.
 - ? Why do you think that is?
 - ? What is the "moral" of the story without the pigs?

- ? Does the moral of the story change if notice is given to the pigs? If so how do the pigs change or impact the moral of the story?
- ? Is there a “moral” to the story that demands the notice about the swine? If so, what is it?

Ephesians 3.¹⁴⁻¹⁹

¹⁴For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Questionary

1. Today's reading is a portion of a prayer that the apostle Paul offers in behalf of the saints.
? What requests does Paul make of God for the saints?
2. Paul asks, first, that the saints "be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."
? What does this mean to you?
? What does it look like in one's daily life?
? What is the significance of this strengthening being "in the inner man"?
? On what is this strengthening with power based?
? This strengthening is brought about through the Spirit, but is a consequence of "the riches of [God's] glory." What do you think of when you think about the "riches of [God's] glory"?
3. Paul also asks that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."
? What does it look like in one's daily life to have "Christ... dwell in your heart"?
? What role does "faith" play in this in-dwelling?
4. Paul asks that "ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."
? What does it mean to be "rooted and grounded in love"?
? What role does it play in helping one "comprehend... and to know the love of Christ"?
? What does it mean to "comprehend" and "know" the "love of Christ"?
? How would you feel about understanding "comprehend" and "know" as "experiencing the love of Christ"? What does it mean to experience Christ's love?
? What impact does Paul's speaking of "the breadth and length, and depth and height" of "the love of Christ" have on the way you think of Jesus' love?
5. Paul speaks of "the love of Christ" as that "which passeth knowledge."
? Do you feel about the Savior's love as Paul does? If not, why not?
? If you do feel as Paul does, what have you experienced in your own personal relations with the Savior that confirm that the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of Christ's love is, indeed beyond understanding?
6. Through comprehending and knowing Christ's love, Paul hopes that the saints will be "filled with all the fulness of God."
? What is "the fulness of God"?
? What does it look like in one's life to be "filled with all the fulness of God"?

Sanctification: imitating and living a life of at-one-ment

Mosiah 4.^{16,19-21, 26}

¹⁶And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish....

¹⁹For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind? ²⁰And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy. ²¹And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another....

²⁶And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.

Questionary

1. It is not enough to be born again, understand and experience the truth of God's oneness and connectedness with us, and strive to live a life of oneness with him.
 - ? What more does today's reading inform us is needed?
 - ? How is this an extension of the principle of at-one-ment, or connectedness?
 - ? According to today's reading, in what specific ways and by what actions do we bear witness to and live the divine principle of at-one-ment with our fellowmen?
 - ? What happens to our lively sense of oneness with God when we do not accept and act upon our oneness with others?
2. King Benjamin asks this rather challenging question: "Are we not all beggars?"
 - ? How do you feel about being called a "beggar"?
 - ? How do you feel about being seen as a "beggar" in the eyes of God?
 - ? How are we, in the eyes of God, like the lowliest of beggars are sometimes viewed in our eyes?
 - ? How would you like God to treat you, or how has he treated you when you have come begging to him?
 - ? Do you treat "beggars" as God has and does treat you?
 - ? What happens to you and your relationship with God when you do not?
3. King Benjamin mentions the need to administer to both temporal and spiritual needs, but there is a heavy emphasis on temporal assistance
 - ? What is it about "imparting of our substance" that makes it such a good indicator of one's connectedness with others and the depth to which we understand and experience God's oneness with us?

4. Luke tells us that John the Baptist warned that those who “bringeth not forth good fruit” would be “hewn down, and cast into the fire.” In response “commoners,” “publicans” (read, government officials), and soldiers who heard John’s warning asked, “What shall we do then?” (Luke 3.⁹⁻¹⁰)

Here is John’s answer to each group respectively.

- “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.”
- “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”
- “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3.¹¹⁻¹⁴).

? How do John’s instructions relate to and compliment those of Benjamin?

? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider that John’s answer to avoiding the fire focused solely on economic matters?

Genesis 12.¹⁻³

¹Now the LORD had said unto Abram, “
Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred,
and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
²and I will make of thee a great nation,
and I will bless thee,
and make thy name great;
and thou shalt be a blessing:
³and I will bless them that bless thee,
and curse him that curseth thee:
and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Questionary

In our 1st series reading on this title, we learned that it is enough to believe and trust Jesus in order to be justified, or forgiven the sins that we inevitably commit. However, if we are to retain that remission of sins, we must do more than believe. We must act. We must become sanctified by striving to imitate Jesus' at-one-ment in our daily lives. Today's reading amplifies the sanctifying efforts in which we must engage if we wish to retain our remission of sins and form the sort of community to which Jesus' at-one-ment points and for which it labors.

1. All too often when we focus on the “Abrahamic Covenant,” we focus on the personal blessings available to us. However, in today's reading, the stronger emphasis in the discussion of “blessings” seems to be aimed elsewhere.
 - ? What is the principle blessing that comes into our lives as we act true to the “Abrahamic Covenant”?
 - ? Did you answer, “The greatest blessing that can come to me is being a blessing to others”?
 - ? Is so, why? If not, why?
 - ? To what examples in Abraham's life can you point that show him seeking to be a blessing to others?
 - ? How did Jesus demonstrate that being a blessing to others was of more importance to him than being blessed himself?
 - ? What do you do as a private individual to *be a blessing* and bring blessedness to others?
 - ? What do you do in your public life, especially as a citizen, to be a blessing to others and to see that the institutions that hold power over people's lives understand and act consistent with the fact that they exist to be a blessing?
2. Consider the following passages.
 - “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁵).
 - “And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20.²⁷⁻²⁸).
 - ? How do these passages relate to today's reading and the responsibility we have to live a life of atonement in imitation of the life of atonement that he lived?

Psalm 67.¹⁻⁷

- ^{2/1} †lohîm! May you show us grace, and bless us!
May you lighten us with your presence
- ^{3/2} that how you conduct yourself might be known throughout the earth;
made known to all peoples the victory you can bring.
- ^{4/3} That the nations might acknowledge you,
all peoples yield to you;
- ^{5/4} that hosts of people might raise a shout of joy
when you govern the nations justly,
when you supply direction to the peoples of the earth;
- ^{6/5} that the nations might acknowledge you,
every people yield to you.
- ^{7/6} Earth will then yield its bounty.
†lohîm, our God, will bless us.
- ^{8/7} †lohîm will bless us
because every corner of the earth reveres him (author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, following is that of the King James Bible.

- ¹God be merciful unto us, and bless us;
and cause his face to shine upon us;
- ²That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations.
- ³Let the people praise thee, O God;
let all the people praise thee.
- ⁴O let the nations be glad and sing for joy:
for thou shalt judge the people righteously,
and govern the nations upon earth.
- ⁵Let the people praise thee, O God;
let all the people praise thee.
- ⁶Then shall the earth yield her increase;
and God, even our own God, shall bless us.
- ⁷God shall bless us;
and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.
1. As beneficiaries of Jesus' atonement, we are obligated to "be a blessing" to and positive influence in the world.
? How does today's reading relate to this obligation?
 2. Speaking for the nation, the Psalmist asks that God be "merciful," "bless," and "cause his face to shine" upon the nation.
? What is his motive, or what does he hope will be achieved through God's mercy, blessing, and presence?
? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that the Psalmist hopes for Israel's blessedness so that other nations will learn to honor, worship, and serve God?
? How do other blessings, especially those of a temporal nature, pale in comparison to the blessings of making the world more godly and obedient to God.
? What additional blessing might come to us as the world increases in its commitment to serving God?

3. The Psalmist hopes that the world will learn about God through the faithfulness his people have toward Him and the faithfulness He shows to His people.
? What does he want the world to know about God?
4. The Psalmist hopes for a day when “the earth yield[s] her increase” as a result of the world’s increased devotion to God.
? What does an increase in the earth’s “yield” mean to you?
? What would be the benefits of an increase in the earth’s yield?
5. In Ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴, Paul lists a number of blessings that come to the church through Christ. One of the things he hopes is that the church will “be to the praise of his glory.”
? How does Paul’s hope relate to today’s reading?

dc 38.²³⁻²⁷

²³But, verily I say unto you, teach one another according to the office wherewith I have appointed you; ²⁴and let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me.

²⁵And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself. ²⁶For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: ‘Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here;’ and to the other: ‘Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there’—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just? ²⁷Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.

Q

uestionary

Throughout his life Jesus sought to reveal his and his Father’s unity, connectedness, attachment, or at-one-ment with humankind. Today’s reading focuses on the desire and need for each disciple to follow Jesus’ example and live a life of connectedness with others, near and far.

1. Today’s reading speaks of others as “brothers,” and by implication “sisters.” It uses a “parable in which others are likened to “sons,” and by implication “daughters.”
 - ? How would your attitude toward and treatment of others change if you truly thought of them as “brothers,” “sisters,” “sons,” and “daughters.”
 - ? How is inequality in our treatment of others—economic, emotional, etc.—a reflection of our thinking of others as something less than family?
2. The Lord admonishes us to “esteem his brother as himself, and practice virtue and holiness before me.”
 - ? What does it look like to “esteem” another as oneself?
 - ? What is the relationship between “esteeming” others as oneself and possessing “virtue” and “holiness”?
3. God really says that the admonitions he is delivering in today’s reading is a reflection of his own character—“it is even as I am.”
 - ? What comes to mind and how does it impact your view of God when you consider him “esteeming” others as Himself?
 - ? What does it mean that God is no “respecter” of persons?
 - ? What does this look like in your life?

