



Creating Zion

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Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord

Hearken, and lo, a voice as of one sent down from on high, who is mighty and powerful, whose going forth is unto the ends of the earth; yea, whose voice is unto men, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth; yea, a voice crying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, prepare ye the supper of the Lamb, make ready for the Bridegroom; pray unto the Lord; call upon His holy name; make known His wonderful works among the people, call upon the Lord, that His kingdom may go forth upon the earth; that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of His glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth; wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, may be glorified in heaven, so on earth, that thy enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen. [Section 65]

One of the most powerful phrases in scripture comes from the gospel of John, where, on two occasions, we read the words, “Come and see.” In the first occurrence, two of John’s disciples seek to follow Jesus and ask Him, “Where dwellest thou?”¹ The second occurrence transpires when Nathaniel questions Philip’s claim that he had found the Messiah, saying, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?”² In the first scenario, John’s disciples simply wanted to know where Jesus was living. Yet Jesus’ answer, “Come and see,” was not merely an open invitation to see where His earthly home was, but rather to see where His heavenly home was. Jesus was beckoning them to follow Him into His Father’s Kingdom, for that is where He truly dwelt.

In the second situation, Philip, whom Jesus had just asked a day prior to follow Him, sought to find his friend Nathaniel so that he might share the good news that he had found the Messiah. However, rather than accept his friend’s bold statement, Nathaniel doubted how the Messiah could possibly come from a place such as Nazareth. Philip undoubtedly knew that there was nothing he could say, nor any evidence that he could present, to persuade Nathaniel to believe in him. Instead, he uttered the words, “Come and see.”

This phrase captures the very essence of Zion. For God not only calls us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power to an endless life, but He also calls us to warn the world of the calamity which is to come upon the earth. To declare to the people that there is a place of safety for them, which will be a refuge from the storm, if they will but turn their hearts to God and follow His Son, Jesus. The purpose of this section in particular is to highlight the importance of sharing the truth about Zion for most of the

¹ Read John 1:37-39

² Read John 1:45-46

world has never heard of it. This evangelical effort comes in two forms, living it (creating or building it) and testifying of it (inviting people to come).

The only way Jesus and Philip could say “come and see” is because they had something to show. The same principle is true for Zion. God has commissioned the Church to remove itself from Babylon so that it might establish God’s Kingdom on earth, even Zion, a city of righteousness, so that the elders could then go forth from Zion unto all the nations of the earth. “And, behold, and lo, this shall be their [the elders] cry, and the voice of the Lord unto all people: Go ye forth unto the land of Zion, that the borders of my people may be enlarged, and that her stakes may be strengthened, and that Zion may go forth unto the regions round about; yea, let the cry go forth among all people: Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom. Behold, and lo, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord.³”

Again, how can the elders tell the people to flee to Zion if there is no Zion to flee to? Hence God has asked the people of His Church to prepare the way of the Lord. The Church was never meant to be the final destination, it is merely a tool to share the message. The message is the everlasting covenant. “And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant⁴ into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me. Wherefore come ye unto it.⁵” God’s mission to the Church is spelled out very clearly in Section Sixty-five. In particular we are:

- to share the Gospel of the Kingdom,
- to prepare ye the way of the Lord,
- to prepare the supper of the Lamb,
- to make ready for the Bridegroom, and
- to call upon the Lord.

We are to do these things so the inhabitants of the earth might receive the Kingdom and be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. The message of Zion, of the everlasting covenant, of Jesus Christ, is one of hope, not just for the Church, but for the whole world. For the Lord has said, “Blessed are you for receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fullness of my gospel, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life, and be made partakers of the glories, which are to be revealed in the last days, as it was written by the prophets and apostles in days of old.⁶” Read the following scripture from Section 108 concerning the importance of God restoring the everlasting covenant:

108:11a And for this cause, that men might be made partakers of the glories which were to be revealed, the Lord sent forth the fullness of His gospel, His everlasting covenant, reasoning in

³ DC 108:3b-d

⁴ Genesis 9:17-23 - ...that I may remember the everlasting covenant... when men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth... And this is my everlasting covenant: that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth and look upward, then shall Zion look downward...

⁵ DC 45:2d-e

⁶ DC 66:1b

plainness and simplicity, to prepare the weak for those things which are coming on the earth; **108:11b** and for the Lord's errand in the day when the weak shall confound the wise, and the little one become a strong nation, and two should put their tens of thousands to flight; and by the weak things of the earth, the Lord should thresh the nations by the power of His Spirit. **108:11c** And for this cause these commandments were given; they were commanded to be kept from the world in the day that they were given, but now are to go forth unto all flesh. **108:11d** And this according to the mind and will of the Lord, who ruleth over all flesh; and unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord, shall be given eternal life. **108:11e** And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord, shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet Moses, that they should be cut off from among the people.

God has given the Church a specific mission to prepare the way of the Lord, meaning Zion, as well as a number of special tools in order to accomplish it, such as the everlasting covenant, the restored Gospel, priesthood authority, the Holy Spirit, etc. While this seems to be an insurmountable task, especially today, we are not the only ones who have received this commission. God also tasked John the Baptist with preparing the way of the Lord, to make straight in the desert a highway for our God, to cry with a loud voice in the wilderness, and to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.⁷ How was John able to accomplish this? The answer is quite simple. He submitted himself to God and His righteousness rather than seeking after his own righteousness.⁸ Can we honestly state that we have done the same?

The author wishes he had some special formula to present, some new method that would allow us to finally obtain the unity within the body of Christ that we have all longed for, or even some secret mystery hidden deep within the scriptures that would unlock the key to Zion. However, the truth is that we already know how to obtain Zion's conditions, we simply must obey the Lord. In particular, God has asked the Church to do the following (this list is not meant to be exhaustive or in any particular order):

- to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (DC 83:7a, DC 95:3)
- to lift up our voices with the sound of a trumpet (DC 28:2)
- to warn our neighbor of those things which are coming upon the earth (DC 38:9c-e)
- to speak in the name of God the Lord (DC 1:4)
- to keep the sabbath day holy (DC 68:4d, DC 119:7)
- to pay God's tithe (DC 64:5a-b)
- to forsake all evil (DC 95:3a)
- to forgive all men (DC 64:2)
- to cast out those in iniquity who will not repent (DC 42:7, 20-23)
- to be one (DC 38:5d-6a)
- to help the sick and the needy (DC 44:3, DC 52:9a)
- to consecrate (DC 42:8-10)
- to go without purse or scrip (DC 83:13-16)

⁷ Read Isaiah 40:1-3, Malachi 4:5-6, and Luke 1:16-17

⁸ Read Romans 10:1-3

- to flee out of Babylon (DC 64:5b, 108:2, 4)
- to purchase land DC 45:12, DC 48:1-2, DC 57:1-6, DC 58:7, 10-11, DC 63:8, DC 98:9)
- to gather to Zion (DC 108:2-4)
- to train up our children (DC 68:4)
- to be anxiously engaged in a good cause (DC 58:6)
- to love God (DC 59:2a-b)

While this list might seem long and difficult, perhaps even impossible to some, it is important for us to remember that God has only ever wanted one item from us, our heart. “Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness; even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.”⁹ This is the only way to truly prepare the way of the Lord. We must fully recognize that in our sins and our weaknesses we cannot possibly obtain a Zion condition. The only way is through Christ and by the power of the Holy Ghost. What does this mean? It means that the author cannot change his heart by his own strength or merit, only God can do that. Therefore, if the author desires to change his heart, he must go to God in order to do so and to do what He asks. So how do we prepare the way of the Lord? In a word, “obey.”

⁹ DC 59:2e

Defining Zion

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee...and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. [Isaiah 60:1-2, 14]

The prophet Isaiah foretold of events which would encompass the whole earth before the great day of the Lord when Jesus would return in power and glory. He prophesied that in the last days a gross darkness would cover the minds of the people because they would not keep the commandments of God, nor embrace the truth, neither would they look up. Instead, Isaiah said the people would defile the earth, transgress the laws of God, change the ordinance of the Lord, and break the everlasting covenant. In return, the Lord promised that He would exercise judgment upon all the inhabitants of the earth and that none would escape, for His judgements shall come upon all men regardless of station, wealth, or status.¹⁰

However, Isaiah also foretold of a place of refuge and safety from the coming calamity. The place would be the mountain of the Lord, a holy city of God, a place of defense, peace, and everlasting joy and holiness. A place where sorrow and mourning would flee away, where children would not die, where the people would labor and be fruitful, and where the Lord would answer all questions.¹¹ He said the place would be called "...The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."¹² Zion is the physical representation of the Kingdom of God on earth. The one which Daniel prophesied would break down and consume all other kingdoms, and the one which Jesus spoke of in His prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven."¹³

While most of the world has never heard of the concept of Zion, God has brought forth His Restored Gospel in the last days for this very cause. For "the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear."¹⁴ For how can God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven if people do not know His will concerning Zion? How can His will be known unless they have heard? How can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach, except they be sent?

Thus, the Father has sent down righteousness out of heaven (the angel message) and truth out of the earth (the Book of Mormon), commanding those who have taken upon them the name of His Son to seek Zion with all their heart and to lift up their voice as if the sound of a trumpet. And this is so that they might be a light and a standard for the world and so that the world might know the divine purposes of God, which is to gather all things together in one in Christ. And yet, if the purpose of the Restored Church of

¹⁰ Read Isaiah 24 and 60]

¹¹ Read Psa 50:1-5, Isa 2:2-4, Isa 4:2-5, Isa 11:6-9, Isa 51:3, 13-16, Isa 60:18-22, Isa 65:20-25

¹² Isaiah 60:14

¹³ Matthew 6:10-11

¹⁴ DC 1:3a

Jesus Christ is to move the cause of Zion forward, what exactly is this Zion, how do we create a vision of it, and how do we move toward it?

Zion is described throughout the scriptures, but perhaps the most encompassing definition is found in Enoch's testimony when the Lord called His people Zion "...because they were of one heart and of one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were no poor among them.¹⁵" While there is much information contained within this single verse, it can still be difficult to capture the image and vision of Zion through it. And although we provided a list of adjectives describing Zion above and what manner of place it is, it is still challenging to wrap our mind around such a concept because few people have actually experienced it or seen it. Perhaps one of the best methods for gaining a greater understanding of Zion is by examining its opposite. Namely, the world, which is spiritual Babylon.

If God described Zion as a place of unity (one heart and one mind) and equality (no poor among them), what might the opposite look like? The Lord defined the world as a place where every man walks in his own way and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world.¹⁶ A condition such as this creates a world where people are divided rather than one, and because they are divided they can never be equal. Such is the state of the world today for as soon as a soul enters into this life, we teach them to be Americans, Russians, or Chinese. We classify entire people as "us" and "them," "in" and "out," rich and poor, democrats and republicans, haves and have nots, etc. We separate people by race, ethnicity, tribe, language, etc. Zion however is a place where we are all identified as the children of God. No one seeks to acquire more than they need, for we are all in need of Jesus Christ and we ought to have equal opportunity to partake of the heavenly gift, even that of eternal life.

God has also described His Kingdom as a place where men and women are born again. In other words, the Kingdom of God is about *life*, both in this world and in the eternal world to come. It is the good news of the Kingdom which causes us to have hope, and encourages us to come to God through repentance and baptism that we might be cleansed from all sin and be made new. Conversely, Enoch defined this present world, this Babylon, as misery and woe, a place which brings death rather than life. For truly death is the law of this world. "And he [Enoch] said unto them, Because that Adam fell, we are; and by his fall came *death*, and we are made partakers of *misery and woe*.¹⁷"

While the world entices us to spend all of our money, labor, and time to partake of its ways with all its allure, intrigue, and promise of pleasure, it rewards us no good thing for it is of no eternal worth. As Solomon testified, "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take *nothing* of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath *labored for the wind*?¹⁸" Whereas Babylon only offers death, a place which can never satisfy, Zion offers the promise of new life and a fullness of joy.

¹⁵ Genesis 7:23

¹⁶ DC 1:3e

¹⁷ Genesis 6:49

¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 5:15-16

There are many more ways to compare Zion against the world, but the last two that we will consider here are, one, light and darkness, and two, those who are justified and those who try to justify themselves in their own eyes. Jesus told Nicodemus, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he who loveth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest. And he who obeyeth the truth, the works which he doeth they are of God.¹⁹”

Zion is a place of *absolute truth*. To dwell there, we must be desirous to step into the light of God that our deeds might be reproved and our hearts might be made manifest. Though we have all sinned and made mistakes, have we done all that we can to turn our hearts, our minds, our wills, our souls to God? Have we believed, have we repented, have we chosen to be baptized, have we endured, have we sought to love with a pure heart? Are we ready to be made known? If so, then God has promised that He will justify us by the power of His Holy Spirit and sanctify us by the blood of His Son.

Babylon on the other hand offers no such promise, for the world teaches men to do that which is right in their own eyes, saying, “There is no harm in committing a little sin. Justify yourselves. Do not confess what you have done, lie a little, cheat a little. Hide your works in the dark. Imagine vain things. Create your own truths.” Yet there is no truth outside of God, for He is a God of truth. He cannot change, neither can His word become void. Every kingdom which God has made has certain bounds and conditions, and He has promised that, “All beings who abide not in those conditions, are not justified.²⁰” However, God has also promised that “that which is governed by law, is also preserved by law, and perfected and sanctified by the same.²¹” In other words, Zion is a place which is governed by law and by light. Those who are *willing* to be governed by it will be justified to God.

Creating a Vision of Zion

Though Zion is frequently discussed in sermons and Sunday School classes, what does Zion mean to the reader? While we know that it is important to have a vision of Zion, for “where there is no vision, the people perish...²²”, it is equally as important to fall in love with that vision. Otherwise, it is not our dream, but someone else’s. Moreover, how will we ever get to Zion without a vision? For if there be no vision, then there is no destination. If there is no destination, then we are all lost for we have no purpose. But we know that the Church does have a purpose, Zion. Again, how do we create a vision of it, and how do we move toward it?

The most critical step in creating a vision is first developing a love for it, as stated above. For if there is no desire or interest in it, why would anyone try to accomplish it? This is not to assume that the Church does not love the *idea* of Zion, but it is important to ask ourselves, “Do we truly seek Zion with all of our heart? Does every life decision we make move us closer to Zion?” If not, why not? Perhaps the answer is because we have not fully committed ourselves to the promise of Zion and all it entails. Perhaps we are not so

¹⁹ John 3:19-22

²⁰ DC 85:10a

²¹ DC 85:8a

²² Proverbs 29:18

different from the Israelites who desired to be like all the nations around them. Or the Israelites who felt too uncomfortable to come up the mountain to meet God and therefore elected to send Moses instead. As long as we see value in Babylon, it will be difficult for us to escape it. Or perhaps we are like the Jews of the first century, who had a zeal for God, but sought after their own righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness of God.²³

Ultimately, it is critical for us to see and understand the necessity of Zion and the glory that it offers. To do so, we will examine various elements of Zion and contemplate what these rudiments might look like in the real world. In so doing, we hope that the reader's desire for Zion shall grow and that our love for its' King, Jesus Christ, will deepen.

Jesus Is King

While the Church often preaches the Kingdom of God, it is important to ask ourselves, "Can you have a Kingdom without a King?" Moreover, can there be a Kingdom without laws (i.e., commandments)? Can there be a Kingdom without magistrates (priesthood) to carry out those laws? Can there be a Kingdom without subjects (citizens) who choose to obey those laws? The answer to these questions is no, and yet how often have we associated these fundamental principles with the Kingdom of God? In order to fully grasp the promise of the Kingdom, we must submit ourselves to the King and His holy law. The Lord Jesus is that King as He told Enoch, "I am Messiah, the King of Zion; the Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity."²⁴ But do we view Him as King? Do we consider His authority final? Most of us have never lived under the rule of a monarchy, thus it is sometimes difficult for us to understand what it means to live under absolute authority.

In the United States, we are blessed to have a government which has been constructed upon just and holy principles. One which the Lord established to maintain and protect the rights of all people so that we might be accountable for our own choices.²⁵ However, we would ask the reader, "Will the U.S. government establish Zion? Will politics bring the Kingdom forth or advance its' cause? Is the U.S. the answer to the world's problems?" No, of course not. We should not center our hope upon government or upon which party is, or is not, in office. Jesus Christ, the King of Zion, is our hope and refuge, not man.

Though God commanded us not to break the laws of the land, "for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land; wherefore be subject to the powers that be,"²⁶ we must recognize that the Kingdom of God is more than an earthly government. For our King has promised, "that, in time, ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your king and watch over you. Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws, when I come, for I am your lawgiver, and what can stay my hand?"²⁷

²³ Read Romans 10:1-3

²⁴ DC 36:10g

²⁵ DC 98:10e-h

²⁶ DC 58:5b

²⁷ DC 38:5a-b

We would ask the reader, “What do you think will happen to our current government and politics when Zion is established?” “What do you think it will be like to have a Holy King?” “Will we submit to His authority and to His laws as citizens of His Kingdom?” It does not matter who is president. What matters is who we choose to be our King.

A Land, A Place, A City

God has always covenanted with man in order that they might know Him more fully and thereby choose to believe in His Only Begotten Son. One of the first examples of this was God’s covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham, an elderly man with no sons, that he would receive a promised land, be made a great nation, and that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. This same covenant was passed on to Abraham’s rightful heir, Isaac. From Isaac, the covenant was passed on to his youngest son, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, which means “God prevails,” as well as unto Jacob’s twelve sons, who would become the twelve tribes of Israel.

This covenant concerning the promised land was meant to be a testament of God’s faithfulness as well as a promise of what is to come for all those who choose to believe in Him. Does the reader know that the Church has also received a covenant in the latter days? The Lord has not only promised us His Kingdom, but a land, even a place, a Holy City that He will prepare for His people to gather to and look forward to the time of Christ’s coming.

The land is the new world, the place is Independence, and the city is Zion. This is the inheritance which God desires to give unto the saints. For God told the Church, saying, “I have made the earth rich, and, behold, it is my footstool: wherefore, again I will stand upon it; and I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, *even a land of promise*; a land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be *no curse* when the Lord cometh; and I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts: and this shall be *my covenant with you*, Ye shall have it for the land of your inheritance, and for the inheritance of your children for ever, while the earth shall stand; and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away.”²⁸

As God covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning a promised land, so has He covenanted with us. We ask the reader to ponder the following questions. “What will this city look like?” “What does it mean when God says that He will remove the curse from off the land?” “Will we be dependent upon the world?” “How will we obtain this land of inheritance?” “Would we be willing to consecrate all we have to the Lord once the Church has been set in order and a Bishop called and ordained?” Search the Scriptures by reading Section 57:1, 48:2, 63:8c-e, 98:9f-g, 102:8, and 58:3 to better answer these questions.