It is one thing to live today’s admonitions at the private and individual level. It is another to live the admonitions in a public manner so as to impact the way society views and treats its various members.

- ? What do you do to encourage society at large to follow the admonitions found in today’s reading?

Matthew 16.²¹⁻²⁶

²¹From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²²Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

²³But he turned, and said unto Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

²⁴Then said Jesus unto his disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Questionary

While today’s passage is one in our series of readings on Atonement, it is part of our series of readings focused on “True Greatness and the Godly Use of Power” (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹; Matthew 16.²²⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁵ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷). The reader may want to consult the other *Read, Ponder, Pray* exercises for today’s reading.

1. In verses 13-21, and in reply to Jesus’ inquiry concerning what his disciples thought of him, Peter uttered his famous confession, “Thou art the Christ. The Son of the living God.” Sensing, perhaps, that Peter misunderstood the meaning of his Messiahship, the true nature of his greatness, and the meaning and extent of his at-one-ment, or unity with humankind, Jesus issued his first warning that he would be rejected and killed.
 - ? How does this warning correct any misunderstandings Peter may have had about Jesus, about the nature of his greatness and power, and about the nature and extent of his commitment to be at one with others?
2. Matthew reports that “Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.”
 - ? What do you suppose did Peter find so offensive about Jesus’ testimony concerning his own suffering, and his death?
 - ? How does Peter’s rebuke of Jesus inform and clarify Peter’s false view of Jesus, of the nature of his greatness and power, and of what his at-one-ment might mean?
3. In response to Peter’s rebuke of him, Jesus rebukes Peter with, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus’ associating Peter and Satan?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus associating Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ with something that is Satanic?
 - ? What is it about the kind of self-sacrifice in which Jesus engaged that a Satanic mindset finds so undesirable and so worthy of rebuke?
4. Jesus teaches his disciples that true greatness is found, not in the degree to which one can gratify themselves, but in their willingness to “deny” themselves.
 - ? How do you feel about this?
 - ? What does it mean to you to “deny” oneself?

The Greek word, *aparnéomai*, means “to reject, disown, or renounce claim to.” It can mean “to be faithless [to oneself].”

- ? How does this impact your thoughts about the meaning of self-denial and what it means to be a true follower of Christ?

5. Jesus instructs his disciples to “take up his cross, and follow me.”

? Given that Jesus had not yet experienced crucifixion, what, do you suppose, were the disciples likely to make of this requirement to “take up a cross”?

The disciples were certainly aware of crucifixion as a means of capital punishment, and the humiliation it was to the victim and their family and friends.

? How, do you suppose, did the disciple’s feel about this admonition at the time Jesus expressed it?

? How, do you suppose, did the disciples’ attitudes and feelings change after Jesus’ crucifixion?

? What does it mean to you to take up his cross?

? How does your life reflect your discipleship in taking up his cross and engaging in self-sacrifice in order to serve others and draw them to Christ?

6. The KJV’s “If any man will come after me,” could be read, If anyone wishes or wants to follow me.” The self-denial and taking up the cross, then is a result of our “wanting” or “wishes.” We have a choice of whether to follow him or not. But having chosen to follow him, we no longer have a choice as to whether we will deny ourselves or not.

? How do you feel about this observation?

? What does your current life show about what you really want or wish? Why do you answer as you do?

? What does today’s reading teach you about true discipleship and about the nature of sanctification or taking upon you the nature of Christ?

? How closely does your own life and discipleship conform to Jesus’ standard?

Philippians 2.³⁻⁸

³Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Questionary

1. Paul issues several admonitions in today's readings?
 - ? What admonitions do you find?
 - ? Which one stands out to you as most pertinent for your life today?
2. Paul admonishes that "nothing be done through strife or vainglory?"
 - ? What is vainglory?
 - ? How does personal ambition for glory/ prestige as a motivator create strife between individuals?
 - ? What would you point to in Jesus' earthly ministry as evidence that he was not motivated by personal ambition for glory/ prestige?
 - ? What evidence would others find in your life that you do not operate at the level of personal ambition for glory/ prestige as a motivator?
3. Paul admonishes us, "in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves."
 - ? What does this look like in every day life?
 - ? What is the significance of Paul's "in lowliness of mind"?
 - ? What is the difference between what Paul is encouraging and what we traditionally label, "low self-esteem"?

Consider the following description Jesus gave of himself.

"I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11.²⁹)

- ? How does it relate to Paul's admonition?

If one assumes that God's follows the counsel that he gives to mortals, and that the advice that Paul gives here is appropriate and inspired of God, then one must ask, "Does God possess "lowliness of mind," and even more radically, "Does God esteem others better than himself"?

- ? How would you answer these questions? Why do you answer as you do?

4. Paul admonishes the Philippians to "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."
 - ? What does Paul mean by this?
 - ? To what evidences would you point that Jesus followed this principle in his own mortal ministry?
 - ? What evidence is there that he continues to follow this principle today?
 - ? What evidences would others find in your life that you follow this admonition?
5. After describing Jesus as "being in the form of God," high praise indeed, he says that Jesus "made himself of no reputation," "took upon him the form of a servant," "was made in the likeness of men," was "found in fashion as a [mere] man," and "humbled himself."
 - ? What comes to your mind when you contemplate Jesus' willingness to leave his divine glory behind to not only become human but to become the lowliest of humans?
 - ? How does your awareness of Jesus humbling himself to such a degree impact how you feel

- about him?
- ? How does Jesus' example of self-humiliation impact the way you act in your own life and in your relationship with others?
 - ? Think about 'reputation.' What is the "reputation" of a slave? What does it say about Jesus that he was satisfied with, indeed sought the reputation of a slave?
 - ? What do you want your "reputation" to be?
 - ? How would you feel about having the "reputation" of a slave?
- ? What does today's reading and questions to ponder contribute to your understanding of the nature of at-one-ment, or connectedness, linkage, unity, etc?

Micah 6.⁶⁻⁸

⁶How should I approach YHWH?

How should I bow to my exalted God?

Should I approach him with an offering to be fully burned?

How about with new-born calves?

⁷Will YHWH be satisfied with thousands of rams?

How about with countless channels of oil?

Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?

How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?

⁸He has already told you, man, what is good.

What does YHWH want from you

but to do justice,

and love compassion,

and possess a readiness to live like your God (author's translation).

Q

uestionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

⁶Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,

and bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

with calves of a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,

or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,

the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;

and what doth the LORD require of thee,

but to do justly, and to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with thy God?

This reading is one of our Just Scripture passages. In addition, it is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Sanctification: Imitating and living Atonement." *

1. In verse 6, Micah asks a general question in two parallel lines
 - ? Rephrase his question in your own words?
 - ? How do you answer the question, "How does one approach God"?
 - ? For what reasons does one approach God?
 - ? How would you answer the question if we asked, "How do I approach God in such a way that he will respond to me"?
2. Micah then follows up his general question with six more questions in parallel lines of poetry (6c/d, 7a/b, and 7c/d). These questions ask about the effectiveness of various cultic activities in pleasing God and bringing a beneficial response from him.
 - ? What do you notice about each succeeding pair of questions?
 - ? How do each succeeding pair of questions suggest an every increasing depth of seriousness and dedication on the part of the worshiper/petitioner?

The questions posed about whether one should approach God in any of the suggested ways, seem rhetorical with the answer being, "No, this is not how one should approach God."

? Do you agree with this observation about the rhetorical nature of the questions with their

- negative answers? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? Do you agree with Micah's conclusion that these are not how God wishes to be approached and are not the means to obtaining a beneficial response from him?
3. Reconsider Micah's last questions.
- "Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?
How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?"
- ? Why is the answer, "no"—hint, it has nothing to do with Yahweh's rejection of human sacrifice?
4. In verse 8, Micah describes the three parallel and most acceptable ways to please God when approaching him for help.
- ? What are those three ways?
 - ? How are the doing of the first two, justice and compassion, manifest?
 - ? How are they manifest in the way you personally treat others?
 - ? How are they manifest in the way you expect and appeal to society and its leaders—secular and sacred—to treat others?
 - ? How is society doing in relation to these two things, justice and compassion? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Based on the doing of justice and the loving of compassion, how prepared is society to approach God with hope of a beneficial response?
5. In the KJV reading, the third of the three acceptable ways to approach God is to "walk humbly with your God." There are a number of reasons to be cautious about this reading (you can see my discussion of these in the meditations devoted to the passage), not least of which is the modern muted and domesticated notions about what humility is.
- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate my reading, "possess a readiness to live like your God."
 - ? How do justice and compassion encompass the divine character and the way God lives?
 - ? How do justice, compassion, and living as God encompass the way Jesus lived during his earthly ministry?
 - ? In your view, what events in the Savior's life exemplify each of these traits and attitudes in his earthly ministry?
 - ? What is the relationship between acting with justice, giving preference to compassion, and living a life in imitation of God, Jesus, and Jesus' atonement—or his feelings of connectedness and unity with others?
 - ? What is the relationship between arcane, often pointless, rituals performed in "sacred places" and real, meaningful, moral, and ethical actions conducted toward others in "profane spaces"?
 - ? To which does God give the greater attention in determining the relationship he has with you on a daily basis?
6. Micah begins by discussing the ways that individuals feel they should approach God so as to please and appease Him. Common to all of these is the belief that God is pleased most with self-sacrifice, the greater the personal sacrifice the greater God's appreciation. However, Micah suggests that such manifestations of self-sacrifice, often legalistic in their nature, are, in fact, not what God asks. What he asks, instead, is just and compassionate relations and behavior one toward another.
- ? How do you feel about Micah's insight?
 - ? What sorts of easy, often legalistic, expressions of self-sacrifice do we today sometimes focus on rather than the much more difficult human relationships based on justice and compassion?