Peace

What greater reward is there in this life than the peace which passes all understanding? A peace which calms the mind, strengthens the heart, and encourages the soul even during the most trying of circumstances. This sort of peace can only be obtained in and through God as we obey His will. For inasmuch as we trust in Him and seek to steadfastly follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we have an assurance

²⁸ DC 38:4d-f

that the Father will count it unto us as righteousness. And the effect or fruit of righteousness is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

The world today has no concept of the principle of godly peace, and thereby they cannot receive a fullness of joy. However, Zion, which is established in righteousness, is a city that is founded upon the peace of God. Can the reader imagine such a place? Isaiah prophesized that those who come unto Zion will learn the ways of the King and that “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.²⁹” And again he prophesized, saying, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.³⁰”

There will be no fighting or war in Zion for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Jesus Christ just as the waters cover the sea. Zion will be a place of refuge, of safety, and of peace, even for and amongst the animals. We invite the reader to imagine what this better world would look and feel like. “What would happen to crime, murder, etc.? Will we need police or military? We will need locks or barriers? What will we eat if we do not partake of meat?” Please read the following from Section 45:12-13:

45:12a Wherefore, I the Lord have said, Gather ye out from the eastern lands, assemble ye yourselves together ye elders of my church; **45:12b** go ye forth unto the western countries, call upon the inhabitants to repent, and inasmuch as they do repent, build up churches unto me; **45:12c** and with one heart and with one mind, gather up your riches that ye may purchase an inheritance which shall hereafter be appointed unto you, and it shall be called the New Jerusalem, ***a land of peace***, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the most high God; **45:12d** and the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it; and it shall be called Zion.

45:13a And it shall come to pass, among the wicked, that every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor, must needs flee unto Zion for safety. **45:13b** And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. **45:13c** And it shall be said among the wicked, Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible, wherefore we can not stand.

Labor

Prior to the transgression in the garden, the scriptures allude that Adam and Eve were able to obtain food and water without much effort. However, one of the consequences of Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit was the curse which God placed upon the ground. What was once easy became very difficult. Adam was now required to work the land by the sweat of his brow in order to provide the basic provisions for his family. Thus, we too are required to labor in order to survive. However, our version of labor has become much different than Adam's.

²⁹ Isaiah 2:2-4

³⁰ Isaiah 65:25 (read also Isaiah 11:6-9)

Though this curse still persists today, the Lord has promised to remove it from the earth during the millennial reign. A promise which we have perhaps taken for granted or overlooked in the latter day as much of the work now is done by machines, processing plants, factories, etc. Yet we still must work in order to earn our daily bread. Very few of us work the land in order to fulfill our primary needs, instead we labor in the various economic systems of the world, the primary of which is capitalism, which can be utilized for good or for evil. Though some might suggest, including this author, that these systems have become corrupt and a source of great iniquity, what would the world look like without them? Consider the thoughts of the author:

I used to envision Zion as an agrarian utopia without modern day technology. While this may or may not be true, I wonder now how a society can live without some of the basic systems civilizations are built upon today. A city consisting of tens of thousands of people must not only have access to food and water in order to survive, but they will also need proper sanitation. Will we still be able to purchase food at the local grocery store? If so, who is stocking the shelves? Even more importantly, where are the supplies coming from? Who is processing the food? These are just some practical things to think about for the scriptures are clear, there will be a Zion on the earth before Enoch's City comes down. Until that day comes, where will the meat come from, where will we get electricity, how will we heat our homes in the winter, how will we be able to pump water, etc.?

In short, we know that people will need to labor in, and for, Zion. We are called to build up the waste places. However, what does that mean and what will it look like? How do we need to prepare ourselves today for that inevitable future? In addition to these questions, we recommend that the reader search the Scriptures by reading Isaiah 65:21-24, DC 98:4f-g, and 2 Nephi 11:106-109.

Gathering

The gathering of God's children from the four quarters of the earth is one of the Lord's most beautiful promises, and one that sheds light upon an important aspect of God's divine character. Namely, that He is a gatherer, which is a stark contrast to Satan's character, which is to scatter the fold of God. The Lord not only promised Israel that He would set His hand a second time to gather them from their lost and fallen state,³¹ but He has also told the saints that He would prepare a holy city, Zion, to be a gathering place for the gentiles and for the scattered remnant of Jacob. "And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion singing, with songs of everlasting joy."³²

While this certainly is an amazing promise, it is also one that begs many questions. To begin, where will everyone live? Are the saints ready to take in people from every nation under heaven? Will we build homes and shelters for them? If so, what might this look like? How many saints have spent time in different countries or even in different cultures? Are we ready to love our neighbor as our self by imparting our substance? Are we willing to sacrifice our wants so that someone else might have their

³¹ Isaiah 11:11-12, 2 Nephi 11:25-29

³² DC 45:14

needs met? It is one thing to know that Independence is the Center Place, it is a completely different thing to be ready to participate in the gathering, whether that be one who is gathered or one who is preparing a place for such a gathering to occur. It truly is an honor to take part in the building of Zion, but are we ready to give all that might be required of us, and to do it together as one body? Please read from Section 58:3 concerning the feast that is to be prepared for the gathering nations:

58:3a Remember this which I tell you before, *that you may lay it to heart*, and receive that which shall follow. **58:3b** Behold, verily I say unto you, *For this cause* I have sent you that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come; **58:3c** and also that you might be honored of laying the foundation, and of bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand; and also that *a feast* of fat things might be prepared for the poor; **58:3d** yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, *well prepared*, unto which *all* nations shall be *invited*. **58:3e** Firstly, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble; and after that cometh the day of my power; **58:3f** then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come. Behold, I, the Lord, have spoken it.

Many people will gather to Zion when God lifts up His ensign to all nations. This means that numerous people of different cultures, backgrounds, beliefs will come together in one place. How will we interact with one another? Is their culture wrong and ours right? Is our culture wrong and theirs right? Do we need to start purchasing land in Jackson county as the Lord has instructed the Church? In consideration to all these questions, we ask the reader to examine Sections 63:8 and 98:9, as well as Isaiah 2:2-4, Isaiah 60:1-5, 3 Nephi 10:1-8, and Ether 6:6-8.

All Things Common

The Scriptures contain several examples in which groups of people were able to reach Zion conditions, such as Enoch and the golden age of the Nephites. In each situation, the people were able to dwell in righteousness inasmuch as they yielded their hearts unto God, and thus they were able to reach a state in which they lived with all things common. Notice that we did not say all things “in” common, but all things common. This is one of the most important and yet misunderstood principles of Zion for all things common, *not* all things *in* common, is the final culmination of a righteous people as we read in Genesis 7:23-25:

7:23 And the Lord called his people, Zion, because they were of one heart and of one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were *no* poor among them. **7:24** And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. **7:25** And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the city of Holiness, even Zion.

Only after the people of Zion had become one in heart and one in mind through Jesus Christ were they able to live without having any poor among them, and this is because they all lived commonly just as the Nephites did. “And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were *no* contentions and

disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another; And they had all things common among them, therefore they were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.³³

Both these peoples were equal in earthly and heavenly things because they were willing to live equally one with another, so much so that no one had more or less than what they needed. As Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, quoting from the book of Exodus³⁴, “For I mean not that other men be eased and ye burdened; But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality; As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.³⁵” What would such a society look like? What would it mean to have all things common? Would we be willing to make the necessary sacrifices? Are we ready to follow the principles God requires in order to have the storehouse? Are we willing to consecrate everything to God and to live commonly? Please read Sections 42:8-15 and 51:4. What other scriptures talk of the storehouse and all things common?

Age of a Tree

Perhaps one of the most precious and striking aspects of Jesus’ ministry is the way that He healed the those in need. “And great multitudes came unto him, having with them some lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them; insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see. And they glorified the God of Israel.³⁶” Not only did Jesus perform countless wonders in the land of Judea and amongst the Nephites, but we find numerous testimonies of His followers performing the same miracles throughout the Scriptures.

Sadly, our world today is filled with all manner of disease and sickness, so much so that it can be difficult to picture a society in which everyone is healthy. However, the Scriptures foretell that there will be no sickness nor premature death in Zion, for the power of God will be in the midst of His people. Isaiah prophesized concerning Zion that children would no longer die before they grew old, and that all would reach the age of one hundred years. What sort of faith must we have to witness such marvelous works? Are we ready to live by the Word of Wisdom? What would life be like without cancer and disease? Will we need medicine, doctors, or hospitals anymore? While we cannot say for certain what such a place will look like, we can definitely acknowledge that such a thought can fill us with a hope for a better world. Please consider Isaiah 65:20 and Section 63:13d-e.

Dwell in Righteousness

There is not one among us who can escape this present world without receiving some form of scar. Whether it be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or some combination thereof, no one is immune to the difficulties of life. The adversary is a master at using fear and shame in an attempt to keep God’s children in bondage. For truly it is Satan, and not the Lord, who points the finger at each one of us, saying,

³³ 4 Nephi 1:3-4

³⁴ Exodus 16:16-18

³⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

³⁶ Matthew 15:29

“Look at what you did. You are not worthy. You are not loveable. You are not wanted. Etc.” In so doing, he has sought to capture a whole creation in misery and woe. For if we have no hope, then we have no faith or vision.

Zion however is a place where people will be made whole in Jesus Christ. Where the ransomed of the Lord shall come singing praises of everlasting joy, and all sorrow and sighing shall be done away. Zion is a place in which the people of God shall dwell in righteousness, happiness, and gladness. For we shall live in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Truly the Kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Can the reader imagine such a place? What would it look like to live in a city where there is no anxiety, depression, anger, suicide, selfishness, pride? What would it be like to talk with Jesus face-to-face and ask Him about those things that you have suffered with for so long? To finally receive an answer to your most important questions? We invite you to read the conditions and the promises found in Genesis 7:23-25, Isaiah 35:10, and Isaiah 51:3 and 11.

Conclusion

The various elements of Zion presented above were not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a starting point to help inspire us to think upon Zion in a new, exciting way. Our hope is that this work will stir up a desire within the heart and mind of each reader so that they may find a new zeal for Zion, so much so that they may even become anxiously engaged in the work. The Church has spoken so much concerning the concept of Zion that it frequently seems like a faraway dream rather than a fast approaching reality. We pray that Zion has become more real and tangible than ever before to the reader, and we challenge you to find ways in which you can begin implementing Kingdom living in your life today. Please read two familiar scriptures from Sections 4:1-2 and 11:3-5:

4:1a Now, behold, a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men, **4:1b** therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day; **4:1c** therefore, if ye have desires to serve God, ***ye are called to the work***, for, behold, the field is white already to harvest, **4:1d** and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perish not, but bringeth salvation to his soul; **4:1e** and faith, hope, charity, and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualifies him for the work.

4:2a Remember, faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence. **4:2b** Ask and ye shall receive, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Amen.

11:3a Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, **11:3b** Keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion.

11:4a Behold, I speak unto you, and also ***to all those*** who have desires to bring forth and establish this work; **11:4b** and no one can assist in this work, except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things whatsoever shall be intrusted to his care.

11:5a Behold, I am the light and the life of the world, that speak these words; **11:5b** therefore, give heed with your might, ***and then you are called***. Amen.

If the reader even has a desire for Zion, then they are called to the work. What can we do today to advance the cause of Christ? What can we do to assist the Father in His great and marvelous work for the souls of men?

Creating Zion

The work of preparation and the perfection of my Saints go forward slowly, and Zionic conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies; but my word shall not fail, neither will my promises, for the foundation of the Lord standeth sure. [Section 140:5c-d]

God's will for mankind is simple. He desires for us to come home to Him. He desires for us to believe in His Son, to repent of our sins, and to come to Jesus with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. In return, God promises to heal every broken heart and every broken body. He promises a remission of our sins, a peace that passes understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable. He promises an abundant life, an eternal life. God's will is "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He [meaning God] might gather together *in one all things in Christ*, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him."³⁷

The idea of being of one, of having one heart and one mind with Jesus Christ, of even having one heart and one mind within ourselves, is a beautiful concept, but one that is immensely difficult to achieve when we actually try to implement it in our daily life. Yet, this is essentially what the Lord's great and marvelous work is all about. It is what Zion is all about. For Zion and the great commission are the catalysts that will bring about God's will to gather all of His children home. Jesus told the Nephites that the work of the Father would commence in the last days when the fullness of the Gospel should go forth unto the house of Israel, both to the Lamanites and to the Jews. Please read 3 Nephi 10:4-7:

⁴)And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst, and then shall the work of the Father commence, at that day ***even when this gospel shall be preached*** among the remnant of this people. ⁵)Verily, I say unto you, At that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people; yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem. ⁶)Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father, ***to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me***, that they may call on the Father in my name; ⁷)Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father, among all nations, in preparing the way whereby ***his people may be gathered home*** to the land of their inheritance.

So why is building up Zion, or even Zionic conditions, so hard? God has given us instructions as well as amazing and beautiful promises, but yet it seems that Zionic conditions are no closer than they were when the Gospel and the Church were first restored in 1830. In fact, we might even be further away, but why? Perhaps some might say it is because we do not love God enough. Perhaps we do not pray enough, fast enough, or study enough. Perhaps we do not have enough faith, hope, or charity. While these things might certainly be true, the author does not believe this is the sole reason. Most church members have heard hundreds if not thousands of classes, sermons, and testimonies concerning Zion. The author doubts that there is a single person in the Church today that does not know they are supposed to love their

³⁷ Ephesians 1:10

brothers and sisters as Christ loves them, or that they are to remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence.

In other words, it's not a lack of knowledge concerning the principles or characteristics of Zion that holds us back. It's not even the lack of execution, of obedience, of follow-through. It's not simply the fact that we do not know Jesus Christ, the King of Zion, or that we do not see our own hypocrisies. It's not that we do not give grace to others who make the same mistakes that we do. The truth is that our current condition is a result of all these things and so much more, and yet the real conundrum is so much more basic. For a moment, let the reader imagine in your mind how a main sequence star is formed.

The birth of a star begins with a large cloud of hydrogen atoms. These atoms are spread out in terms of both distance and mass. As gravity influences these atoms to move, or fall, toward each other, the cloud becomes more and more dense, which creates large amounts of inward pressure and causes the temperature to rise to incredible levels. It's important to note here that the nucleus of a hydrogen atom is a single proton. Typically, when there are two positive charges in close proximity to each other, they will repel one another, not attract. However, if the pressure is great enough and the temperature is high enough, then the nuclear strong force, which is one of the four fundamental forces of nature and is responsible for holding protons and neutrons together, will take over. When temperatures reach 10 million Kelvin, the hydrogen nuclei will start to ignite or fuse together. As two hydrogen protons fuse together, one will become a neutron, which releases enormous amounts of energy, providing enough outward pressure to prevent the newly formed star from collapsing.

As this occurs, the hydrogen atoms in the core will begin to fuse into helium. While this causes the core to shrink into a smaller sphere, the core will actually become denser which then causes gravity to have an even stronger pull. Now, instead of hydrogen just fusing in the core, hydrogen will begin to fuse in the shell *around* the core. As the pressure and temperature continues to mount, the fusion reaction within the core begins to occur at a faster and faster pace. The core will now be under even more pressure and the fusion will occur over a larger radius, expelling energy further and further out. The radius of the star itself will begin to expand until it becomes a Red Giant. The first fusion from hydrogen to helium occurs at 10 million Kelvin, but the ignition or fusion temperature for helium is 100 million Kelvin. However, this will not occur unless the star is massive enough to condense the core to reach this temperature, in what is called critical mass. It's basically through this process that all the elements in the universe were formed, including the elements that make up our earth as well as our physical bodies.

At this point, the reader might be wondering what any of this has to do with our present topic, but hopefully the reader has noticed the subtle similarities between the birth of a star and the formation of Zion. First, a star cannot form without gravity and hydrogen, one without the other is useless. Next, hydrogen cannot fuse into helium without pressure and temperature, and energy to prevent the core from collapsing. Finally, the star changes from a main sequence star to a Red Giant once the gravitational pull causes the hydrogen atoms to fuse around the shell of the core, creating more inward pressure and expelling energy further out. It is this inward pressure that creates the temperatures necessary for helium to ignite into nitrogen.

These fundamental processes are the same for Zion. Similar to protons, people in general tend to repeal one another due to our natural man, and just as protons could not coexist and meld into something new without the extreme pressures of gravity and temperature, man cannot knit their hearts together in unity and in love without the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. As the powers of Jesus and the Spirit work upon us, a core of people will begin to form as it does with the star. This core of people will continue to expand as the testimony of Jesus grows within our hearts and minds until it reaches critical mass. And as it does so, the gifts of the Spirit will move freely amongst us until it becomes Zion, the Kingdom of our God on the earth. Thus, Zion is essentially God's formula for bringing a bunch of individuals, who naturally push each other away like two protons, into one cohesive core.

So what does this have to do with anything? Simple, God cannot create Zion in us because we will not allow Him to bring us together. We are too smart, too holy, too righteous, too proud for the gravity of Jesus Christ to bring us together to work out our differences. Zion is not the absence of conflict, but the triumph over it, just as humility is not the absence of pride, or courage is not the absence of fear, or love is not the absence of selfishness, but again, they are the triumph over all these things.

While there might be several reasons for our current condition as a people, the author believes the true cause is unbelief. Unbelief that God can do it, unbelief that Zion is worth the sacrifice, unbelief that Jesus died for me personally, and even unbelief in God Himself. This might sound harsh, but that is not the author's intent. It's important that we start facing the light and see how we measure up to Christ. We must ask ourselves, "Is my belief in God's power, Jesus' sacrifice, Zion, etc., reflected in the way that I live my life? What can I do differently? How is God presently changing me, challenging me, making me uncomfortable, drawing me out of myself toward Him?"

In many ways, we are not so different from Israel, who, when presented the chance to come up to the mountain to meet God, chose to stay in the valley. Why? Perhaps because they were too uncomfortable. Perhaps it was because they were too afraid of what God might ask of them. What if He asked them to do something they were not willing to do? What if He asked them to give up something they wanted to keep? Perhaps it is because they did not *believe* that God was worth it. Maybe they did not believe that His way was better than their ways or the ways of the nations around them. Maybe they were not so different than the rich man who only gave of his abundance rather than the poor widow who gave her all.³⁸ They were willing to come so far, but not willing to go all the way.

If any of these questions or statements resonate with the reader, then we would ask you one more set of questions. In Romans 14:17, we learn how God defines His Kingdom. He says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." In other words, the Kingdom of God is about having a right relationship with Him, and when we do, we will have a peace that passes all understanding. And it is this peace that brings such unspeakable joy into our lives, and all these things occur through the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the Kingdom. So, we simply ask the reader, "Do you have joy in your life? Not just occasionally, but on a consistent basis?" Pause here and truly consider these questions.

³⁸ Read Mark 12:47-50

If you do not have joy, or if you do not have it on a consistent basis, perhaps it is because you, just like the author, do not have God's peace, and maybe you do not have God's peace because you are not currently right with Him. So how do we change? It starts first with just the desire to change. We must then allow that desire to work within us enough to compel us to get right with the Lord by coming up the mountain. If we do come up the mountain, even as a little child, He will meet us there. And yet, knowing this does not necessarily make it any easier. So again, how do we do it?

How do we come up the mountain? How do we change the current state of affairs in our own hearts and in the Church? The answer, we start with belief. Belief is born within us when we humble ourselves enough to see the goodness of God and what He has done in our life, not just this life but especially in the life to come. For all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. All of us have broken His law, and because of this, not only would we be destined for hell, but we would deserve to go to hell if it were not for God's goodness toward us. Thus, because of Jesus Christ we can proclaim the Good News even as Lehi and Nephi did, saying, "But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld His glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of His love."³⁹ "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for He hath redeemed my soul from hell."⁴⁰

We then sharpen and strengthen that belief by taking on the task of building up Zion, for we will see more and more of God's goodness when we are about His business. This is partly why God gives us tasks to accomplish. He gave the Church the responsibility of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, also known as the great commission, and the responsibility of Zion, also known as the great and marvelous work, because He knows that we need responsibility in order to come up to higher ground. The people of the Church will not mature without responsibility, just as a child will not mature without it. So, what exactly are we responsible for?