The apostle Paul taught that, "the end of the commandment is charity..." (1 Tim. 1.5).

? How does this relate to Micah's teachings as found in today's reading?

dc 20.²⁹⁻³⁴

²⁹And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ,
and worship the Father in his name,
and endure in faith on his name to the end,
or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

³⁰And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
is just and true;

³¹And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength.

³²But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace
and depart from the living God;

³³Therefore let the church take heed and pray always,
lest they fall into temptation;

³⁴Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also.

Questionary

1. In Dc 20.¹⁷⁻³⁶, we have five “we know” statements (Verse 17, 29, 30, 31, 35). In today’s reading, we have three of them.
? Of what truths does today’s reading bear witness?
2. In verse 30, we hear “we know that justification... is just and true.” In verse 31, we hear, “we know also that sanctification... is just and true.”
? What does it mean to you to be “justified,” and “sanctified”?
? What is the difference?
? How would you feel and what would you think if we suggested that “justification” is the remission of sins—sins that we have, do, and will commit—that we can experience in every moment of our lives, while “sanctification” is the perfection of Christ-like character, especially that of at-one-ment or connectedness/unity, that comes after a life-long effort of improvement?
3. In describing “justification,” the text sees it as coming “through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Period. In describing “sanctification,” the text also sees it as coming “through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” However, in the case of “sanctification,” the text adds, “to all those who love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength.”
? What is the significance of the fact that “to all those who love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength” is absent in the matter of “justification”?
? How do you feel about the fact that personal works of righteousness are not a prerequisite to “justification” but are to “sanctification”?
? Why is it that “good works” cannot achieve “justification” or the forgiveness of sins?
4. Both “justification” and “sanctification” are dependent upon “the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”?
? What do you understand “grace” to be?
? If you were to consider that “grace” is something other than or in addition to “enabling power” what would that something be?
? How would you feel and what would you think if we suggested that “grace” is Jesus’ dispositional and willing acceptance of us?
? How would an actual knowledge that Jesus finds you acceptable make your belief in and acceptance of the forgiveness of sins more likely?

5. We have suggested that “sanctification” is the perfection of Christ-like character, especially that of at-one-ment or connectedness/unity, that comes after a life-long effort of improvement.
 - ? What are you doing today to grow in Christ-like character, especially that of at-one-ment or connectedness and unity with Christ and with others?
6. The text bears witness that “there is a possibility that man [or woman] may fall from grace.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “fall from grace”?
 - ? How does it happen?
7. In today’s reading, “the church” is warned to “take heed and pray always lest they fall into temptation.” Then, “those who are sanctified” are warned to “take heed also.” It seems that the two groups, “the church” and the “sanctified” are not synonymous.
 - ? What is the difference between “the church” and the “sanctified”?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think about the two groups not being synonymous?
 - ? Are you in one group or the other? Or both? Why do you answer as you do?

John 13.³⁴⁻³⁵

³⁴A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Questionary

1. Jesus' life, ministry, suffering, and death was meant to reveal the connectedness, the unity, the at-one-ment that he and his Father feel with us. It was also meant to set an example for the rest of us to follow.
 - ? How does today's reading relate to this hope that we will live a life of at-one-ment in imitation of Jesus'?
2. Jesus did not admonish that we "love one another," and leave it at that. He added, "as I have loved you."
 - ? How did Jesus love his disciples?
 - ? How has Jesus demonstrated his love for you?
 - ? How do you demonstrate your love of others? How far must you go, if necessary?
 - ? How well are those who are able to be vaccinated, yet, do not get vaccinated following Jesus' example and loving as Jesus loved?
 - ? Why is it so tempting to act in a way that is un-Christlike and to follow doctrines, ideologies that diametrically oppose the teaching found in today's reading?
 - ? How do you protect ourselves from falling prey to such falsehoods?
3. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."
 - ? How do you feel about this standard by which we are apparently to judge discipleship?
 - ? What attitudes and behaviors can others observe in you that would indicate that you are a true disciple of Jesus?

1 John 3.¹⁶⁻¹⁹

¹⁶Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Questionary

1. We are justified—born again, forgiven, receive a remission of sins—solely through faith in Christ and his grace—his generosity or beauty of character and soul. There can be no thought of working our way to forgiveness or birthing ourselves. We are wholly dependent upon the merits of Christ. However, having been justified without money and without price, we do have a part to play in retaining our remission of sins. While still in need of help—and much of it—we do have a role to play in our sanctification. With help, we exercise our will and exert our energy in striving to imitate Jesus, the first of sanctified men. Like him, we seek to be of maximum benefit to the individuals that surround us and the societies of which we are a part by laying down our lives to raise others up.
 - ? What principles of sanctification do you find in today's reading?
2. Most of us will not be called upon to literally “lay down our lives” in death “for the brethren. But there are other ways to “lay down our lives.”
 - ? What are some of those ways?
3. With his warning that “whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion,” we are reminded that an important aspect of our lives that heavily influences and determines our sanctification is economic—how we use our personal economic resources and what we do to influence society's use of economic resources to benefit the less advantaged.
 - ? What do you do in your private life to open up your bowels of compassion to those who “have need”?
 - ? What do you do in your public life as a citizen to assure that the institutions to which you belong—religious, governmental, civic, etc.—open up their bowels of compassion to those who “have need”?
 - ? How does your joining with others in the spirit of at-one-ment (unity, cooperation) increase the effectiveness with which those who “have need” are assisted?
4. John speaks of “assur[ing] our hearts before him,” God.
 - ? What does it mean to you to have a heart that is “assured”?
 - ? What role does our use of economic resources and the distribution of our economic resources to assist those who “have need” play in having hearts that are “assured” before God?
 - ? To what extent is your heart assured before God?

dc 88.¹²³

See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.

Questionary

1. This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement.”* It is also one of our *just scripture* passages. The fact is, almost any of our *just scripture* passages could also serve under this Atonement title. To begin, let us ask this question:

? How did and does Jesus himself observe the admonition found in today’s reading?

It will be easy to answer, “He loves,” and stop there. But try to go beyond this. Ask yourself

? How did/does exhibit an absence of covetousness?

? How did Jesus “impart” to others?

2. Covetousness is mentioned in the same breath as “love one another.”

? How does covetousness reveal a lack of love for others?

While we can covet non-materialistic aspects of others lives, covetousness principally lives in the materialistic realm.

? In this context, then, how is the imparting of material assets a sign of love?

3. This reading admonishes us to “impart one to another *as the gospel requires*.”

? How does “the gospel” require one to impart their material assets?

? What scriptures would you bring to bear to justify your answer?

? How does the following passage shed light on what the “gospel requires” in one’s imparting of material assets?

“And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. Perhaps thou shalt say: ‘The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just’— But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God... And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done” (Mos. 4.^{16-18, 22}).

? How is Jesus consistent with the principles found in this passage as he relates to us and gives us what we ask?

? Could Jesus have felt that he would not impart his benefits to us because he had managed his life well, while we had not?

? How “deserving” are you of Jesus’ benefits?

? What is the central feature of the Doctrine and Covenants when it comes to how one manages their material resources and how they “impart” them?

? What do you think and feel when you realize that your attitude towards your material assets and how you impart them is a central aspect of sanctification, your becoming and acting like Jesus,

and your ability to dwell with him comfortably?

Matthew 22.³⁴⁻⁴⁰

³⁴But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. ³⁵Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, ³⁶“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

³⁷Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” ³⁸This is the first and great commandment.

³⁹And the second is like unto it, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement.”* It also represents a reading from our Lent/Easter series of readings as, according to traditional chronologies, the conversation reported here took place on Tuesday of Holy Week.

1. As our title suggests, sanctification is about imitating Jesus in his feelings and actions of at-onement or connectedness with others
 - ? To what words and actions of Jesus would you point as evidence of his love for and attachment to God and others?
2. According to Matthew, this question was put to Jesus in a “tempting” way.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What was the “lawyer” hoping to accomplish?
 - ? How, if at all, did the lawyer’s insincerity impact Jesus’ answer?
3. Consider the lawyer’s question, “Which is the great commandment in the law?”
 - ? In light of our familiarity with this question, it is difficult to do, but we want you to try. If you had been asked this question without knowledge of Jesus’ answer, how would you answer this question? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If someone followed you around to observe your daily activities, would they be able to surmise from your actions that these two things were the most important things in your life? What would they see to confirm or deny it?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus did not answer with any specific, legalistic rule?
 - ? What is the relationship between love and legalistic behaviors?
4. Jesus says that “all the law and the prophets” “hang” on the love of God and the love of neighbour.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How does the following passage relate to Jesus’ answer and his vision of the law?