Yes, we are responsible for sharing the Good News and seeking first the Kingdom of God in order to establish His righteousness, but we are also responsible for taking part in God's creation, just as God allowed the Brother of Jared to take part in the solution to get his people across the sea to the promised land. Creativity is one of God's most profound characteristics. We only need to look up to see the truth of this, for when we look at the stars in the heavens, the rolling hills, the waves of the sea, or even the various animals and plants, we can see that God is a God of creation, and yet why is that? Why does God take so much enjoyment in creating? Is He perhaps inviting us to do something, to join Him in His creation?

People create art, songs, technology, etc., but the most beautiful thing that we can create is what kind of life we are going to live. Will we create Zion in our life so that it becomes our reality? Will we allow Christ to create His life in us? Think of a child with building blocks. The parents lay out the blocks for the child and allow him to build whatever he would like. God has done something similar for us. He has given us Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Holy Spirit, gifts and talents, authority, etc. Now He says, what will you create? He has also given us instructions, but with those instructions comes an enormous amount of

³⁹ 2 Nephi 1:29

⁴⁰ 2 Nephi 15:7

freedom. If we desire to come up the mountain and to see God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, then we must believe in Him and in His invitation to create a new world with Him. Are you ready for that responsibility? If so, there are few things that we need to consider.

Do you suppose that we can survive as we are now? Do you suppose that God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon us in our divided state? Do you suppose that you have a place in that better world? There's no special formula, some new method that would allow us to finally obtain the unity that we have longed for, for so long. There's no secret mystery hidden within the scriptures that if we just knew, would give us the wisdom to overcome our current condemnation. Instead, the author would present the following steps that we need to take as a people who profess to believe in Jesus Christ and in Zion. These steps will help us to move toward creating Zion conditions.

1. Do not try to dominate the Church or use the Church for your own purposes.
2. Acquire and cultivate the power to put yourself in the other person's place.
3. Do not look for perfection in people. Look on others, not as they are, but as they can be. Determine to hold no secret criticism. Stop looking for slights. Expect the best from others not the worst.
4. Determine to settle differences as they arise, do not let them get cold. Do not just counsel patience, but right the injustice.
5. Be willing to decide with the group against yourself. Remember we are organs for one another. Don't allow yourself to become petty, be bigger than that.

Five Steps to Creating Zion Conditions

As believers in Jesus Christ and the Kingdom, it is important for us to ask ourselves, "Why is the Church in the condition it's in today?" It is also critical to understand what God means when He invites us to believe in His Son. The word believe is used 648 times in the Scriptures, which highlights how important it is to the Gospel message. However, its frequent usage also presents a risk, namely, that we might undervalue the word because we read it so much, or that we might misunderstand the word because we think we already grasp it's meaning and thereby we simply gloss over it.

According to the *1828 Webster's Dictionary*, the word "believe" means, "To credit upon the authority or testimony of another; to be persuaded of the truth of something upon the declaration of another, or upon evidence furnished by reasons, arguments, and deductions of the mind, or by other circumstances, than personal knowledge."⁴¹ It also means, "To have a firm persuasion of any thing. In some cases, to have full persuasion, approaching to certainty." When Jesus told Nicodemus that God "so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," He was not simply talking about a thought process or a profession of words. But as John put it, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath witness *in himself*; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son."⁴²

⁴¹ <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/believe>

⁴² 1 John 5:10

In other words, belief is a *full* persuasion in God. It requires an inward and outward response for if we truly believe in something then we must trust and hope in it to such an extent that it causes us to obey and to act. If we believe in Jesus Christ, then we will trust in all that He is and we will hope in His promises to such a degree that we will obey His every word and act to do His will on the earth, even when we might not “feel” like doing so. Thus, if we are not obeying His word nor doing His will, then it must mean that we do not *truly* believe in Him, or at least, that we do not believe in Him *enough*. Perhaps we might say even as the father whose son was possessed told Jesus with tears, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”⁴³

We can give all the fancy classes and sermons we want (PowerPoint and all), read endless amounts of scripture (or write books like this), or even go to Church every time the doors are open, but we will not advance the cause of Christ until we seek to implement God’s will in the following steps. These steps are a witness to God, that we *truly* believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

1. Don’t try to dominate the Church or use the Church for your own purposes

We must face the truth that the Church is partially in the condition it’s in because men have tried to dominate the Church and use their authority for their own purposes. As the Lord told Ezekiel concerning the shepherds, or priesthood, of Israel, “Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”⁴⁴ Please read the following passage from Ezekiel 34:

³Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed; ***but ye feed not the flock.*** ⁴The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; ***but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.*** ⁵***And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd;*** and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. ⁶My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill; yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

⁷Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; ⁸As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, ***because there was no shepherd,*** neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; ⁹Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; ¹⁰Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore, ***for I will deliver my flock from their mouth,*** that they may not be meat for them.

The Church is in a scattered condition because the shepherds that were supposed to feed it, fed themselves instead. However, before you start thinking that its’ those “other people” who have done this, or who are doing this, ask yourself, “How have I behaved when I did not get my way?” Did you try to dominate the situation? Did you do it without consideration of others or their feelings? Did you say

⁴³ Mark 9:21

⁴⁴ Ezekiel 34:2

something like, “If you refuse to agree with me, or see it my way, then I’m going to leave this branch?” Or perhaps you said, “I don’t like how the Church can’t get along. I’ve had enough. I’m tired of the hypocrisy. I’m leaving completely.”

Whether you are priesthood or not, you still have authority to make a difference in God’s Church. You have authority to make a difference in the world today. How have you used that authority? Did you try to dominate the Church, even by leaving it? Even the act of leaving is a form of control. We have a mental illness in the Church today, and it goes something like this, “If I don’t get my way, then I’m separating myself and my family.” This is a divorce mentality and it has plagued the Church since 1984, and perhaps even before then.

So how then might we counter this movement to dominate or to control? The answer is simple, seek to become even as a little child, innocent, pure, and blameless for such is the Kingdom of God. We need to follow their example in how they are always looking upward. We ought to be as harmless as doves just as they are, and we ought to have the same mind as Jesus Christ, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of *no reputation*, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.⁴⁵” In other words, we are to follow Christ’s example, for even though He was the Son of God, He stooped down to wash the disciples feet. He left the courts of glory to serve us even in our sins. He does not dominate us, He saves us if we will.

If we desire to submit as Christ did in order that we might cease to dominate others, then we must seek to understand how great our God is and how small we truly are through prayer, fasting, and study. It is through this process that we are able to cultivate the ability to humble ourselves just as King Benjamin taught the Nephites in Mosiah, chapters one through three. When we start to realize our own nothingness, then we can finally begin to see that we are not always right, and that we in fact might even be wrong sometimes. It is here that we can start to submit our desire to dominate others and certain situations to the Lord.

2. Acquire and cultivate the power to put yourself in the other person’s place (empathy)

It is important to understand where other people are coming from. However, that does not mean that you necessarily have to agree with them or their beliefs. In fact, it’s highly probable that you will not agree in many circumstances, but it is still important to validate the other person. Few things are as painful and destructive as shutting someone down, or turning your back on them, simply because they hold a different viewpoint than you or because they did something, or did not do something, that you do not agree with.

When people stonewall another person, they often do so without really understanding where that person is coming from or what they might be going through. It is called empathy. Sadly, it is too easy for us as a people to become blind to someone else’s situation, background, upbringing, personality, temptations, etc. We start worrying about who is in the right and who is in the wrong, rather than examining what is the truth. And the truth is that “in understanding comes love.” Not a love that is blind, or one that accepts

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sin, or one that disregards God's justice and judgment, but one that sees a person for who they really are. A child of God who is worthy of your love.

Please do not misunderstand, we are not saying anyone should compromise the Gospel, but instead we need to listen to each other and come with the mindset that says, "Maybe I am wrong in my beliefs. Maybe I should at least hear this person out before making judgments." We also need to ask, "What is this person *actually* saying, and not just want *I think* they are saying. And "What is their intent or the intent of their heart?" We can especially see this in the interaction between Chief Captain Moroni and Chief Judge Pahoran in Alma, chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight.

During this time period in Alma, the Nephites have basically been at war with the Lamanites for almost eight years. Thousands of people, both soldiers and citizens, have perished, and thousands more have suffered due to the effects of the war. Helaman and his two thousand warriors have begun to succeed against the Lamanites in their part of land, but both Helaman and Moroni need men and provisions in order to protect the people. It is here that Moroni writes a letter to Pahoran requesting supplies, but when his letter goes unanswered, Moroni is filled with anger and writes a second letter to Pahoran, basically placing the responsibility of the death of his soldiers, as well as the people, on Pahoran. Moroni even threatens to kill Pahoran, take his food, and overthrow the government if he refuses to send the provisions.

Unbeknownst to Moroni, Pahoran is dealing with his own troubles, for a group of men, called kingmen, have overthrown the government, appointed a king, and implemented a confederacy with the Lamanites to gain control over the entire land. In the author's opinion, Pahoran had every right to be furious with Moroni and to revile him, but that is not what Pahoran did, instead he wrote back to Moroni, saying, "And now, in your epistle you have censured me; but it mattereth not, I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart."⁴⁶ Pahoran understood quite well who Moroni was. He knew that Moroni "was a man of perfect understanding...a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God...a man who was firm in the faith of Christ."⁴⁷ Pahoran was able to put himself in Moroni's place, and because of this, he exercised empathy and grace toward his brother. In fact, Pahoran even validated Moroni's feelings without agreeing with his conclusions.