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1.⁵).
 - ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that “charity” and thus loving relationship with others and God is really the only commandment?
 - ? Are there “commandments” that you keep that do not consciously invoke love of others? How would they fit into Jesus’ view of the commandments and of true obedience?
 - ? Can anyone claim obedience to God or others if love isn’t the motivating factor? Why do you answer as you do?

Write down six to ten specific commandments or rules of behavior.

? How do these relate to and serve as a reflection of the love of God?

? How do these relate to and serve as a reflection of the love of neighbor?

Thanksgiving: in praise of atonement

Alma 26.¹⁶

¹⁶Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever.

Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord?

Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men?

Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

Questionary

1. I have reformatted today's reading in order to call attention to the two questions that Ammon asks.
 - ? Take a few moments to answer these questions and to consider why you answer as you do?
 - ? On what are your answers based?
 - ? Are they based on "doctrinal" or "theological" understanding, your own personal experience, or both?
2. The two questions seem rhetorical, anticipating an obvious answer of "No one."
 - ? What do you think and feel about the implied assertion?
 - ? Again, do you think and feel as you do because of a "doctrinal" or "theological" understanding, or because of your own experience with God?
3. Ammon confesses that he finds it impossible to say all that could and should be said about the Lord's "power," "mercy," and "longsuffering."
 - ? Do you find yourself under the same difficulty?
 - ? Though you may not be able to say all that could or should be said about these divine attributes, what would you say if asked to speak and testify about each of them? Take a moment to write down your thoughts as if you had been asked to speak or testify of them.
 - ? How has God exercised these divine attributes in your life?

Psalm 40.⁹⁻¹⁰

⁹I have preached righteousness in the great congregation:

lo, I have not refrained my lips,

O LORD, thou knowest.

¹⁰I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart;

I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation:

I have not concealed thy lovingkindness

and thy truth from the great congregation.

Questionary

1. The Psalmist confesses his commitment to preach and praise four things about God.

? What are those four things?

? What does it mean to speak of God's

Righteousness

Faithfulness

Lovingkindness

Truth

? How do each of these divine attributes impact your everyday life?

The Hebrew word translated as "faithfulness" could be translated as "fidelity."

? What comes to mind when you think of "fidelity"?

? What do you think and feel when you contemplate God's inalterable fidelity toward you?

2. The Psalmist confesses that he has been most diligent in testifying about God's incredible character.

? Could you say the same?

? How have you attempted to reveal God's character to others?

? What more could you do to be a faithful witness to the character of God?

3. This reading comes under the rubric of "In Praise of Atonement."

? How do the four divine attributes found in today's reading relate to God's feelings of "at-one-ment" or connectedness to us?

2 Nephi 9.8, 10, 13, 17, 19, 20

⁸*O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace!* For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

¹⁰*O how great the goodness of our God!*¹ ~~who~~ prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit

¹³*O how great the plan of our God!* For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

¹⁷*O the greatness and the justice of our God!* For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.

¹⁹*O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!* For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

²⁰*O how great the holiness of our God!* For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

Questionary

1. Today's reading is a bit unusual in that it is not a single block of scripture, but several disjointed passages. However, together, they represent verses that are united in their praise of God. In the six "O" exclamation statements, Nephi lauds attributes and actions of God.
? What divine attributes and actions stand out to you?

2. For each Divine attribute and action, Nephi mentions a benefit that flows to mankind as a result.
? What benefits flow from the following?

- "The wisdom of God, his mercy and grace"
- "The goodness of our God"
- "The [great] plan of our God"
- "The greatness and the justice of our God"
- "The greatness of the mercy of our God"
- "The [greatness of the] holiness of our God"

3. Earlier in the chapter, Nephi spoke as follows concerning "God."

"I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him" (verse 5).

Nephi also speaks of God as "the Holy One of Israel," who is Yahweh.

This all indicates, as we have seen in so many other passages, that Jesus is the principle God of

¹ In five of Nephi's six "O" exclamation statements in which he lauds the greatness of God, the statement ends with an exclamation point, followed by a reason for the exclamation. This one is the exception. I have emended the text to make it compatible with the other five.

the Book of Mormon and the God worshipped by Nephites.

? How does this recognition impact your view and feelings of the Savior?

4. Of all the Divine attributes—wisdom, mercy, grace, goodness, greatness, justice, and holiness—only one is repeated.

? What is that attribute and what might be the significance of its double mention?

5. One of the beneficial aspects of scripture is that one can discern the feelings and sentiments of its inspired writers and compare those feelings and sentiments to oneself.

? As you consider the feelings that Nephi possesses and the sentiments he expresses, how do your own compare?

Psalm 22.²²⁻²⁵

²²I will declare thy name unto my brethren:
in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

²³Ye that fear the LORD, praise him;
all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him;
and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

²⁴For he hath not despised nor abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted;
neither hath he hid his face from him;
but when he cried unto him, he heard.

²⁵My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation:
I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

Questionary

1. As LDS people, we sing hymns that speak of and actually do “praise” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We even “praise” them in talks and testimonies. But we do not use the word, “praise.” One does not hear, for example, someone who bears their testimony say, “I would like to praise God for...”
 - ? What, do you think, accounts for the culture’s hesitation to use the word, “praise”?
 - ? Does it matter?
 - ? What are the advantages or disadvantages in our reluctance to use such language?
2. The Psalmist assures us that he “despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted.”
 - ? Have you found this to be true? When and under what circumstances?
 - ? How would your sense of this promise alter if we translated, “he does not ignore and is not repulsed by the humiliation of the humiliated”?
 - ? What are some of the things that causes one to feel humiliated?
 - ? In moments when you felt the humiliation of weakness and sin, have you experienced God as one who does not ignore and his not put off by the humiliation of weakness and sin?
3. Rather than ignoring and being repulsed by human humiliation, God reveals his face to the humiliated.
 - ? What does this say about his character?
 - ? How do you feel about this divine character trait?
 - ? Have you found God revealing, rather than hiding himself, in your moments of humiliation? What were the circumstances?
 - ? How have you praised God “in the great congregation” in response to his mercy?
4. The Psalmist says, “I will pay my vows.”
 - ? What is a “vow”?
 - ? Have you made vows to God? What was a vow you have made and when and why did you make it?
 - ? What do you think when you read of the Psalmist paying his vows publically—“before them that fear him”?

Colossians 1.¹²⁻²⁰

¹²Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

¹⁵who is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of every creature:
¹⁶for by him were all things created,
that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,
whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers:
all things were created by him, and for him:
¹⁷and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.
¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church:
who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;
that in all things he might have the preeminence.
¹⁹For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;
²⁰and, having made peace through the blood of his cross,
by him to reconcile all things unto himself;
by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Q

uestionary

This reading is also the 5th in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings. In addition, this reading is one of five from the 1st chapter of Colossians.

In verse 3, Paul informed the Colossians saints of the prayers he offered to God in their behalf—the things that he thanked God for (verses 3-8), and the things he requested of God in their behalf (verses 9-14). In today's reading, we hear a continuation of his prayerful requests (verses 13-14) followed by what many believe to be the lyrics of an early Christian hymn (verses 15-20).

I have reformatted verses 15-20 to represent the hymnic nature of the passage.

1. In verses 12-14, Paul lists a number of blessings for which he hopes the Colossians are grateful and for which he hopes they express their gratitude to God.
 - ? What are those things?
 - ? What do each of these blessings mean to you?
 - God has “made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”
 - God has delivered us from the power of darkness”
 - God has “translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”
 - In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”
 - ? How, and to what degree do you feel that you have experienced these divine blessings?
 - ? If you are unsure, or feel that you are missing something, what could you do to increase your awareness and experience of these in your life?
 - ? How can you include the gratitude you feel for these blessings in your daily prayers?
2. In the possible hymn found in verses 15-20, Jesus is said to have “preeminence” “in all things.”
 - ? What specific aspects of Christ's character and mission do you identify as evidence of his preeminence?
 - ? What specific aspects of Christ's character and mission does Paul mention as evidence of his preeminence?
 - ? What evidences can be found in the way you live your daily life —the things you think, say,

and do—that reflect Christ’s preeminence in your life?

3. In declaring Christ preeminent, the hymn uses several “superlatives” as it describes Jesus.

? What superlative words do you find that refer to Jesus?

- “*Firstborn*” (And not just “firstborn”—that would have said it all—but “firstborn of every creature—another superlative, “every.” Does it get more superlative or comprehensive than “every”?)
- “*Before* all things” (Is there anything in front of “before”?)
- “*Head*” (any body parts above the head?)
- “*Beginning*” (Is there anything before “the beginning”?)
- “*Preeminence*”
- “*Fulness*” (And not just “fulness,” but “*all* fulness.”) Why the unnecessary redundancy?

? Did you find other indicators of Christ’s preeminence?

? Taken altogether, what impact does all this “superlative” language have on your thoughts and feelings about and for the Son of God?

4. There is another “superlative” word, used in combination with another word, that is used six times in the hymn.

? What is that word and what are the two words that, together, are repeated six times?

“All” is a superlative. Does it get any more comprehensive than “all”? Is there anything greater than “all”?

? Take another look, if you missed it, at all the things to which “all things” refers when speaking of the Son.

? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider all the ways that Christ is preeminent as identified by the hymn?

5. Paul speaks of Jesus as “having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself...”

? Who is the subject of the verb “made peace”? Who is “himself”?

? Our LDS culture can sometimes almost belittle “the cross.” But Paul has no lack of appreciation when it comes to the cross. Elsewhere, he writes,

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1.¹⁸).

? How do you feel about Paul’s assertion that peace is brought about through the “life given on the cross”?

? What are your thoughts, feelings, and estimations of the cross? Would Paul be able to relate?

6. It is significant that Paul teaches “by the Son, the Father reconciles all things unto himself” rather than “by the Son, Father is reconciled unto all things.”

? What, do you think, is the significance of this observation?

? How do you feel when you consider that it is our feelings toward God—especially the feeling we sometimes have that Father is not, somehow, on our side—that need reconciled, rather than God’s feelings toward us?

? How does Jesus accomplish our reconciliation toward God?

? You might want to make your own list of 1) your gospel hopes and expectations; 2) the things that Father has done for you, and about which you feel great awe and gratitude; and 3) the things that you have learned and felt about the Savior that suggest why he should take priority in your life.

? If you would like a different kind of experience, take what you have thought and felt, along with what you have added to your own list, and write lyrics to a hymn of praise for Christ.

Psalm 145.³⁻¹³

- ³Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
and his greatness is unsearchable.
- ⁴One generation shall praise thy works to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts.
- ⁵I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,
and of thy wondrous works.
- ⁶And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:
and I will declare thy greatness.
- ⁷They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness,
and shall sing of thy righteousness.
- ⁸The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion;
slow to anger, and of great mercy.
- ⁹The LORD is good to all:
and his tender mercies are over all his works.
- ¹⁰All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD;
and thy saints shall bless thee.
- ¹¹They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and talk of thy power;
- ¹²To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts,
and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.
- ¹³Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

Q

uestionary

1. In today's Psalm, the Psalmist makes quite a list of God's qualities and excellencies that make Him worthy of praise.
 - ? What divine qualities and excellencies do you find?
 - ? Consider each of them. How do you feel about them?
 2. The Psalmist utilizes a good deal of repetition as he speaks of "thy works," "thy mighty acts," "thy wondrous works," and "thy terrible acts."
 - ? Why do you feel he utilizes such repetition?
 - ? How do you feel after this repetition?
 - ? What mighty and wondrous acts has God performed in your life?
 3. In speaking about the greatness of God, the Psalmist and others "praise," "declare," "speak," "utter," "sing," "bless," and "talk."
 - ? Do these all mean essentially the same thing, or is there significance to this variety of speech?
- ? How strongly do you share in the Psalmist's feelings of praise for God?
 - ? How could you encourage and enhance appreciation of God in other's life, as the Psalmist hopes to do in the life of his readers?

Psalm 63.³⁻⁷

³Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,
my lips shall praise thee.

⁴Thus will I bless thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in thy name.

⁵My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;
and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:

⁶when I remember thee upon my bed,
and meditate on thee in the night watches.

⁷Because thou hast been my help,
therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

Questionary

1. The Psalmist bears witness that God's "lovingkindness is better than life."
? What is meant by "lovingkindness"?
? What are your thoughts and feelings when you contemplate God's "lovingkindness" as "fidelity" or "faithfulness" to you?
? What do you think and feel when you read that God's fidelity "is better than life"?
? What would others see in your life as evidence that God's fidelity is "better than life"?
2. The Psalmist speaks of being satisfied with God's fidelity "as with marrow and fatness."
? What do you think of when you think of "marrow and fatness"?
3. The Psalmist speaks of "remembering thee upon my bed" and "meditating on thee in the night watches?"
? What does it mean to "remember" and "meditate" upon God?
? How much time and effort do you devote to meditating upon God?
4. The Psalmist is committed to taking shelter "in the shadow of thy wings."
? What do you see in your mind when you consider this imagery?

Revelation 4.^{8, 11}; **5.**^{9-10, 12, 13}

1st hymn

⁸“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
which was, and is, and is to come.”

2nd hymn

¹¹Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things,
and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

3rd hymn

⁹Thou art worthy to take the book,
and to open the seals thereof:
for thou wast slain,
and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred,
and tongue, and people, and nation;
¹⁰and hast made us unto our God kings and priests:
and we shall reign on the earth.

4th hymn

¹²“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

5th hymn

¹³“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

Questionary

Appropriately enough, when we think of the Book of Revelation, we think of the apocalypse. But before John launches into his apocalyptic vision, he offers an introduction (1.¹⁻³), writes a universal letter to seven churches “in Asia”—modern day Turkey (1.⁴⁻²⁰), writes seven individual letters to the seven churches (2-3), and records his vision of the divine throne room in heaven (4-5). Only then does he begin his apocalyptic vision with the opening of the seven seals.

While in the heavenly throne room, John sees increasingly larger groups singing hymns of praise to God and the Lamb. In today’s reading, we examine the five hymns sang in John’s presence.

1. In the first hymn, we hear, “holy, holy, holy.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to speak of God as “holy”?
 - ? How does God’s holiness impact your daily life?
 - ? Does your respond to these two questions change if we understand God’s “holiness” to mean something like, “God is someone completely *separate and unique* from all other beings? If so, how does it change your perspective of holiness and the holiness of God?
2. In the second hymn, we hear, “thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”
 - ? What is it, do you think, about creating and being a creator that brings God such pleasure?
3. In the second hymn and again in this third hymn, God and the Lamb are praised as “worthy.”
 - ? What does it mean to speak of God and the Lamb as being “worthy”?

In the third hymn, we hear of three blessings that come to us through the Lamb’s death.

- ? What are those three things?
- ? What is the relationship between our being “redeemed” and our being given power to “reign

on the earth”?

4. In the fourth and fifth hymns, we hear that the Lamb is to receive “power,” “riches,” “wisdom,” “strength,” “honour,” “glory,” and “blessing.”
 - ? How does the Jesus’ possession of all these things impact your daily life and the way you live your daily life?
5. With each hymn, the choir becomes larger. Take a moment to review the text and answer the following questions.
 - ? How large is each choir?
 - ? How do you feel as you see the choirs get larger and larger?
 - ? How would you describe the size of the final choir?

Psalm 71.¹⁴⁻¹⁹.

- ¹⁴But I will hope continually,
and will yet praise thee more and more.
- ¹⁵My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness
and thy salvation all the day;
for I know not the numbers thereof.
- ¹⁶I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD:
I will make mention of thy righteousness,
even of thine only.
- ¹⁷O God, thou hast taught me from my youth:
and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.
- ¹⁸Now also when I am old and grayheaded,
O God, forsake me not;
until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation,
and thy power to every one that is to come.
- ¹⁹Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high,
who hast done great things:
O God, who is like unto thee!

Questionary

1. The Psalmist says that he will speak of God's "righteousness" and "salvation."
 - ? What does he mean by God's "righteousness"?
 - ? How is this manifest in your daily life?
 - ? What does he mean by God's "salvation"?
 - ? How is this manifest in your daily life?
 - ? How would you feel and what would you think if we thought of God's "salvation" as God's "victory"?
 - ? What victories has he brought into your life?
 - ? How much like the Psalmist are you, in that God is a significant part of your daily speech?
2. The Psalmist promises God, "I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."
 - ? Why does the Psalmist feel the need to make this promise?
 - ? Who else's "righteousness" could he "make mention" of?
 - ? Why is it that only God possesses a "righteousness" that is worth thinking and speaking of?
3. From his youth to his old age and unto the present and future generations, the Psalmist has testified of God—his "righteousness," his "salvation," his "wonderous works," his "strength," and his "power."
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist and his dedication to God and to proclaiming him?
 - ? How accurately could this be said by and of you?
4. Today's reading ends with "O God, who is like unto thee?"
 - ? How do you feel when you read this witness?
 - ? Why is it important to feel and acknowledge this truth?
 - ? How does a knowledge of this truth serve as a protection against the whiles of others who would have you be in awe of them and become their disciples?

dc 128.²²⁻²³

²²Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause?
Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren;
and on, on to the victory!

Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad.
Let the earth break forth into singing.

Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel,
who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their
prison;

for the prisoners shall go free.

²³Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud;
and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King!

And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness.

Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord;
and ye solid rocks weep for joy!

And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together,
and let all the sons of God shout for joy!

And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever!

And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven,
proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms,
principalities, and powers!

Questionary

1. In this hymn-like passage in which the prophet calls for the praise of God, the call to praise contains a progression.

? What is the nature of that progression?

? What do you feel as you see the call to praise progress to larger and more expansive limits.

Brethren... earth... the dead... mountains... valleys... seas... dry lands... rivers... brooks...
rills... woods... trees... rocks... sun... moon... stars... sons of God... eternal
creations... heaven.

2. The prophet's jubilant feelings toward God stem, here, from the discovery of God's willingness and ability to save even the dead.

? How do you feel when you contemplate this truth?

? What is the larger message this truth contains about God's committed willingness and ability to reach out to all?

? What is the message this truth contains about God's committed willingness and ability to reach out to you?

? To what extent do you join in the sort of praise that is found in this reading?

? How do you manifest your praise for God?

Psalm 106.¹⁻²

¹Praise ye the LORD.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good:
for his mercy endureth for ever.

²Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD?
who can shew forth all his praise?

Questionary

1. The Psalmist invites us to “praise” and “give thanks to” God.
? What is the relationship between “praise” and “thanks”?
2. The Psalmist offers this invitation to praise and thanks because God is “good” and “his mercy endureth for ever.”
? To what would you point in your life to confirm God’s goodness and enduring mercy?
3. As further reason for praise, the Psalmist’s suggests that his “mighty acts” are beyond recounting and that it is impossible to praise him as he deserves.
? What do you think and feel when you consider these assertions about God?

Consider the following quotes.

“I testify that He is utterly incomparable in what He *is*, what He *knows*, what He has *accomplished*, and what He has *experienced*.... We can trust, worship, and even adore Him without any reservation! As the only Perfect Person to sojourn on this planet, there is none like Him!”

“In intelligence and performance, He far surpasses the individual and the composite capacities and achievements of all who have lived, live now, and will yet live!” (Neal a. Maxwell, *CR*. October 1981, p. 9)

“God is ‘more intelligent than them all’ (Abraham 3). I believe that this means more than that God is more intelligent than any other one of the intelligences. It means that he is more intelligent than all of the other intelligences combined. His intelligence is greater than that of the mass” (B H. Roberts, Note in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 353).

- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Jesus’ powers and capacities are not simply greater than every one of the billions of other individuals who exist among his creations, but that they are greater than those of all the other billions combined?
- ? So, add and combine the spiritual capacities of Russell Nelson, Joseph Smith, Moroni, Alma, Peter, Nephi, Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, Abraham.... and all the rest... they are inferior to God’s alone. Thoughts?

Psalm 150.¹⁻⁶

¹Praise ye the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary:
praise him in the firmament of his power.

²Praise him for his mighty acts:

praise him according to his excellent greatness.

³Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:

praise him with the psaltery and harp.

⁴Praise him with the timbrel and dance:

praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

⁵Praise him upon the loud cymbals:

praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

⁶Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.

Praise ye the LORD.

Questionary

1. In this reading, the Book of Psalm's final psalm, we are told where to praise God, why to praise God, and how to praise God.

? Where, why, and how does the Psalmist say to praise God?

Different cultures have different ways of praising. Some are quite and somber, others are louder and more enthusiastic. As we read this psalm's exuberant form of praise, with its inclusion of dance, we might think of the man healed by Peter who "entered...into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3.⁸).

? How do you feel about louder, more exuberant form of praise that is called for here?

2. As we have said before, one praises God through acts and through words.

? How would you characterize your praise of God through words?

? What can you do to possess and exhibit a greater degree of praise?

Song of the righteous: a prayer unto me

hymn #193

“I Stand all Amazed”

1. I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.
2. I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine
To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine,
That he should extend his great love unto such as I,
Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify.
3. I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt!
Such mercy, such love and devotion can I forget?
No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,
Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet.

Chorus

Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me
Enough to die for me!
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!

Questionary

The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. Take a few moments to ponder the meaning of each line of this wonderful hymn as you would verses of scripture? For example,

The hymnist speaks of being “*confused* at the grace that so fully he proffers me.”

- ? What, do you think, does the hymnist mean by “confused”?
- ? What is legitimately “confusing” and hard to understand about the Savior’s expansive love and grace?
- ? To what degree do you relate to the hymnist’s feelings?

The hymnist marvels that “for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.”

- ? How do you feel when you contemplate Jesus suffering and dying for “sinners”?
- ? To what degree do you think of yourself as a “sinner”?
- ? How confident are you that you have access to Jesus’ “grace,” or his good feelings and acceptance?

The hymnist speaks of the Savior’s “devotion.”

- ? What do you think of when you think of devotion?
- ? Is this a word that you would apply to your own experiences as he relates to you? Why do you answer as you do?

The line, "I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt" ends with an '!'. The hymn's chorus ends with "Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me! Think about those '! at the end of the line.

- ? What does that '! suggest to you?
- ? When you think of Jesus and his willingness to suffer and die for you, how appropriate to your feelings are those exclamation points?

hymn #103

“Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer”

1. “Precious Savior, dear Redeemer,
Thy sweet message now impart.
May thy Spirit, pure and fervid,
Enter every timid heart;
Carry there the swift conviction,
Turning back the sinful tide.”
2. “Precious Savior, dear Redeemer,
We are weak but thou art strong;
In thy infinite compassion,
Stay the tide of sin and wrong.
Keep thy loving arms around us;
Keep us in the narrow way.”
3. “Precious Savior, dear Redeemer,
Thou wilt bind the broken heart.
Let not sorrow overwhelm us;
Dry the bitter tears that start.
Curb the winds and calm the billows;
Bid the angry tempest cease.”

Q

uestionary

The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. When we sign hymns, we make many assertions and offer many confessions through the hymns’ lyrics.
? When you sing the hymns and consider their lyrics, how much thought do you give to the assertions and confessions that you make through your voluntary signing?
2. In today’s hymn, we find several confessions.
? What confessions do you find?

When you consider the following confessions that are made in today’s hymn, how consistent are they with your own thoughts and feelings about yourself?

“Timid heart”
“We are weak”
“Broken heart”
“Sorrow”
“Bitter tears”

Though we often think of the “broken heart” as being synonymous with “being humble,” such an understanding doesn’t seem to fit here. If having a broken heart is to be humble, why would the poet ask that it be bound or treated. Here the broken heart is not something healthy after which we seek, but something that needs repair.

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider this observation?

- ? By this understanding, how “broken hearted” are you?
3. Today’s hymn describes some of life’s dangers.
- ? What dangers do you find mentioned in the hymn?
- ? How consistent are the hymnist’s feelings about the dangers of this world to your own?
- “The sinful tide”
“The tide of sin and wrong”
“Winds and... billows”
“Angry tempest”
- ? Why do you answer as you do? What does your response to the poet’s feelings suggest about you?
4. Today’s hymn uses various words and phrases to describe the Savior and his influence in our lives.
- ? What words and phrases do you find that describe the Savior and his influence in your life?
- ? How consistent are the hymnist’s descriptions of the Savior with your own thoughts and feelings about the Savior?
- “Precious”
“Pure and fervid”
“Infinite compassion”
“Thou are strong”
“Loving arms”
- ? After considering the thoughts, feelings, and confessions to which the hymnists gives voice, how will you feel about singing this hymn—in affect, affirming the thoughts, feelings, and confessions—in the future?

hymn #136

“I Know that My Redeemer Lives”

1. I know that my Redeemer lives
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives who once was dead.
He lives, my ever-living Head.
He lives to bless me with his love.
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed.
He lives to bless in time of need.
2. He lives to grant me rich supply.
He lives to guide me with his eye.
He lives to comfort me when faint.
He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.
He lives to silence all my fears.
He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart.
He lives all blessings to impart.
3. He lives, my kind, wise heav’nly Friend.
He lives and loves me to the end.
He lives, and while he lives, I’ll sing.
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.
He lives and grants me daily breath.
He lives, and I shall conquer death.
He lives my mansion to prepare.
He lives to bring me safely there.
4. He lives! All glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still the same.
Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
“I know that my Redeemer lives!”
He lives! All glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still the same.
Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
“I know that my Redeemer lives!”

Qquestionary

“The Song of the Righteous: A Prayer unto me.” * The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. In this hymn, the poet essentially “lists” the many things that our Redeemer lives to do in our lives. He tells us what the Redeemer lives for, things which bring him joy and a feeling of fulfillment. For example, he is our “kind, wise heavenly Friend” Being our “friend” brings him joy and fulfillment

? Make a list of these things based upon this hymn?

We might say something like, “he lives for food,” or “she lives to read.”

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the Savior “lives for you,” lives to... [fill in blank with the hymnist’s list] in your life”?
 - ? What things mentioned by the hymnist have you experienced in your life?
 - ? Is there something that the hymnist mentions that you have not experienced, but wish to?
 - ? What could you do to facilitate such experience?
 - ? What can you do to help others facilitate such experiences?
2. We see the confessional nature of the hymn as well, as the hymnist confesses some weakness.
- ? What sorts of things does the hymnist confess?