Empathy is the capacity to identify and share in someone else's emotions, and the key to empathy is to realize that acknowledging someone's feelings is not the same as endorsing them and that validation is not the same as agreeing with them. Again, we do not always have to agree with one another in order to love one another, but God does ask us to live peaceably with all men, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ.⁴⁸ In fact, much could be accomplished toward creating Zion conditions by simply using these words, even as Pahoran did in his own way, "I understand. That must have hurt. That must have been hard. I would have felt the same way. I see you, I get you, and I have you."

⁴⁶ Alma 28:11

⁴⁷ Alma 21:132-134

⁴⁸ Romans 12:18, 2 Corinthians 13:11

Remember that you do not always have to fix the situation, fix the other person's point of view, or fix them emotionally. Instead, start by acknowledging what the person is going through and validating their feelings. In so doing, you might just find that the situation will fix itself just as it did with Pahoran. Most of us, including the author, become entrenched in our emotions when we enter into conflict. When we do this, the frontal lobe, where all our logic resides, goes offline and we are no longer able to think logically. Thus, using logic when we are in conflict rarely works because the person is operating from the emotional part of their brain. Empathy however cools the brain and brings it back to the logical side. Logic does not lead to logic, empathy does. This works for a marriage, a friendship, or any kind of relationship for that matter, including with our brothers and sisters.

Remember that charity, which is required for empathy, suffers long, is kind, is not easily provoked, and thinks no evil. While we know that charity will never fail, it's often hard for us to choose it, especially in the moment, which is why we must acquire and cultivate this power by taking a step back and realizing that not only does God love this person, but He also is in this person, just as He is in you and loves you.

3. Don't look for perfection in people. Look on others, not as they are, but as they can be. Determine to hold no secret criticism. Stop looking for slights. Expect the best from others.

Arthur Oakman once said, "The mark of a saint is not perfection but consecration. A saint is not a man without faults, but a man who has given himself without reserve to God." Brother Oakman is helping us to see that there is a very big difference between "perfection" and the commandment where Jesus asks us to be perfect, saying, "Ye are therefore commanded to be perfect, *even* as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."⁴⁹ Perfection or perfectionism is a worldly term, usually referring to someone placing unrealistic demands on themselves or others, such as never making any type of mistake, ever. However, the word that Jesus used actually means completion, finished, or whole. In other words, Jesus is asking us to love others completely or wholly as His Father in heaven does. For the Father's love is like the rain and the sun, it falls upon all, both the just and the unjust. His love is perfect.

Thus, when we say, "don't look for perfection in people," we mean stop looking for them to be faultless or to never make a mistake. There isn't a single person on this planet who is without fault, including you. So why then do we expect other people to be without fault? Instead, Jesus asks us to love others completely, which would require us to love others as He loves us. Does He look upon you and only see your worst? Does He seek to criticize you or search for ways in which He can condemn you? Of course not. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved."⁵⁰ God asks us to do the same. He desires for us to save the world, not to condemn it. Again, do not misunderstand, we are not saying that we should not hold people accountable, but rather in this context, we ask that we stop looking for slights in other people and refuse to hold secret criticisms. Criticisms are different than complaints. Complaint is an expression of grief over the *situation*; criticism is about tearing the *person* down for who they are and what they have done.

⁴⁹ Matthew 5:50

⁵⁰ John 3:17

When we start harboring criticism toward another person, we tend to develop what is called confirmation bias, which makes it very difficult for us to create Zion conditions. Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories. In other words, if a brother in the church believes his fellow brother is a manipulator, then he will see everything he does as an attempt to manipulate. And this because he is only focusing on the imperfection and has concluded that other person's worst is final. At this point, he might even hope, or wish, that other person's worst truly is final. C.S. Lewis gives us a good test for this in his book, *Mere Christianity*, page 118:

Suppose one reads a story of filthy atrocities in the paper. Then suppose that something turns up suggesting that the story might not be quite true, or not quite so bad as it was made out. Is one's first feeling, 'Thank God, even they aren't quite so bad as that,' or is it a feeling of disappointment, and even a determination to cling to the first story for the sheer pleasure of thinking your enemies as bad as possible? If it is the second then it is, I am afraid, the first step in a process which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils. You see, one is beginning to wish that black was a little blacker. If we give that wish its head, later on we shall wish to see grey as black, and then to see white itself as black. Finally, we shall insist on seeing everything – God and our friends and ourselves included – as bad, and not be able to stop doing it: we shall be fixed for ever in a universe of pure hatred.

The key to avoiding secret criticism and confirmation bias is to focus on the person's best, or in other words, expect the best from other people just as we hope that others will expect the best in us. Has the reader ever experienced a time when someone you loved jumped to the wrong conclusion about you? It can be quite heart breaking when someone who have worked with, ministered with, and worshiped with, suddenly thinks the worst of you. It's as if all the good that you have shared together no longer matters, they have judged you as being the worst, regardless of whether you really have become the worst or not. If this resonates with you as much as it does the author, then we encourage you to not reciprocate this toward others.

Instead, let us follow the words of our Master, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."⁵¹ Please read the following example between the author and his wife concerning expecting the best of someone rather than imagining their worst:

There was a time early in our marriage where I needed to ask my wife, Jane, a question. At the time I thought it was a really important question, but now I can't even remember what it was about. Regardless, I felt it was critical in the moment, so I called her on the phone, but she didn't answer. I called her a couple more times, and still no answer. I started to get furious and frustrated, "Why is she not answering my call?" I asked. "What is she doing?" I started to weaponize my frustration toward her in my heart before this little voice in my head spoke to me

⁵¹ Luke 6:36-38

saying, “Andrew, you know your wife hates being tied to her phone.” I thought, “Yes, that’s true, and I do respect that she does that...” Then the voice spoke further, “Andrew, you know that your wife is not the sort of person who would look at the phone, see that you are calling, and say, ‘I’m just not going to answer him, I don’t want to talk with him.’” In this moment, I realized that I had become so focused on what I perceived to be a slight against me, that I didn’t see my wife’s true character. The fact of the matter was, she just didn’t have her phone on her at the time.

This example is a great illustration of how we as a people can ride out the wave of our emotions and allow logic, mercy, truth, and love to shine through. Again, please do not misunderstand, we are not counseling people to bury their emotions, or even to invalidate what they feel, but instead we are encouraging you to check your emotions with the reality of the other person’s character. Next time that frustration toward a brother or sister, or anyone for that matter, begins to flare check it with the following scripture from Philippians 4:6-8:

⁶Be afflicted for nothing [i.e., meaning do not be anxious]; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brethren, whatsoever things **are true**, whatsoever things **are honest** [i.e., honorable], whatsoever things **are just** [i.e., innocent, holy, righteous]; whatsoever things **are pure**, whatsoever things **are lovely** [i.e., acceptable, pleasing, friendly towards], whatsoever things are **of good report** [i.e., well spoken of, reputable]; if there be **any virtue**, and if there be **any praise**, think on these things.

4. Determine to settle differences as they arise, don’t let them get cold. Don’t counsel patience only, right the injustice.

On at least two separate occasions, we find examples in the New Testament where the twelve argued amongst themselves concerning who was the greatest among them. An argument that the Church still struggles with today albeit in a slightly different manner. We struggle with who has authority and who does not, whose interpretation of scripture is the best, who is the most the right or righteous, and which branch or organization is the closest to God, which one best represents the “one true Church.” However, the biggest difference between the twelve and us, is that they allowed Christ to settle their conflict and we have not.

In both instances in Luke where the twelve began to reason among themselves concerning who should be the greatest, we find that Jesus was determined to settle the dispute rather than simply counseling them to be patient and to ignore the underlying problem. Jesus also handled the conflict by using an example or a parable of sorts. In Luke, chapter nine, Jesus resolved the conflict by bringing a child before them and saying, “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth him who sent me; for he who is least among you all, the same shall be great.⁵²” And when this contention arose again in Luke, chapter twenty-two, Jesus told them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they who exercise authority upon them, are called benefactors. But it

⁵² Luke 9:48

ought not to be so with you; but he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he who is chief, as he who doth serve. For whether is he greater, who sitteth at meat, or he who serveth? I am not as he who sitteth at meat, but I am among you as he who serveth.⁵³

In other words, Jesus did not quell the conflict by simply saying to the twelve, “You shouldn’t behave that way?” Or by saying, “You shouldn’t feel that way.” Instead, Jesus was able to resolve the issue by using reason, for when the twelve saw how beautiful that little child was and how he was truly great even though the parents served him, they realized that they were simply little children themselves, and it was the Son of God who served them. The same is true for the second example, for Jesus highlighted the twelve’s pride by comparing them to the pride of the world. In one sense, both of Jesus’ examples were rather harsh, but on the other they were a much softer way of dealing with the problem at hand.

The prophet Nathan used the same method when calling out King David for his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband, Uriah, by sending him to the frontlines of a dangerous battle. For instead of telling David directly that he was a wicked man, Nathan used a story concerning a rich man and a poor man and how the rich man took from the poor man’s flock even though he already had a large flock himself. In so doing, David was able to see the injustice of the story so when he asked Nathan who the rich man was so that he could punish him, Nathan replied, “Thou art the man.”⁵⁴ David was so convicted that he exclaimed, “I have sinned against the Lord.”⁵⁵ David also wrote Psalm 51 during this period in order to chronicle his sin and his sincere desire to repent.

These examples, both of Jesus and Nathan, are really important for us today, as they show us so clearly the way in which we are to settle injustices in the Church. So much good could be accomplished in the Church today if we could see how poorly we have treated one another through a story like Nathan’s. For we are the men and women who have refused to allow God to bring us together because of our unbelief, our traditions, our prejudices, our preconceived notions, and our affair with this world. If we want to settle injustices then we need to be able to speak about them, which is one other major difference between us and the twelve. At least they were able to speak about the issue at hand concerning who was the greatest among them.

How many times in Church do we ignore important issues? How many times do we allow the injustices to become cold so that it grows into bitterness and contempt. If we never speak about these things then the wrongs will never get truly addressed. There seems to be this paradoxical conundrum in the Church where we avoid critical problems that need to be resolved because we do not want to create conflict, but then yet we still manage to create conflict by making mountains out of mole hills. In other words, we avoid healthy conflict in one area and end up creating unhealthy conflict in another. Marriage is a perfect example of this. Please read the following from the author:

One of the first conflicts between Jane and I in our marriage was “keeping score.” We were directed not to do this by the couple who did our pre-marriage counseling, but yet we did it

⁵³ Luke 22:25-27

⁵⁴ 2 Samuel 12:7

⁵⁵ 2 Samuel 12:13

anyway. In fact, we started doing this right out of the gate. Within the first couple weeks of our marriage, I got into the habit of coming home from work and noticing all the things that Jane did differently than me. We had two different views of how to manage the home. So when I got home, I started doing what I thought should be done, and as I did so, I started to make mental tally marks of how much I was doing and how little I thought Jane was doing. Of course, because of this I fell into the trap of confirmation bias, and I didn't see all the things Jane really was doing, which was a lot.

Now it's important to understand that both Jane and I struggle with withdrawing from conflict. While this should have been a problem for us, it actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it forced us to stay on top of it as we knew we were already weak in this area. So rather than allowing the issue to get cold and to linger, we determined to settle the indifference because we didn't want it to become a cultivating ground for bitterness. We were able to do so by simply communicating. Once we better understood our views and expectations, it wasn't a problem anymore.

As we stated previously, Zion is not the absence of conflict, but the triumph over it, and our triumph over it is directly related to our willingness and openness to communicate. However, while communication is important, we must also remember to “cease to find fault one with another.”⁵⁶ We must be conscience to avoid offense toward God and toward men.⁵⁷ We must speak the truth in love, for what good does it do us to have the truth but to be void of charity.⁵⁸ Instead, it would serve us well if we chose to speak as Jesus and Nathan did, using analogies or parables to make our point. Finally, we must examine ourselves through the example of Jesus Christ, for if we remember that a brother has aught against us, we might actually be the one responsible for the injustice.⁵⁹ For example, if you continue to move from branch to branch and your reason for doing so is because it's always the fault of the other person, or because you continue to highlight how much you hate drama, the real issue might actually be you. Please read the following from Jane King:

When I used to work for the airlines we had a code word for the trip that would allow us get into the cockpit incase the pilots needed something. The code word announced that it was clear or safe to open the door. I always knew there was going to be trouble when the captain announced our code word would be “no drama.” This was a definite red flag that we were going to have drama on the flight, incited by the captain himself.

Remember not to simply counsel patience, but be sure to right the injustice. Much harm has been done in the Church today because those who have offended and hurt others have repeatedly been permitted to do so without recourse by the Church leadership. How many problems have been caused, even over generations, because no one righted the injustice and simply left it to others to fix. How many individuals have caused division and separation in the Church, and have been permitted to do so, because no one

⁵⁶ DC 85:38a

⁵⁷ Acts 24:16

⁵⁸ Ephesians 4:15

⁵⁹ Matthew 5:25-26

stood up in a loving and humble manner in order to right the injustice? This not only hurts those members directly involved in the situation, but also those who are able to see the wrong.

Settling injustices does not just apply to those weightier issues, but to everyday struggles as well. For example, consider how many introverts have been drained by extroverts who will not stop talking, or extroverts who have been hurt because they felt unloved by those who are introverted. The vast majority of people do not mean to be bothersome or unloving, it is simply a matter of differing personalities. How wonderful would it be if we could express ourselves without the fear of ruining the relationship? How wonderful would it be if we could be vulnerable instead of always feeling like we have to be patient and bury our feelings? What if the introvert could simply say, “I need you to stop talking right now,” or if the extrovert could say, “I don’t feel like you care,” and the opposite person could listen without taking offense? Truly, we could create Zion in such an environment.

Thankfully, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation for He knows that when people come together, even when they do so under the covenant of Christ, we can sometimes give offense and take offense, which would prevent the Church from being able to offer up their sacraments to the Lord as they ought to. God gave us the process of reconciliation, which is an important component in creating Zion, as a way for us to overcome our differences and disagreements and to knit our hearts together in unity and in love. The process of reconciliation is as follows:

1. Before we partake of the sacrament, we must first examine ourselves to see if we have angst with a brother or sister. [Matthew 5:25-26]
2. If a member has trespassed against another, or if they know someone has trespassed against them, then they must go to that individual alone in order to reconcile. [Matthew 18:15]
3. If there is no reconciliation, then they must bring a witness with them. [Matthew 18:16; Sec 42:23a]. However, this witness ought to be a teacher, and if they cannot find a teacher, then a deacon. [Rules of Order, Sec.158:3]. It’s imperative that the witness only hear the grievance in the presence of the other party and not before then.
4. If there is no reconciliation, then that individual can go before the presiding officer [Matthew 18:17] who will then direct the teacher or teachers to labor diligently with the offending party in effort to bring reconciliation. The teacher specifically has this responsibility as described in Sec 17:11.
5. If there is no reconciliation, then that individual can call an Elders’ Court [Sec 42:23]. However, no Court should act unless the proper labor has been performed as outlined above and in General Conference Resolution No. 608. To learn more about the Elders’ Court, study pages 108-124 in Gomer T. Griffith’s *The Interpreter*.

It should be noted that some branches will handle this process differently as some will not allow for an Elders’ Court. Moreover, once the Church is fully organized, the processes of reconciliation may also include a Bishop’s Court [Sec 104:32-33] and a High Council [Sec 99, 104:35]. Go deeper by studying pages 108-134 in *The Interpreter*.

5. Be willing to decide with the group against yourself. Remember we are organs for one another. Don't allow yourself to become petty, be bigger than that.

Of all the steps we have discussed thus far, this one might be the most difficult as it strikes directly at our pride. It is also very similar to Step 1, which requires us to stop dominating the Church, others, and situations when things do not go our way. Instead, we must ask ourselves, "What does God truly want? What is His will, not mine?" One reason why this, as well as pride in general, is so difficult for us to overcome is because it requires us to sacrifice ourselves. Not just some of the time, or just in certain situations, but at all times, in all places, in all things. It's the same reason why following Christ and enduring to the end is so difficult. No matter how much we might love God, there are moments in our life when we just do not want to submit. It's not because we are desperately wicked or evil, but because we have not yet mastered how to love God completely, or perfectly, with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, ALL our mind, ALL our strength. We have not yet mastered how to decide against our self for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom.

Oddly enough, the author does not believe this alone is a cause for condemnation, for we have all fallen short of God's glory. We all struggle in this area and what's more, God knows it. As we read in the Psalms, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.⁶⁰" The true problem instead resides in whether we are trying or not, and only God knows if you are truly trying. Are you striving to love God wholly? Are you striving to decide against yourself? Consider for a moment, a marriage. There is not a marriage in the world today in which both spouses sacrifice their own desires one hundred percent of the time. However, what might happen to a marriage if neither the husband nor the wife attempted to do so any of the time? At the very least, the marriage would be completely miserable, and at the worst, it would end in divorce. If this would not work in a marriage, it also will not work in the Church nor in our relationship with God.

So what can we do to overcome our pride? First, we must realize that none of us can decide against our self by our own will power alone. We need God's help. Second, we need to know exactly where we need the help. It's not enough to simply say that we are prideful, we need to know how that pride works in us. Only then can we receive God's help. Perhaps the best place for us to start is by first understanding what pride actually is. In a word, pride is "competition." Please read the following from C.S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*, pages 121-123:

I now come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagined that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in

⁶⁰ Psalm 103:13-14

others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it and others.

The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility... According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.

Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?' The point is that each person's pride is in competition with every one else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree.

Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone. That is why I say that Pride is essentially competitive in a way the other vices are not... Greed may drive men into competition if there is not enough to go round; but the proud man, even when has got more than he can possibly want, will try to get still more just to assert his power. Nearly all those evils in the world which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of Pride.

Pride is the root of all sin. It's an illness that we are all afflicted with, and Jesus Christ is the only cure. Pride not only causes us to compete against our fellow man, but worse, it causes us to compete against God. On its face, it is beyond ludicrous to think that we could ever compete against Him, and yet I do it every day when I choose my will above His. The key then to overcome our pride and to stop competing with our brothers and sisters is to first stop competing with God. To do so, we must first begin with trust. Trust that He is greater than us in every way. Trust that His plan for us is ultimately for our good, even when it hurts, even when it does not make sense.

Second, we must ask the Lord, "In what ways do I compete against you?" While this might be a scary question to ask, and though the answer will undoubtedly hurt, it will be more than worth it. For when God does answer you, you will see that even though you are small and insignificant, He loves you completely. It's this love, a love that we do not deserve, that allows us to see His glory. For in the light of this love we see our place, and know our sins and our failings, and yet for some reason He has not

rewarded us according to our iniquities. Here, we are able to comprehend, at least to some degree, the breadth, length, depth, and height of His love. Here, we can taste of His goodness. Not just by reading the scriptures, but by actually experiencing it for ourselves. Please read the following from Brother Lawrence's book, *Practicing the Presence of God*, pages 42-43:

I look at myself as the worst of all men, covered by sores and filled with decay, a man who has committed all sorts of crimes against his king. Wounded by this deeply felt regret, I confess all my wickedness to him. I ask for his forgiveness. I put myself entirely into his hands so that he may do whatever he wants with me. And then far from punishing me, this king, full of mercy and goodness, embraces me with love. He makes me eat at his table, serves me with his own hands, and gives me the key to all his treasures. He talks with me, enjoys my company in thousands of ways, and treats me in all ways like I am his favorite. This is how I look at myself from one moment to another when I am in his holy presence.