Consider the following confessions:

“My soul” is “hungry”
 I possess “fears”
 I shed “tears”
 My “heart” is “troubled”

- ? To what degree do the hymnist’s confessions become yours as you sing such confessions in meetings?
3. The hymnist writes, “He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.” This is both a statement of confession—the hymnist possesses “complaints”—and a statement of worship and gratitude—“he lives to hear” my complaints.
- ? What does the hymnist mean by “complaint”?
 - ? How is one’s willingness to “complain” to God a manifestation of trust in God?
 - ? How do you feel about God, know that “he lives” to faithfully hear and compassionately respond to our complaints?

hymn #117

“Come Unto Jesus”

1. Come unto Jesus, ye heavy laden,
careworn and fainting, by sin oppressed.
He'll safely guide you unto that haven
where all who trust him my rest.
2. Come unto Jesus; He'll ever heed you,
though in the darkness you've gone astray.
His love will find you and gently lead you
from darkest night into day.
3. Come unto Jesus; He'll surely hear you,
if you in meekness plead for his love.
Oh, know you not that angels are near you
from brightest mansions above.
4. Come unto Jesus from ev'ry nation.
From ev'ry land and isle of the sea.
Unto the high and lowly in station,
ever he calls, “Come to me.”

Q

uestionary

The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. In this hymn, many kinds and classes of people are invited to “come unto Jesus.”
 - ? What kinds and classes of people do you find being invited?
 - ? Think about these kinds and classes of people. Draw a mental picture of each of them in your mind.

Those who are “heavy laden.”

Those who are “careworn and fainting, by sin oppressed.”

Those who have “in the darkness... gone astray”

Those who “in meekness plead for his love.”

Those who are “from ev'ry land and isle of the sea.”

Those who are “high and lowly in station.”

2. We speak of the confessional nature of many hymns.
 - ? As you sing this hymn, what confessions do you make?

Consider the following lines:

His love will find you and gently lead you
from darkest night into day.

- ? What sorts of trials, temptations, and sins might cause one to feel that they are in the “darkest night”?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate Jesus' willingness to enter the “darkest” of nights, search you out, and lead you “into day”?
3. The hymnists speaks of several promises that come to those who “come unto Jesus.”
 - ? What promises do you find?

? How do you feel about the following promises?

“He’ll safely guide you.”

“His love will find you and gently lead you.”

“Angels are near you.”

“Ever he calls, ‘Come to me.’”

? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the Savior’s relentlessness as expressed in the live, “*Ever* he calls, ‘Come to me’”?

? How do these promises might apply to you?

? How have you experienced one of more of these promises in your own life?

? How can you become the voice that speaks to another, “come unto Jesus”?

? Have you been thinking of someone in particular who could benefit from such an invitation?

? What could you say or do to help them “come unto Jesus”?

4. After pondering this hymn, consider Isaiah 61:¹⁻³.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;
because the LORD hath anointed me
to preach good tidings unto the meek;
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all that mourn;
To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,
to give unto them beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
that they might be called trees of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD,
that he might be glorified.

? How do the kinds and classes of people that Jesus serves, and the promises he extends to them in today’s hymn compare to the kinds and classes of people Jesus serves and the promises he extends to them in Isaiah 61?

hymn #98

“I Need Thee Every Hour”

1. I need thee ev’ry hour, most gracious Lord.
No tender voice like thine can peace afford.
2. I need thee ev’ry hour; Stay thou nearby.
Temptations lose their pow’r when thou art nigh.
3. I need thee ev’ry hour, in joy or pain.
Come quickly and abide, or life is vain.
4. I need thee ev’ry hour, most holy One.
Oh, make me then indeed, Thou blessed Son!

Chorus

I need thee, oh, I need thee; Ev’ry hour I need thee!
Oh, bless me now, my Savior; I come to thee!

Questionary

The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. This is one of many hymns which are “confessional” in nature. In these types of hymns, we candidly acknowledge our mortal weaknesses and our need for divine assistance if we are to successfully navigate life’s trials and temptations. Consider the following confessions found in other hymns in our hymnbook.
 - ? What confession or confessions do you make when you sing this hymn?
 - ? How much thought do you give to such confessions when you sing them?
 - ? How strongly do you identify with the confessions you have identified?
2. Consider the following second lines.
 - No tender voice like thine can peace afford.
 - Temptations lose their pow’r when thou art nigh.
 - Come quickly and abide, or life is vain.
 - Oh, make me then indeed, Thou blessed Son!
 - ? How strongly do you identify with each of these assertions/ confessions?
 - ? What experience or experiences have you had that confirm temptation’s loss of power when the Savior is present and active in your life?
 - ? What does the hymnist mean when he confesses that “life is vain” without the Savior’s willing presence?
 - ? What does it mean to you to become Jesus’ possession?

hymn #185

“Reverently and Meekly Now”

1. Rev'rently and meekly now,
Let thy head most humbly bow.
Think of me, thou ransomed one;
Think what I for thee have done.
With my blood that dripped like rain,
Sweat in agony of pain,
With my body on the tree
I have ransomed even thee.
2. In this bread now blest for thee,
Emblem of my body see;
In this water or this wine,
Emblem of my blood divine.
Oh, remember what was done
That the sinner might be won.
On the cross of Calvary
I have suffered death for thee.
3. Bid thine heart all strife to cease;
With thy brethren be at peace.
Oh, forgive as thou wouldst be
E'en forgiven now by me.
In the solemn faith of prayer
Cast upon me all thy care,
And my Spirit's grace shall be
Like a fountain unto thee.
4. At the throne I intercede;
For thee ever do I plead.
I have loved thee as thy friend,
With a love that cannot end.
Be obedient, I implore,
Prayerful, watchful evermore,
And be constant unto me,
That thy Savior I may be.

Questionary

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1. In this hymn, the poet wrote it in such a way as to have the Savior speak directly to each of us. In doing so, he extends several promising admonitions and touching invitations.
 - ? What admonitions and invitations do you find in this hymn?
 - ? Is there one that seems most appropriate to your life at the present time?
 - ? What might you do to act upon the following admonitions and invitations?
 - “Think of me, thou ransomed one; Think what I for thee have done.”

- “Oh, remember what was done that the sinner might be won.”
- “Bid thine heart all strife to cease.”
- “Forgive as thou wouldst be.”
- “Cast upon me all thy care.”
- “Be constant unto me.”

2. The poet also has the Savior making a number of promises and assurances.
 ? What promises and assurances do you identify?

One of this hymn’s most touching promises is: “At the throne I intercede; for thee ever do I plead.”

- ? How do you feel about this promise? Do you believe it? Is it a reality that affects your life? Have you had a sense of its reality?
- ? How do you feel about these words that the hymnist places in the mouth of the Savior, “I have loved thee as thy friend, with a love that cannot end”?
- ? Have you felt and experienced the truth of these words? How and when?

hymn #67

“Glory to God on High”

1. Glory to God on high!
Let heav’n and earth reply.
Praise ye his name.
His love and grace adore,
Who all our sorrows bore.
Sing aloud evermore:
Worthy the Lamb!
2. Jesus our Lord and God,
Bore sin’s tremendous load.
Praise ye his name.
Tell what his arm has done,
What spoils from death he won.
Sing his great name alone:
Worthy the Lamb!”
3. Let all the hosts above
Join in one song of love,
Praising his name.
To him ascribed be
Honor and majesty
Thru all eternity:
Worthy the Lamb!

Q

uestionary

“The Song of the Righteous: A Prayer unto me.” * The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, “Prayer Book,” in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. This hymn was inspired by Revelation 5.¹². This verse records the words sung by a host of one hundred million angels.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

This is actually the third of five hymns found in Revelation 4-5. Read the other four hymns found in Revelation 4.⁸; 4.¹¹, 5.¹², and 5.¹³.

- ? What do you learn about the Father and Son from these hymns?
- ? What do you think it means to say that the Savior is “worthy”?
- ? What makes him worthy? Of what is he worthy?

2. Find a cross reference for the following statements made in this hymn:

Jesus “all our sorrows bore.”

Jesus “bore sin’s tremendous load.”

3. The hymnist admonishes, “His love and grace adore.”

- ? What does it look like to you to “adore”?
- ? How appropriate is this word to your own feelings for the Savior and his love and grace?

4. The hymnist also admonishes, “Sing his great name alone.” Compare this with the Psalmist’s testimony that “his name alone is excellent” (Psalm 148.¹³). Elsewhere, Paul, observing that many members of the early church had formed too high estimations of church leaders, admonished, “let no man glory in men” (1 Corinthians 3.²¹).
 - ? Why, do you feel, are such admonitions necessary and needed?
 - ? What evils can you imagine, or even have observed that flow from not following such counsel as that found above?

hymn #66

“Rejoice, the Lord Is King!”

1. Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore!
Mortals, give thanks and sing
And triumph evermore.
2. The Lord, the Savior, reigns,
The God of truth and love.
When he had purged our stains,
He took his seat above.
3. His kingdom cannot fail;
He rules o’er earth and heav’n.
The keys of death and hell
To Christ the Lord are giv’n.

Chorus

Lift up your heart! Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!
Lift up your heart! Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Questionary

1. The hymnist exclaims
 - “The Lord is King”
 - “The Savior reigns”
 - “His kingdom never fails”
 - “He... purged our stains”
 - “He took his seat above”
 - ? What does all of this mean to you in terms of impacting your daily life?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you sing, “The Lord is King”?
 - ? What comes to mind and when you contemplate the Savior’s reign over the kingdoms of this world?
2. The hymnist admonishes us to “rejoice,” “adore,” “lift up your heart,” and “lift up your voice.”
 - ? Is this something you do and feel regularly as you contemplate the Savior’s power and reign?
 - ? What do you think when you think of “adoring” the Savior?
 - ? How do you adore him?

hymn # 115

Come, Ye Disconsolate

1. Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.
Here bring your wounded hearts; here tell your anguish.
Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal.
2. Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure!
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
"Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot cure."
3. Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above.
Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing
Earth has no sorrow but heav'n can remove.

Questionary

1. The title and the first line of this hymn extend an invitation to the "disconsolate" who are "languishing." The hymn also extends an invitation to those with "wounded hearts," those in "anguish," those who are "desolate," and those who are "straying."
 - ? What does it mean to be "disconsolate"?
 - ? What does it mean to "languish"?
 - ? What does the hymn invite such individuals to do?
 - ? How appropriate is it for you to apply such descriptions and such invitation to yourself when you sing/pray this hymn?
 - ? Are you supposed to apply the description and invitation to yourself? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If you are not meant to apply the description and invitation to yourself, what is the point of singing/praying the hymn?
 - ? How do you feel about the fact that in singing/praying such hymns as this one, you are, essentially, making confession of weakness and need?
 - ? To what degree do you allow your singing/praying of such hymns to act as true confession and real seeking to experience the invitations extended?
 - ? What invitation/s are extended to the "disconsolate" the "languishing," those with "wounded hearts," those in "anguish," those who are "desolate," and those who are "straying"?
 - ? What comes to mind when you hear and sign/pray of "the mercy seat"?
2. "Mercy seat" was the name given to the ark of the covenant, or, more accurately, the lid of the ark that was found first in the Holiest Place of the Tabernacle and later in Jerusalem's temple.
 - ? What does "mercy seat" imply?
 - ? Think first of the word, "seat." What this imply?
 - ? Who sat on the "seat"?
 - ? If Yahweh, Israel's God and King, sat on the "seat," what better word might we use for "seat"?
 - ? What comes to your mind when you contemplate that the ark of the covenant is God's throne, and the Holiest Place, His throne room?

It was common practice in the ancient Near East for Kings to name their throne such that it was a representation of their rule and a characterization of their personal ruling traits. Thrones were given names like "throne of power," "throne of glory," "throne of magnificence," "throne of

vengeance,” “throne of judgement, etc., etc.” More often than not, words were strung together, sometimes for lines and lines of texts, to name a throne: “throne of glory, magnificence, vengeance, judgement....”

- ? What does it say about Yahweh, Israel’s God, and his rule that he chose to give his throne the short and unassuming name, “Mercy Seat” when he could have legitimately given it so many other and more names that who also have accurately described him and his reign?
 - ? Why is it so important to him that he be known as merciful above the many other attributes he possesses?
 - ? Why is it so important that you understand the priority he places on this attribute as he makes himself known to you?
3. The hymnist wants the repentant to know that hope is “fadeless and pure.”
- ? What is it that the repentant “hopes” for?
 - ? What does it mean to you that hope for forgiveness, right standing with God, and a lively sense of God’s presence in your life is “fadeless and pure”?
4. The hymnist invites, “Come to the feast of love.”
- ? What do you think of when you think of a “feast”?
 - ? Have you experienced such a “feast of love”?

Alma ask, “if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love... can ye feel so now”? (See Alma 5.²⁶)

- ? What does your own “song of redeeming love” sound like? What are its words?

Take some time to sit down and write your own hymn that expresses your experiences with God, His character, where his love has taken you from, where it has brought you today, and where you hope it will take you in eternity.

hymn # 72

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
Join the great throng,
Psaltery, organ and song,
Sounding in glad adoration!
2. Praise to the Lord! Over all things he gloriously reigneth.
Borne as on eagle wings, safely his Saints he sustaineth.
Hast thou not seen
How all thou needest hath been
Granted in what he ordaineth?
3. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy way and defend thee.
Surely his goodness and mercy shall ever attend thee.
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
Who with his love doth befriend thee.
4. Praise to the Lord! Oh, let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath breath, join with Abraham's seed to adore him!
Let the "amen"
Sum all our praises again,
Now as we worship before him.

Questionary

1. With each verse, the hymnist admonishes us to offer "Praise to the Lord."
? What are some of the reasons the hymnist offers as reasons to praise him?
2. The hymnist says that God "is thy health and salvation."
? How do feel and what do you think when you contemplate this?
? Is there a difference—and if so, what is it—between saying God "contributes" or "aids" in our "health and salvation," and saying that he "*is* our health and salvation"?
3. The hymnist admonishes us to "Ponder anew what the Almighty can do, who with his love doth befriend thee."
? What would you see the Almighty do in your life, the life of those around you, and in the nation in which you reside?
? How truly do you feel the truth of God's "befriending" you? What does this mean to you?
4. In the final verse, the hymnist speaks twice of "adoring him."
? What does this mean to you?
? Do you adore him? What evidences would others find in your life that you adore him?

hymn # 74

Praise Ye the Lord

1. Praise ye the Lord! My heart shall join
In work so pleasant, so divine,
Now, while the flesh is my abode,
And when my soul ascends to God.
2. Praise shall employ my noblest pow'rs
While immortality endures;
My days of praise shall ne'er be past
While life and thought and being last.
3. Why should I make a man my trust?
Princes must die and turn to dust.
Their breath departs; their pomp and pow'r
And thoughts all vanish in an hour.
4. Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God! He made the sky
And earth and seas with all their train,
And none shall find his promise vain.
5. His truth forever stands secure.
He saves th'oppressed; he feeds the poor;
He sends the troubled conscience peace
And grants the captive sweet release.
6. The Lord gives eyesight to the blind;
The Lord supports the sinking mind.
He helps the stranger in distress,
The widow, and the fatherless.
7. He loves the Saints—he knows them well—
But turns the wicked down to hell.
Thy God, O Zion, ever reigns;
Praise him in everlasting strains.

Questionary

1. In speaking of the praise of God, the poet of this hymn confesses: "My heart shall join in work so pleasant, so divine." In another line, he promises, "Praise shall employ my noblest pow'rs."
 - ? When you contemplate praise God, do you think of it as something "pleasant" and "divine" that is worthy of your "noblest powers"?
 - ? What, do you think, is meant by "noblest powers"?
 - ? What does it look and sound like to "employ" one's "noblest powers" in praising God?
 - ? Could it be said that you "employ" your "noblest powers" in your prayers and in your praise of God? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How could you "employ" your "noblest powers" in prayer and praise to God?
2. The poet lists a number of classes of people whom the Lord serves and blesses.
 - ? What are those classes?
 - ? When you think of the Oppressed, the poor, those with a "troubled conscience," captives, the blind, those with a "sinking mind," foreigners, widows, and orphans, what do all these have in common?
 - ? Why does the poet focus on the vulnerable?
 - ? Do you relate to any of the vulnerable groups? In what way are you vulnerable?

- ? To what extent do those who have no vulnerabilities or imagine themselves to have no vulnerabilities seek Jesus? To what extent do they feel the need/desire to praise him?
 - ? How do you feel when you contemplate that Jesus really came to serve those who were vulnerable and would face their vulnerabilities honestly?
3. The poet addresses the foolishness in trusting and praising any mortal being.
- Why should I make a man my trust?
Princes must die and turn to dust.
Their breath departs; their pomp and pow'r
And thoughts all vanish in an hour.
- ? What does an inordinate respect for mortal beings look like? How is it manifested?
 - ? Take a few minutes to identify five passages of scripture that warn of the dangers of putting trust in “the arm of flesh”?
 - ? How free are you of this sin? On what basis do you answer as you do?

hymn 69

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

1. All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.
2. The company of angels
Are praising thee on high,
And mortal men and all things
Created make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
With palms before thee went;
Our praise and love and anthems
Before thee we present.
3. To thee, before thy passion,
They sang their hymns of praise;
To thee, now high exalted,
Our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises;
Accept the love we bring,
Who in all good delightest,
Thou good and gracious King.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "The Song of the Righteous: A Prayer unto me." * The Hymn Book is a rich source of doctrine, understanding, and inspiration and can profitably be studied in the same manner as scripture: reading, pondering, highlighting, cross-referencing, etc. The Hymn Book, often titled, "Prayer Book," in other faiths, is also a rich source of guidance in our personal prayers.

1. The hymnist speaks of "glory," "laud," and "honor" as things belonging to God.
? What do each of these mean to you?
? Do you contribute in any way to His possession of such things? Why do you answer as you do?
2. The hymnist speaks of a "company of angels," "mortal men and all things" that praise God "on high." Compare the following verses.

"And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever" (Dc 76.²).

"And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things—where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne for-ever and ever; before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever" (DC 76.⁹²⁻⁹³).

- ? How do you feel when you consider angels, celestial beings, and all else devoting themselves to praising God forever?
- ? How do you feel being a part of this throng?