In Genesis, we read that when the people keep all of God's commandments, embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward.⁶¹ This sounds wonderful, it even sounds simple, but again how do we do this? How do we keep all the commandments? How do we embrace the truth? The answer is that we must first start by looking upward. To look upward is to keep our eye single to God's glory, or in other words, to remember His indescribable goodness. The scriptures continually counsel us to keep God's goodness in the forefront of our mind, for it's His goodness that moves us to repent and causes us to fear Him. To fear disappointing Him, to fear forgetting Him, to fear competing against Him. In a strange paradox, it is the fear of the Lord that will set us free. For if we fear Him, then there is no need to fear man, and if we do not need to fear man, then there is no more reason to compete with man.

In such a state, it would be silly to compete with our brothers and sisters for we are all sinners. We all came from the dust. We are all worth the same amount. God says we are worth the blood of His Son. If we could just remember this, if the author could just remember this, then we have the foresight to pray for God's assistance that we might see, in the very moment, when we begin to compete with Him and others, and to ask for His help that we might stop ourselves from doing so. This task is not easy, as the reader well knows. It not only takes practice but also much grace. Grace for others and especially grace for ourselves for when we fail, and we will fail. The key is to keep trying. Never be discouraged.

1 Never be discouraged, trust the Father's word, In the time of trial let His voice be heard; Trusting in His promise, tho' the waiting long, He will surely bless us—praise Him with a song.

2 Never be discouraged, if along our way Disappointments meet us, tempting us to stray; Closely cling to Jesus, ask Him for His grace, In His words of comfort find a resting place. [Chorus]

3 Never be discouraged, patiently endure, God doth often test us—trials make us pure; Soon will come the reaping, then with joy we'll sing, Praise the Lord of harvest, praise the heavenly King. [Chorus]

⁶¹ Read Genesis 9:21-23

[Chorus] Praise Him, trust the Father's word, Praise Him, let His voice be heard, Praise Him, tho' the waiting long, Praise Him, praise Him with a song.

Pride also makes it difficult for us to see that we are all members of the same body as Paul so clearly demonstrated.⁶² It is important for us to remember that we are organs one for another. We do not all have to do the same mission or job, nor do we need to make others do our mission in the exact same way that we do. We do not need more Andrews, Janes, or Michaels, we need more Jesus Christ. If someone else does something better than you, then praise God for it. You do not have to do what that person does. You have your own gifts and talents. In fact, God has a separate purpose for you that only you can accomplish. In this way, we no longer have to compete for who is the greatest as the apostles did. If one wins, we all win. If one member is excellent in something, then we are all excellent in that thing, for again, we are organs one for another.

A problem arises however when we think that our mission, our way, our plan, our perspective, our vision, must be the way that everyone else must go. As brother, and elder, Tom Mitchell once said, "We must resist the temptation to quickly and impetuously tell each other what we think we know, either to subtly, and sometimes unwittingly, try to impress others or convert others to our private interpretation of some thing; or how to magically and immediately fix all our problems, or who or what belief system in the Restoration is right or wrong, or who's at fault for this mess we are in." There comes a time when we must ask ourselves, "Do I need to say everything that is on my mind? Will my comment actually contribute to the conversate and to the group, or am I just talking to say something?"

As the Church continues to strive to become one, there will be tough conversations that need to be discussed. We would ask you, "What part will you play in all of this? How will you respond to create Zion conditions?" Perhaps we should consider that we have all departed from God's plan concerning Zion, and as C.S. Lewis once wrote, "We have all departed from that total plan in different ways, and each of us wants to make out that his own modification of the original plan is the plan itself. You will find this again and again about anything that is really Christian: every one is attracted by bits of it and wants to pick out those bits and leave the rest. That is why we do not get much further: and that is why people who are fighting for quite the opposite things can both say they are fighting for Christianity."

The author believes that we are all fighting for Zion, but we are not getting much further because we cannot stop competing against God and against each other. Who will be first then, to decide against themselves for the group? Can we stop ourselves from getting petty? Can we be bigger than that? With God, nothing is impossible.

Conclusion

We started our conversation on the five steps by asking the following question, "Why is the Church in the condition it's in today?" Now, we would like to answer it by telling a story about Alcoa, the world's eighth

⁶² Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

largest producer of aluminum. In the mid 1980's, Alcoa was beginning to lose both customers and investors. They needed to make a change in order to grow their company again. Thus, they decided to hire a relatively unknown individual, a man named Paul O'Neill, whose background mainly encompassed working for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Before O'Neill decided to take on the job as Chief Executive Officer however, he studied the company and asked himself, "How could I change this company if I was the CEO?"

In response to this question, O'Neill stated, "I knew I had to transform Alcoa. But you can't order people to change. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing. If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company." That one thing was safety. O'Neill told a room full of shareholders during his first meeting, "I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries." This, of course, was a total shock to investors who expected O'Neill to discuss company profit margins and his economic plans for the future. Shareholders began to worry about their investment.

Six months after O'Neill became CEO of Alcoa, he got a phone call in the middle of the night from a plant manager in Arizona. Apparently, a young man who had recently joined the company only a few weeks earlier had tried to repair an extrusion press that had stopped operating. The young man jumped over the yellow safety wall, walked across the pit, and removed the aluminum scrap that was jamming the 6-foot swinging arm. As soon as the piece of scrap metal was dislodged, the arm restarted its arc and killed the man instantly. O'Neill was devastated. He ordered an emergency meeting of all the plant's executives.

During the meeting and subsequent investigation, they found dozens of errors that contributed to the young man's death. First, two managers had seen the man jump over the wall but did not stop him. Second, the training program did not emphasize that he would not be blamed for the breakdown. Third, no instruction was given that he should find a manager before attempting a repair. And fourth, there were no sensors to automatically shut down the machine if someone stepped into the pit. Following this information, O'Neill turned to those in the room and said, "We killed this man. It's my failure of leadership. I caused his death. And it's the failure of all of you in the chain of command."

The author believes we must take the same approach. All of us are responsible for the state of the Church, not just a few individuals. It's our failure in stewardship. Stewardship of the gospel, of the everlasting covenant, of the gifts of the Spirit, etc. We caused the Church's demise. And it's the failure of all of the priesthood who were tasked with watching over the flock, those who were in the chain of command. This is a very harsh statement, but the sooner we acknowledge our failures, the quicker we can get to correcting them. O'Neill was able to completely change Alcoa because of this tragedy. Instead of viewing the tragedy as a crisis, he saw it as an opportunity to change the culture of the company by addressing one keystone habit, safety. The keystone habit that we need to change is belief, as already stated. Our beliefs, or in other words our worldview, dictate everything about us. How we think, how we act, how we view the world around us. If we can grow our belief in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, then the state of the Church will begin to change, for our hearts will change through faith and repentance.

However, if the author is to implement this change within his own life, then I must first acknowledge that not only do I violate all five of these steps when interacting with my brothers and sisters, but I also violate these steps with God. For how frequently do I attempt to dominate God by trying to force my will and my own desires upon Him. How little do I seek to understand Him and put myself in His place as His Son stood in mine? As we read in Psalms, “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, *to see if there were any that did understand*, that did seek God.⁶³” How quick am I to doubt God and question Him for the things He has done or the steps He has taken? How quick am I to expect the worse from God? How often do I allow the differences of sin to get cold rather than fixing them in the moment? How often do I refuse to decide against myself and do His will? Brothers and sisters, perhaps many of us are guilty of these things. And yet, for some unknown reason, God continues to pour out His grace upon us. Truly His mercies are new every morning, and all He asks of us in return is to continue to believe in Him. Not just with our words, but in our actions and very life.

If you desire to grow your belief in Jesus Christ, then begin by working on these five steps, for they are an example of how Jesus treats us. First, He does not dominate us but allows us to have free choice, even if our choice works against Him as it did with Judas. Second, He put Himself in our place when He hung on the cross. Third, He refuses to see our worst as final, even as He told the Roman soldiers who were responsible for nailing Him to the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.⁶⁴” Fourth, He is determined to settle the difference between us and God by paying the ransom for our sin and conquering death so that we might have a way back into the God’s presence. Fifth, He was willing to put His own will aside in the garden of Gethsemane, saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.⁶⁵”

The choice is up to us. It always has been. Our life is our witness to God whether we believe or not. It is our witness of our covenant with Him. When the children of Israel forgot who their savior was and created a false god at the base of Mount Sinai, God told Moses, “They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them, they have made them a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.⁶⁶” God then tells Moses, “I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people.⁶⁷” In other words, God had proven what sort of people the children of Israel were. For they, like we do at times, had broken their covenant and walked in their own way, after the image of their own god, whose image was in the likeness of the world.

God desires to prove us just as He did with Israel, saying, “And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God; for He will give unto the faithful, line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you, and prove you herewith; and whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name's sake, shall find it again; even life eternal; therefore, be not afraid of your enemies; for I have decreed in my heart, saith

⁶³ Psalms 53:2

⁶⁴ Luke 23:35

⁶⁵ Luke 22:42

⁶⁶ Exodus 32:8

⁶⁷ Exodus 32:9

the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy.⁶⁸ What then will the Father say in the end about us? “I have seen this people, and behold, they are a... people?” You fill in the blank.

Thankfully, the story in Exodus did not end there. For in response to their sin, Moses plead with God, just as Jesus pleads for us,⁶⁹ saying, “...Turn from thy fierce wrath. Thy people will repent of this evil; therefore come thou not out against them. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants to whom thou swarest by thine own self...Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.⁷⁰” God saved the children of Israel from His judgment that day because of the covenant that He made with their fathers. The same is true for us if we will believe. And if we believe, then we will seek to move the cause of Zion forward, by creating Zion conditions in our lives today.

⁶⁸ DC 95:3a-c

⁶⁹ Read Genesis 7:44-45, Jacob 3:109-111, and DC 45:1c-e

⁷⁰ Exodus 32:

